



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, March 4, 2020
3:30 p.m.

Transcript No. 30-2-4

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Second Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UCP), Chair
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP), Deputy Chair

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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
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Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UCP)
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UCP)
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* substitution for Michaela Glasgo

Also in Attendance

Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)

Support Staff

| | |
|-------------------|--|
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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participants

Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General
Hon. Doug Schweitzer, Minister
Frank Bosscha, QC, Deputy Minister

3:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 4, 2020

[Ms Goodridge in the chair]

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

The Chair: Wonderful. I would like to welcome everybody here today and call this meeting to order. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, I will ask that you please introduce the officials that are joining you at the table. My name is Laila Goodridge, MLA for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche and chair of this committee. I will look to my right to continue introductions.

Ms Sigurdson: Good afternoon. Lori Sigurdson, Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Rutherford: Brad Rutherford, Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Neudorf: Nathan Neudorf, Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Guthrie: Peter Guthrie, Airdrie-Cochrane.

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

Mr. Amery: Mickey Amery, Calgary-Cross.

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

Ms Issik: Whitney Issik, Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Schweitzer: Doug Schweitzer, Calgary-Elbow and Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. With me here today I have Frank Bosscha, QC. He's my deputy minister. I also have Dennis Cooley, ADM for Solicitor General, and Gerald Lamoureux, assistant deputy minister, corporate services.

Also with me here today, in the back here, I have Eric Tolppanen – he's the assistant deputy minister for Alberta Crown prosecution service – Kim Sanderson, assistant deputy minister, correctional services; David Peace, assistant deputy minister, justice services; Tom Rothwell, assistant deputy minister, legal services. Tom is new to the team, so this is his first time here in the Justice one. He's attended other committee meetings for Health or other areas. Tom is our new ADM for legal services, taking over from Frank Bosscha. Frank has a record of never having to come to the front here to actually make comments, but if people have a really good question or want to know pith and substance about the carbon tax case, Tom Rothwell is here. He can provide commentary. He didn't think I'd actually say that, so there we go. Bill Sweeney, senior assistant deputy minister for public security, is here. We have Mary MacDonald, assistant deputy minister, resolution and court administration services. We have Fiona Lavoy, executive director, policy and planning services branch, and Brad Wells, senior financial adviser.

Ms Ganley: Kathleen Ganley, Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Phillips: Shannon Phillips, Lethbridge-West.

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

The Chair: I would like to note the following substitution for the record: Ms Issik will be substituting for Ms Glasgo.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, and the committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and on Alberta Assembly TV. I would ask that everyone please set their cellphones and any other devices to silent for the duration of this meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. Standing Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation while the speaking time limits are set out in Standing Order 59.02(1). In brief, the minister or member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of these comments we then 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. When combined with the minister's time, it makes up a 10-minute block. Discussions should all 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. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or an e-mail to myself or to the clerk.

A total of three hours has been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, and the scheduled end time of today's meeting is 6:30 p.m. 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 a break at about the midway point.

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 the microphone in the gallery area. I'll just ask that they introduce themselves prior to speaking. Pages are available to deliver notes and other materials between the gallery and the table. Please note that attendees in the gallery are not to approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members will have priority at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to the three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allocated in the schedule, and the committee will adjourn. Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run; however, the speaking block will be paused.

Any written material 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 in Committee of Supply on March 19, 2020. 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.

I now invite the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to begin with his opening remarks. Minister, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you very much, and thank you, everybody, for making time to be here this afternoon for this important work. Just as a high level, I'm going to go through some of the fundamentals as to our department and the different areas that we've been working on.

Again, our government believes that Albertans should live in safe and resilient communities while having access to a fair and innovative justice system. We work alongside partners in health, law enforcement, the legal community, judiciary, municipalities, and many other groups and organizations to ensure that these goals are met. Justice and Solicitor General has a direct or shared responsibility for all elements of the justice system in Alberta. Part of this shared responsibility includes ensuring that law-abiding Albertans, including those living in rural communities, are able to live in a safe and protected environment. Our landmark rural crime initiative helps achieve that critical goal. It's also high time to modernize the justice system in keeping with our initiative here to bring in justice digital. We'll be introducing technology to do just that.

Just on a high level there, talking about modernizing our judiciary, right now, as people may have noted from question period today, MS-DOS is still a foundational technology used in our court system. That's simply not acceptable. The program was developed in 1981, and I mentioned in a kind of half-joking way in question period that that's when we found out that Luke's father was Darth Vader. It really just kind of highlights how old the technology is that we have in our court system and the need to modernize it. That's one of the reasons why we're doing the justice digital initiative. We believe that that's going to find many efficiencies for our courts, and it's going to allow us to deliver better services to Albertans. Right now there's simply too much paper being generated through our court processes, too many copies being made, too many full-time hours going into managing paper when we can be far more efficient in our justice system, so that's a big focus of what we're trying to do.

As far as commitments go, I'm proud to reconfirm for everyone that this budget is still in line with our campaign commitments that we've made to Albertans to ensure that the Alberta law enforcement response team has an additional \$50 million over four years. In addition to providing them with the additional funding – you know, this is really important. We were just down in Lethbridge earlier this week, and we were able to announce that we're increasing the capacity of the ALERT office there by over 40 per cent. That's going to allow us to go after organized crime in those communities. Right now we've got a meth crisis, particularly down there in southern Alberta. Lethbridge is a hub of drug trafficking. There's a hub of activity there, and the community has seen an exponential rise in meth use. Enabling ALERT to have additional resources in the area is really important.

Also, part of our initiative that we announced this week as well was additional funding for Blood Tribe police. We have an additional five officers for the Blood Tribe police force. It's about a 15 per cent increase in their complement. We're proud to work with the federal government on that initiative there to get that done for the community. That was in addition to working in collaboration. I mentioned earlier on the fact that we work in collaboration with the Health ministry quite a bit, and we do. Associate Minister Luan, the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, has done excellent work in collaborating with our office on the treatment alternatives and how we work together from a Justice department along with Health to find better outcomes for Albertans. I was proud to stand with him making two announcements. One was announcing the drug treatment court in the city of Lethbridge. The other one was announcing additional beds for the Kainai on the Blood Tribe reserve.

Those are really important initiatives for us to partner together on to end the cycle of addictions, to partner together in a multipronged approach that's fair and firm. I would love to get into drug treatment courts here today to talk about their importance. Again, I'd like to confirm for everybody here today that our budget has the additional

\$20 million that we committed over four years to fund additional drug treatment courts. The first one outside of the cities of Edmonton and Calgary is in Lethbridge. We're proud to work with ACJ Redman down in southern Alberta to make that a reality. He's a very forward-thinking judge. He's done a lot of good work already to lay the foundation for that, so that is really exciting work.

3:40

One other area, too. I see the member from Leduc is here. The other issue that we have that's a challenge is liquor store thefts. We've got 25 to 30 a day happening right now in the city of Edmonton. Apologies; I might have to stop every now and again. I battled a cold. My voice every now and again gets a little bit dry, so if I grab my water, that's why. We've got about 25 to 30 a day happening in the city of Edmonton, so we've tasked a task force with us here to help us find solutions to address, deal with liquor store thefts and the prevalence of it. It's a trend that we've seen in rural communities as well, where there's a lack of respect for the rule of law, and we're seeing that grow into our cities. We need to make sure that we come up with appropriate responses, and I'm confident that the member from Leduc is going to come up with some excellent suggestions for us to respond.

Again, as I mentioned earlier on, with justice digital the \$27 million of funding that we've provided is still there in our budget and in our out-year forecast as well to modernize our justice system. As I mentioned – you guys have heard me say it before – we've got people surrounded by fax machines. They take paper from one place. It gets printed off. They take it to get stamped. They go back to the fax machines. They fax it back. These are good people doing good work. I was actually blown away at how efficient they are with paper and how fast they can actually move paper, but it's just unacceptable in today's day and age that we have a system that operates that way. Justice digital: a big part of the focus is finding those core areas and finding ways for us to build efficiencies in.

Rural crime: I mean, you guys have heard me talk about this a lot over the last while, and I'm proud of the work that our rural members in particular made on this area and the fact that we actually have this on the national stage now. At the first meeting of all the justice ministers from across Canada we were able to get that on to the national agenda, to actually have a rural crime strategy as a country. That was a big part of it. We actually had deputy ministers from across Canada have the first opportunity to meet to talk about what that means, how do we actually have a national strategy, and the point that I was able to drive home at that meeting was the fact that our policies can't always be designed for downtown Toronto. We have to have policies that are designed for rural communities. I was actually amazed at the support that we had from justice ministers from coast to coast on finding and addressing the fact that rural crime is a real issue across the country. I'm really proud of the work that our members did continually on bringing that issue forward.

I mean, we had over 40 municipalities that we met with last year, met with over 3,500 people, 8,000 submissions. It led to some foundational things that other governments across the country are taking a look at, from how we're managing scrap metal dealers and having greater scrutiny there. We're working on the regulations now for that. The Alberta law enforcement response team is working on developing a tactical unit to go after scrap metal theft in the province of Alberta to ensure that that area is dealt with. You know, coming from the city of Calgary, I never really realized that copper wire theft was such a prevalent issue in our rural communities. So that is an area that we're strategically investing in, making sure that we listen to Albertans as well. The RAPID force as well, providing enhanced powers to our sheriffs, our fish and

wildlife officers, commercial vehicle operators, providing them with additional training: that, again, is funded in this budget, and it's funded in this budget to make sure that we can continue to deliver on those commitments to Albertans.

That was a part of it but also working with our many colleagues here on finding innovative approaches to protecting property rights, to making sure that they are respected in this country, respected in the province of Alberta. Many other jurisdictions are – it was actually funny. I had a minister – I won't name the province – come up to me and say, "Hey; we got this really neat property rights bill that we just brought in for introduction," and he was describing it. I don't think that he knew that it was modelled actually on the work that we had done last fall. He was about to introduce it. I'm really proud of the collaborative team effort that we've got there and also the fact that we have community impact statements that are available now in the province of Alberta to help tell the story. When the RMA and AUMA meetings come up, we'll be working with municipal governments to make sure that they fully understand how to use those so that they can do that in the province and make sure that they can tell the story as to the mental health impacts that rural crime is having across the province of Alberta.

One of the other areas, too, that wouldn't have come about without the feedback that we had from the thousands of people that we met with last year was the police funding model and getting that new partnership in place with municipalities across Alberta. It's going to lead to an investment of over \$286 million over five years in law enforcement, an additional 500 personnel. This is a historic investment in policing and a new partnership with our municipalities in the province of Alberta. It's going to take our complement of RCMP from about 1,600 to about 1,900 in the province of Alberta. This is the largest single investment in rural policing since the March West. This is significant, and the feedback that we've had from people on the ground in rural Alberta is that they know that we listen, that they know we're going to continue to listen and fight hard for them.

