



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, November 19, 2019
9 a.m.

Transcript No. 30-1-10

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First Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participant

Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General
Hon. Doug Schweitzer, Minister

9 a.m. **Tuesday, November 19, 2019**

[Mr. Ellis in the chair]

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

The Acting Chair: All right. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. 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, 2020.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials that are joining you at the table. I am Mike Ellis. I'm the MLA for Calgary-West, and I'm substituting for Ms Goodridge as chair of this committee. To the right, go ahead, sir.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. Nathan Neudorf, MLA for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Guthrie: Peter Guthrie, Airdrie-Cochrane.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Jeremy Nixon, Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Yao: Tany Yao, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Long: Martin Long, West Yellowhead.

Mr. Walker: Jordan Walker, Sherwood Park.

Mr. Amery: Good morning. Mickey Amery, Calgary-Cross.

Mr. Schweitzer: I'm Doug Schweitzer, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. With me here today we've got Frank Bosscha, Deputy Minister of Justice; Dennis Cooley, associate deputy minister, Solicitor General; and Gerald Lamoureux, assistant deputy minister, corporate services.

Ms Pancholi: Good morning. Rakhi Pancholi, Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Ganley: Kathleen Ganley, Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Shepherd: Good morning. David Shepherd, Edmonton-City Centre.

Ms Sweet: Good morning. Heather Sweet, MLA, Edmonton-Manning.

The Acting Chair: Wonderful. Thank you.

There are no official substitutions for the record.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* and that the committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

For the process review and the speaking order and time, hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. Standing Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation. Now, while the speaking time limits are set out in Standing Order 59.02(1), in brief, the minister or members of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of his comments we begin a 60-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus.

The rotation of speaking time will then alternate between the Official Opposition and the government caucus, with individual speaking times being set to five minutes, which, when combined with the minister's time, may take up to a 10-minute block. Discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not the speaking time is combined. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. If members have any questions regarding the speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or e-mail to either the chair or the committee clerk.

A total of three hours has been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General. The scheduled end time of today's meeting will be at 12 p.m. That's noon. With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having the break? Hearing none, we will have that break.

Ministry officials may be present and at the direction of the minister may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area. Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit 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 the committee will adjourn. Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the meeting clock will continue to run. However, the speaking block time will be paused.

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

The vote on the estimates and any amendments will occur this evening in Committee of Supply. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk, and 20 copies of the amendment must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff.

Now I invite the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to begin with his opening remarks. Minister, welcome. You have 10 minutes, sir.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you very much. Good morning, everyone, and thank you for being here today. I'm really looking forward to our three-hour discussion about our budget. I'm proud of the work that our team has done here today to put this all together, and I'm really looking forward to the engagement and discussion and dialogue that we'll have going forward.

As you know, today I'm presenting Justice and Solicitor General's 2019-2023 business plan and the 2019-2020 estimates. First, I'd like to introduce the officials sitting beside me today. We have Frank Bosscha, the Deputy Minister of Justice, to my left. We also have Gerald Lamoureux, assistant deputy minister of corporate services, to my left. On my right we have Dennis Cooley, associate deputy minister, Solicitor General.

Also with me here today, just behind here, we have Eric Tolppanen, assistant deputy minister, Alberta Crown prosecution service. We also have Kim Sanderson, assistant deputy minister, correctional services; David Peace, assistant deputy minister, justice services; Lorne Merryweather, acting deputy minister, legal services – oh, sorry. Marie Strauss is filling in for Lorne. I

apologize. We have Bill Sweeney, senior assistant deputy minister, public security; Mary MacDonald, assistant deputy minister, resolution and court administration services. We also have Fiona Lavoy, executive director, policy and planning services branch, and Brad Wells, senior financial officer.

At a high level, our government believes that the first duty of government is to protect public safety and that nothing is more important than protecting the safety of law-abiding Albertans. The justice system is the foundation of our democracy, and law-abiding Albertans need to have faith that they'll be protected against those who wish to do them harm. For too long too many Albertans were being victimized and too many criminals were going through a revolving-door justice system, back on the street and claiming new victims. Premier Kenney and our party want to change that. We want to do everything in our power to stop the revolving door and keep Albertans safe. Our government received a historic mandate. Fifty-five per cent of Albertans voted for a government that would ensure Albertans can live in safe and secure communities while having a faster, fairer, and more responsive justice system.

During the provincial election we made approximately 20 commitments dealing with the criminal justice system. We have already delivered on many of them, and the rest are in the process of being delivered on. In Budget 2019 we fulfilled our campaign commitment to spend \$10 million on 50 new prosecutors and support staff. Our Crown prosecutors are essential to the proper functioning of our criminal justice system. Because there wasn't proper funding for criminal justice, there was a triage system in the justice system. That wasn't right. It simply led to too many delays, too many backlogs, too many cases being dropped. Triage is a medical term. It shouldn't be used in the justice system.

We also committed to increasing funding for the Alberta law enforcement response teams by \$50 million over four years. I'm really excited to see what they're going to be able to do. Right now they're in the process of developing new programs going forward, and they've already done an immense amount of good for Alberta.

I'd also like to say that Budget 2019 is another promise made, promise kept to Albertans. With ALERT, you've seen numerous reports in the media already of some of the success that they've had, and we need to build on that and grow with them and find different ways that we can go after organized crime and different areas. I'd love to get into that here in a little bit.

We've also committed, for an additional \$20 million over four years, to expand the use of drug treatment courts, both in doubling the number of those who could participate in Calgary and Edmonton but also in looking forward to bringing drug treatment court services to other areas of Alberta. One thing here I just want to highlight as well. One of the easiest decisions that we made was expanding the reach of drug treatment courts in Calgary and Edmonton. I'm just shocked that the previous government did not take action on this. Six hundred thousand dollars doubled the capacity of Calgary and Edmonton. Six hundred thousand dollars doubled the capacity. More money was spent, I believe, on light bulbs and shower heads than was spent on doubling the capacity of drug treatment courts. Their priorities were just not aligned with where Albertans were, practical solutions that needed to be made, so we're here making sure we can get this done for Albertans.

Again, when it comes to drug treatment courts, this area, I was the former vice-chair of the Calgary drug treatment court for years. The immense amount of success that this program has: that 70 per cent of the graduates don't commit another criminal offence is what the stats are showing. It's a successful program. It's a reasonable step to take. It has accountability built into it. It works with our health care providers. It takes somebody that has been a drug addict and admitted their guilt and is willing to be accountable for what

they have done, and it requires them to go and talk to a judge on a regular basis to be accountable for their treatment. It's a successful program. I'm proud of the practical steps that our government is taking to help make sure that we deal with the drug crisis we have across Alberta.

Now, getting on to rural crime, I've travelled as far north as Fairview, I've been down to Coaldale, Drayton Valley, Two Hills, and I've been to St. Paul talking to Albertans about what's happening in their communities. The response has been eye-opening for me. I'm a Calgary MLA, so when I was asked to take on this role of Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, you know, I kind of heard the stories on rural crime. I heard the stories as to what was happening in these communities, but you understand it academically. If you just stayed here in Edmonton and you didn't go out and talk to people, if you just relied on the stats that were coming in, you would think that rural crime is on the downturn. You would think that we've bent the curve on this. Nothing could be further from the truth. People have simply stopped reporting.

9:10

We had a town hall where we asked people how many of them had been victimized by crime. Almost every single hand in that room went up saying that they had been a victim of crime, many of them multiple times. We had a story about somebody whose trailer was stolen. Fortunately, they recovered it. The problem was that it was stolen again.

So we had instances like this time and time again that were happening in rural communities. Then you ask them: are you still reporting the crimes and thefts that are happening to you? People are saying no because they don't believe that justice will be done. Even if the person is caught, they believe that the person will be right back out there in their community. So really making sure that we offer tangible solutions to deal with rural crime is important for our government. We've already made an announcement that came directly from those town halls, announcements on tangible ways to go after and tackle rural crime that came directly from the feedback that we received from Albertans.

Now, as we get into this as well, one of the things that we wanted to do is make sure that we use our resources as best as humanly possible. When we did the rural Alberta provincial integrated defence force, the RAPID force, that was intended to take 400 highly trained people – fish and wildlife officers, sheriffs, commercial vehicle officers – and we're going to be giving them additional training so that they can provide us with additional boots on the ground.

We have about 1,600 police officers right now in rural Alberta. By having an additional 400 law enforcement professionals out there in our communities, we're going to be able to deal with 911 situations in a more responsive way, we're going to have the ability to have additional backup in emergency situations for police, and just simply provide better services for Albertans. This has been done in Saskatchewan. We're looking forward to doing it here.

I've talked to many sheriffs, actually, in the last little while, and quite often they'll come up to me and actually high-five me. They've been waiting to actually have different responsibilities. They're excited about this opportunity going forward, and we're looking forward to getting that done with them.

The other bit of feedback that we received loud and clear from Albertans is that they want to make sure we have the strongest property rights protections possible, and we're going to be introducing legislation that's going to help us do that here this fall. In addition to that, we also proclaimed the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Identification Act. It was eye-opening to me to see how much scrap metal is being stolen, the copper wire theft that's going on in rural

communities. I never knew that that was going on in Calgary. You don't see that in the city of Calgary. You don't see that in the city of Edmonton. If you're a city MLA, you don't understand the extent of this theft that is going on in rural communities.

By holding this accountable, having greater transparency with respect to scrap metal dealers, it's going to be one extra way for us to help crack down on crime, hold people accountable, make sure that people aren't buying stolen property, and make sure that we cut off the monetization. A lot of this money is going right into the drug trade. It's people feeding addictions. It's also going into organized crime. That is simply not what Albertans want. That's not the justice system that they want. They want us to be innovative. They want us to listen to Albertans.

The other one, too, where we are proud of what our government has done on rural crime is the community impact statements. We need to make sure that we get better evidence in front of our courts, and we're doing that here. We're going to start having that service available in January with our prosecution service. We're going to make sure that people have the ability to get their community impact statements before the judiciary.

Right now our justice system is written for downtown Toronto; it's not written for rural Alberta. It's broken, and it's not right, and these people deserve better. That's the one thing that I really took away from rural Alberta when I did this tour, that the people you face and the people that you're talking to one on one just want the system to work. They just want to feel safe. They don't feel safe right now. When you have somebody that comes down their dirt road, they're now wondering if that person is there to harm them whereas years ago they were wondering if it was a family member or a friend or maybe somebody that needed their help. Now it's completely been turned on its head, and it's been destructive. The mental health issues that this has caused are immense. People do not feel safe. They're worried for their loved ones.

We need to do more, and that's why I'm so proud of the effort of all of my colleagues that I've been working with on this file, making sure that we bring it forward, you know, in a timely way and a responsive way to make sure that we deal with rural crime. It is a foundation of what we're trying to do here.

As well, I'll gladly get into, in the discussion, what we're doing around police funding. It's in our budget amendment act, and it has the potential to do . . .

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, Minister.

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. The timer will be set for 20-minute intervals so that members are aware of the time. We will begin with the Official Opposition. Is it Member Ganley? It's either back and forth with the minister or split time. Member, what would you like?

Ms Ganley: I would like to go back and forth if the minister is agreeable.

Mr. Schweitzer: No.

The Acting Chair: Okay. So it's my understanding, under Standing Order 59.02(1), that both parties have to agree to the back and forth. Otherwise, the default is the split time.

Member, go ahead. Thank you. You have up to 10 minutes.

Ms Ganley: All right. I've never seen that happen before, so I wasn't really prepared for it. But we'll give it a shot anyway. I will in this case just read through my questions. I'd like to begin with resolution and court administration services. In every instance if the minister isn't able to provide an answer in his time, just because of

the sort of weird math that we're doing this in, I'm happy to receive that in writing afterwards. Thank you.

My first question. Turning to the budget, page 149 of the main estimates, line 2.4, we see a decrease in Provincial Court, \$4 million relative to estimates and \$1.5 million to actuals. I'm just wondering how that will be achieved. I'm certain that "efficiencies" is going to be the answer, but I'm just wondering: specifically, in what ways? Will there be fewer judges? Will there be fewer court clerks? Is this a decrease in something else? That would be very helpful.

My second question. Staying on RCAS but jumping to the fiscal plan, by 2022-23 we see a decrease of \$43 million relative to actuals in '18-19, so that's just over 20 per cent. Will this be distributed evenly across all departments? Will it be evenly between Provincial Court, Court of Queen's Bench, resolution services, et cetera? That is, of course, on page 108, the second line, RCAS, in the financial plan or page 110 of the business plan under RCAS.

My third question is: what is the estimates decrease in resolution services, and will that affect the number of court clerk positions? Do we intend to have the same number of court clerks? Again, we're on page 108, second line of the table, or on the financial plan on page 110.

My next question is: have courts indicated an ability to absorb those costs internally? I certainly know that with respect to the courts there were memoranda of understanding that required sort of a consultation back and forth, so I'm wondering how that went and what they've said about how they'll do that internally. I'm wondering: overall, are we going to see fewer court clerks? Will there be fewer court clerks in that file in year '22-23 than there were this year? Will there be fewer judges? In this case, obviously, I'm referring to Provincial Court judges since the other judges are appointed federally.

The next question I have is: do you intend to proceed with the unified family courts? I do know that there was a certain amount of money that came back as a result of judges being appointed under section 96 being paid federally. It was always our intention to reinvest that money in services that would basically make it the case that court was not the first option for a family breaking down. Instead, there was resolution services as the first option, and court was only the backup, instead of court being the default. I think that was a really, really important project, and I'd really like to see – but a lot of the gains you get from unified family courts happen because of those investments in services. So I'm a little concerned that we're going to move to those courts, and then that money is just going to go back to Treasury, and they're not going to have the impact they could have.

Next, I'm wondering if we intend to set up additional support services within the courts. I know there were a number of different conversations around community courts, for instance, which have been demonstrated in other places to decrease crime. I'm just sort of wondering about those things and about supports around that.

Next, on page 108 of the business plan we're dealing with performance measures. Performance measure 2(a) has been retained from last year's business plan. It was at 22.1 weeks last year, which was down from 24.1 weeks, and that is, again, lead times in Provincial Court. It's down from '15-16, which is a good thing, obviously. We want to be rowing in that direction, but I think we were all aware that there was significantly more work to do. I'm glad to see that that's been retained.

9:20

But I'm just wondering about a couple of other measures from last year's business plan that haven't been retained. The median time from first to last appearance no longer appears, and I'm just curious as to the reason why that was removed because I think that

that's an important measure in measuring how well our court system is performing.

I also note that the measure that deals with the time for preparation of a Gladue report has been removed. I think that's a big concern because we know that prior to our coming into government, there was a significant concern with that. We worked hard to try and address it because when those reports don't make it in time, then everybody shows up for the sentencing, and you can't have the sentencing, and it just sort of backlogs the whole process. I'm very hopeful that we'll see that measure return, and I'm just curious as to why it was removed.