We're going to continue to fight hard, too, for Criminal Code amendments. I made that point to the federal Minister of Justice, that we need Criminal Code amendments to reflect the reality of rural communities, in the sentencing provisions in particular.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. The timer will be set for three 20-minute intervals so that members are aware of the time. Are members planning to share time for these interactions?

Mr. Schweitzer: No.

Ms Ganley: I would make that request. Okay.

The Chair: For the Official Opposition, is it Ms Ganley?

Ms Ganley: Yes.

The Chair: All right.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. Sorry. I'm just going to redo my notes here. I've prepared two scenarios just in case we chose not to answer questions again.

Okay. Starting, then, with the court budget, because I think that's probably my biggest area of concern here, the minister is no doubt very well aware of the Supreme Court's decision in Jordan and the work that's being done within the department since 2016 in order to bring those timelines down. Obviously, I don't have access to the information anymore, but we did see a bending of those curves

fairly significantly between 2016 and early 2019, and that was a combination of efficiencies and investment.

What I'm concerned with here is that we're actually seeing some of that be reversed. Obviously, generally in order to function – most folks will be aware of it but just for anyone who happens to be listening in – a courtroom needs security, litigants, a judge, and a court clerk. I think the big concern here is that in this budget we're seeing increased investment, potentially, in something like the Provincial Court that could go towards judges, which is a good thing. I don't deny that for a second. The problem is with resolution services, which is the line that funds primarily court clerks – there are a few sort of resolution counsels in there in order to take things out of the court area – which is reduced by 25 per cent, so that's \$4 million on a \$16 million budget. That's a pretty significant reduction for court clerks. I think that that concerns me, and I think it should concern all Albertans.

Oh. Just for clarity here, I am looking at page 151 of the main estimates. These court clerks, as the minister no doubt knows, were already strained. I know that at a certain point, going beyond the current staffing levels, the ministry does tend to track instances in which, once the stress gets too high on employees, you start to see more people taking sick leave, and with those individuals, that puts more strain on the rest of the system, and the whole thing enters a really unfortunate spiral. I think we had gotten those staffing levels up, so we didn't have that problem anymore, but I'm a little worried we're going to start seeing it again.

The first question that I have is: what do we expect to happen to timelines as a result of that, and how many cases do we expect to see stayed as a result of Jordan?

Just to pre-empt the inevitable discussion about e-courts, I'm well aware that e-courts create efficiency. Criminal e-file was implemented while I was the minister. I imagine that you would see similar gains from implementing it in civil and family courts. For those implementations, my recollection is that they saved us population and inflation for one year, so that's about 3 to 4 per cent. Let's assume that you say 5 per cent, which is pretty good for an initiative like that. I think it's a really good initiative; I'm glad to see it rolling out. I guess the question is: where do you plan to find the other 20 per cent of efficiencies? Again, we're not talking about judges or the court budget directly; we're talking specifically about the line that funds resolution and court clerks.

3:50

I also see that the Provincial Court budget has gone up. I'm wondering if I can get an explanation for that and whether it has to do with more judges. I can't really track that because overall the entire RCAS budget goes down. I'm not really seeing where the additional funding for drug treatment court is, so I would love to know where that is. I would praise the minister for that. I think that's a really good initiative. I think that's going to help, not enough to make up for the other changes, but I think it's going to help. So I'm just a little bit curious as to what budget line specifically that's in. I guess my basic question is: how do we plan to square that circle? I'd like specifics, if that's possible given that there are 10 minutes to respond, because I'm really concerned that we're going to see longer wait times.

I also notice that while the business plan is tracking matters that are stayed by the courts due to Jordan, I'm a little curious because the website – it did; I hope it still does – tracks matters that are proactively stayed by the Crown, and I'm interested in whether we're going to see more of those.

To sum up, then, just to make sure we've got them all in there with respect to courts, how are we planning to deal with the growing

population and with what will definitely be more court cases? As we're adding new officers, the point of those new officers, as I understand and as the minister has stated over and over again, is to catch more rural criminals. That will result in an increase in matters in the court that is greater than population growth, so how are we planning to do that with 25 per cent fewer clerks? Has the department estimated how much we're expecting Jordan stays to rise as a result? How can the minister ultimately reassure concerned Albertans about matters that won't even see a trial? Again, I know that e-courts will help, but certainly it's not going to help 25 per cent.

I think the next area I'd sort of like to move on to in terms of questions is the prosecution service. Last year's budget, looking to the out-years, read as follows: \$105 million in the '19-20 budget, \$109 million in the '20-21 budget, \$114 million in the '21-22 budget, and \$117 million in the '22-23. That would account for the 50 additional prosecutors. But this year there's a bit of a surprise in the budget. What we're seeing is \$105 million for '19-20, so the year that's passed, \$102 million this year – that's a decrease even from last year – \$101 million in '20-21, and \$104 million in '22-23. So by '22-23 we'd basically wind up flat relative to today.

I'm a little curious how we're going to add 50 additional prosecutors with no additional money. Now, I certainly know that the minister has recommitted to this, so I imagine that there's some plan to pay for it, but since there's no money in this year's budget – in fact, there's less money in this year's budget – and there's no money in the out-years budget, I'm really curious as to where that money is coming from and whether it will in fact be from salary reductions to Crown prosecutors. I think we both know that there are already significant challenges in recruiting and retaining, especially in rural areas, so I think salary reductions would be a pretty big concern for me.

I mean, if you're adding the 50, I think that's right. We added about 70 over the course of four years, so that seems like the right number to keep up with sort of a growing population. I guess the question is: how do you plan to add them without any additional money in the budget?

I'd also like to know, since we had this conversation last year, how many prosecutors have successfully been recruited since the last time we spoke. At that time I had asked for numbers in April, which were not provided, but numbers were provided in October in terms of how many prosecutors there were. If there were 25 vacancies in April, as the minister has stated repeatedly, when we left government, I'm just wondering how many of those have now been filled, whether there are 25 vacancies still or whether there are fewer than 25 vacancies. As always, I'm happy to get any of this information back in writing. I know that sometimes we don't have the information right in front of us. At this point it's been almost a full year since you took office, so I'd like to know specifically how many vacancies have been filled.

The next area I'm interested in discussing is corrections. According to the most recent information from the office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer – so that's a federal report – Alberta continues to have the lowest cost per prisoner in the country. Now, obviously, those numbers aren't right up to date, but they're the most recent ones available to us. That was the case when I took office in 2015. It was the case when I left office as well. I assume that it continues to be the case today. I don't think there's any case to be made around corrections and finding efficiencies because I actually think it's probably the most efficient corrections operation in the country, or at least judging from the numbers it is, since we, again, have the lowest cost per prisoner. Given that and given the fact that the response from last time's estimates . . . [Ms Ganley's speaking time expired] I guess we'll come back to that.

The Chair: Wonderful.

To the minister for your 10-minute response.

Mr. Schweitzer: Perfect. We'll start with I think it's section 2.2, that you were referring to with respect to the courts budget. Let me find it here. I'm looking forward to answering your questions.

With respect to your questions around Jordan timelines, we don't see any change in the issues when it comes to Jordan timelines. There's no expectation of a rise in Jordan issues in the province of Alberta. We are seeing a rise in applications, people trying to seek it, but we aren't seeing that trend line being upheld by the judiciary, at least that I'm advised of. We're not expecting it to rise given our current approach.

Regarding your question around, you know, court clerks and the budget there, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, justice digital is going to provide an immense number of efficiencies. The number of people that we do have on that side: they're amazing. Like, they've walked me through the process, what they do with paper. It actually blows me away what they can do with paper, but in today's technological age that we are in, the justice system that we have is simply not up to date.

The justice digital initiative, replacing things like MS-DOS, replacing the fax machines: we are going to be able to find an immense number of efficiencies behind the scenes with our clerks. You know, the criminal side is one thing, but it's another thing, too, as it relates to all the different civil issues that come up. We literally had people with an 87-cent cheque, and the amount of paperwork that had to go into dealing with handing out an 87-cent cheque was grossly disproportional to the cost associated with that 87-cent cheque. So we do believe that we will receive an immense amount of savings there through that whole process.

In addition to that, some aspects of the court clerks are in the Provincial Court budget as well. You did see an uptick in the Provincial Court budget. There are elements of the court clerk costs that are included in the increase to the Provincial Court budget as well. We do have elements that are going on both sides of that.

With respect to your question about drug treatment courts, I share your affinity for them. As I mentioned earlier on, doubling the capacity of Calgary and Edmonton was a no-brainer for us to do, and in bringing them down to the city of Lethbridge, where, you know, we have a meth crisis, I think that was a wise investment. This week I was there with the Member for Lethbridge-East, and that was really well received in the community. The judiciary down there is leading in many ways with the resources that they have, and this is going to help.

As far as the funding that goes with it, we are going to be expanding. I think you'll see in the budget that there's about a \$17 million net increase to the victims of crime fund. We are going to be expanding the scope of the victims of crime fund. I don't want to pre-empt the Legislature, but we will be proposing legislation to expand the mandate of the victims of crime fund to include public safety initiatives like the drug treatment court, so \$4 million of that will come through that fund. That includes the 5 per cent levy increase that we're going to be putting in through that. So the funding that you were asking about: that's where that is going to be coming from.

4:00

As far as your question about prosecutors – and I knew that that question was going to come when you saw the line there – again, that'll come into the public safety initiative. We're going to be expanding the scope of the designated fund. We will be paying \$5 million for Crown prosecutors through that. You saw the number

there. I think it's about 101 and a half million dollars. It would actually be an extra \$5 million to that, so about 106 and a half million dollars would be provided for prosecution services; \$5 million of that, though, would come through the fund.

We do believe that with that process of hiring additional prosecutors – one of the gaps that we have in the province of Alberta is just making sure that we have a larger legal talent pool of prospective prosecutors in our province. One of the initiatives that we saw right away was with the province of Alberta only having eight articling students. That's wholly insufficient for a government legal team of this size. The private sector: you know, the larger law firms in the province of Alberta have about 20 articling students a year for their provincial team. Right now the province of Alberta will have, ultimately, the largest articling pool in the province. We're going to go from 16 this year to 20. We filled those positions. In rural Alberta primarily is where those positions went, and we do believe that that'll lead to a longer term trend of being able to fill the backlog that we do have in our province.

We actually have been hiring, and a lot of recruitment has been going into the hiring process. One of the things that we did run into this year: we've been running somewhere between 25 to 30 vacancies still in the prosecution service right now, and that's primarily – the federal government went on a bit of a hiring spree. Every time we hired somebody new, the feds came in and hired somebody. Over the last few months we haven't seen that trend continue, so I'm optimistic, at least, that that'll provide us with an opportunity to start making some gains into that. We do have the budget room, as I mentioned, to hire an additional 20. We do believe that having that larger pipeline of young legal talent coming into the system will give us the path to a combination of younger talent as well as kind of recruiting in – it'll allow us, hopefully, at that point in time to fulfill the backlog as well as hire the additional 50 positions that we need.

Now, by having these additional prosecutors in place, part of our strategy as well is going to be making sure that we reduce the caseload per prosecutor in the province of Alberta. We believe that that'll allow them to focus more on their different cases that they have, which will allow us to get earlier resolutions, better case management. We'll hopefully be able to get away from, you know, the triage model that we've inherited and get back towards a more proactive prosecution service that's able to manage their case files in a more comprehensive way. We believe that'll help us as well with Jordan issues going forward, part of our ongoing strategy for file management.

We turn now to – I'll make sure I've covered off all the points that you asked about that. Oh, you had a question about salary reduction: no, salary reductions are not part of our strategy.

Now, on the corrections side – I'm going to turn to that now – as you see there, the estimate is \$286 million as a whole for correctional services. When you add in the \$4 million for drug treatment courts that would be added in, that we're going to be paying for out of the fund, if you looked at it under the historical way that this would have been done, that would have been about \$290 million. But because we're going to pay \$4 million for drug treatment courts out of the broadened mandate for the fund, that'll be how we're going to pay for that.

As far as finding efficiencies, we're continuing to work with our department to see if we can find additional efficiencies. As you've seen in our out-year forecast, we do believe that we still can become more efficient in our correction services in the province of Alberta. It's premature for us to provide further details on that. That work is still ongoing right now to see if we can find that road map forward that'll find those savings. We do believe that they are there. We do have cost pressures, though, from, you know, providing food and

other services and other contract services that do come in, so we are managing that as best we can in addition to making sure we have the right complement of staff to manage overtime pay in the correctional services division as well.

I think that I've answered all the questions. See? Questions get asked; questions get answered.

The Chair: Back to the Official Opposition.

Ms Ganley: Okay. Continuing in that vein on corrections, my understanding of what you said – and I'll just let you confirm this understanding, if it's correct – is that you're going to manage inmate population growth without any increase in budget, so you are projecting still that there will be a growth in the inmate population. In this one I am looking at lines 7.1 through 7.5.

My other question about that is how you plan to do that in light of the fact that there have been a number of court decisions dealing specifically with how incompatibilities are managed by our corrections system, which is to say through administrative segregation primarily, that indicate that basically the way we have been doing it is not working. Because of those decisions, there had to be, my recollection is, quite a lot of changes. I'm not seeing a lot of investment with respect to this. Now, of course, I'm looking under capital, which is on page 153, adult remand and correction centres. In the upcoming years that's at \$288,000. That's not a lot in terms of reformatting units to be smaller to handle those incompatibilities in different ways. I'm not seeing a lot of additional money in the budget, so I'm a little curious how you're going to comply with those decisions. Oh, I just said that without reading it. Okay.

I also note that in your written responses to last year's estimates you state that – I had asked this question last year as well, about how you're planning to manage that growth without additional funds being invested. The written response read, in part: by investing in new approaches to service delivery in corrections. What I'm asking is whether or not you're looking actively at sort of American-style, for-profit private jails, because that's kind of what it sounds like.

Since we had touched on it already, I will move also to the victims of crime fund. I'm a little bit curious about how all this different money is going to flow. I note that the minister has renewed, just I think as recently as today, a commitment to add \$50 million to ALERT. That is, of course, covered under line 6.8, which is organized and serious crime, in the budget. The '18-19 actual was \$32 million, the forecast for '19-20 is \$34 million, and the budget estimate for '20-21 is \$30 million. It doesn't increase in the out-years. Given that there's no money for ALERT there, I'm curious as to whether you are funding ALERT through the victims of crime fund. That's, again, line 6.8 on page 152.

I'm curious. I'm turning now to the fiscal plan. I'm on page 136, under Justice and Solicitor General, of the fiscal plan. The statement says:

The scope of... the Victims of Crime Fund will expand to include public [security] priorities.

Here the question about ALERT.

In addition, the financial benefits program will be replaced with... service-based [programs] for victims of crime. The Victims of Crimes Program Committee and the Criminal Injuries Review Board will be eliminated to streamline processes.

By streamline I think you mean eliminate.

Currently the victims of crime fund has funds that support various groups that support victims, and it has funds that flow directly to victims through those applications. It sounds like you are eliminating those funds which flow directly to victims, so that's the financial benefit program. I'd like a confirmation on that.

4:10

I'd also like a confirmation, since it says that those funds are being reallocated – last year \$44 million was spent from the victims of crime fund, and that was the combination of the two, the money directly to victims and the money for victims' services. What I'm asking is: next year, when you start drawing on the fund for other reasons, will \$44 million at minimum continue to be spent on victims of crime?

I'd also be interested to know – we had done a lot of work within the department and with our government in terms of expanding certain programs that are paid for from the victims of crime fund. The HomeFront model in Calgary was looking to be rolled out throughout the province. That was a big draw on the fund. We were also expanding victims' services personnel in the Crown's office to better support people coming through court cases and a number of other programs, including expanding grants to different communities, community-based programs, particularly those that were very, very badly overdrawn. I'm just wondering if all of those programs will be maintained or if some of them will be lost in this reallocation of funding. I think those are most of my questions on the victims of crime fund.

Moving from there, then, under legal aid, which is – and again I'm on page 151, right at the bottom, line 5.8. Under the agreement that we had signed with Legal Aid, we were to provide them with \$110 million in funding this year; instead, the investment will be \$94 million. That agreement requires that the minister provide direction to Legal Aid on what to change, what to reduce, so I'm just wondering what direction was provided.

My next question is about the sheriffs. That is found on page 152 this time, in line 6.9. I have put together, as I'm sure your staff has informed you, that that line, sheriffs branch, now includes fish and wildlife and the commercial vehicle enforcement branch. I think that's fine. I mean, there were discussions of combining that before. My understanding is that you've centralized those budgets, and that line is now paying for everything. That number for the '18-19 actuals does represent the same number that adding those three numbers together would have represented.

But then we see in the estimate for '20-21 that there's a 15 per cent reduction. It's going from \$108 million to \$91 million, almost \$92 million. That's a pretty big reduction, particularly in light of the fact that I believe the department's estimate in terms of the additional work that those individuals would be doing was about 15 per cent under the RAPID force. As the minister had announced, those sheriffs and commercial vehicle enforcement and the fish and wildlife branch will now be available to respond to other matters, other policing matters. I think the estimate was that that would increase their workload by roughly 15 per cent. Now we're also seeing their budget cut by 15 per cent, so that's almost a 30 per cent sort of increase in the work on the individuals.

Particularly, I think, in commercial vehicle enforcement we were running pretty tight on the line in terms of our obligations, under occupational health and safety, to the employees. I'm a little worried about what those cuts mean and whether those individuals will still be able to do the work that they're required to do, particularly in light of – you know, there's been a lot of recent attention since the Humboldt tragedy on commercial vehicle enforcement and the reason why that's really, really important. I'm just sort of wondering how those individuals are going to manage to do sort of 15 per cent more with 15 per cent less, about 30 per cent more work, and still maintain the standards that they currently have and whether there will be specific reductions in sort of one program versus another. [Ms Ganley's speaking time expired] Well, that worked out great.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Ganley.

Now on to the minister for 10 minutes of response.

Mr. Schweitzer: With respect to – we'll start with corrections. You're referring to I think it's line items 7.1 to 7.5. With respect to the budget right now we're running at about a 72 per cent capacity in our correctional facilities in the province of Alberta. No, we are not going to an American-style private delivery of correction services. We are maintaining the current delivery model of correction services in the province of Alberta. Again, we are running at 72 per cent capacity, so even if there is an increased demand for services in correctional facilities, we do have the capacity within our existing infrastructure and structure to manage that. We don't believe that that would necessarily impact the budget numbers in a material way if it was to increase, you know, in a modest manner.

Again, with respect to administrative segregation, we're continuing to work with our, you know, stakeholders on that to make sure that we continue to provide the services as required by the law in Canada, to make sure that we deliver on that. Again, we're managing that by delivering on efficiencies in our system and making sure that we manage towards it as well as managing our overtime rates in the province of Alberta to make sure that we keep our costs down. I'll just try to see if there's anything I can add. Yeah, just one other point to raise on that is that, again, we're continuing to monitor court cases as they do arise, because every now and again you do get a new landmark decision that requires ongoing obligations. We'll continue to monitor them to make sure that we're in compliance in the province of Alberta, and we'll continue to do that good work.

With respect to the victims of crime fund in its current form, again, as I mentioned earlier on, we want to expand its mandate to include public safety initiatives. Right now the victims of crime fund has about a \$70 million reserve. About \$25 million of that is for ongoing future liabilities and future obligations. What we want to do is make sure we use the funds that are in the victims of crime fund in the best way, and we believe that that is by expanding its mandate. Increasing the levy by 5 per cent – as I mentioned earlier on, we are going to be increasing it by \$17 million. I think that the levy will increase it by about \$14 million to come into the fund, and we do have that additional reserve of about \$70 million sitting there. One of the things that we're looking to do – you've asked me the questions; I might as well kind of give you the summary of it. Out of the new structure of this fund, including public safety initiatives, \$10 million of that will go to ALERT, about \$6.6 million of that would go to the RAPID force, \$5 million of it will go to Crown prosecution, and \$4 million of that will go to drug treatment courts. I think that I've already mentioned all of those ones earlier on to you, but those are the other ones that you just asked about. So that makes about \$26 million. Right now we've increased it to \$61 million-ish for this year, give or take. As well, we're looking at other ways to find efficiencies.

With your questions about the grants, our goal here is to preserve the grants. We are going to look for efficiencies there to try and save about \$1 million in the grant program overall, but we do believe that we can maintain grants. We did start a consultative process with stakeholders in this area. A few months ago we started that process to make sure we can better deliver services. Those consultations are going to continue to make sure that we can do that, you know, going forward.

With respect to the financial benefits program we believe that we're going to be able to find about \$7 million of savings there. Our goal there would be to – and you'll see this when we introduce

legislation later on. We do believe that we can streamline the processes there and find efficiencies, reducing red tape, but we will come back with a new program. It will, you know, continue to operate in the interim in a more reduced capacity, but we do believe that there's a way forward there to maintain benefits. We are a little bit out of alignment with the rest of the country when it comes to that benefits program, so we want to make sure that it is more sustainable going forward in the province of Alberta.

I think, as you say, that in the out-years this new fund as we structure it would continue to increase. It would go up to about \$68 million, \$69 million in the out-years as we continue to expand the scope for the fund.

4:20

With respect to legal aid I'm not sure if you're aware of this or not, but what we did there is that we worked hard with the Alberta Law Foundation. The Alberta Law Foundation had about \$70 million, the same amount of surplus in a reserve fund as the victims of crime fund, just ironically the same number. They had \$70 million in their fund, and they've come to the table with \$34.4 million over three years to provide to Legal Aid. We were aware of the fact that, yeah, we were asking Legal Aid to take a reduction in the amount provided by the government of Alberta, but we did recognize, in working with our partners at the Alberta Law Foundation, to continue to provide services to those that need it. The Alberta Law Foundation has come to the table with \$34.4 million to help fund legal aid services in the province of Alberta.