I'm going to turn now to corrections. Again I'm in the main estimates, on page 150, line 7.2. I'm looking at adult remand and corrections. Given that we know that the adult remand population has been growing faster even than the population in Alberta, which is growing at a fairly high rate for the country – and that's been the case for probably the last decade – and that that has resulted in cost pressures, obviously, in corrections, a significant amount of cost increase, to deal with those increased people that are in those centres, I'm just wondering: how is it that next year you intend to deal with a higher number of offenders with the same number of dollars, or is it the case that you intend to have fewer offenders in there? That would be interesting to see. Again, we're on line 7.2, page 150.

Looking now at page 110 of the ministry business plan, I notice that corrections is down about \$19 million in 2020-21, and then it's down over \$20 million compared to current by 2021-22. Obviously, this is a significant decrease. I don't see a way in which this could be achieved without incarcerating fewer people. I'm not for a second suggesting that that's necessarily bad. I think there's a lot of evidence that if there are certain people who are not being put into remand, that actually overall decreases our crime rates and increases public safety, so I'm definitely not suggesting that that's bad. I'm just wondering: what policies do we intend to use in order to achieve that? That's a significant win, I think, and I'd like to know how it's going to be achieved.

Also, sort of staying on that same line, in light of recent court decisions having to do with the use of solitary confinement, which, as the minister will no doubt know, is how we essentially manage offender populations, particularly when dealing with gang-affiliated offenders – and the courts have basically told us that we are not permitted to use that offender management system any longer. Obviously, most of these individuals are incompatible. They can't be placed in the same unit with each other. There are normally too many of them for the number of units that exist in corrections centres. I'm just wondering how it is that we're planning to stay with the same money this year and then decrease significantly in out-years and also comply with that decision, which has, in my view, imposed a significant number of costs on the public.

My next question is: when we're estimating what our corrections populations will be in the out-years, what are we estimating at, and what do we estimate the cost per prisoner will be? I think it used to be somewhere around \$141 a day. I may have follow-ups on those once we're done.

In line 7.2 on page 151 of the estimates under capital, I note that there's only \$288,000 in capital there. I'm just wondering what that is for.

Finally, in this area, does the ministry intend to close prisons in order to . . .

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, Member.

Minister, you have 10 minutes to respond to the questions asked by the member. Thank you.

Mr. Schweitzer: Perfect. Thank you very much, Chair. You covered a lot of ground in 10 minutes, a lot of questions, so we'll try and do our best here to get through it in 10 minutes. Just going to figure out where we're going to start.

We will start first with – questions were asked around, you know, the courts and the efficiencies around the courts. Just to give this context, I want to kind of highlight the judicial system that we've inherited. It is a paper-driven system. I had a tour of the Edmonton courthouse, where we have amazing people doing good work, and I'm amazed at how organized they can be with what they have to work with. Right now the amount of paper that we ask them to move on a regular basis to actually do something very simple – what would be, with current technology, relatively basic processes is being done with paper.

Let me just highlight this right now. Like, we are issuing an 83-cent cheque, a physical cheque, that has to be sent out, has to be documented with paper. It has to then be sent back and put on a file with paper. It has to go to another person along the chain with paper. It touches numerous hands, just to issue an 83-cent cheque. We have somebody that's being held. You know, they're supposed to be discharged. Again, it goes through numerous stacks of paper, numerous hands, just to be able to call and have the person released.

So one of the biggest things that we're investing in right now is making sure that we actually digitize our court – we're calling it judicial digital or justice digital – to make sure that we actually have a modern court system. One of the foundational infrastructure pieces that we have right now in our court system is MS-DOS. It's from 1981. I was two years old. That is one of our foundational pieces of software that we use in our justice system. One of the most efficient ways for lawyers to file documents is with a fax machine. We have four people that literally sit around a fax machine. They take the paper, they go downstairs, they get it stamped, they take the paper back upstairs, and they fax it back. That is what we have right now. Other provinces have online digital systems. Other provinces have other efficiencies.

So when I'm asked about, "How are we going to find efficiencies for clerks? How are we going to find efficiencies at our courthouses?" I'd ask that member, why didn't you – why didn't you – find efficiencies? My God, this is from 1981 software. Like, where were you? This justice system right now and what we've ask these people to work through – I'm amazed that our court functions right now. I'm amazed at how they function. A perfect example of that: in Calgary we've got a newish courthouse, you know, built over 10 years ago but newish. We had technology 10 years ago. We had things called BlackBerrys back then, yet we're asking them to function like it's 1981. When I'm asked if we're going to find efficiencies: yes, we will. We will find many efficiencies. We'll work with our clerks. They're amazing people, and we'll get that done.

When it comes to the arrangement and talking to the chief judges and the memorandum of understanding, we've had many meetings already with the three chief judges to talk to them about the budget and the challenges that we have. We're working with them as partners to make sure that we can hit our targets. I mean, most of them – we've asked for, you know, modest or slight reductions in their different budgets. The rationale behind that, the reason why we've done that is that we believe that we can find efficiencies. To the Court of Appeal's credit, they were actually using their operating budget to invest in digital technology because the government wasn't doing it. The government wasn't stepping up to get that job done. We're making sure that we work with them, now with our actual budget, to digitize to make sure we can alleviate some of those pressures on their operating budget.

Questions were raised about the unified family courts. Again, this is another instance where, you know, the stars were aligned for the previous government to get this done, and they didn't pull the trigger, just like drug treatment courts. They didn't pull the trigger; they didn't act. Right now we're waiting to see who the next federal Justice minister is going to be. I've talked to the head of the Provincial Court, the head of Queen's Bench. They're in favour of a unified family court. We're going to review it to see if it works for us financially, to look at the details. Again, we want to talk to whoever the next federal Justice minister is to see what the game plan is. We have a lot of asks of the next federal Justice minister. We have a lot of asks of them for how we're going to deal with the justice system here in the province of Alberta, you know, from rural crime to making sure we have the proper number of judges appointed to both the Court of Queen's Bench and to the Court of Appeal. So we have lots of issues there before we can make a final decision on family courts.

9:30

You asked about how we're going to deal with prison populations. You also asked questions around community courts and additional supports. I mean, we've just announced the largest initiative to deal with specialized courts that's been done, drug treatment courts. For too long we've laid the pressure on the judiciary to innovate in our court systems. This is the first time, in my understanding, that a Justice minister has stepped up to actually put together a unified strategy to deal with drug treatment courts. But when it comes to community courts that you mentioned, we're exploring that right now. We're looking at different initiatives there right now as a potential option going forward. We have addictions problems. We have people that are continually rounding through our justice system. We have to find a way to end that revolving door, and I believe that treatment is going to be part of that solution. We are hoping to see if we can find a solution there in working with community stakeholders. There's a built-up demand. We've just got to find a new way of looking at the justice system.

We're also going to be working in collaboration and hoping to see if we can get something done on this with our Health department and with Community and Social Services to see what we can do. Again, no definitive announcement on that here today, but it's something that we're open to. If people on both sides have suggestions or ideas around it – I know people are passionate about it – I'd love to hear their ideas. I think we have to look at the justice system differently because the current system is broken. We cannot keep doing what we're doing.

With respect to questions about why different items were removed from key performance measures, the main thing that we have tried to do here is make sure we reflected our campaign commitments that we made to Albertans so we could track some of those around drug treatment courts and other areas. The main thing there was to make sure we track that. If the member has specific questions about details that they'd like us to track down for them that aren't there, available to us today, we're happy to follow up with you and table those in the House, if you'd like, on those ones there. Those are reasonable requests.

Again, we recognize the importance of Gladue reports, recognize the importance of us dealing with our crunches that we have in the justice system, but that's why we're hiring more prosecutors. That's why we have to hire more prosecutors. Their caseload is simply too high. We inherited a situation where we had – depending on the day, depending on how many people were in there, we were around 25, give or take, prosecutors short when we came in. We're in the process right now of filling those positions. We're in the process right now of getting those people hired. We're encouraging people

that are civil lawyers here in the province of Alberta, if they're interested, to apply to become prosecutors, because the demand is on the prosecutor side. We need to fill those positions. We're going to be working to hire greater articling classes to fill those positions. That'll help us further reduce those wait times, get things to trial faster, allow us to do early interventions as well to settle cases. It's really important that we get that done to help see if a case is viable or not. You can't just, you know, put so much pressure on the prosecutor that they only look at it on the last day to see if a case is viable or not. You need to make sure that they have a proper caseload so they can do those assessments earlier on in the process. It will save the justice system money. It's the right thing to do. That's our priority that we've committed to.

Lots of questions were asked about out-years. We can deal with that in future estimates. Glad to deal with that in future estimates. We're not going to get into that here today. I'll just say that there are many things, just like I articulated with the courthouses, many ways to find efficiencies in our corrections facilities. There are many different ways that we can get that done, and we'll talk about that in future budgets. That's beyond the scope of what we're here to talk about today.

When it comes to the capital – I'm just getting pointed to the line item to deal with the capital. Oh, okay. The capital item in corrections is for a body scanner at the Peace River Correctional Centre and industrial equipment such as washers, dryers, and kitchen equipment. It makes up about \$288,000, or the \$0.3 million. That's what that one was for.

Let's see if there are any other points that we covered off here.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

We'll now continue with the Official Opposition, going into a second 20-minute block. We're continuing with Member Ganley and continuing with the split time.

Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Absolutely. I'm glad to hear the minister say that he'll follow up with my questions in writing. I think that's really important. I'm just going to check back with the officials, that you were able to catch all those questions. Was there anything you needed repeated from the last block? No? Okay. Perfect. Fantastic.

I just do want to correct one small thing on the record. The budget is comprised of multiple documents, and it is, in fact, the case that the subject of estimates is all of those documents, which includes projections to the out-year. Obviously, as the minister will be incredibly familiar with, it's very challenging to make changes in the justice system in one year. Those changes have to be made over time. You have to implement policies and have them in for several years before they have any impact at all, which is why we have these lovely other documents like the financial plan and the business plan, in order to deal with those out-years so that we can see what's coming and what the plans are. Just to clarify that one.

Particularly, the things that came out of that – obviously, I had a lot of questions, so the minister wasn't able to get to them all – that we need follow-up with in writing have to do with what we expect offender populations to be in the out-years to achieve that 20 per cent decrease and specifically what the projections are with respect to the number of court clerks and the number of judicial officers.

I do have, actually, an additional question arising. The minister referenced digital justice. I do see here on page 151, again under capital, line 2.1, program support, \$5 million for technology. I'm just wondering if that \$5 million is the entire allotment for digital justice. I say that because when we looked at digitizing – and, admittedly, there were more components to it because there was the possibility of Skype appearance – just traffic court, the estimate was

closer to \$40 million. So I'm just wondering if that \$5 million is the whole thing and what that will be spent on.

Again, I'm happy to receive all of these answers in writing. I know I have a lot of questions.

The final question on corrections, which I didn't get to, was whether there was an intent to close any prisons and, if so, which ones? Obviously, because of layoffs those plans would have to be made ahead of time. I'm looking at closing prisons, again, for the out-years.

Turning now to Alberta Crown prosecution services, page 149 of the main estimates, for the current line 4.1, program support, I'm just wondering – there's about a million dollars in savings – whether that has to do with staff reductions or moving staff to other areas, and what are those savings?

Then turning, of course, to line 4.3, criminal and youth prosecutions, which is basically flat from last year's actuals – and I get that in the out-years we do actually start to see money coming in – I'm assuming those 50 prosecutors are in the out-years as opposed to being in this year. If you're basically flat, I don't know how you intend to hire 50 more people. Basically, my question is: do you intend to do that hiring in '19-20 or in subsequent years?

Continuing in criminal and youth prosecutions, again, line 4.3, you've indicated repeatedly that in April 2019 there were 25 unfilled positions which you inherited. I'm surprised to hear that. I know that there's some turnover, but I'm surprised to hear that in light of the fact that in January of that year that definitely wasn't the case. But I'm fully aware that there could have been a mass exodus. Those things happen sometimes. I'm just wondering if someone can get me the total number of prosecutors employed by the government on April 1, 2019, and how many we were budgeted for. And if that's the case, why did we not see any of those savings reflected in the budget? We spent the entire allotment we were budgeted for, so if there were 25 unfilled vacancies, what happened to that money if you didn't pay it to prosecutors, absent, of course, the \$2 million we were planning to add in for the rural crime strategy?

9:40

If that was the amount of money paid for, say, 380 prosecutors, which I understood to be the number, and there were 25 vacancies plus the 50 additional prosecutors, I'm just wondering how we're planning to achieve that or when we're planning to achieve that in light of the fact that we don't see \$15 million added to the budget until 2022-23.

Is there a plan to roll back wages for Crowns? I ask that only because I'm concerned. As the minister will no doubt be aware, it's already reasonably difficult to retain people.

Now turning to the business plan, I'm just looking at performance metric 2(c), page 108 of the business plan. What is a trial Crown prosecutor as differentiated from a Crown prosecutor, and specifically who's excluded? Again, as I had understood, there were about 380 positions. This would suggest that 43 were either vacant or excluded in some way. So what is the operational definition of a trial Crown prosecutor as opposed to anything else?

Also, again, 2(c) indicates 337. Given that people leave or are hired, I'm just wondering, like: what day is that 337 from? Obviously, it wouldn't have been exactly 337 over the entire fiscal year. And was the 337 the total number of Crown prosecutors employed in the government of Alberta on April 1, 2019, specifically?

Moving along, on page 110 of the business plan or, likewise, on page 108 of the fiscal plan we see the actual from '18-19 is \$103.6 million, and then we see the estimates up \$1.2 million this year, \$6.6 million, and then \$10 million in 2022. I'm wondering, like:

what is the hiring plan for those Crown prosecutors? How many each year over time?

Page 151, capital: switch to there. On line 2.1 – oh. Look at that. I had written that question. I'd wondered where it went. Okay. So that's, again, about the program support. I was just wondering about the intention to build new technology. I know that with respect to the Crown, obviously, we have PRISM already in place, and we've made significant progress on criminal e-files. So when you talk about e-courts, I assume that we're talking about civil matters. I know the Court of Appeal had done that on their own. Just a little bit more detail about what's contained in that number and whether there are larger investments in the out-year that might account for the gains we're hoping to make.

Turning now to public security, on line 6.1, program support, we see a \$5 million increase. I'm just wondering what that is.

Now turning to line 6.3, Alberta Serious Incident Response Team, I notice that that's held flat. Again, we're on page 150 here. Given the important nature of the work they do and its importance not only to the person who's filed the complaint but to the person who's accused of a complaint that may be off work suffering mentally and the fact that that workload had been increasing and increasing and that we were sort of having to inject money in additional years, I'm just kind of wondering whether they're going to be able to handle their caseload with that.