This will give us a runway of about three years to find a sustainable path for legal aid in the province of Alberta. We're hoping – the federal government has made comments on this. The federal government has not provided sufficient funding to legal aid historically in the province of Alberta. We're going to continue to ask the federal government to provide additional funding for legal aid. We're going to continue to work with Legal Aid to provide that. We do recognize the important work that Legal Aid does, so, again, we're going to continue to work with our stakeholders to find those efficiencies. We do believe some of the digitization efforts will help with efficiencies as well in working with Legal Aid, so we're going to continue to work with them on that path.

When it comes to the sheriffs branch and the sheriffs, line item 6.9, as I mentioned earlier on, one of the reasons why you see a reduction in the budget line item there is that \$6.6 million for the RAPID force would move to the expanded scope of the fund. The \$2.1 million that's there for the SCAN unit is going to get moved to ALERT. Again, that brings down the demand there. We're working towards about \$5.5 million of operational efficiencies in the department as well. Historically they were funding some of the indigenous policing officers through some of these line items, so we're going to make sure that those go through a separate line item for the indigenous policing initiative as well. That's where some of those adjustments come through, that fund.

I think those are all of the questions that you asked in that last round.

The Chair: Back to the Official Opposition for their next 10-minute block.

Ms Ganley: Okay. Thank you, Minister. That was very helpful.

Now to the things that are not as nicely collected, so it's kind of scattershot. One of the areas I wanted to ask about – and this arises in part from estimates earlier today in Municipal Affairs. Earlier in estimates Minister Madu was asked to provide a year-by-year, municipality-by-municipality breakdown of the per capita cost of reduced MSI spending, reduced funding for grants in place of taxes

– sorry; this is just background; I'm getting to where I'm going, I promise – and the change in fine revenue as a result of the new split. That's the ticket fine revenue that flows through Justice. Your ministry worked with Municipal Affairs to provide the same type of information on per capita costs, municipality by municipality, for rural policing. Minister Madu had directed us to ask you about information on the fine revenue split. My question is: will you commit to provide – and obviously you don't have to read it out here though you're welcome to. Will you commit to provide a year-by-year, municipality-by-municipality per capita cost estimate as a result of the changes in fine revenue split between the government of Alberta and municipalities? That's one question.

The other question I have relating to that area just relates to how money is flowing, obviously, with changes to the Police Act here in Alberta, which will now ask municipalities who previously didn't pay for their policing to pay for their policing. How does that money flow? I notice that in your budget – again, this is in line 6.5, contract policing and oversight; that's the PPSA, flowing primarily to the RCMP – there's a small increase from \$263 million to \$279 million, but I'm not sure that would account for the money that's coming in from municipalities. I'm wondering: do each of the municipalities pay separately for the RCMP, or does it come into Justice and get collected and then go out as one sort of collective dollar amount? If so, where does it enter, and then would it leave through this line item of contract policing and oversight, item 6.5? I think those are my questions on that one.

I'm curious if you have an answer with respect to the Alberta Law Foundation. Of course, interest rates historically were very high, and then they became lower. That meant that the Alberta Law Foundation has had much, much less money to deal with over the course of time, and that pie has sort of been slowly shrinking, which has caused them to shrink their grants to various organizations. Now, my conversations with them indicated that they weren't able to bring forward more funding for legal aid without cutting elsewhere, so I'm wondering if that was part of your conversation or not.

With respect to line 5.3 – that's the office of the Chief Medical Examiner. Now, obviously, we're all aware that this has been an issue before your time, before my time. It's been an ongoing issue for a very long time. We do tend to do a higher percentage of autopsies here in Alberta, and as a result of that, we have higher costs for our office of the Chief Medical Examiner. That's just, as the minister will know, a sort of artifact of our legislation and the way the test is run. But given that sort of, like, constantly increasing workload on the Chief Medical Examiner, I'm just wondering how we're planning to stay within that budget and whether or not that will continue. The Chief Medical Examiner's office was tasked with doing a lot of very complex work around coding deaths and whether or not they were due to fentanyl or another drug. Particularly in instances of multiple drug toxicity, that's more of an art than a science, so it took one person doing a lot of that work. My understanding was that that was Dr. Brooks-Lim, who has now left. I'm just wondering whether that work will continue under the current budget.

In lines 5.5 and 5.6 I see that there's been a movement of money from the Public Trustee to the public guardian line. I know that that's sort of all kind of one. The office of the public guardian and trustee in some ways functions as one entity and in some ways is in two budget lines. I'm just wondering about that and the reason for that movement there.

I also note that line 5.7, which is fines enforcement, has come down somewhat, and I'm wondering if that's because Justice is retaining a lower portion of those fines or whether that's because we expect the total amount of the fines to come down. For the

benefit of anyone on the committee who's not familiar with this, the money comes in from tickets to Justice. It's sort of split up. It goes out to municipalities, in part by way of shared fine revenue. Some of it goes into general revenue, but some of it comes back to Justice, and it goes back to this ticket processing line. I'm just curious about: what projections caused that to go down?

I also note that in line 6.1 – I'm trying to talk slowly because I feel like this one might be too many questions for the time – public security program support is down almost 50 per cent, so I'm sort of wondering how that's being achieved. I know that there's a lot of careful analysis and really, really good work that, in my experience, comes out of that shop, so I'm a little bit curious about that.

4:30

ASIRT, which is line 6.3: the minister will be aware that they do incredibly important work. I believe there were a couple of times over the course of my mandate that we increased their budget because they have a lot of work. In fact, the amount of work that they have has been sort of steadily increasing, and those cases are not only complex, but they draw a lot of public attention, and there are a lot of people waiting on the outcome. There are the families of the affected persons. There's the officer and the family of the officer and often the entire service. Often everyone is sort of on pins and needles awaiting those decisions. I'm just wondering if ASIRT is of the view that they're going to be able to keep their timelines the same or reduced within that sort of flat budget.

Line 6.6. This is interesting because, Minister, you raised this before. You said that some money is coming out of the sheriffs line to go into that line. I was going to say that it was up a little, but if that's the case, it may not be up at all. The history of this matter, for those on the committee who are not familiar with it, is that we have three First Nation services in the province and also a series of sort of additional officers that go to First Nations. The split in terms of the cost is slightly different. Instead of being 70-30, it's 48-52.

Alberta has been begging for years and years and years for the federal government to come to the table and put some more money into it, and they finally did. My hope is that the province is going to come up with their half of the share to pay for those additional officers, because I know that those First Nation services are some of the most strained in the province, and they could really, really use those resources. Because there are only a certain number of those positions for the country, I think that if we don't use them again this year, as we didn't last year, we're going to lose them. I would like some reassurance that we're going to come up with our half of that money.

I'm also a little bit interested – and this comes into the budget indirectly with respect to all of the line items under section 2, I suppose, having to do with resolution and court administration services. I note we're not moving forward with the unified family court program. I'm a little interested to see that, because the justification that's been given is costs. But my understanding is that because those judges all have to be appointed under section 96, actually the federal government winds up paying for more judges, so the province gets money... [Ms Ganley's speaking time expired] Darn it.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Ganley.

Back to the minister for 10 minutes of response.

Mr. Schweitzer: Sure. On your first question, around fine revenue municipality by municipality, again I don't have that at my fingertips here today, but we can work to generate a report for you to answer that question.

With respect to police funding – and this was item 6.5 – as part of the transition to the new police funding model we did have some municipalities that paid for enhanced policing, which is about \$6 million, give or take. What we're doing is that we as the province are going to take ownership of that full cost as part of the first year for police funding. The first year would generate new revenue through the police funding model in the low \$20 million range. That \$6 million would come off the top of that, and then there would be an additional \$15 million that would get put into additional policing, which then is matched by the federal government, 30 per cent. It is going to be managed through the police contract that the province of Alberta has with the RCMP. So that is how that is to be structured.

Then as the amount goes up, all the money goes back into policing. The next year it would be 15 per cent, so a higher amount; the next year, 20 per cent, another higher amount; and 30 per cent. That's how you get to the overall number of \$286 million over the five years as all that money goes back into the policing contract.

With respect to the Alberta Law Foundation question that you had, you know, that was a discussion that we had with them to work that through. Again, it's through their reserve funds. The Alberta Law Foundation has excellent governance, and we would expect them to maintain that. It wasn't an either/or. That is my understanding of that discussion, Member. We're happy that the Alberta Law Foundation has come to the table to provide ongoing services to Albertans.

With respect to the Chief Medical Examiner's office, line 5.3, one of the things that's new here is that we brought in an executive director to help with the management. Historically the Chief Medical Examiner had a dual hat. They had a medical role, but they also had a management role. We have brought in an executive director to help manage the medical examiner's office. We're hoping that that can help bring some stability to management to help work with us to find efficiencies, to manage caseloads in the province of Alberta. We'll continue to monitor caseload demands as required, and, you know, we can hopefully continue to work with them on that here in the province of Alberta.

Again, I do think there are opportunities to hopefully at some point in time reduce certain barriers as well, the sharing of information between different departments. Hopefully, that will help bring some efficiencies in as well. There's potential for that. I don't want to, you know, prejudge that.

With respect to your question about section 5.7, fines enforcement, again, that's just an internal department savings initiative for that one there. That's just a matter of finding efficiencies within the department. That's a savings initiative.

I'm just going to move to 5.5 and 5.6, the public guardian and trustee. With respect to the public guardian services, we have about a \$0.9 million decrease in the budget there. That's related to budget restraint as well as through attrition, two vacant positions that were there, as well as \$0.7 million in savings initiatives in that area.

On the Public Trustee side we have a \$1.1 million increase in funding for the replacement of the legacy trust accounting system, which is offset by a \$0.4 million decrease due to budgetary restraints as well as a decrease in the budget through savings initiatives in the area. There's also a \$2.6 million increase in funding for the replacement of the legacy trust accounting system. Sorry. Let me restate it: a \$2.6 million increase in funding for the replacement of the legacy trust accounting system. Sorry. I was looking at two different line items. I apologize. That didn't add up originally, and now it does.

With respect to your question around 6.6, indigenous policing, that is additional funding to fund 16 new police officer positions. In addition to that, there are resources that we're working through on

the RCMP side as well, but it will be 16 new positions for indigenous policing through that effort.

With respect to ASIRT, at 6.3, again, we're going to continue to monitor the caseload. There are no changes in that area. We're going to continue to monitor caseload, work with them as a key stakeholder in the department. I do agree with you: they do excellent work that is important to our community. Again, we're going to continue to work with them on that.