I also note on line 6.4, law enforcement standards and audits, the budget is almost doubled from the actual. I'm just wondering what that is and specifically whether it's an anticorruption unit.

Line 6.5, contract policing and oversight. I noticed that there's a teeny, tiny less . . .

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, you have up to 10 minutes to respond to the member's questions. Thank you.

Mr. Schweitzer: Perfect. Why don't we stay with public security to start. I'm just going to get my spot here. The rationale for the reason why there's an increase from the budget last year to the estimated budget for this year is that the \$7.6 million is due to an increase of \$2.6 million for the guns and gangs federal funding agreement; \$1.3 million in operating grants for the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services; \$1.3 million in operating grants for child advocacy centres; \$1.1 million for central shared services, WCB, RMI premiums and things like that; \$1 million for the biology casework analysis; and \$0.3 million for the human trafficking task force. That's item 6.1.

Now line item 6.3, Alberta Serious Incident Response Team. There's been no significant change here again to the budget. Again, we are working with our partners at ASIRT to continue to make sure that they manage their important role in oversight in our law enforcement services that we provide in Alberta. We're going to continue to work with them to make sure that they have the resources and tools that they require. Again, no significant change there, just to make sure that we're going to continue to work with them and monitor. Again, we're going to make sure that they have the tools that they need to do their important role.

Now, taking a look at line 6.4, the question was asked as to why the budget had gone up. In 2018-19 it was approximately \$3.4 million, and in 2019-20 it's at \$6.1 million and change. The rationale for the change here is that it's a \$2.7 million increase due largely to the drug-impaired driving federal funding agreement. That's where that change is driven out of.

Now, as we get to line 6.5, contract policing and policing oversight – oh, we didn't get to a question on that. That's where we left off. Okay. Perfect.

All right. When it comes to technology and the investment in the capital of justice digital, this is just one year of a many-year investment into technology. It'll be a four-year investment of \$27 million, that will allow us to do justice digital. Again, as I was mentioning earlier, this is one of our foundational investments that we made. It was one of the most important strategic decisions that we made at the outset. We made a bunch of decisions regarding rural crime. We're hoping to make a future decision here shortly regarding the future of police funding that'll help us on the ground to deal with rural crime.

One of the other areas where we have an immense amount of work to do – and this is the reason for the strategic investment – is to make sure that we invest in modernizing our courts. Earlier on I highlighted the fact that we have, you know, four people around fax machines carrying paper up and down between floors. This investment is going to allow us to deal with that issue. We've also got to make sure that we allow for the release of people that are in custody in a timely way, without paper having to go through multiple stages at the courthouse, multiple stages from the courtroom down to a clerk, then information going to where they're being held. We have to make sure we deal with this in efficient ways, so that's where this money and resources are going to be. It's a four-year project.

Again, one of the things that we're making sure we do here as well – we want to make sure that we get the feedback of the judiciary as well in this whole process. We can't do this in a bubble. This can't be us coming up with all the answers, the smartest guy in the room. It can't be that way. We're going to make sure we go down and meet with the clerks on the ground. We've already done this. My deputy has done this. He was in Wetaskiwin the other day. He was in Calgary the other day taking a look at what's happening behind the scenes: how do the processes work, and how do we actually find a way to deliver the services that Albertans deserve? We're going to make sure that we do this working with the people on the front lines, working with the leadership of the judiciary to make sure that this program is a success and works for Albertans.

9:50

Your question about, you know, closing prisons. At this point in time there's no plan to close prisons. It's a premature discussion at best. Again, we're finding lots of different ways to find efficiencies in our correctional services to make sure we continue to provide the services that Albertans are looking for. We're looking at lots of different options to make sure that we provide those services that Albertans are looking for.

Your question about Crowns. This is a budget, not actuals. This is a budget as to what we're trying to do here today. Right now in this year's budget we are simply trying to fill the vacant positions. Let's put this in context. We're about 25 lawyers short right now, and we've dedicated to Albertans to hire 50 additional prosecutors; 75 lawyers is what we need to hire to get our prosecution services up to the complement where it needs to be. That's the equivalent of the second-largest law firm in the city of Edmonton. The largest law firm is about 100. The next one down in Edmonton I think is about 50. So this would be the equivalent of hiring the second-largest law firm in one of our largest cities here in our province.

This is not a small undertaking to get done. We are encouraging folks that are in our civil branch – if they're interested in applying for jobs in the prosecution service, we're asking them to do that. We're asking them to take that step as part of public service. We're going to find ways to get students and hire different students. I've sent a letter to the deans of the two law schools encouraging their students to take a look at prosecution service as an alternative for them for their articling year. We also simply

have to be innovative. The articling program that we offer to get prosecutors in the door is not competitive with the private sector. The private-sector programs in the way that they handle student recruitment are far more effective at attracting candidates, you know, to their workforces. We have to start thinking more nimbly, approaching this differently. I'm proud of the work that our ADM in this area is doing on this and the forward-thinking processes that he's doing.

The reason why you haven't seen the big spike is that we simply have to fill the backlog this year. The reason why you're going to see an increase in the future in the budget for prosecution services is because those 50 positions would be hired in the out-years. They would be. We're going to make sure that we work to get that done in a responsible way for Albertans.

The question about rolling back wages for Crowns: no, not happening, not part of our plan. But let me comment on the Crown wages and the situation that we inherited from the previous government. With the freezes that you put in place, this is what we inherited. Prosecutors are considered management, and as a result their wages are frozen, and it causes complications. If somebody's wages have been frozen in one year and they're, like, at year one and they work for two years and then you bring in somebody laterally at the three-year call, it's causing discrepancies in pay. Those issues have been raised with me by, you know, the group of people that are working together. They are prosecutors fighting for their colleagues. We're exploring different options to see if we can address that. Obviously, we have tough budgetary constraints. We have lots of demands on resources for the justice service. We're exploring to see what we can do because I understand that frustration.

Also, right now we're seeing that the federal prosecution is trying to poach lawyers. This happens every 10 years, give or take. In '07-'08 the province was poaching federal lawyers. It's a normal process. Right now the feds are on a bit of a hiring spree trying to take prosecutors over to their side. We have to make sure that our program is resilient, we have to make sure that our program is effective for recruitment, and we have to make sure that, again, if we do have to deal with anything going forward, we're working hand in hand with people there to make sure that, you know, we can hopefully address some of these issues going forward. It's not in our budget today, but we're listening to them and hoping to address that in the future.

A definition of a trial Crown is effectively our Crown bail office. That is the definition of a trial Crown, somebody in the bail office.

The Crown complement: as of April 2019 we had 335 Crowns that were hired and in place, and there were 28 vacancies at that time.

I'm just trying to see if there's anything else that I can go through here.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you, Minister. Hold that thought.

We'll now go back for the third 20-minute block, split time. Go ahead, Member Ganley.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, and thank you very much, Minister, for those answers. Having received the numbers in terms of April 2019, I'm wondering if we could get a point in time for today in terms of Crowns, which is seven months later, just to sort of see what progress we're making on that. I do appreciate the fact that there's attrition and there are a lot of concerns.

I guess this is more of a comment than a question. If you are able to deal with that situation with respect to the anomalies with the Crowns, then I congratulate you for that. I think that's a really good thing, and I'm really glad to see that you're doing that. I had heard

those frustrations. I think they're right, and I think you're right, so if you are able to do that, I would fully support you.

I think most of those other questions were answered. I'm just going to run really quickly through the end of the questions that I had with respect to the public security division, and then I'll jump over to something else. Line 6.5: I see that there's a very small increase in budget. On page 110, again, in the out-years we see a decrease to section 6 over all the out-years. I'm just trying to understand, because I know we got from the technical briefings from officials that those were decreases to the PPSA. That's the contract to the RCMP. I'm just wondering how much that decrease is and whether that information from officials was, in fact, correct.

I'm also wondering if the department, given some of the things you're considering in your panel, has an estimate on what the costs would be to move from the RCMP to a provincial police force. I remember that such an estimate existed, but obviously it's sort of four years out of date now.

Line 6.6, indigenous policing services. As the minister will be familiar with, after years and years of waiting the federal government has finally allocated some additional positions. Those are shared on a 52-48 cost split with the feds. I'm just wondering. I know that Alberta was allocated a certain number of those positions from the federal budget. Does this cover all of those positions?

Line 6.8: I see that the number is identical to last year's numbers. I just want confirmation that that's correct. In both cases it's \$32,100,000. I'm just sort of wondering where that \$5 million increase is.

Okay. I'm going to jump over to some different questions just for a moment, putting a line in that. With respect to legal services – sorry; I'm jumping back now to page 149. Legal services is lines 3.1 through 3.3 although specifically I'm looking at 3.1, which is civil law. With respect to the forward-funded inquiry headed by Steve Allan, I'm just wondering if all the money for the initial inquiry, the \$2.5 million, sits in the Energy budget or whether some of it is residing here and whether any of that is captured within legal services and whether that line contains any sort of support to Steve Allan or to that inquiry.

Also, if there's further litigation to arise out of the inquiry, would the money be captured in legal services, that line item, in the out-years, or would it come under Executive Council?

Also, is there money currently set aside for litigation coming out of the inquiry? Why or why not? Often, you know, when we project that something is going to cost money, we put it in the budget. It's kind of the point of doing a budget. So I'm just wondering where that money is projected to reside; specifically, if it is under legal services. If it is under the direction of the Ministry of Justice, do you perceive any conflicts of interest with respect to your decisions with respect to that?

10:00

Additionally, the individual in charge of that particular inquiry, Steve Allan, obviously has become very, very well known recently, fundraising for you in 2018 and openly calling for folks to vote for you. I'm just wondering whether it was, in your view, appropriate to be involved in that appointment and whether it's appropriate to be engaged in any litigation or legal proceedings coming out of that inquiry. Also, if you can walk me through the steps you took to ensure that appointing Mr. Allan was appropriate.

Can you also walk me through the involvement in selecting Dentons as the primary law firm to head the inquiry? I know that Mr. Allan's son is a partner there, and I'm wondering: you know, how involved was he versus how involved were legal, Justice department officials in that decision? Finally, do you foresee any issues with Stephens' son Toby being a partner at Dentons? If you

could, explain to the public for the record whether you think that anyone could stand to benefit and whether that's appropriate.

I guess that exhausts my questions on that legal services area. Oh, I did have just one more on that. You said that you're encouraging folks to move over to the prosecution service. I'm wondering if there's any intention for lawyers sort of captured under that line – I guess they bill to other departments, so they're captured all over the place even though they work for the Ministry of Justice – whether there's an intention to lay off lawyers in the civil division, because we're hearing significant concerns about layoffs, between a third and 50 per cent. Just wondering about that.

I guess I will turn back, then, to the questions I had with respect to public security. Turning then to line 6.9, I see the sheriffs have a decrease over the budget of last year. I'm just wondering what the intended reduction is for that, whether it's sheriffs transporting prisoners, whether it's court security, whether it's the integrated traffic units.

In fish and wildlife and commercial vehicle enforcement I see a very slight reduction. Again, this is on line 6.10 and 6.11 of page 150 of the main estimates. I'm just wondering, with respect to fish and wildlife and commercial vehicle enforcement, in light of the flat budgets or moderate reductions, how it is you expect them to handle additional workload. I don't think it's a bad plan to have them responding necessarily to calls; it's just that the work that they were doing obviously needs to be done.

I'll just take one example, commercial vehicle enforcement. Obviously, this has been a huge topic in the news. Our government made a ton of moves on it. The reason for that is that there are huge concerns, especially in light of the Humboldt tragedy, around commercial vehicles and the appropriate regulation of commercial vehicles and ensuring that we're inspecting those commercial vehicles. I'm just wondering, if those folks are constantly being called off to calls, how we're going to accommodate that extra workload without any extra resources.

Finally, my question is: is it still the intention to move the commercial vehicles enforcement branch within the sheriffs? When will we see that move and how it's sort of accommodated within the budget?

Okay. Jumping then to justice services – this is on page 149 if we're looking at the main estimates – my first question is about line 5.3, which is the office of the Chief Medical Examiner. They have a pretty heavy workload. This is an area in which we made multiple investments over our years in part because of the constantly increasing workload. Because of the way the statute works in Alberta, we sort of see a higher number of autopsies than in some other jurisdictions. We also recently saw that this hit such a level that they were unable to contain the remains of the deceased within the facility because of the backlog. Obviously, that would be incredibly challenging emotionally for the families of those . . .

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, Member.

Minister, you have 10 minutes to respond to questions. Thank you.

Mr. Schweitzer: I just received – my deputy just had an update on the trial Crown. Sorry. We want to make sure we give you all the right information here. There actually are 337 trial Crown in offices. It's not just bail Crown. The ones that it doesn't include would be: appeals, bail, management, the policing unit and education unit. It's your standard trials. I just wanted to clarify that point for you.

Let's dive into 6.5. When you take a look at 6.5, for contract policing the 2018-19 budget was 256 million dollars and change, and the 2019-2020 estimate is \$263 million. It's a \$7 million increase. It's comprised of \$6.9 million for the provincial police

service agreement, which is comprised of \$4.9 million of general operating inflation adjustments and \$2 million for the rural crime reduction initiative. So this is a continuation of your previously announced initiative there. There's also \$0.1 million for Edmonton airport police services. That's 6.5.

With respect to the estimate for the creation of a provincial police force, I mean, that's not in our budget. That's not before us here today. This is beyond the scope of what I'm here to answer. Again, I know it'll be a part of the fair deal panel discussions that are going on across Alberta. I look forward to hearing back from the panel as to, you know, what they're hearing from Albertans and what their recommendations will be, but at this point in time it's not built into our budget.

With respect to 6.6, the indigenous policing services, in 2018-2019 the budget was 11 million dollars and change, and the estimate for 2019-20 is \$12,182,000. The approximate \$1.2 million increase represents Alberta's 48 per cent share of the increased funding for indigenous policing announced by Public Safety Canada. It's primarily for inflationary pressures.

Now let's turn to 6.8, organized and serious crime. The budget for 2018-19 was \$29,100,000, and the estimate for 2019-2020 is \$32,100,000. Getting the budget through and providing time for the Alberta law enforcement response team to ramp up their services – we're dedicated to spending an additional \$50 million in our first term on the Alberta law enforcement response team, and we have every intention of filling that campaign promise that we've made to Albertans. The approximately \$3 million increase that we see in year-over-year budget for ALERT is to fund that commitment going forward and to provide them with the lead time they need to get us recommendations for the next budget as to how they can ramp up their services. We need to give them a little bit of runway so that they can put together their road map and game plan, and this is that initial money to help get them planning. I'm looking forward to our next budget, when we're planning on providing even more services through Alberta law enforcement response team.

Now, you had asked a few questions about our RAPID force announcement as it relates to, you know, fish and wildlife and commercial vehicles. This was done in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan took these efforts to unify their peace officers with their policing in a co-ordinated way to get better results because we have so much ground to cover in rural communities. They're vast geographic regions where we have to find a way to make sure that we can service Albertans and just get our response times down.