With respect to 6.1, this right here relates to a few different things. We did a reallocation of \$2.6 million for the guns and gangs to item 6.8, with respect to organized and serious crime. We also had a \$2.3 million saving with respect to a change with respect to the biological casework analysis, so we had that in there as well. Health and Children's Services as well had taken on some additional work that was funded through there historically.

You had started to formulate a question around the unified family court, and I think you'd already articulated a question there. I can answer it. When this project came to my attention, I was operating under the assumption that it could be a cost saver and an efficiency driver as well. We explored it. We looked at it. Even then the initial proposal that came back required tens of millions of dollars in infrastructure changes to the courts. When I was talking to the courts, I said: "Look, there have to be zero infrastructure changes. You've got to use existing infrastructure in the province of Alberta. I don't mind reinvesting. If we're saving on salaries for judges, I don't mind investing that back in as long as it's a net zero."

4:40

Every which way we tried to do it, it was going to cost more. It was going to cost millions more every year to operate, even with the federal government picking up the tab of additional QB judges. We did look into it in an earnest way to actually see if we could make this work, but it was going to cost additional infrastructure, and it was going to cost additional support resources as well, so we ultimately made a decision, at least at this point in time, not to proceed with it. I do think that it's an initiative that, you know, if we had different financial times in the province of Alberta, might make sense in the future, but at this point in time there are other pressures on the department that I think would have a higher priority than going with this. We'll continue to work with the existing structure that we have.

I think that that was it. Was there anything else that I missed?

I'm just going to ask my deputy. He didn't get on the record much when he was an ADM.

Mr. Bosscha: With respect to the question about the OCME and the toxicity work that they were doing, that will continue. There was a larger, more up-to-date lab constructed that will allow them to expand the work that they do.

Mr. Schweitzer: That was it for items, I believe.

The Chair: Wonderful. Thank you, Minister.

With that, I will turn this back to the Official Opposition and Ms Ganley for the remaining four minutes and 40 seconds in this 60-minute block.

Ms Ganley: Yes. I do have a couple of different things arising, so I'm going to start with a couple. On page 157 – this is under the revenue line item – at the very bottom under Other Revenue I just see that that goes up significantly, by about \$22 million and then \$9 million and \$12 million in the additional out-years, which is on page 115 of the business plan. I'm just curious as to what the other revenue is.

I think that victims of crime we have mostly walked through. I understand what the minister was seeing in saying that, in fact, we're not eliminating the financial benefits but we're just reducing it. I don't want to presume the legislation, and I'm sure that we will see that in the legislation, but what I would be interested to know is whether we're trying to come in line with other jurisdictions, so whether we're essentially reducing the benefits that each individual would get or whether we're talking about excluding some individuals who were previously included.

Specifically, if there's any way to get back to me in writing with respect to – so you're looking to find about a million dollars out of the grants. I know that a lot of those programs were already really stretched. I'm just wondering specifically about that expansion of the domestic violence program and whether that will still occur.

I also noted that in line 1.1, which is the minister's office, at a time when we're sort of reducing or holding flat the overall budget, we're seeing a \$50,000 increase there. I'm curious what that's for.

Then in line 3.1 we deal with civil law. My understanding is that we're looking at laying off about a third of the civil lawyers. I do know that those civil lawyers work at all different departments across government, and even when they're sort of centralized in terms of budget to Justice, they essentially bill them out to most of the large departments. Sometimes the smaller ones get it for free. We're seeing that \$5 million reduction because that would sort of be the Justice share, I'm guessing.

What I'm wondering, though, is whether elsewhere in the budget – so you're obviously going to have to see some increase in outside legal opinions, which I think may potentially drive a certain amount of cost, and then if there's other work that isn't getting done, I'm just curious how you're accounting for a potential liability because right now there are a lot of things that lawyers do that aren't actually going to court, right? There are sort of back-end things like looking over contracts and looking over the way government sets up legislation and regulations and policy to make sure that those things are compliant with the law.

Now, you could stop doing some of that work, but that will create potential liability in terms of people suing the government, various departments, not just Justice, at some point in the future, and I'm wondering if that's being taken care of in an accounting way at all.

I think that I'm about to be out of time, so there's no sense in launching into an additional . . .

Mr. Schweitzer: Yeah. It's just the same people recommending it. I can answer it later on.

With respect to the other revenue, that's police funding. As you see that incrementally grow . . . [Mr. Schweitzer's speaking time expired] Oh, we're out of time for this section. Got one done.

The Chair: Yes. Now we're out of time in that block.

Fantastic. Now we're moving over to the government caucus, and it's going to be Mr. Neudorf.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and through you to the minister, thank you, Minister, for the multiple trips that you have made to Lethbridge to meet with city police and judiciary. It's very important for me particularly that you come and spend time with the police service, the EMS service, the front-line staff that deal with the challenges that we're facing, and I do appreciate that you've taken personal time to make that trip. It is also just very encouraging for us in Lethbridge to see your personal commitment to enforce the rule of law for a safe and structured community. A lot of concern over the last few years has been regarding some of the intent of government and legislation, as well as the police force supporting them in their duties.

What I'd like to just discuss with you a little bit as we start is drug treatment courts. Page 113 of the business plan discusses these drug treatment courts. I know that we've heard all kinds of stories of people that are afflicted with drug addiction who are in the cycle of offending, going to prison, then released, and then reoffending.

The previous administration chose not to make additional investment in the drug treatment courts, so I'm very pleased that under your leadership as minister this has been corrected with new investments in this program, especially since you've been very vocal about alternative courts and how they can be used to protect public safety by supporting actual recovery from addiction to prevent future criminal activity. I know that our government supports a firm criminal justice system to protect Alberta's communities from drug-related crime, and I'm glad that we finally have a Justice minister who is a vocal champion for a justice system that ensures that Albertans are safe, secure, and protected.

But with a government that has devoted a ministry to mental health and addictions, I'm also glad that we have a Minister of Justice who understands that increased access to mental health services will reduce that tendency to reoffend as well as the use of emergency departments by those who are in the criminal justice system by helping them rehabilitate instead of on that path of reoffence. When they become healthy, we see that a vast majority become contributing members of our society. This impacts their families because their health impacts future generations so they, too, can have success.

I'm also pleased with how much support our government has received from law enforcement for these investments into mental health and addictions treatments to help citizens at risk and reduce the use of our criminal justice system when dealing with public health problems.

I think this is what our government understands, particularly our minister, that sometimes problems that we are dealing with through the criminal justice system are actually health problems and that enforcement alone won't solve all those challenges that we're facing with the addiction crisis in our communities. The investment that our government has made to drug treatment courts recognizes that we need collective solutions with a focus on restorative justice frameworks to truly address the cause and impact of addictions in our communities. Our government understands that Albertans are living with addictions that need to be treated with compassion, and they need early access to long-term addiction and mental health services.

4:50

The questions that I have for you, you can discuss in your time coming up.

Number one is up to \$5 million for the drug treatment courts in '20-21. For those who didn't have the benefit of listening to your statements in the fall, can the minister please discuss how these additional investments in drug treatment courts will benefit all Albertans?

Two, the minister mentioned \$600,000 for the expansion of the Calgary and Edmonton drug treatment courts in the fall. Is this included in that \$5 million of investments in '20-21, or is there an additional investment for this expansion?

Three, the business plan states that "the ministry will engage with medium-sized communities to identify new sites for Drug Treatment Court services." Obviously, I was pleased that the minister announced just this week that Lethbridge will have the first drug treatment court outside of Edmonton and Calgary. Can the minister provide any details around when Lethbridge's new court will be up and running?

I very much appreciate as well your comments about Judge Redman and the groundbreaking work that he has done in the integrated drug courts, which they have done on their own budget and with their own staff. I thank you for acknowledging him in his work that he's done in Lethbridge.

Aside from Lethbridge, can the minister provide us an update on the consultations taking place with other communities and whether there are specific communities that are more interested in having a drug treatment court or even an alternative possibility of seeing the example set by Lethbridge with the integrated drug court and how they have done that, as the judge has said, off the edge of their desk. I believe that this innovative approach can be helpful to many communities if they do not have the benefit of having a full drug treatment court funded through the provincial budget.

Question 4. The performance metric 3(d) on page 114 of the business plan shows the number of individuals admitted to the drug treatment courts expand from 28 in 2016-17 to 49 in 2018-2019. Further to that, are there any expectations for the out-years moving ahead, whether we will see that number continue to rise, or do you expect it to level off at some point in time, particularly with the new investment into drug treatment courts?

If you could, Minister, through you, Madam Chair, maybe develop the discussion about the potential for this to divert greater and greater numbers from the court system, or will that at some point in time logistically and practically hit a maximum threshold as obviously this is only one sector of what our courts face and the funding for them?

At this point in time that concludes my comments and my questions, but I would love to hear the answers. Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Schweitzer: Madam Chair, what is the time in this section?

The Chair: You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Schweitzer: Ten minutes. That's combined, or is that 10 minutes just for me?

The Chair: Ten minutes for yourself and 10 minutes for the government caucus.

Mr. Schweitzer: Perfect. Thank you very much.

Getting this done – this is actually an area that I'm really passionate about. I was a volunteer on the board of the Calgary drug treatment court for over five years. I've had the opportunity to see first-hand the amazing work that these courts can do and how they can turn people's lives around.

Quite often, you know, participants, when they come in, just to kind of give people a higher level of context, they have to admit their guilt up front. Sentencing is then deferred. They have to report to court on a weekly or biweekly basis, depending on how the court is structured, to report on their progress in their treatment. Many of these individuals, when they come into the program initially, we need to make sure that they're stabilized. That's why we're working so closely with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to ensure that we have treatment spaces across the province of Alberta.

In southern Alberta the announcement yesterday of the Blood Tribe having additional capacity there: I think that that is an amazing thing for southern Alberta to make sure that we have that treatment capacity.

Getting the announcement in Lethbridge is really important. Working with the local stakeholders, we had multiple meetings with local municipal leadership, with yourself, helping to lay the foundation to have Lethbridge be the first city outside of Calgary and Edmonton to announce a drug treatment court. It won't be the last, that's for sure.

We are blessed with geography in Alberta, where our mid-sized centres are reasonably spread out and kind of cover a lot of the territories. You've got Red Deer in central Alberta; you've got Medicine Hat in the southeastern corner; you've got Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray. Right now we are looking at some of those other mid-sized centres as other options for drug treatment courts. We want to go through that process to make sure that there are willing stakeholders locally. We have to work in collaboration with the judiciary as well to ensure, you know, that there's an interest there on their side to work with us on this.

The initial feedback from the leadership on the judiciary has been very promising. I mean, to their credit, the Alberta judiciary have been leaders in the country in establishing, you know, different types of restorative justice initiatives, mental health courts. The early feedback on the Calgary indigenous court has been promising as well.

One of the reasons why we went to Lethbridge first, though, was the good work that ACJ Redman was doing locally. He already had set up off the side of his desk, you know, some form of restorative justice in there with the restorative justice court.

I do think that in kind of our mid-size centres they may not have the overall demand of a city like Calgary or Edmonton, where, you know, we're hoping to get those programs up to 40-plus participants in each of those cities. They may not have that ability to specialize with that critical mass of numbers, but what we want to do is work with the judiciary to innovate in our mid-size centres where they might bring in elements of the mental health courts, they might bring in elements of an indigenous court, they might bring in other elements into their court to make them a success in those mid-size centres, and I do think that there's a road map there to work with them to help change lives.

When it comes to the success of the program, I mean, it's real. A lot of the individuals that are coming into these programs, they come in and the stats show that they're stealing thousands of dollars' worth of goods a week quite often to feed their addictions or they're trafficking drugs or they're involved in organized crime in some way, shape, or form, more from the selling drugs in order to feed their own addictions side of things. When they come in, you know, that's where they're at, but when they graduate, 70 per cent of the graduates don't repeat. They don't come back through the criminal justice system, and these are individuals that right now are continually rounding through the system.

The more people that we can provide treatment to, the more people that we can bring accountability to through a justice-led initiative. I do believe that that is the path forward. I think that it'll help us, you know, bring stability to so many peoples' lives right now that are in that cycle of addiction. And I do believe that this is one of those ways that we can be innovative in our justice system.

I had the opportunity a couple of weeks ago to meet – they actually held the national meeting of drug treatment court professionals in Calgary. I had the opportunity to go and participate in a round-table with members of the judiciary, prosecutors, defence lawyers, you know, community workers, probationary workers to talk about our plans here in the province of Alberta. The people around the table were looking at Alberta as the leading model right now for the country. There's a lot of good work, I think, ahead of us. I do believe that we are leading the curve on this across the country.

I did have the opportunity to meet with Minister Lametti, the federal Minister of Justice, and told him about our commitment to drug treatment courts and other diversionary courts as a solution going forward, and hopefully when the federal government's budget comes out, there's money in there to help support initiatives like this across the country. I do believe that Alberta is ahead of the curve in the country, and that we are going to help set the model for the rest of Canada.

We are working on that. The department is doing amazing work. We have identified someone who can help us lead the charge to develop out this program across Alberta. We've identified someone that's going to work with us in doing that. I don't know if it's public yet as to who the person is going to be. Not yet. We've identified someone that can take on that role. Once that's available to the public, we'll make that publicly available. But, again, this is, I think, one of those ways that we can transform how we deliver justice in our province, deal with, you know, the addictions crisis that we do have across the province of Alberta, and provide services to every corner of Alberta, at least through some of these hubs that we do have geographically dispersed. I'm hoping that we can get them into each of our mid-size centres long term.

Again, that also brings about equality because right now if you're in Calgary and Edmonton, you have this available to you as a potential option. If you're in a smaller centre that's remote, you may not have these types of services available to you. We're hoping that by expanding it to our mid-size centres, we'll figure out programs that could work in smaller and smaller centres and continue to see these grow. I do believe that this is a way that we can transform justice. We hear lots about incarceration rates, we hear lots about lots of different challenges that we do have in our justice system, but when somebody is willing to work on their addictions issues, I do believe that this model is one of the ways forward for us in Alberta.

I'm trying to think if there's any other – oh, you asked about metrics. Yes, we're definitely going to be – I mean, 3(d), that would have been just Calgary and Edmonton historically. We're hoping that that number there doubles just from Calgary and Edmonton, and then we'll expand as well. As we get into our mid-size centres, you'll see that number continue to grow.

5:00

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Back to the government for an additional six minutes.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. A couple of things, Minister, through the chair. It is very significant when you yourself come and visit a community, whether it's mine in particular or anyone else's, just to see first-hand how it functions and how it works. Obviously, you get a lot more insight into the decisions that you make, so I don't want to understate how important that is.

I would like to just share a story that I was able to see in the intervention courts. Judge Redman had been working with a young individual whom he sentenced, and rather than prison time he actually had him make a table with his father. There are just so many elements to that. One is that he was beginning to learn a trade in carpentry and woodworking, which was something that he enjoyed doing. He spent additional time with his father, which was a very strong, relationship-building practice. And then in the course of the weeks that he had to come back and report – it was just prior to you visiting Lethbridge that he had completed that table and presented it to the judge in the court, successfully completing his sentence, so to speak. We hope that that is just the platform that he needs to continue on moving in a direction that is beneficial not only to him as an individual but, obviously, to his family.

I was also very encouraged that you recognized mid-size centres and other centres in allowing them, possibly, to increase the mandate of what drug treatment courts can do and where they can do it, because they can bring into existence some of these very unique and specialized sentencing models for, hopefully, additional effect.

I did have one last question for you if time will allow. Obviously, there is the funding for drug treatment courts, there is their function, but I don't know if you're able to predict or if this is figured in your costing in your budget: how much would this reduce costs from the other judicial services that you have to budget for? Is there a saving in that respect? Yes, we're diverting money. Yes, we're putting money into drug treatment courts. But is there also a benefit in reducing the demand on just the courts in general? Will there be cost savings that can be found there?

Mr. Schweitzer: From a cost-savings perspective, it saves many ministries' resources. Again, this isn't a departmental study; this is something just from my own experience, historically. I've seen studies that show it's kind of \$3 in savings to government for every dollar put into drug treatment courts, thereabouts, mainly because you're saving on ambulance visits, you're saving on people coming into emergency rooms, and you're saving on people in other areas by providing drug treatment courts resources. In addition to that, you're also saving on, you know, cars being stolen, thefts from liquor stores, that the Member for Leduc-Beaumont is working with us on. You're reducing all of these associated harms to society and breakdowns in civil society as well. You're reducing all those costs on the community.

But the best thing is that you're giving somebody a chance at life. A lot of these folks are in a spiral that they want to get out of, and they're struggling to find a way out. Through this process – it's not an easy path. Like, sometimes serving time is easier than going through a drug treatment court process because these individuals have to face, you know, sometimes the harm that they've done to their own family and, hopefully, try and rebuild those connections. That, many times, can be far more difficult for an individual.

These programs are very effective. Actually, I'm glad that you shared that story about the table. I was wondering how that story ended, so I'm glad that the table did arrive for that young person. I do think that we have a very innovative judiciary. They're willing to work with us on this. I do think that if we continue to work with them and provide resources through this in this dedicated longer term funding, we will find amazing results, where the province of Alberta will lead.

I think I probably have about 20 seconds left. I can keep going if you want.

The Chair: A minute and 58 seconds.

Mr. Schweitzer: Oh, a minute. Well, back to you.

Mr. Neudorf: I do have one other thing that I would just like a little bit further comment on. It has been in my notes here, but I should address that the 45 per cent increase to ALERT forces in Lethbridge is also significant, taking the force from nine members to I believe it was 12 or 13 members. Can you just explain for me in terms of the budget what the impact on our community will be with these additional members and what they're tasked to do?

Mr. Schweitzer: It'll allow them to work with us to go after organized crime, particularly in that area, going after drug trafficking, meth. One thing that's really exciting is that we also do have a member of the Blood Tribe that's going to be built into ALERT. That is really exciting. It's actually a credit to the Blood

Tribe Police Service. They're going to now be integrated into that ALERT program. It's really the ability to integrate. Crime doesn't have a jurisdiction. It goes across borders, and it goes across, you know, police boundaries, all of those things.

Providing those additional resources will allow us to go after organized crime, in particular, in the city of Lethbridge. We know that drug trafficking crimes, the use rate of meth in particular, have gone up. We do have a meth crisis, and that is profound in Lethbridge. We can't just keep doing it the way that we have. I think this will help us both on the treatment side, the compassionate side, but at the same time provide those police resources necessary to go after the organized-crime groups that are just preying on these individuals. You hear the stories of people that are there at these consumption sites, in particular some of the stories of how they're being preyed on by people in the community around them bringing these drugs into the community overall.

We can't just keep doing what we've been doing. It's not working. I think that this is part of that overall system to help build out the different pillars. We need to go after, you know, those that would prey on the vulnerable, and this is a big part of that initiative there for ALERT.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With that, I propose that we are going to take a five-minute break. It is currently 5:07. We are setting the timer for five minutes, so please be back, and we will start promptly.

[The committee adjourned from 5:07 p.m. to 5:12 p.m.]

The Chair: We are back to our next five-minute block, and that is to the Official Opposition. I believe that will be to Ms Ganley.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. I do have just a few things to sort of follow up on. The first two questions: I apologize; because they're follow-ups, they'll be all over the map. The first two questions are with respect to RCAS, so the entire sort of point 2 all the way through. If we start to see the Jordan trend moving in the wrong direction, will you re-evaluate that budget?

The second question is with respect to a project that I guess I took a personal interest in previously, which was a community court project that was trying to launch. Obviously, drug treatment court does a really fantastic thing, but this is, like, a slightly different thing. It deals with people with sort of low-level mental health challenges, and I thought it was really interesting. We were sort of looking for a way to reorganize things internally to get there. So those two questions.

The next question I have is with respect to – I'm now on page 115 of the ministry business plan. That's the sort of out-year numbers table/chart thingy. As we had discussed other revenue, that's the money coming in from municipalities that will go out under the PPSA in order to pay for those enhanced officers. We see coming in an increase of \$22 million in the '20-21 budget, an increase of \$31 million in the '21-22 budget, and an increase of \$43 million in total in '22-23. Meanwhile, when we look down to the public security line, which is obviously not broken down but includes the PPSA, we see that there's actually an overall drop, which we had discussed, in '20-21. And '20-21, of course, actually breaks down into estimates.

Coming out from the PPSA, we see a roughly equivalent increase, so that makes sense. But in subsequent years, so in 2021-22, we're still down about \$4 million from the current budget total in public security, and then we're up about \$18 million in '22-23. That doesn't quite sort of balance out to the same \$96 million that we're seeing coming in from municipalities. I'm wondering if the minister can guarantee that 100 per cent of the money coming in

from municipalities will flow back out and that there won't be any other decreases to PPSA in there. If that is the case, where else would those decreases be coming from? That's a sort of long question about that.

The other thing I wanted to circle back on was the victims of crime fund. You had indicated that there's about a \$70 million surplus right now, and over the course of the out-years in the budget – again on page 115 – you see it go up. Right now the draw is \$44 million, we go up to \$61 million, and then \$70 million and \$70 million in '21-22 and '22-23. They are both that \$70 million number. In total, that's about \$69 million. There will be, like, a slight increase coming in as well, as you mentioned. What I'm wondering is: do you intend to deplete that surplus except for the sort of contingent liability, that \$25 million? Do you intend to deplete that entire surplus in those three years, in which case in the fourth year sort of what is the plan to fund those services? So those are the questions there.

Then I was wondering if you could just run through again – and it's possible that I actually just missed something in here. I know you had said that there's a total of \$5 million coming out from victims this year for drug treatment court, I think, and \$17 million – oh, sorry. That's for . . . [Ms Ganley's speaking time expired] Oh. Five minutes is short.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Ganley.