10:10

Too many instances that I heard when I was out in these communities – it particularly was driven home for me in Rocky Mountain House. We had 800 people there. I wish everybody here could have been there. It's one of those things where the young women that presented at the beginning of that town hall: their sister was beaten by four people on their property, they had sawed-off shotguns, and their sister was on the phone with her dad while this was all unfolding, begging for her life. When it comes to response and the reason why we did the RAPID force announcement and why we're asking our peace officers to take on more responsibility, it's because that's what Albertans have asked of us. It's because we've heard in every town hall that they want their sheriffs to be able to help. I've talked to many sheriffs on the ground that are excited about this.

We have to make sure that we do this responsibly and give them the training that they need to get that done. To make sure we keep them safe and don't put them in a compromised position, we have to get them that training. One of the reasons why you don't see a huge, significant change in this year's budget relating to this is that

we're in a planning phase right now, and when it comes to the actual training and the additional training that's required to get them fully tooled, our plan is to have them in the field in the fall. So you'll see more details on that in further budgets regarding how we're going to roll that out.

We found through the province of Saskatchewan and the details we have from there that doing these additional services comprises maybe about 15 per cent of their duties. Asking them to respond to an emergency 911 call that's appropriate, providing an additional backup car where appropriate, enhanced ability to deal with traffic tickets and potentially even impaired driving offences on our roads comprised about 15 per cent of their time. It's the prudent thing to do. We already have these resources on the ground, 400 boots on the ground, that are already out there. It makes sense to enhance their skill set and their ability to perform.

With respect to your question about why there was a decrease in the sheriffs in line 6.9, \$3 million of that was through operational efficiencies and vacancy management and attrition. Also, the sheriff surveillance unit was about \$2.1 million, and we're reprofiling that and working with ALERT to reprofile that unit going forward.

With respect to your questions about the inquiry that is being run by Commissioner Allan, that's in the Energy budget; it's not in this budget. With respect to any potential litigation relating to it, I could be premature to speculate if there will be any litigation regarding that inquiry. I believe it has a \$2.5 million budget. Again, not my department: I'd refer you to the Minister of Energy.

You know what? It's beyond the scope of what we're here to deal with today, but I'll answer it anyways. Steve Allan received the Alberta Order of Excellence. He was the Calgary's city person of the year, former chairman of the Calgary Stampede. He received the title, from Treaty 7, of Chief Rides Many Horses as an honorary title. This person has had an immense amount of success in his career. He's given back for homelessness, given back an immense amount of time as a Rotarian, given to his community.

How he's been dragged through the mud over the last few weeks is appalling. The fact that the NDP lines of attack on this are the same as Ecojustice's is appalling. Absolutely appalling, what we are seeing in the attacks on this person's credibility: aligning yourselves with Ecojustice – you guys should be ashamed of yourselves for doing that – the same lines of attack, the people that are angry at the fact that this inquiry exists, the people that attack the future of the province of Alberta, the prosperity of our province. To go after somebody like Steve Allan, who's given so much to our community, is absolutely appalling, and you guys should be ashamed of that. Aligning yourselves with Ecojustice: can't believe it.

Again, Commissioner Allan in his role is akin to a judge. He's akin to a judge. He's free to conduct his inquiry as he sees fit. His decision to hire who he sees fit to assist him with his inquiry is built right into the terms of reference and built right into his agreement. I'd just leave it at that. Commissioner Allan is a person who has given an immense amount to our province. I respect him, and – you know what? – I'm looking forward to seeing his report. I'm hoping that we can run to ground exactly how this foreign money has interfered in the province of Alberta and interfered with the jobs that we need in our province.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

This first 60-minute block has expired. We will now go to the government members' side. For the next 20 minutes – who are we starting with? Michaela Glasgo. Go ahead, Member.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for . . .

The Acting Chair: Oh. Sorry. Member, are you going back and forth, or are we doing split time?

Ms Glasgo: I think that we'll just split time.

The Acting Chair: Split time. Go ahead. Ten minutes.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister, for being here today and for bringing your department officials and for your transparency on so many of these issues. I know that this is a tough file, and you were handed a mess. I'm very grateful for the work that you're doing. One of the areas that I'm the most grateful for is the rural crime file and how seriously you've taken this. I think what you said just shows your humility. Right at the beginning, when you were talking about – you know, you're a Calgary guy. This isn't your area of expertise. You don't live in the sticks with some of these people. It's true that you can't really understand what's going on in rural Alberta until you've been there, until you've heard the mothers who are scared when their husbands leave for work, until you've heard the young women, like you said, who have had to defend themselves. It's horrifying.

Back to my nomination, I had a very Brooks-Medicine Hat kind of meet-and-greet at Bow slope shipping company, which is our local auction yard in Brooks, one of them. I met a family, and we were talking about everything – you know, jobs, the economy, pipelines; we were talking about debt and deficit – but the biggest thing for them, they said: if you want to do something that really matters to us, we need to decrease response times, we need to make sure that there are people here, we need boots on the ground, we need people who are trained and ready to go so that they can fight this rural crime epidemic. So thank you so much, Minister, for taking this so seriously.

I know that consultation has also been a huge part of your purview and of your job as Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. We really appreciate that in Brooks-Medicine Hat because over the last four years there wasn't really a whole lot around the Brooks area, especially Medicine Hat. We've been a little bit, I'd say, neglected by ministers in the past down in southern Alberta, and I know that your willingness to get down to Medicine Hat and to come and see us is definitely not lost. I know that snowmageddon kind of got in the way the last time – that's far beyond our control – but I'm excited for your visit whenever we can find time for it and make it happen.

I thought one of the biggest takeaways from your initial comments was talking about the faith in the justice system, that has been – well, it seems to be lost by so many people, especially in rural Alberta. You noted that very clearly, and I think that all of us in this room can probably – I mean, if we sit back objectively, even those of us who might be on opposite sides could probably see how that's true.

I mean, there are people who – I'm thinking about Eddie Maurice. I'm thinking of people who really have done nothing wrong objectively who are being tried like criminals and being told that they are less than because they live in rural Alberta. They don't deserve the same kind of supports from the judiciary or from police that other people do: that's how these people feel. Whether that's right or wrong and whether that's factual or not I don't think is relevant here. I think the fact of the matter is that that's how these people are feeling. They are feeling isolated, they are feeling left alone, and they are feeling not heard.

But I do think that there's hope on the horizon for them. I note the fair deal panel coming out and things like that. They're really

excited about that because that's an opportunity for them to really have their voices heard. They're looking forward to some more Alberta-based solutions that I know that your ministry is willing to hear and ready to provide.

10:20

To page 106 of the business plan. In reference to your key objective 1.4 the ministry mentions that one of its focuses is to review the legislation and introduce legislation to protect Albertans and their property rights. This is something that I think, for both of the legacy parties, has a long history here in Alberta, this need for more enhanced property rights. I know that that's another thing that comes up because many communities in rural Alberta are dealing with widespread and skyrocketing crime, by over 100 per cent between 2017 and 2018 in some communities. Many communities are still dealing with crime rates at near or five-year highs, and that's just crazy to me.

I know that in *Maclean's* magazine, on the 20 most dangerous places in Canada, eight of those communities are from Alberta. I think we can't accept that as being okay, so I'm very happy to know that you're taking such an effort on this. I know that many of these places are places that you've actually visited on your tour. I mean, there are many that you haven't that are on this index list, but that doesn't mean that they're not as important, so I'm happy to see that you're going there as well. A lot of them involve property offences. I'll let you speak to this, but some of these numbers are likely much higher because people have just stopped reporting the crimes, which I think you alluded to in your previous remarks as well.

I'm glad to see that key objective 1.4 says that the ministry is looking to protect Albertans and their property rights because Albertans in rural areas have a unique vulnerability due to their remoteness and their neighbours and their remoteness from law enforcement. When I look at this key objective as well as other parts of the business plan and performance measures and other documents, I see a government that is committed to responding to widespread and increasing rural crime, especially property crime. After four years of government inaction that saw skyrocketing property crimes in many of Alberta's rural communities, this is a really fresh perspective that we're seeing from you and your ministry.

While we're always thankful for the tireless work that's done by our law enforcement – I mean, it's so important, and nobody is not grateful for when a police officer arrives; there's none of that – we can't ignore and I can't ignore as an MLA and I know that we can't ignore as a government that rural Albertans don't feel safe right now or secure or protected in their communities, and that's a real problem. So even with the exemplary work that is done by our law enforcement personnel, there's a lot of frustration that's directed at a system that rural Albertans, I believe – and, I mean, I've heard and you have as well. They ultimately feel that this system is failing them. It impacts our homes, it impacts our families, and it impacts mental health. It's really hard for these people to feel as though they're part of a system or part of a province that cares about them when they can't even feel safe in their own homes.

I personally believe – and I'll let you elaborate on this, too – that rural Albertans really do deserve better when it comes to the justice system. They deserve a government that recognizes their unique vulnerability in rural areas and more isolated parts of the province. They deserve a justice system that reflects the realities of rural Alberta. We need to show criminals that the Department of Justice and Solicitor General will not tolerate this.

Like I said, I've heard this, even back to my nomination. This is almost two years ago when I started that. It actually is two years ago that I started that. This was at an auction yard of all places. This

is a place where we should, you know – usually the topic of discussion isn't crime; it's cattle. Here we are sitting and talking about break-ins and people scared of losing their trucks and scared of losing their houses and scared of losing property. I don't believe that the same amount of distrust and the same amount of insecurity is felt in the urban parts of my riding. Because I represent one of these rural ridings and I have an urban contingent within the riding, I hear both perspectives, and I certainly don't hear that in the middle of Brooks. I certainly don't hear that in parts of Medicine Hat. You really do hear this when you go out to Duchess or you go out Scandia or you go out to Tilley or Bassano. Name a small town in my riding, and you're going to hear this sentiment.

I'm pleased to see that in your ministry's business plan you recognize that our government must spend on the tools and resources necessary to ensure that rural Albertans know that their justice system will protect them, their loved ones, and their property. That's why I want to ask – and you can answer this in your time. When one of your department's key objectives is to create new legislation to protect Albertans and their property, I would like to know specifically what steps you've taken to create new legislation to protect property and to help these rural Albertans feel safe.

I know that my constituents really are kind of waiting. They've been waiting for four years. I remember when the galleries were full. I mean, I wasn't an MLA then, obviously, but I was one of the three people who watched question period. I was sitting at home, and I was watching, and I heard the now Minister of Environment and Parks talking about: you know, look at all these people here; why aren't you doing anything? And it felt like it took forever. It just felt like those people weren't even there to the previous government. I know that their concerns should be heard. I know that they felt that their concerns should be heard, and that's why they came out in such large numbers.

I guess what I can say for now is: thank you for the work that you're doing and for your department and everyone who's here to elaborate on this. But also know that rural Albertans – we have a caucus full of rural MLAs, and we know that our constituencies are better than what they've been getting. I guess the standard, the bar, is set pretty high. The bar was set pretty low from the previous government, but, you know, you're setting the bar pretty high for yourself, and we're really excited to see what's coming.

I will let you elaborate on these comments because I believe my time is finished.

The Acting Chair: Well, like the previous speaker, you're close but not quite. If you yield your time, we can go back to the minister.

Minister, you have a little over 10 minutes including the member's time. Go ahead.

Mr. Schweitzer: Perfect. I'm just assuming we're probably going to do the bathroom break after this one. When do you normally do your five?

The Acting Chair: We could, yeah.

Mr. Schweitzer: Up to you.

The Acting Chair: Yeah. Well, the plan is to have it after the . . .

Mr. Schweitzer: After one more?

The Acting Chair: . . . Official Opposition.

Mr. Schweitzer: Perfect. We can do that, too.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Schweitzer: Really, just an immense amount of thanks and gratitude on my part, first and foremost, to all of our rural MLAs and the amount of advocacy that you guys have done. You already did a lot of the legwork as many of you sought your nominations, as many of you campaigned in the last election campaign. I mean, crime was one of the biggest parts of our platform, over 20 commitments dealing with crime issues and justice issues across the province. The legwork was the foundation. That was foundation of our announcements that we've made to date: the need for more prosecutors, the need to enhance ALERT. They needed the ability to do that.

In starting the rural crime town halls that we did across Alberta – I mean, it was number one. We had to do it because there was a demand out there. People were so frustrated. I was blown away about the fact that 3,000 people showed up to these town halls across the province. The largest one had 800 people at it. You don't normally see that in politics. You don't normally see that many people engaged about an issue.

Yet coming as a city MLA, I didn't fully appreciate it. My eyes were opened when I went out to these town halls to see what was happening, to see the heartbreak and the visible fear that people are living in: husbands worried about their wives back home when they leave the property and vice versa, people worried about their children. It's real and justified, and the frustration with not being listened to by the federal government as well as the provincial government for years on rural crime is just unacceptable, and their frustration with government as a whole is justified. The government has let them down. It has absolutely let them down.

I remember the first leg of my tour. We started near Calgary, and then worked our way up to near Grande Prairie and Fairview and a few other communities. I remember, Member Martin Long, that we stopped in Whitecourt with you as well on our way back down. I remember coming to my office in Edmonton on the way back, and I met with my deputy, and he asked: how did it go? I think we were hoping to see that the crime stats that were there were going to show a positive trend, and the feedback resoundingly from every single town hall we went to was that rural crime was worse than ever. Rural crime was worse than ever, and people had just grown so frustrated with the justice system that they weren't reporting. They weren't calling the police.

Obviously, we want them to. We want them to have that confidence that they believe that they can have that response, that they believe that they can have that belief that the justice system will keep everyone safe and that justice will be done, but so many people told me that they had just lost confidence. So we needed to act decisively. We needed to make a clear signal to people that we have their back, that we're going to have the strongest protections possible for property rights so that people know that we are going to make sure that this government stands up for people, stands up for law-abiding Albertans where they for so long had felt as though the system has been tilted in favour of the criminals. It's about time that the system actually works for law-abiding Albertans, and that's what we're seeking to do.

There were two instances that were lightning rods on property rights, and these stories came up at every town hall. They weren't just isolated to the Jumbo Valley situation down south. They weren't just near Okotoks, where Eddie Maurice was located, but what happened to Eddie Maurice and what happened in Jumbo Valley came up near Fairview, came up in Drayton Valley, came up in St. Paul, came up in every single town hall that we did and the immense amount of frustration from Albertans that the justice system was not working for them, that their property rights were not being respected, that everything they had worked for was worth nothing, that the justice system would not be there for them.

That's why I'm proud of the team effort that we did on the Jumbo Valley announcement, making sure that people that are purposely trespassing can face fines now – we're going to be bringing in the legislation; hopefully, we can pass it this fall – of up to \$10,000. If they repeat, they can get \$25,000 fines. They can face up to six months in jail.