Now to the minister for five minutes of response.

Mr. Schweitzer: All right. When it comes to your question about community courts and other restorative justice initiatives, we're continuing to explore to see what else we can do. I'm a big believer in restorative justice initiatives. I don't know if it'll be purely the community court model. I've met with a group in Calgary that is looking at different initiatives. I don't know if it'll be purely that, but I do know that we are continuing to work closely with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions on different areas where we can help people, you know, that have different issues that they're facing. Why are they coming to the justice system? Quite often it's either addictions or it's a mental health challenge. We're looking to see how we can be creative in the province of Alberta.

The first pillar of that will be the drug treatment courts and getting those expanded out, but again I'm open to ideas for how we can continue to provide better services. Again, if you have areas of that – like, this is just about helping people, so if you have suggestions or ideas, I think that this is one of those areas where you could actually have a bipartisan initiative on that. I'm open to chats on that if you want to ever talk about that.

Police funding: yes, all the money goes back. All the money is going to go back into policing, \$286 million over five years. That's one of the reasons why we're creating the provincial board, to help provide governance for us and help us set the priorities with the RCMP. That'll have membership from RMA and AUMA. We're in the process of working with them now to get that up and running as that starts out. So, yeah, all the money goes back in. In order to fund going forward, we will continue to work towards further efficiencies in the department to be able to hit our funding goals in those out-years.

You asked a question about an out-year beyond even these out-years. I think that would be beyond the scope of today's committee, but I'd gladly get into that later on if I do have the privilege of sitting here in those years.

With respect to the victims of crime fund the 5 per cent increase will increase it by about \$14 million. Right now you have, you know, I think it's north of \$40 million-plus, \$40 million to \$45

million, coming in every year. This will be an additional \$14 million on top of that. That wouldn't deplete the reserve in this period of time here. We still would have a sufficient reserve. It would just simply bring it down from – right now it's just sitting there. The \$70 million is sitting there. It should be used for helping people and making sure we don't have victims in the province of Alberta, helping us with public safety. One of the best ways to make sure that you don't have victims is making sure you have a safe community. That's what we're working towards right now in that area there.

As far as the RCAS budget goes, you know, the success of justice digital: we will be monitoring in real time. I want to make sure that this program works, and some of our budget forecast is predicated on making sure that the technology is as successful as people believe it can be. I'm not operating in a bubble here. We're going to make sure that we monitor it to make sure it's successful and make sure that our courts have the proper supports that they require. We want to make sure that that happens. Our team believes that the justice digital initiative will be successful, will allow us to find efficiencies, will allow us to bring those into our court system. Again, though, we will monitor that in real time this budget year in particular because that success this year will allow us to make further changes next year.

5:20

You had questions last time. I made one misstatement, where I said that the SCAN unit was going into ALERT. It's the sheriffs' surveillance unit that's going over to ALERT. I misspoke between the two. The sheriffs' surveillance unit is going over to ALERT.

You mentioned earlier on – I'll answer some of the other questions so that our team doesn't have to write them up – the victims of crime grants, the \$1 million. We're consulting with the stakeholders that receive grants now to make sure we have a sustainable model going forward. No decisions have been made as to how it could impact grants going forward, but we want to make sure we effectively preserve as much of that pool as possible. Again, we're looking for about \$1 million in efficiencies or savings there. Again, you've worked in this area. You know lots of the good groups that are helpful. We're open to ideas as well if you think there are ones that are really successful. We're open to suggestions on that front there.

The minister's office: you had a question about the minister's office. Yes, we're sharing resources amongst a couple of the different offices there to help provide better services. We do have an exponentially high response rate to questions from media. I think we have about 40 per cent of the media questions coming to our ministry in particular, so we have a high response rate. This is going to help us respond to questions as they come in. I'm sure you remember that fun experience of having many media requests coming into the Justice ministry.

With respect to the civil lawyers, we actually did find a way to work with some of the ministries on some cost sharing as well. It's preserved through our budget here. Initially I think that in the media there was speculation of a bigger number. We have been able to bring that number down, particularly in working with Children's Services and a couple of other areas to preserve existing government teams that were there instead of working to outsource them. We work with the different ministries on that to find a path forward for it, so we have been able to preserve more of the lawyers that were in that civil law division.

I think those were the other questions that you had. Is there anything else that we needed to cover here? Okay. Perfect. I'm probably close to five minutes.

The Chair: You've got three seconds left, Minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: There we go.

The Chair: Fantastic.

With that, we are back to the government caucus, and I believe it's Mr. Amery.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister and his officials for attending here today. I wanted to commend you and your ministry on a number of things. However, I wanted to talk to you a little bit about some of the things that you may have already touched on, Minister, through the chair, of course.

You had mentioned earlier that your ministry was able to look at increasing the number of articling students hired by the Crown, and I think the number that you gave earlier was increasing from eight to 16. I'm pleased to hear that. You had mentioned something about having the Crown hire at least 20 more coming up next year, if that was what I understood, giving the government of Alberta the largest articling class in the province. I think that's an incredibly important thing. Having done that not so long ago, I think that, you know, the very essence of the foundation for a young lawyer is having good articles, and I'm certain that the province gives some of the best articles for a future career with the Crown prosecutors office.

Having said that, I'm looking at your outcome 2, and one of the particular figures that I'm interested in here is performance indicator 2(b), the number of Jordan applications granted. Now, you talked a little bit about this earlier, but going through the figures from 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20, I see that 2019-20 appears to be the year where we've had the fewest Jordan decisions granted by the province. One of the questions I have for you here is: do you have any figures about how many applications have been put forward in that 2019-2020 year as compared to how many were actually granted?

It looks like the 2019-2020 year appears to be the lowest number of Jordan applications granted. I don't want to make any assumptions here, but I'm wondering if we can take from that that there are fewer Jordan applications coming forward. If that is accurate, why? Is it because court cases are moving more efficiently through the system? Is it because of something else that's taking place which doesn't give rise to a Jordan application to begin with? I'd like to hear your comments about that if you could, please.

The other thing: in your performance metrics here, Minister, 2(a), the "lead time to trial for serious and violent matters (weeks)." Then you have metrics here that show that in 2018-2019 the Provincial Court of Alberta lead time to trial for serious and violent matters was 22.1 weeks. The target for 2020-2021 is 21 weeks; for 2021-22, 20 weeks; and finally, for 2022-23, 20 weeks as well. Firstly, do you have any performance metrics for the 2019-2020 year, and secondly, how is it that your ministry is going to reduce the lead times for serious and violent matters down to 20 weeks, as indicated in these performance metrics? If you could provide a little bit of information for the committee on what it is that will specifically deal with lowering or reducing the lead times to trial for these serious and violent matters, I think that would be very helpful in figuring out how you got to these figures.

Going back to what I talked about with respect to the articling students, firstly, again, I'd like to commend you on doing so. I know that many of the judicial centres which will see these new hires are outside of Edmonton and Calgary, but from my own experience, Minister, I know that there is a dire need for additional prosecutors both in Calgary and in Edmonton. Again, going back to how important I see young graduates beginning their articles with

Alberta Justice and continuing with the Crown, do you have any information to provide the committee about what types of future positions will be available for new articling students, both in the major cities in addition to those that are being hired outside of the judicial centres? Give us your feedback, give us some comments, something to look forward to, hopefully, especially in those two major judicial centres.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Amery.

Now to the minister for your five-minute response.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you very much, and thank you for the excellent questions. I do think that when it comes to the pipeline of legal talent in the province of Alberta, one of the things that we're seeing: we're competing right now with the federal Crown prosecution service for, you know, qualified prosecutors that have years of experience. As I mentioned in my earlier comments, they went on a little bit of a hiring spree earlier this year. It appears as though that may be tempered, at least for the moment, but I do think that there's always that tension. Ten years ago the province was taking lawyers from the feds. Then they changed their compensation package, and then they were trying to take lawyers from the province. This is kind of that back and forth that happens between the federal government and the provincial government in hiring prosecution talent.

I do think that there actually is a demand for more lawyers that have this skill set, that more lawyers come through the system. The province of Alberta increasing it from eight to 16 spots this year to 20 spots in the out-years I think is an ongoing – and I'm hopeful that it'll be ongoing – program for the province of Alberta given our demand and the fact that we still have 25 to 30 positions at any given moment right now to fill, plus filling the additional demand that we've committed to of an additional 50 prosecutors. I do think that that's the right path forward for us in the province of Alberta.

Another area, though, that I do think that we in government sometimes lose sight of, particularly if we're competing with the private sector for student talent, is that law firms hire summer students. They almost kind of wink, wink, nudge, nudge, give them an articling job, and with that comes a pretty good prospect of getting long-term employment. I do think that we need to think a little bit more longer term as to how we recruit students and summer students as well into our articling program. This is the first step, getting this articling program to where it needs to be, but hopefully that'll lead to that pipeline of talent in the province of Alberta.

When it comes to Jordan applications granted versus applications made, I'll turn it over to my deputy minister.

Mr. Bosscha: Thank you, Minister. In response to the Jordan question, we can't really break it down further for the '19-20 year. What I can tell you is that there were 251 applications between 2016 and December 31, 2019. Five are still pending, 79 were dismissed, 25 were granted – and that's what you see in the chart here – two are under appeal, 50 were abandoned by the defence counsel, 34 were proactively stayed by the Crown, and 59 were resolved but not through the Jordan application. So out of the 251, that gives you what's currently out there, which is five pending, and the rest have been resolved in some manner.

5:30

Mr. Schweitzer: Just to build on that, I don't think that we can go there and spike the football on this one. The Jordan reality: we're living in a post-Jordan world when it comes to prosecution service, making sure that we have the prosecution horsepower there to make sure they have the right caseload. It is going to be important for us

to make sure that we can keep this number as low as possible and, hopefully, eliminate it altogether. Keeping it as low as humanly possible is the goal.

When it comes to, you know, lead times for trials for serious and violent matters, again, that's really about building out, making sure that our Crown prosecutors, who are doing amazing work right now, have the right caseload. That goes back to our hiring and getting more students in the pipeline, getting those prosecutor positions filled. That is part of our long-term initiative here, to make sure that we can deal with that and keep that number lower longer term. Right now, I mean, when you inherit a triage system, sometimes things are scrambling to the last minute because you've got so many different things you're trying to prioritize. Reducing that caseload, hopefully, will allow our prosecutors to prioritize internally, you know, assess files earlier on in the process and determine the viability of cases earlier on, so you can, again, focus on your core priorities that have a reasonable prospect of prosecution.

What are we at? A minute?

The Chair: Fifty-eight seconds.

Mr. Schweitzer: Fifty-eight seconds. Over to you. Want to do a quick one?