10:30

On top of that, we're making sure that if there's an organization involved – right now we're seeing an uptick in these organizations trying to disrupt law-abiding people doing their work, doing the best practices in the world, particularly our ag industry, the best in the world at what they do. Going in there and terrorizing these people on their property, in their homes, on their farming operations will not be tolerated in the province of Alberta. That's not acceptable. If these organizations think that these rural Albertans are prey, think again. That's why we're going to be bringing in fines for them of up to \$200,000.

It simply cannot happen. It cannot happen. This is not acceptable: we're sending that signal. These people deserve to feel safe. There's a proper process to regulate things, and we're going to make sure that the law is being done. That being said, we fully respect their Charter rights to protest. If they want to protest on the street and they want to get the proper permits, do it. You know, free speech is something that is a foundational principle of our party, but that being said, you don't have the right to trespass on someone's property – you just don't – and to do it for your own personal agenda and gain. That's why we're sending that clear signal.

With respect to what happened to Eddie Maurice, you know what? What happened to him was so relatable to Albertans. The reason why it came up was that everybody saw themselves as the next potential Eddie Maurice. They saw their son as the next potential Eddie Maurice. Their kid could be the next potential Eddie Maurice, faced with that situation where you've got a young child in the home, two people committing a criminal act on your property. The fact that the person committing a criminal act on Eddie Maurice's property then had the audacity to sue him civilly: that, again, was a lightning rod across Alberta that the system was giving too many rights to criminals, not giving rights to law-abiding Albertans on their properties. That's why we're making sure – and we're going to be bringing in legislation here soon – that law-abiding Albertans cannot be sued by somebody committing a criminal act on their property. It's just not right. It's just flat out not right.

The other thing, too, that we heard loud and clear – again, as a city guy I didn't fully appreciate it – was copper wire theft. Like, I did not appreciate how much copper wire theft is going on in the province of Alberta. One of the things that we saw – and then we went and verified it as well. You hear it on the ground in these town halls: copper wire theft, copper wire theft. I'm, like: "Copper wire? What are you guys talking about?"

We heard it at every town hall, so then we actually went and talked to the utility companies, we talked to oil and gas companies, and we talked to the telecoms. They're, like: "Yeah. It's costing us millions of dollars." That particular theft may not be a million dollars, but when you add on replacement costs, you know, people going to unsafe work environments – we literally had a picture of one guy who went to a live generator to rip out this type of wiring and lost fingers. Like, these people are out there doing these crimes, and it's creating unsafe work environments. For somebody that's going out to the field, they don't know if they're going to be safe, and it's creating havoc in our rural communities.

That's why I'm proud of the fact that our team brought into place the ability to have further scrutiny of scrapyard dealers and

accountability in that, which is really important. It'll allow for our law enforcement officials to have a database where they can go and track and follow up on stolen property, potentially. It also puts further obligations on scrapyard dealers to make sure that they aren't dealing in stolen property. There already are Criminal Code provisions to make sure you don't deal in stolen property, but it's a healthy reminder that there are civil ramifications as well. If they don't comply, there are civil ramifications. We're going to be working on the regulations over this winter and into the spring. We already have the act proclaimed to make sure that that's in force. The ones that require further regulatory oversight: we're going to be working on those.

Now, the other one, too – and this is a big part of our commitment – is with the Alberta law enforcement response teams and providing additional funding to the Alberta law enforcement response teams. We're working with them right now on additional tactical units. We're asking them to develop a game plan to help respond to rural crime because their ability to work across jurisdictions is really key.

Working with local law enforcement is really important because one of the bits of feedback that we received on the tour as well as just from law enforcement personnel is that crime has no boundaries, that crime has no borders. For the towns and rural communities that are close to Calgary and Edmonton, you have many people hopping back and forth between the cities, committing, you know, an immense amount of disruption and havoc in our rural communities. As you get further removed from the two major cities, it's a bit of a different strategy.

A lot of this as well is being driven by meth. Meth is a real challenge that we have. You're seeing people go town to town to town committing these offences and just going, effectively, on a meth bender. It's just causing havoc in communities.

That's really important for us: to make sure we have ALERT funding, greater scrutiny of scrapyard dealers, to make sure that we go after the root cause of rural crime, and to cut off the monetization as well. In addition to that, though, you have to pull on every lever that you've got – prosecutors we've already talked about at length; greater property rights – but we also have to make sure that we end the revolving door. That's the other reason why we brought in the ability for enhanced community impact statements.

The Acting Chair: All right. Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to the Official Opposition. At the end of this block, the 10-minute block, we will have our five-minute break.

Minister, are we continuing with the split time? Yes? Okay.

We'll go for five minutes. Thank you very much. Member Sweet, go ahead.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here this morning. You know, I do want to comment on the fact that we're not going back and forth. I feel like this is an opportunity, maybe, to clear the air for Albertans and to get a better understanding of sort of whether it be miscommunication or just clarity around some of the expenditures that are coming out of your office and then, of course, of your government.

I know you commented on Mr. Allan. I do want to get it on the record that this is not about his expertise or his ability to do the job. I've been very clear on that as the critic for ethics and democracy. This isn't about whether or not he has the qualifications. The questions that have been asked specifically around the \$2.5 million, which is something that you have commented on in the media, about how it went through your ministry to clarify whether or not there would be a conflict of interest: the concern is that there is a perception that there is a conflict of interest.

I just want to walk us back a little bit and instead of making it about the comments that the government has made and that you just recently made this morning around an attack on Mr. Steve Allan – it is not an attack on Mr. Steve Allan. It is a question that Albertans have a right to ask around a \$2.5 million budget that has been allocated to an individual through an order in council that directly looks at legal services and looks at an inquiry into what this government perceives as foreign-funded influence, and it is about ensuring that Albertans understand why there is \$2.5 million being given to an individual on behalf of Albertans to do this work without openness and transparency. When I ask questions – and I've asked questions for a week now – asking this government to be open and transparent and to explain what the money is being used for, what the decision process was, how the decisions were made around legal services and the different organizations, including Dentons, that were assigned to do this work, it is not an attack on an individual.

It is a question that the government needs to respond to because this is a significant amount of money at a time when this government has been very clear that it needs to roll back spending, that it can't look at enrolment growth for education, that there are issues around health care, that we're seeing caps on AISH being cut, when we're seeing an impact on children in care and the services being provided to them to the age of 24, and other issues. This is about transparency. Again, I think it's important, and I'm asking you – and I will be asking other ministers – to be open and transparent.

You are currently on the board of directors for the Canadian Energy Centre, which is found on page 103 of your fiscal plan, which is also a \$30 million financial project. There is no openness and transparency around that project. There is no FOIP. There is no ability for Albertans to understand and to know what this government is doing around a \$30 million budget, for one thing, and a \$2.5 million budget for foreign-funded inquiries.

10:40

I think Albertans have a right to understand where this money is going. I have asked repeatedly, I have tried to be respectful, and I have tried to give opportunities for this government to do that. To say that this is an attack on an individual: it is not. It is a question on behalf of Albertans. It is my role as the critic to ask you to be open and transparent about where this money is going and what is happening. It is not intended to talk about what is going on with Steve Allan.

It is me asking you very clearly. When you make comments to the media that you have done the due diligence around a conflict of interest to ensure that there is no perception of a conflict of interest, that the Public Service Act has been followed, that the code of conduct has been followed, as any public service is required to do, which Mr. Steve Allan signed in his contract to abide by – when I ask those questions, I am honestly asking respectfully, Minister, that you tell Albertans the process that has happened to ensure that there's openness and transparency and that Albertans have confidence that there is no conflict of interest, that there is no perceived conflict of interest. I don't think that that's an unreasonable question to give Albertans an answer to. Walk them through the process. Let them know that this \$2.5 million, that you say that your ministry has vetted . . .

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, you have five minutes to respond.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Chair. I mean, we're here today to talk about the budget for the Department of Justice, and in my previous

answer I outlined to members of the opposition that the \$2.5 million budget for the inquiry is with the Department of Energy. Questions were raised as well about the Canadian Energy Centre. Again, those items are in the budget for the Department of Energy. We're here today to talk about the Department of Justice's budget. I've already made my statement, clearly, regarding my views on Commissioner Allan's good work, that he's doing in standing up for Albertans and our jobs. Again, I have nothing further to add to my earlier comment that I made.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

We'll go back to the Official Opposition. Okay. Member Ganley.

Ms Ganley: Absolutely. I'm going to return, then, to a couple of additional questions and some that are follow-ups. My first follow-up question is again with respect to line 6.8. We are looking at page 150 of the main estimates, line 6.8, organized and serious crime, which is basically the line item for ALERT. The minister has been up front with us on a couple of other items, where he talked about sort of rural crime funding going into the budget. It's often the case that you input money for something in-year. Sometimes you announce it; sometimes you don't. I would like to point out that the actual from the year 2018-19, that would have ended at the end of March, is \$32,100,000, and the estimate for next year is \$32,100,000, which is an identical number.

I also note, Minister, that you said, not in your last response but in the response before, that some of the change with respect to the sheriffs' budget was because the sheriffs' surveillance unit was put back into ALERT. That was where it was originally. It was taken out, and I guess it's back in now. There are probably, actually, some pretty good reasons for that. Given that that \$2.1 million has moved from a line item in the sheriffs' budget, I'm wondering why it doesn't reappear in ALERT since, again, the budget is identical to the actual from last year. It doesn't appear in that line item.

The other question I had that was arising: line 6.6, indigenous policing services. You indicated that that was for inflationary pressures. I'm a tiny bit concerned about that because my understanding was – the federal government delights in announcing things and then filling in details later, and they had announced additional funding, additional positions for indigenous policing services. Our First Nations have been clamouring for this for years. I'm sure that your department officials are aware of the significant amount of lobbying that's gone on on that. We were granted, as I understand it, in Alberta 11 positions or possibly a few more. I'm just wondering: is it the case that this is just inflationary pressures and that those positions are not going to be filled? The federal government is paying for over half of them, so it's definitely worth using the money. I just want to maybe circle back on that to confirm.

Moving, then, to justice services – oh, we had gotten through most of my question on the office of the Chief Medical Examiner. Again, we're on line 5.3 on page 149. Basically, my concern is that in light of their heavy workload and in light of the fact that we've asked them to do all of that additional work, which is significant and time consuming, around deaths as a result of multiple drug interactions, trying to pin whether those are related to opioids, I'm just curious as to whether it was their view that they're able to handle that additional workload. I'm also wondering whether it decreases further in the out-years given that we see cuts in justice services in the out-years.

Turning to line 5.6 on page 151, I know the history of this is that there was a plan – sorry; this is in the capital part, page 151, just for the four people that are probably following along at home.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, Member.

As per the agreement we're going to take a five-minute break. I cannot stress that – we're on a very tight timeline right now, so five minutes. Then we will return with the government members.

[The committee adjourned from 10:46 a.m. to 10:52 a.m.]

The Acting Chair: All right, folks. Okay. Fantastic. I see that we have the government members' side. I see the Official Opposition. The minister is seated, so we will now continue. The five minutes has expired.

I'm assuming that we're going to continue with the split time with the government members, and I see Member Long. Go ahead. You have up to five minutes, sir. Thank you.

Mr. Long: Minister, thank you so much for your time today and to your ministry staff. I just want to start by pointing something out, that you mentioned recently, about how it used to be in rural Alberta. When you saw someone driving down the road, you were excited and looking forward to a neighbour stopping in, and now, today, when you see someone driving down the road, you have fear. Your stomach ties up, right? That is the feel in rural Alberta where I live. For you to be on your tour this summer – you pointed out that you stopped in my constituency. You obviously, for a guy coming out from Calgary, have made it a point to hear and listen to the concerns and actually get the feel of rural Alberta, and I commend you for that.

That mentality is throughout my region. In my campaigning I myself was sick to my stomach hearing some of the stories of 80-something-year-old farmers around Peers getting beaten within an inch of their lives by people committing property crimes, you know, their wives being beaten, that sort of thing. One story is too many, yet I heard countless stories of those scenarios across my region. You're right in that people have grown tired of waiting for RCMP or policing services to show up when they're called, hoping they show up. But, inevitably, if they do show up, it's days later. If they show up, it's days later. Again, I know that you're familiar with those stories, and you know how gut-wrenching that is and how helpless people are feeling. I do want to commend you for the time that you've taken to tour, yes, but most importantly to listen.

Quickly, through this – I know we don't have a lot of time. It is apparent that this government and your ministry are doing whatever is necessary to ensure that Albertans across the province and in rural Alberta are safe. I'd like to direct you to pages 106 and 107 in your performance metrics, where you discuss measures being taken to protect Albertans and how your ministry plans on decreasing crime rates. Now, my colleague earlier, I know, pointed out *Maclean's* 20 most dangerous places in Canada. Eight of those communities are in Alberta. Well, last year it was only 7 of 10, so I guess that that's what the former government considered progress, you know, that we were getting more communities that were more dangerous. I don't know. It's kind of confusing for me.

That said, I know that you've said that rural Albertans feel that justice is failing them, to the point where they're no longer reporting crimes for reasons like insurance purposes and others, and I'd like you to speak to that under the performance metrics that I mentioned already.

I have a few other things that I want to get to. Based on the information you heard in town halls, you introduced a number of measures that the government will take to protect Albertans and how the ministry will attempt to decrease the crime rates discussed on pages 106 and 107. Can you tell me how the measures will change the conditions on how criminals are actually operating? I know that you discussed a little bit earlier wiring and that sort of

stuff, the criminals targeting, basically, industry roads and industry equipment. How will the measures create tougher penalties to deter criminal activity and ensure that those who commit the crime do face stiffer punishments?

How are we going to give victims of crime a voice in the administration of justice? I know that that's something that – I know that people today are happy that our government is listening to them, but how will the justice system listen to the victims of crime? How are we going to create a regime that doesn't discriminate against those who want to protect . . .

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you, Member.

Minister, you have five minutes to respond. Thank you.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you very much, Member. I really appreciate, again, all of your passionate advocacy on this issue, both your thoughtful questions here today but also in your community and even bringing some of your stakeholders to the Legislature from time to time. I really do appreciate all your efforts that you're doing there.

As far as our strategy to combat rural crime, I mean, it's multipronged. You have to approach this from every angle that you've got. One of our campaign commitments that we made – and it's in our budget – is making sure that we have the proper level of prosecutors in the province of Alberta. Too many cases right now are being dropped or they're not being provided with the due attention that they deserve. By getting the proper caseload there for our prosecutors, they'll then be able to do a proper assessment, working with our law enforcement officials to make sure they can identify individuals that are high-risk, repeat offenders.

They can start doing more targeted work, because right now, you know, when they get their day – their stack of files is so high for that day. I mean, the files that are going to get a lot of their attention would be an assault or a murder file or a sexual assault. That'll get a lot of their attention. Sometimes the property crimes that are happening that are causing havoc and a whole bunch of unsafe environments across rural Alberta aren't getting as much attention as they should. That's the triage model that we inherited, effectively, in a nutshell. So we have to make sure that we get our prosecutor complement up to where it should be.

I mentioned earlier on as well that our justice system is designed for downtown Toronto. It's not designed for rural Alberta. That's one of the reasons why we brought forward the ability to have enhanced community impact statements in our courts. This tool was available going back to 2015. It just took an order in council in the province of Alberta to allow this, to have an enhanced ability to bring in community impact statements. I'm shocked that the previous government didn't do that.

I'm surprised that they wouldn't allow for a community voice to be there in the courts because I am hopeful that our judiciary, when they hear the impact of rural crime and the havoc that it's causing in these communities, will get different precedents, that we're going to get stronger sentences because people are going to see or the court will hear the mental health issues that it's causing, the anxiety that it's causing, the fear that it's causing, where people literally cannot sleep. I met a couple where they now sleep with an axe under their bed. I've heard multiple times where people have loaded firearms close by, just in case somebody comes back, because they've been victimized so many times on their properties. It's just – the justice system has failed in rural communities for too long.

11:00

I remember that one of the really tragic stories that I heard, too, was about a business owner in Drayton Valley that has effectively

lost their ability to get insurance coverage, so he now sleeps in his business. He sleeps in his business to deter people from breaking into it. He has lost complete confidence in the justice system. We're hopeful that in bringing forward these different types of accountability measures, the community voices that are there, it'll help.

For the people that have been victimized as well, this tool was available going back to 2015 – again, it was never used – the ability to have enhanced restitution powers, the ability to streamline, the ability to get restitution when somebody has victimized you. The previous government just sat on their hands for four years, didn't bring this forward, didn't want Albertans to have this tool for some reason. I am shocked. It came up at every town hall. People want to have the ability to get recovery in a streamlined way. They shouldn't have to go through a real expensive legal process. Lawyers are expensive. They should make sure that they have a streamlined process, and that's what we've done. We've given enhanced restitution powers for Albertans. These are just the common-sense things that we're trying to get done.

Now, to make people more comfortable that the police will respond – you mentioned how long the response times are or if they even do come sometimes, and I've heard many instances where the police will come a couple of days later because they have other priority calls they're dealing with. Remember that we have certain communities that go completely dark for hours at a time, where there's no police service available at all. That's the baseline that we're starting from right now in rural Alberta.

I've been really encouraged by the discussions that we have had around the police funding model with rural municipalities. We've listened to them. We had the ability at the RMA convention last week to talk to them about what we've heard and what we've listened to. I did an hour-long webinar answering questions from rural municipalities. And you know what? I'm hopeful that we can potentially get to a new partnership with rural municipalities. If we can do that, with true governance for them – right now the RCMP don't report to the local communities the way that they should. There isn't that local accountability, the way it should be. Municipal policing is at its best when there's that local accountability built into it. I'm hopeful that we can get to a point where we can get to a new partnership and have a historic new way going forward.

Even at, you know, the lower end of a new police funding model with them, where all the dollars go back into more law enforcement . . .

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll now go to the Official Opposition and Member Pancholi. I'm assuming we're still doing the split time, Minister? Is that correct? Yes? Okay.

Member, go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Sorry. I'd just like that confirmed. So, yes, Minister, you do not want to share time? You want to split time?

Mr. Schweitzer: You can have your five minutes, and then I'll do my five minutes.

The Acting Chair: So split time, yes. Okay. Thank you.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Minister. I just wanted to confirm that.

Minister, I'd like to speak to something that is set out in the business plan, and I'm looking at page 107 of the business plan, specifically under outcome 2, which talks about: "Alberta's justice system is fair and effective." It also talks about the ministry's commitment to "ensure the justice system is fairer, faster, more

responsive and effective with initiatives." It also adds that "additionally, this outcome includes legislative changes and democratic reforms to strengthen government accountability." Then I note that key objective 2.3 is: "introduce democratic reforms to strengthen government."

Clearly, one of the ministry's key objectives is to strengthen democratic reforms. Of course, we know that strengthening democratic reforms is to enhance the public's trust in government and its integrity. I'm also aware, as I'm sure the minister is aware, that of course the Ministry of Justice is responsible for the Conflicts of Interest Act. I also know that given the minister's background as a practising lawyer for several years he'd be quite familiar with the basic principles of conflict of interest.

You know, I think I want to go back to something that one of my colleagues, the Member for Edmonton-Manning, mentioned. She mentioned conflict of interest and specifically how, as the minister would be aware, conflict of interest does not exist only when there's actually evidence that somebody has put a personal or other interest above either their fiduciary interest or their obligations in their employment role, but it's also where there is an appearance or a perception of a conflict of interest. We know that the courts regularly, in the application and interpretation of conflict-of-interest law, apply a higher standard to those in public service, particularly to those who are elected officials, because of the greater obligations that those people in public service have. They're in a position of trust with respect to the public, and they owe a duty to make sure that there is transparency and accountability in what they do. We have all, as Members of the Legislative Assembly, taken great steps to ensure that we meet our ethics obligations with respect to the commissioner, our conflict-of-interest obligations. I know that the minister, given his background, would be very familiar with all of this.

Given that there is a particularly high standard of integrity that is expected of public officials, I'm going to go back to the issue that was raised by my colleague from Edmonton-Manning and by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View with respect to the appointment by the minister. Now, it wasn't appointment by order in council, but we know that it was done by recommendation of the minister to appoint Mr. Steve Allan to head up the inquiry into potentially foreign-funded lobbying or, as we call it, the Un-Albertan Activities Inquiry.

I want to go back to that issue. With respect to the conflict of interest and the stated objective of the ministry, within its business plan, to strengthen democratic reforms and ensure trust in government, I'd like to go back to that issue and ask whether you believe it is appropriate, whether or not there was an actual conflict of interest. There certainly is, undoubtedly, given the interest by a number of individuals and media and constituents and the Official Opposition, a perceived conflict of interest in appointing somebody to head up an inquiry that is responsible for \$2.5 million of government funds who openly and actively campaigned for the Minister of Justice, who actively and with the minister's knowledge went out and actively campaigned and said that we should elect this individual because he could be in cabinet.

Lo and behold, he was correct. The minister was elected and was appointed to cabinet, and then shortly thereafter this individual was appointed to be the head of an inquiry, with a cushy \$291,000 salary and overseeing a budget of \$2.5 million. The first \$905,000 of that goes to a law firm that not only the Minister of Justice was employed at but that the commissioner's son is also currently a partner of. Now, again, this is not about . . .

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you, Member. We will go back to the minister.

Just a reminder. As has been this committee's practice for the last several weeks, you know, the questions that we are going to be asking must be tied into the budget or to line items within that budget. Thank you very much.

Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Chair. When it comes to democratic reforms that we're bringing forward, I mean, I'm proud of the fact that we brought in the Senate Election Act bill in the spring. We're planning on holding Senate elections here in the province of Alberta. Too many Senators didn't side with the province of Alberta when it came down to the time to vote for bills C-48 and C-69. We're going to make sure we bring back the democratic reforms, make sure we have elected Senators in the province of Alberta. That's important. That is a commitment that we made to Albertans. That's what we're going to be doing.

When it comes to broader democratic reforms, we're planning on bringing those in next year. We're going to have broader democratic reforms at that point in time dealing with a whole range of issues that we campaigned on. I know there's also a private member's bill out there regarding recall rights, other things like that. We're going to make sure that our democratic system works for Albertans and make sure that we listen to Albertans.

As well, as part of the fair deal panel, one of the things that they're talking to Albertans about is citizens' initiatives. Do they want to make sure that that is out there? Do we want to go forward with things like citizens' initiatives? There are a whole bunch of different accountability measures that we should have going forward that our department is reviewing, consulting with stakeholders on. I'm looking forward to hearing the feedback of the fair deal panel regarding the different initiatives that they're examining right now.

Some of the pieces as well are the different constitutional issues that we face as a country. We all know about the court challenges that we have, the carbon tax issue, that's being led by Energy, and different areas as well. We have to make sure that the Constitution works for Albertans. I can't wait to actually hear about what the fair deal panel actually has to say to us, what they recommend in coming back to us. I'm excited to see that and to make sure that we bring accountability into our democracy, accountability into how our country and federation work as well. The feedback I've heard – and I was out there on rural crime, but sometimes other issues would come up as well. I'm not going to lie; Justin Trudeau came up every now and again in rural Alberta. Those issues came up regularly. We've got to make sure that we respond to Albertans as well.

11:10

Questions were raised about my past employment. I've worked at three of the largest law firms in the province of Alberta. They employ at any given time about 500 lawyers here in the province of Alberta. I worked with the Ethics Commissioner when I was asked to take on this role. I retired as a lawyer from a law firm before I was appointed as Justice minister. I went through that process to make sure that that worked for Albertans. Every single one of my former law firms do work for the government of Alberta. All of them do. For me, it's a matter of making sure that we undertake in this office to make sure that we act with integrity on a daily basis. We've learned from, you know, decisions in the past to make sure that we do this properly.

When it comes to Commissioner Allan, he's an independent commissioner. He's akin to a judge. His compensation is akin to a judge's. We've asked him to take on a big role. The compensation is in line with a Provincial Court judge's. That makes sense. That's

common sense. When it comes down to his engagement agreement, again, he's contracted to have independence because that is the whole idea here: he's akin to a judge. When it comes to the contractors that he hires, the commissioner is entitled to select those resources at the commissioner's sole discretion. At the commissioner's sole discretion.

I've already highlighted for this committee Commissioner Allan's resumé, the service that he's done: somebody with 40-plus years as a forensic accountant, somebody that's received the highest orders of recognition for their service to our province, the charitable work that he's done. Commissioner Allan is due the respect of an independent judge, and he has the responsibility to select his resources, to spend his budget, the \$2.5 million budget that's in the Department of Energy, as he sees fit. That said, I'm looking forward to seeing his report when it comes forward. I'm looking forward to that. Again, he's independent; he makes his own decisions.

When it comes down to other initiatives as well, we're actually going to be doing another series of town halls next year. We did a lot of them on rural crime this year. We're going to be doing more town halls next year. There will be a follow-up on rural crime to see the progress that we're making on all those key issues. But we also want to hear from Albertans as it relates to justice, as it relates to democratic reform. I'm looking forward to hearing what the fair deal panel has to say as well.

A different approach: instead of just staying in the Legislature and staying in the city of Edmonton, we go out and talk to Albertans. We're not afraid of having those conversations right with Albertans as to what their priorities are, what they want to see, what they want from this government, because things can change quickly. One of the things that we've seen, particularly as it relates to rural crime, is that things can change on a dime, and you need to be responsive. You can't put your head in the sand for years and wait for the galleries to fill up with frustration. You've got to be out there talking to Albertans, talking to them about what their priorities are. We're going to do that. So when it comes to electoral reform, our MLAs have already brought forward many different ideas.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll go back to the government members side and continue with Mr. Neudorf. You're going to split the time. You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister. I really want to thank you for spending time in Lethbridge this summer, for coming to see my city and see the challenges that we face, and for your proactive nature in realizing that some of our challenges require a multipronged approach between ministries, not just Mental Health and Addictions but also Justice. I appreciated your time there.

One of the things I would really like to speak to you about that's in the budget, if you could illuminate it even further, is the drug treatment courts, something that's a new concept to me. I come from a construction background, so some of the nuances of different courts are not familiar to me. I know that you have been very vocal about these alternative courts that help break the cycle driven by drug addiction, and that is why I'm very pleased to see on page 106 of your business plan that the government is investing \$20 million over four years to expand these drug treatment courts to further protect the public safety by supporting actual recovery and addiction to prevent future criminal activities. At that point in time, if you can just speak about the co-operation between your ministry and the Associate Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions and how this collaborative approach is beneficial in a number of areas,

breaking down silos, as well as about the efficiencies that could be gained by multiple ministries addressing a single issue.

It is firmly believed by myself and many of my constituents that we need a firm criminal justice system to protect Alberta's communities from drug-related crime, and I've been very glad to see that you've been so vocal a champion for a justice system that ensures Albertans are safe, secure, and protected.

I'm also glad to see that you believe in alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders, to help break that cycle of drug abuse, crime, imprisonment, and reoffending. Increased access to mental health services will reduce the incidence of recurrence and reduce the use of emergency departments for those who are in the criminal justice system by helping them rehabilitate instead of reoffend. We know that for many, drug use is a key factor that leads to repeated crimes.

I mentioned that our government is firm on criminal justice and will not compromise in keeping Alberta safe, but these alternatives also show that we are fair and compassionate, so I'd like you to, if you don't mind, expand on how in the budget you're addressing that compassion to also feed into a recovery model with the other ministries. Drug treatment courts are an integral part of that system, as I've addressed. We shouldn't be looking at drug addicts as criminals. Many just need access to treatment and mental health care to support their recovery. When they are healthy, we have seen a vast, vast majority becoming contributing members of society. This impacts our families because their health impacts future generations. So there, too, we can have success. You may be able to speak to some of the projected future returns or less impact to costs on our system by following this model.

I'm pleased to see that law enforcement supports this investment in mental health and addictions treatment to help citizens at risk reduce the use of our criminal justice system while dealing with public health problems. I think this is what a lot of people miss. Sometimes problems that we are dealing with through the criminal justice system are actually health problems. There's another ministry that I know you're collaborating and working closely with. If you wouldn't mind speaking to that and how that positively impacts your budget.

Because enforcement alone won't solve the challenges we are facing with the addictions crisis in our communities, these collaborative efforts between other ministries are crucial. This investment in drug treatment courts recognizes that we need collaborative solutions that are focused on restorative justice frameworks to truly address the cause and impact of addictions in our communities. Albertans who are living with addictions need to be treated with compassion. We also need early access to addiction and mental health services. So, again, if you could explain how this \$20 million will help with the expansion of drug treatment courts and how that, in turn, prevents future crime – specifically, how many additional Albertans will this help? – and the plan to expand the drug treatment courts.

We are familiar with a lot of attention being spent on Calgary and Edmonton, the systems that work there. Representing a mid-size city, we often feel that some of our additional services are lacking. I look forward to hearing how you plan to address that to the communities that would fall into that category, how these courts will provide addicts and former addicts with the chance to deal with addiction and stop committing crimes, and what the minister sees as a return on the investment to Albertans by preventing addiction-related crime in their communities.

I would also like the minister to let this committee know how these programs work. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, Member.

Minister, you have five minutes to respond to the member.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you so much. Again, thank you for having me down to the city of Lethbridge to meet with local stakeholders and talk about different justice issues, policing issues, addiction issues that, you know, the city of Lethbridge is facing right now. You've covered off a lot of area here. You talked about drug treatment courts. It truly is a collaboration with Health. Drug treatment courts don't work if you don't have the proper wraparound services for the participants that are in the drug treatment court program.

Working with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions is critical to the future success of drug treatment courts across Alberta. I was excited to, you know, make the announcement of the additional \$20 million over four years for drug treatment courts. The easy, you know, flip the switch expansion in Calgary and Edmonton – you already have pre-existing programs there, that have been there for 10 years. Again, about \$600,000 to double the capacity of Calgary and Edmonton. I'm shocked that the previous government did not take that reasonable step to deal with addictions. It's \$600,000, double Calgary and Edmonton. It was just a no-brainer. That's one of the easiest decisions I had to make in this office. But they failed to do it.

When it comes to our mid-size centres, we have to work with them to make sure that they have the ability to provide those wraparound services. I believe that cities like Lethbridge, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Fort McMurray probably have what we need to get this done. We want to reach out right now, though, to those local stakeholder groups. So much of this is done through collaboration with police, probation, and other areas that you need.

11:20

You also need space, space for people that are addicts to have the ability to stabilize their lives. The announcement by the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to provide additional space and capacity is critical to the ability to successfully roll out drug treatment courts in the province of Alberta. It's really important that we work together on that going forward. The announcement, when we did this here in the city of Edmonton, was powerful. We had people speaking that were graduates. We had people speaking that were participants that had already gone through it.

As far as how the program works, it's typically a 12- to 18-month program. The person is charged with an offence. Typically they're facing a pretty serious crime. At least a year, probably two years of correctional time that they're facing. They have to admit their guilt up front. Whether or not they graduate, sentencing is deferred until after. They have to then report to the court on a weekly basis, usually weekly or biweekly, depending on their stage. They have to be accountable to the judge. If a person goes off the rails or the person starts using a little bit again, they're not necessarily kicked out of the program. The judge will assess that with the team that's around them to give them a potential second chance if the person is willing to recognize they've got problems and willing to accept those additional treatments. It's only when the person is not willing to comply, not willing to deal with the root cause as to why they have addictions that you would then take the step of removing them from a program. At that point in time sentencing would occur, and they'd face the sentence for the crime that they admitted their guilt to. So it has accountability built into the process, which has made it so successful.

People that end up graduating: 70 per cent of them don't commit a crime again, according to the stats that we have in the province of Alberta, which is an immense amount of success. You meet so many of them that are able to get back to employment, lead

meaningful lives. They reconnect with their families in a way that is just powerful. If you see these folks at graduation, it's powerful. I'm also proud of the fact that I was able to send letters of congratulation to people that have graduated from the program at their graduation ceremony.

It's an area that I've got an immense amount of passion for. I was on the board in Calgary for years. This is an area where we need to do more. We actually need to be even more strategic about these other types of specialized courts – we have an indigenous court that we've opened in the city of Calgary – as well as making sure that we have some leadership in this. I mentioned earlier the potential to look at community court options, other ways that we can deal with addiction issues that we have in the province of Alberta in a way that deals with the root cause as to why somebody is rounding through the justice system.

In order to do that, though, it's not just Justice. You need to have Health at the table, like you were mentioning. You have to have Health at the table. The two of us have to work in partnership to deal with why people are coming through the justice system, why they're there. In addition to that, we have to have Community and Social Services there to make sure that we work together, to make sure that those proper services are at the table so that as somebody progresses along that 18 months, using drug treatment court as an example . . .

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister. Hold that thought.

We will now go to the Official Opposition. Member Ganley, you have five minutes split time with the minister. Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm assuming that we're not in a position to ask to go back and forth again.

The Acting Chair: I mean, unless things have changed.

Mr. Schweitzer: Let's just keep doing what we're doing.

The Acting Chair: Split time. Okay. Thank you.
Go ahead.

Ms Ganley: I'll just start by commenting on some of the questions I asked previously, and I hope that those questions will not be lost. Minister, I know you've chosen not to go back and forth today as has been the practice for at least a number of years in estimates, and I assume that's because you don't want to answer our questions. I'm guessing this is because you don't want to be held accountable for Steve Allan and the appointment and the many concerns that have been raised. I want you to know that we expect you to answer our questions today. We expect answers. We expect answers to everything we've asked, every single one to be voted on before the budget. That is just my follow-up, that we are expecting to see answers to our questions.

With that, I will jump back in and just add the two questions that I had asked previously. One was about ALERT because compared to actuals last year, which are \$32,100,000, estimates for this upcoming year are also \$32,100,000, so an identical number. You've also indicated that the surveillance sheriffs have moved back into ALERT, so that's \$2.1 million. It's not clear to me where that's accounted for.

The next question I have is on page 110. I am looking now at the ministry business plan. We go down to the second sort of large chunk of things, just before the second set of two lines: the victims of crime fund. Actual for this past year was \$42,972,000; the estimate for next year is \$43,394,000 which is below the \$4.5 million that we were intending to add, the program that we had announced. The targets for 2020-2021 is \$32,746,000 – that's over

a \$10 million decrease – and 2021-22 is \$27,746,000 and the same in the next year. That's over a \$15 million decrease. This program was a significant concern when we were in government. Money is coming in. Regardless of how much you spend, money is coming in; it's accumulating. That money statutorily belongs to victims of crime. It is their right to access that money, and that's why we came up with the plan to qualify how much of that needed to be held for contingent liability and to slowly spend the rest over time. So I'm a little curious as to why it is that we've chosen to stop giving to victims of crime that money which belongs to victims of crime.

My next question just returns to the question – and the minister actually raised it. I'm glad he did because it reminded me of this question. You've gone on at length, Minister, about your feelings on the triage policy. I think in the time that the decision was being made, it was one that had to be made, but we have subsequently chosen to inject a significant number of resources. We added over 70 prosecutors during our time in government, over four years. We added additional court clerks, and we added additional judges, and that was in order to deal with that particular issue. I understand that you have strong feelings on that. You would rather inject resources than use that. I'm just wondering: has the triage policy been repealed?

Finally, one of the questions that we missed earlier, and it's come up a couple times, but maybe we just haven't gotten to it: how many Crown prosecutors have been hired in the last seven and a half months?

One final question. In answer to the question about what constitutes a trial prosecutor – and there are 337 of them according to the business plan – you indicated that that excluded prosecutors who were working in appeals or for bail. But then when asked how many Crown prosecutors there were on April 1 of this most recent year, you indicated 338. I'm just a little confused by those numbers because if there were 337 trial prosecutors – I know you're not running the Crown bail office and the appeals branch with one person. I'm just wondering if maybe we could get some clarification.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, you have five minutes to respond to the member's questions.

Mr. Schweitzer: Perfect, Chair. I've answered the questions that have been asked of me today and will continue to do so.

When it comes to the sheriffs question that you had, right now we're paying for this, during this transition, out of the general revenue. As we work on our ALERT budget for next year, you will see that go into the ALERT budget for next year. Right now they're in a transitional phase, so they're going to be based out of the existing sheriffs budget that we have in place for it.

The victims of crime fund: you had questions there. I mean, this year's budget for victims of crime is about \$3 million higher than the budget for 2018-19. The 2018-19 budget was \$40,045,000; the budget for '19-20 is \$43,394,000. It's an increase that's going to the victims of crime fund this year. I can also advise you that we have just started a process of reviewing the victims of crime fund. We will be starting that with stakeholders to talk to them about the future of the victims of crime fund to determine the steps forward. Many measures that are there have been there for a long time. I recognize the fact that we do have statutory framework and parameters around the victims of crime fund as it's structured today. We will continue to fulfill that mandate. Going forward, we're looking forward to talking to stakeholders about the future of the victims of crime fund to make sure that we can better serve people that have been victims of crime. That's our intention here, to make

sure we serve the victims. That's why we brought in things like Clare's law. We intend to bring forth things like Saving the Girl Next Door and other initiatives that we campaigned on in the last general election campaign to provide greater services to people that have been victimized in the province of Alberta.

You asked a couple of questions about different points in time. We can get back to you with greater details on that. I think it's beyond the scope of what we could probably piece together here with paper at the moment. We can get you further details on that.

When it comes to the triage policy, that's why we have to hire these prosecutors as fast as humanly possible. We're trying to deal with cases as much as and as efficiently as we can. The current rate in the city of Edmonton: I think there was one report showing almost half the cases getting dropped or not being pursued through. That's unacceptable. That's not going to be our path forward once we get the proper case level for the province of Alberta.

11:30

The Acting Chair: That's fine. Okay. Great.

We're back with Member Ganley. Go ahead.

Ms Ganley: Absolutely. I'm going to jump now to line 5.6 on page 151 of the main estimates, so jumping back to another book. The history on this is that there was an attempt to create a new data system for the public guardian and trustee. That data system is incredibly needed. The RFP went out because we were asking for physical storage instead of a cloud solution. There were no responses to that RFP. That was meant to be rolled forward, and the funds were coming from the common fund, not from government resources. I don't see that in here, so I'm wondering what has become of that critical infrastructure to support vulnerable Albertans and why it doesn't seem to be appearing in the capital plan.

Turning back now to page 149, line 5.8, of the estimates, I note a decrease to legal aid next year, in a year in which it was meant to increase based on a plan we put forward. Given that the minister is required to consult with Legal Aid in the event of any cuts in order to provide direction as to how those cuts will impact services, what direction has the minister given to Legal Aid? What will be cut? Financial eligibility guidelines, the domestic violence project to help survivors of domestic violence, duty counsel at bail: just sort of specifically, which areas of that project will take the hit?

My next question is with respect to human rights. Again I'm looking at the main estimates, line 8.2 on page 150. I notice that there's a \$1.2 million reduction to human rights grants. In light of the fact that this government has also cut antiracism grants, I think this is particularly of concern. I'd like an explanation, you know, for all of those organizations that were doing fantastic work to promote human rights. We really did get a very good return on that investment. I'd like an explanation as to why that decision was made.

In line 8.1 we also see reductions to the Human Rights Commission ...

The Acting Chair: All right. Thank you, Member.

We'll now go to the government members' side, Mr. Nixon, to continue with the split time. You have up to five minutes, sir.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the minister for the time and the thoughtful answers so far. I got goosebumps earlier listening to the discussion around drug courts, and I also want to make sure I get my plug in for community courts. I'm glad to hear that that's something that's being thought of and discussed.

Talking about a good justice system, I think you need a justice system that is just, that is accountable but also compassionate. I think a lot of people that are wrapped up in the justice system are also victims or were victims at one point in time. We know that many people wrapped up in the justice system are vulnerable and are often acting out of desperation. Obviously, my own experience is working with homeless youth, seeing kids bounce from CYOC to my shelter and back to CYOC, so I'm happy to hear we're focused on dealing with that recidivism and doing better things for young people. I'm sure you know my own father's story. He was a homeless 16-year-old who was going to freeze to death, and acting out of desperation to save his life, he robbed a gas station and did two years of hard time.

I think that being able to learn from the past and make sure that we're approaching our justice system with both accountability and compassion is just critical, and being able to focus our time and our resources on dealing with people who would prey upon the vulnerable in our community is critical. I think that's also the type of transformational change that we're looking for here, that we keep talking about.

Organized drug crime, drug trafficking, and sexual exploitation of children are all crimes that tear at the fabric of society and prey on the most vulnerable in our community. That's why I'm so glad to see, on page 106 of the business plan and on page 108 of the fiscal plan, that your ministry will be increasing funding to Alberta law enforcement response teams by \$50 million over four years. I'd like to know a little bit more about how this will give us the ability to combat gang violence, drug trafficking, and child exploitation in our communities.

We know that many communities in our province are being devastated by problems related to opioids and methamphetamines. Of course, Calgary-Klein is no exception to that. We know that we're losing, on average, two Albertans per day who die from opioid overdoses in our communities, last year 800 people. We obviously know that that's impacting folks who are living on our streets and vulnerable people in our community. It's also impacting people who are dying in their own homes, a good chunk of folks. Obviously, we're investing on the mental health and addictions' side, investing in recovery and helping people through addiction. I would like to hear a little bit more about how you're collaborating with mental health and addiction to resolve that.

We know that illegal drugs are devastating in our communities, so I want to know a little bit more about how we're going to be working towards addressing and cracking down on illegal drugs in our communities and how this budget addresses that. Sorry. I'm trying to fit it all in in five minutes here. How are we partnering with organizations whose mandate is to combat drug crime, and how does the budget help us to accomplish that? How are we targeting the supply and sale of opioids and methamphetamines in our community? Obviously, that's going to be pretty critical to be able to address that. The big drug of choice, of course, for our youth in the shelter was crystal meth, so I'd be happy to hear about that as well. I think we can agree that the threat posed by drugs in this province needs a specialized response.

In the case of organized crime, sustained and vigorous enforcement is key to turning the crisis around by providing ongoing assistance to communities. Is ALERT limited to just the drug trade? If you could talk a little bit about that for me.

I also think that, just like with all law enforcement, this committee should be commended – no. Basically, wrapping everything up, I want to ask you how you see that this increase in funding benefits Albertans by combating crime, and what additional measures would this \$50 million investment go towards

in combating drugs in our community? Seven seconds. Keep up the great work. We really appreciate you. Nice tie.

The Acting Chair: Minister, you can continue.

Mr. Schweitzer: I appreciate it. Thank you, hon. member. I actually hadn't heard the full story of your dad. I knew parts of it, but I actually hadn't heard that part of the story. On the amazing work that your family has done for people facing homelessness and addictions, I just want to commend you and your family for what you guys have done for the province of Alberta. It's amazing what you've accomplished and the leadership that your father has played for so many people, so I just want to say thank you to your family for everything you've done.

When it comes to projects like drug treatment courts, community courts, we have to think outside the box. We have to think outside the box. Right now, if we keep doing what we're doing with the justice system, we're never going to deal with the root cause as to why people are addicts, why we continue to have more demand coming into our justice system, why we continue to have people that are living lives where they don't have the wraparound services to deal with their addictions and they fall through the cracks.

More and more we're asking our police service to provide a social service role, in a way that's not the initial design of the police service, to make sure that we can find a way that – you know, we have to get these people treatment, so I'm actually really excited about the collaboration that's going on right now with the Minister of Health, the Health department, and the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. I'm hopeful that we can come up with some new strategies going forward that will allow us to get more and more to the root cause as to why people are continually showing up in the justice system and give people the ability to have those meaningful lives. Again, I've talked a lot today about the investment that we've made in drug treatment courts.

11:40

I can also get in a little bit today about the Alberta law enforcement response teams and the various initiatives that they do. All of the members of the United Conservative Party that are here now in our caucus as MLAs campaigned on an additional \$50 million for ALERT, and a lot of that is going to go into different tactical units. Many of them go into, you know, the ICE unit to go after child exploitation. That one there is one that all of us who are parents really get. Everyone gets it intuitively, but particularly parents. When you have children, like, you really understand the importance of an ICE unit, and all of us Albertans understand the importance of that to keep our young people safe.

Again, the units as a whole: the combined special enforcement units have the ability to investigate serious and organized crime, targeting drug trafficking, street gangs, you know, outlaw motorcycle groups, firearms trafficking, financial racketeering, organized vehicle thefts, chop shops, things like that. We've got units based in Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer. We want to make sure that we enhance their ability to continue to do their good work and provide additional units that can go after different issues. For example, I mean, you'd have to work with them to see what the game plan would look like, but with the scrap metal that's being stolen, maybe they have a targeted unit that goes after that in the future, so just finding different ways to enhance their ability.

Again, I mentioned, earlier on, the Integrated Child Exploitation Unit, focused on people that are luring children, doing activities online, the illegal child exploitation that's happening, making sure that they have what they need; Criminal Intelligence Service

Alberta, a central hub for strategic analysis and intelligence sharing on serious and organized crime in the province, making sure that they have what they need; Alberta specialized law enforcement training, you know, providing additional training as well to law enforcement personnel.

Again, I just want to highlight how effective the Alberta law enforcement response teams have been as a tool for us to go after organized crime and get drugs off the streets. You regularly will see the major announcements where drugs and guns are coming off and there's been a bust of numerous individuals. Quite often, almost in the vast majority of those situations, that's the good work of ALERT behind the scenes. In many instances it could be, you know, over extended periods of time that they're conducting those investigations. Really, it's critical that they continue their good work going forward. I'm excited to see what they can do with the additional resources we're going to be providing them over the next four years and the services that they can provide for Albertans.

The other one, too. I know I've spent a lot of time in rural Alberta over the last few months in particular. We also have other significant challenges in the big cities of Calgary and Edmonton. I'm looking forward to working with local stakeholders, working with our colleagues to find solutions to the addiction issues that we have, and, again, listening. We also have, you know, gang issues in the city of Calgary, violence that's happening. That's unacceptable. The Alberta law enforcement response teams will be helpful, I believe, in combating that, working in collaboration with local police and, in addition to that, making sure that we find those community-based solutions, because I do think that good old common-sense, community-based solutions sometimes are the best way to deal with an issue.

I was up near Beaverlodge, near Grande Prairie. They told me about an old program that they had, which was very reminiscent of what I've heard about some different organizations wanting to do community courts. They used to do it in the '70s and '80s.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll now go back to the Official Opposition, Member Ganley, again continuing with the split time. Go ahead.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I think the first thing to point out as we're going through these numbers – we're rapidly reaching the end here, and we do still expect answers to a number of questions – is that, Minister, you are responsible to answer for everything that is contained in the budget documents. I understand that you're taking the position that you're not responsible to Albertans for cuts in the out-years, but that's not the rule of this committee. That's not the rule of this process. That's a decision on your part. So if you want to make that decision, that's fine, but I just want it on the record for Albertans to understand that that has nothing to do with the process. That's a decision that you have made.

When we're talking about a \$43 million reduction to courts, that's a 20 per cent cut. Indicating that you are not responsible to answer to Albertans for how that's going to be achieved, especially in light of Jordan, especially in the era where in places like Ontario and Quebec we saw murders being stayed because of a failure to meet timelines, one of the big hinderances there being a lack of judges and a lack of court clerks – I'm pretty concerned about that.

In addition, Minister, you speak repeatedly about the additional funding for ALERT, but that doesn't appear in this budget year. That appears in subsequent years, allegedly. We don't really know.

I think that from a point of mere logical consistency, it's pretty clear that we're talking about the entire budget. We're talking about a \$15 million decrease to victims of crime. I think that that's

something for which you should provide account to Albertans, if nothing else.

The additional questions I have just sort of arising. You had mentioned, when we were talking about the budget for the RCMP, that there was an increase there for the crime reduction units that we brought in. I think we've seen incredible results from those crime reduction units. My question is: do you intend to keep them?

I also would like to ask, given that we're going to see these reductions in court budgets – and I know, certainly, you've talked about finding technological efficiencies. I mean, we've mostly implemented or had, before I left, criminal e-file, so we're talking about e-file with respect to civil and family matters, not with respect to criminal matters, so there are no additional efficiencies to be gained there.

What I'm wondering is whether you will commit to tabling the numbers from the Crown prosecution annual report that dealt with the number of cases over the Jordan timelines and how much that had reduced. In Provincial Court, where we were able to appoint judges, unlike the federal government, that was a bit slow to the table, we saw huge reductions in those times to trial. I'm hoping that you'll be willing to commit to table those numbers for this year, for previous years, for years going forward so that we can see that that progress is continuing to be made. I understand the need to find money, but I think that in light of Jordan it's a pretty big challenge to do that.

I think that, Minister, you are responsible to account for how it is that you intend to reduce prison populations in the out-years. You know, you say that you're going to reduce those populations. I'm not saying that that's necessarily a bad thing. We have seen statistics that indicate that putting fewer people in jail can sometimes decrease crime rates. I think my concern is, Minister, that you have repeatedly referred to the justice system disparagingly, talked about the revolving door, about people being released from jail, which indicates that it's your intention to put a whole bunch more people in jail. How it is that you intend to achieve simultaneously an increase in the prison population and a decrease in the prison population, I think, is something that we'd all be very interested to hear.

Just one last little note is that I don't want to lose the questions that I'd asked about the decrease to human rights grants because I think that that's incredibly important, in a time when what we're hearing on the ground from stakeholders throughout the province is that we actually are seeing an increase in overt racism, people actually saying nasty things to other people's faces, why it is we think that we should cut the antiracism grant and, in addition, cut the human rights grants that could have fulfilled a similar mandate. In addition, we're making reductions to an already strained Human Rights Commission. You know, people are waiting years to get a trial, so I think this is a huge concern. Yeah. I think there is a need to account for that.

Finally, I think that with respect to legal . . .

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, Member.

Minister, you have five minutes to respond.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Chair. Again, we heard a lot of kind of general questions there, general statements, without a huge number of specifics to line items there, but I'll do my best to answer the questions that have been provided.

With respect to the Human Rights Commission we have a commissioner who has an immense amount of experience with a direct-access model. When it comes to the budget that we put forward here, that is to allow for the direction to go down a direct-access model, which will provide better services to Albertans. He

has the right experience to get that done for us. That's the right call to do, the right way to be prudent with our tax dollars, to make sure we have that direct-access model for the Human Rights Commission. That's important.

When it comes to the grants for the Human Rights Commission, we have a minister of multiculturalism now, so the appropriate place for grants to be provided for that area is through the minister of multiculturalism. We thought that was the prudent way for tax dollars to be spent, through that ministry. So that was the decision we made there.

When it comes to the remand facilities and the budgetary changes you referenced in the out-years, right now we are exploring for future years how to get more efficient with the resources that we have here in the province of Alberta. How do we make sure that we get the best bang for our buck? Right now we're working with our stakeholders. We're trying to find ways to go forward to deal with corrections, to deal with our remand facilities to get the best results for Albertans.

11:50

When it comes to the revolving door, I've talked a lot about community impact statements. I've talked a lot about rural Alberta here today and making sure that the justice system works for Albertans. I've also talked about the fact that we're going to be expanding drug treatment courts and ending that cycle of folks rounding through the system. Again, \$600,000 would have doubled the capacity of Calgary and Edmonton, and your government failed to act when you were in power. You failed to act on it: \$600,000, double the capacity of drug treatment courts. You want to talk about ending the revolving door? Give those people meaningful lives going forward. You didn't. You didn't make that decision. That would have been one of the easiest decisions, I think, to make: \$600,000 would have gotten that done, double the capacity of Calgary and Edmonton.

Again, we have differing views, potentially, as to how the justice system should work. I think we have to have accountability in our justice system and also deal with treatment, deal with people that have addictions. We may have differing views on that, and that's fine. We have differing views. That's how we're going to be tackling the revolving door.

When it comes to court budgets, you've asked a few questions about that in kind of a generic way here today in this last little round. Again, technology is the key. We can't have people carrying around, you know, stacks and stacks of paper in an archaic way. I went down to Edmonton, and they've got paper going back, like, 100 years. If we had the unfortunate circumstance of a fire, we would lose, like, a century of legal knowledge. We would lose over a century of data in the courthouse. It's unacceptable for us to be at this stage today where we are. I mean, BlackBerrys have been invented for a long time. The courthouse in Calgary was invented around the same time BlackBerrys were there, yet we're still using a paper system for a huge amount of what we're doing. Again, there are lots of ways that we are going to find court efficiencies. There are lots of ways that we can bring technology into this to make sure we get the best bang for our buck for Albertans.

With respect to your question about the crime reduction units for the RCMP, we're going to keep them and build on them. We're going to keep all four of those units. With respect to your question as to their success I'd encourage you to come to the town halls. I invited you out to our town halls across Alberta, and you didn't take up the offer to come to Rocky Mountain House, where 800 people showed up. They were immensely frustrated. The NDP legacy tour should have been done just so you could hear about your record on rural crime. You didn't come. You didn't want to hear directly from

Albertans on this. You would have actually heard maybe a different story than what you're hearing from your department officials about the supposed success of your program. You would have heard a very different story from them as to what was actually happening in their communities. Are we going to keep it? Yes, because it's at least something. It's at least something that can be done for rural Albertans, and we're going to be building on this going forward.

But, again, the fact that your previous government and now your opposition were unwilling to come and hear from rural Albertans about their concerns is shameful. These people are living in fear, and that fear escalated and grew over four years. For four years that fear and anxiety grew, with people feeling as though they had not been heard. I'll tell you this. When we were in Rocky Mountain House and we told them about our announcement – we made our rural crime announcement the day before we went to Rocky Mountain House – 800 people that were there were upset. When they heard about what we did and the announcement that we made, Minister Nixon and I left to a standing ovation from that room. They felt for the first time in over a decade that they'd been heard and that they'd been listened to, and I'm just proud of where we are right now.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister.

All right. Members from the government side? I see Member Rutherford. Go ahead, sir. You have up to five minutes.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Given that we're down to the last six minutes, I'll keep it rather brief. I'd prefer to split time if you do. That'd be great. Thank you.

Thank you for coming out to Leduc, Minister. It was appreciated that you took the opportunity to listen to the residents in Leduc and the surrounding area about rural crime. I just want to be able to comment on rural crime in general but the number of police officers that we have. I think back to my time in the EPS, where I was a police officer for 10 years. When we got 911 calls, we had to be there within seven minutes. That was the time allotment, and often we'd beat that. In rural Alberta that's not an option. The distances that have to be travelled can be immense. I know some RCMP officers that I worked with that would talk about a family fight happening, but it was 200 kilometres away. I mean, there's just no time to get there in a reasonable amount of time, but they do their best.

I want to comment also that as we talk about policing and RCMP and sheriffs, we're not talking about the individual officers. Each individual officer is working extremely hard to respond in a timely manner and to serve their community, and I think it's important to recognize that when we say that the RCMP needs to do better, we're talking about the organization as a whole but not the individuals, because they do very important work within the community as well.

I'd like to just draw your attention to page 106 of the business plan, key objective 1.1. I'll just go through a set of questions and give you the last couple of minutes here to respond to them. As we look at the current funding model for municipalities, if you could talk about what it currently is and then what the consultation process has been. Currently I know that it was a platform commitment, but if you could comment on that process as well, then what the proposed model looks like. Will it lead to additional officers on the ground? It's so important that they are properly spread out around rural areas to reduce those response times and get to those calls. It will increase people wanting to phone and report, knowing that they've been heard, that the response times are reasonable, and that there are good investigations that are happening. I was wondering if you can comment on that process that you're going through.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Minister, go ahead, sir.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for those thoughtful questions on this. Yes, we've started a consultation with municipalities regarding the future of police funding. When the consultation started, it was talked about as police costing, and we heard loud and clear from people that it's about police funding, it's about more resources on the ground. We provide the base level of funding that we have in our budget that's before you today; that's not going to change going forward. We want to make sure that people heard loud and clear that we're going to provide additional resources for policing. That is a commitment that we've made.

The feedback that we've heard is that if we are to proceed with a new police funding model, every single dollar that municipalities provide needs to go into additional law enforcement: police officers, potentially backroom support for police. That has to happen. That's a commitment that if we proceed, we're going to make.

In addition to that, there has to be governance. There has to be accountability. Right now with the RCMP there are some detachments that are doing great work, but it's kind of like: you like your local councillor, but you're mad at city hall. There's some of that feeling out there with RCMP. But you hear the occasional story where if it was accountable the way Edmonton and Calgary police service are done, it wouldn't be allowed, it wouldn't be tolerated. The type of relationship between the local community and their detachments wouldn't be allowed in a bigger city municipal policing structure. That accountability measure is key to having a new governance model, so if we are to proceed, we'd have new governance for how policing is done in rural communities.

The other bit of feedback we heard is that some communities already pay for an enhanced police officer. If we decide to proceed with the model, they want to have full credit for that, and that makes a lot of sense to us if we are to proceed. If we do this going forward, it will be a historic investment in law enforcement in rural communities, one of the largest investments ever made, if we decide to partner together in a new way forward to deal with rural crime. You can't talk about police funding without talking about rural crime because the two go hand in hand; they're so important for our future. I'm hopeful that we can get to that point, where we can partner together going forward.

We've got about a minute left, so I'm just trying to see if you have any other topics you want me to cover off.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Rutherford: Sure. For the RAPID force, how long is it going to take to train up the sheriffs and fish and wildlife officers so that they can start responding to 911 calls? Is that the intention, just the response and not the investigation aspect of it?

Mr. Schweitzer: We . . .

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Sorry, Chair.

The Acting Chair: No. You're doing split time, correct?

Mr. Schweitzer: Right. We really want to appreciate the work that they do. We want to make sure that they have the training they need. The idea would be to get them on the ground starting in the fall of 2020. We don't want to put them into a compromised situation. We

might provide them with some additional Criminal Code powers regarding, potentially, impaired driving and things like that – sometimes you have a sheriff that’s on the side of the road with somebody they know is impaired, but they have to wait half an hour for an RCMP officer to show up so they can actually deal with the issue; that doesn’t make a lot of common sense – making sure that we deal with this in a streamlined way.

The other tool that we need to do is to break down the barriers so that they can actually communicate with each other. We’re having challenges right now between RCMP and sheriffs communicating, so making sure that we can break down those barriers will be part of the investment to get the RAPID force off the ground.

Mr. Rutherford: Okay.

The Acting Chair: Is there anything else you want to say, Minister, for 18 seconds? No. Okay.

Mr. Schweitzer: I appreciate it. It was great.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Rutherford: I would just close with saying thank you for being here. It’s informative, and I look forward to the fact that we’re going to be increasing the number of police officers that are in Alberta.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, Member. Thank you, Minister.

All right. I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for this item of business has concluded.

I’d like to remind the committee members that we are scheduled to meet next this afternoon at 3:30 to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Service Alberta.

Thank you again to the minister and staff. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]