Mr. Amery: Okay. Well, sure, if that's okay, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Amery: Very quickly, I'll just make a comment, only because I think that the inherent basis of these Jordan applications shouldn't exist with an efficient judicial system, meaning that if we can get these cases to trial properly, there would never be any reason to hear a Jordan application. Based on the performance metrics and what I perceive to be a reduction in the successful applications, it appears as though whatever the ministry is doing is translating to a lower number of these Jordan applications being granted, which is an indicator, to me at least – and maybe you can confirm this – that the system is processing these cases more efficiently.

Mr. Schweitzer: I think so. Right now, with the resources that they have, the team is doing excellent work to keep this number down. Again, I don't want to spike the football on this one, though, because it's an ongoing effort.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now back to the Official Opposition and Ms Ganley.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. Again, most of these are going to be follow-up questions. I think we've canvassed resolution in court administration services fairly fully, but one thing I did notice, though, is that line 2.6, the Court of Appeal, is up pretty significantly relative to everything else in that line. It's only \$500,000, \$600,000, but on a \$6 million budget that's a fairly significant amount of money. I'm just curious what that is.

The other questions I have. Just turning back, we were discussing item 6.9, which is the sheriffs branch, which now includes commercial vehicle enforcement and fish and wildlife as well. They had a reduction of about 15 per cent, which is about \$16 million, I think. We're seeing \$6.6 million coming in from the victims of crime fund to pay for the RAPID situation. I'm curious, with that \$6.6 million, if we're talking about just the number in '20-21 – let's just say it like that – or if you're talking about the number over three years when you cite that \$6.6 million.

Then we have a couple of million for the sheriffs' surveillance unit, which is moving. But that still leaves that down \$8.6 million

and with that increase in workload. I mean, I think, Minister, you're probably aware of how hard those folks work already and of the draws on their time. Certainly, the courts, I have no doubt, have communicated to you the same concerns about an insufficient number of sheriffs that they communicated to me over and over again. I'm just wondering: is there anything else in there that's going to sort of try to make up for that difference? I wouldn't want to see and I know you wouldn't want to see those employees being put at risk at all.

Then to line 7.4. I just noticed that in the overall corrections budget, this line, which is community correctional services, kind of drops a little more than everything else does. It's 3 and a half million on about \$41 million, so that's reasonably significant, especially since I know that in those community correctional services, you know, there was some enhanced training, particularly around domestic violence offenders, and the amount of work they're being asked to do is increasing. So I'm a little curious about what those cuts are in there.

Finally, just on correctional services generally, I know you were citing that it's only about 72 per cent full. My recollection of what the map on that looked like is that they are quite full in some places and not full in other places. So my question is: are you looking at potentially closing a prison in northern Alberta?

How am I for time?

The Chair: One minute and nine seconds.

Ms Ganley: I did have one other question. With respect to those civil lawyers – I believe there were about 90 overall that were potentially being terminated – how many of those positions have we managed to preserve, and of the ones that aren't preserved positions, were they filled with a person or not?

Mr. Schweitzer: Is that . . .

Ms Ganley: That's everything.

The Chair: Fantastic.

To the minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Okay. Perfect. With respect to line item 2.6, the Court of Appeal, the additional \$500,000 there is for support staff, also providing them with resources. They started their own digital project many years ago. This is going to help provide them with resources there to help complete that project, so this is an initiative there to provide them with additional supports. Chief Justice Fraser is doing excellent work there. She wanted additional resources last year, but we weren't able to provide, and this is going to help us to provide resources there, at the Court of Appeal, to continue their good work.

With respect to line 6.9 and the sheriffs, what we have here, just to kind of give you the math on it: the \$6.6 million is for the victims of crime fund for the RAPID force, so that'll be the enhanced public safety initiative element there. The \$2.1 million for the sheriffs' surveillance unit is to ALERT. In addition to that, we have about \$5.5 million of operational efficiency – we're going to be doing that – and also through vacancy management.

It's one of those interesting areas where I think that this is a broader government discussion for the longer term as to how government as a whole manages FTEs and how that whole process works. I'm sure you share this fun experience as a cabinet minister, talking about FTEs. I see former Minister Phillips over there is also giggling about FTEs. I think that this might be one of those areas that – I'm not sure if you've ever watched *Yes Minister*, the British

comedy show, but I think that FTEs are one of those areas that you could have a fulsome discussion about at some point in time.

This is an area, though, too, where we do believe we will find \$5.5 million of operational efficiencies by managing vacancy management. And then there are a few other areas: transferring half a million dollars to corporate services, and a few other just kind of reallocations internally, and the other one I mentioned as well, transferring some of the budget over to the indigenous policing. So that was that one as a whole.

In line 7.4, community corrections, this is effectively keeping it whole when you take out the \$4 million this year for drug treatment courts, that we're going to be putting into the broader mandate for the fund. Basically, it's the \$41 million minus \$4 million that gets to the numbers. So it's basically flat, but the \$4 million is going to come out of the additional fund. So there's that one there.

As far as the civil lawyers, there was the broader media question about potentially, you know, 90 lawyers being terminated. That number is now 30.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now back to the Official Opposition. Ms Phillips, two minutes and 53 seconds.

Ms Phillips: Oh. Okay. A couple of questions. One, around the victims of crime financial benefits program, I heard it alluded to that some changes are coming, which we understand. I believe the exact language was: some benefits are out of line with other jurisdictions. I'm wondering if that information can be shared with the committee: what that interjurisdictional comparison looks like and what's under consideration for the financial benefits program under victims of crime.

5:40

I had another couple of questions around the unified family court. As I understand it, there were some infrastructural challenges. Are there other things under consideration for meeting those challenges? That is to say, Manitoba, Ontario, and Saskatchewan started the unified family court with pilot projects. Not all jurisdictions have them everywhere as well. And there are different models, as I understand it, in Ontario. There's a hybrid court in Saskatchewan. There's a special division in the superior court. Are there ways that either the department is going back to look at some analysis on how to make it a lower cost thing, or are there any ways that the department is in consultation with the fairly active stakeholder community around this topic to have them either temper expectations or come back with some problem solving around the costs? It would seem to me that it's unfortunate to turn down free judges. They do come with some administrative supports as well. Whether or not those are sufficient is a conversation for another day. But as I understand it, the federal money comes with some court costs or administrative-type staff as well.

Those were my two sets of questions.

The Chair: Minister, you've got 58 seconds.

Mr. Schweitzer: Fifty-eight seconds? Not 55. All right.

With respect to the victims program, again, right now – you'll see that in the legislation that we ultimately bring forward here. I believe it's going to be coming forward here in the coming weeks on that side of the equation. Again, the idea here is to try and bring us in line with other jurisdictions in Canada and to update it. The intention here as well is to make sure that we can hopefully help preserve the grant programs that we do have coming out of here and find other priorities for the province of Alberta.

With respect to the unified family court the initial program that we were looking for was a hybrid model, like you mentioned. It was only going to be for Calgary and Edmonton. It wasn't going to be for the other judicial centres that we were looking at. Again, if a proposal comes back that, you know, we don't have the infrastructure money now to do that but if we can use existing infrastructure and if they can come up with a model that's net zero when it comes to, like, a cost, like if it's savings here and there, I'm still open to it. But right now every time I asked, it came back with millions of dollars in infrastructure, millions of dollars of additional cost even when you factor in potential judicial savings.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With that, we're back to the government caucus, and I believe it's Mr. Amery.

Mr. Amery: Thank you once again, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister, for your responses earlier. I wanted to go into that a little bit further, and in particular I wanted to talk about your key objective 2.4. I think we talked about this a little bit during the last estimates, but I still wanted to get both an update and a little more information about that. Key objective 2.4 indicates that it is your ministry's desire to "hire additional Crown prosecutors to ensure criminal matters are dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner." We've talked about this at length, about the minister's desire to hire 50 Crown prosecutors and support staff.

You also mentioned earlier today that you were focusing on looking for local talent at the graduate level, trying to bring them through and article, and then having them continue with the Crown prosecutors office. One of the things I wanted to ask you about is: where is your ministry at in terms of the hiring of these prosecutors? What are sort of the targets from now until 2022-2023 in relation to the hiring of those? Can you provide the committee with an idea of the recruitment plan that you have in place or one that you intend to put into place in order to attract experienced Crown prosecutors and the articling students? And, knowing the local talent that we have here with our colleagues present, what types of metrics is your department looking for, and can we provide you with any input on the types of candidates that you might be interested in for these positions? I certainly know that a lot of the people in this room have that industry background and might be able to provide qualified recommendations. Is there a process available for the members in this room and outside of this room to do that?

I'm just trying to find it here. I can't find it quickly enough, but I note that in your business plan there is a \$10 million allocation to hiring these new prosecutors or a \$10 million estimate annually for the cost of these prosecutors. I know that prosecutors are not nearly well paid enough for the work that they do. Can you break down the \$10 million annual cost for these 50 prosecutors? I don't think that the 50 prosecutors' annual salary equates to \$10 million, so what other things is this \$10 million being applied to in order to constitute that allocation in your budget?

You talked a little bit about the hiring of 50 additional prosecutors. You briefly talked about some of the vacancies and the problems that you're having with the vacancies that need to be filled. Again, what steps is the ministry taking to fill these vacancies? What sort of credentials are you looking for? If you can comment on this – I know we're getting a little bit too detailed, somewhat – how many vacancies are there, and how many have been filled from the beginning of April 2019 till now?

I mentioned it earlier. I know that the new articling students are being allocated to places other than the two major judicial centres in the province. Can you provide some indication of how additional prosecutors and support staff will be allocated as you continue to

hire the targeted 50 Crown prosecutors in this province and those articling students as well? I know that people in this province are very fluid, and certainly I'm curious to see where they will be allocated. What areas have you identified as being lacking in prosecutors and support staff?

Finally, Minister, page 147 of the estimates indicates that your budget for '20-21 is estimated to fall by approximately 3 per cent. Where do you find the money for these 50 new prosecutors, where do you find the money for the support staff, and where do you find money for the articling students that you're looking to hire and the ones that you have hired? What is your long-term plan to sustain these new hires and these individuals?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Amery.

We're back to the minister for five minutes of response.

Mr. Schweitzer: Perfect. Thank you for the excellent questions. With respect to, you know, once we get to the full complement – let me step back. The goal here for the program is to ramp up over the next three years. This year we have funding in place for an additional 20 prosecutors on top of the current budgeted amount for the prosecution service. The next year after that would be an additional 20, and the last year would be an additional 10 to get to the full 50. Once you have that full complement, the cost would be about \$10 million. That would include support staff that would come along with that – every time you get two or three lawyers, you likely need an additional support staff to go along with that to make sure that they can operate at their full capacity in the court system – making sure we have the proper complement of support staff there as well.

When it comes to compensation, I mean, it's a typical grid format, grid structure. Different levels of seniority go along with it. You know, the articling students that would become young junior lawyers would be more affordable from an FTE perspective than somebody that's a 25-year call in the practice. As they become younger lawyers, from an FTE perspective your cost comes a little bit down, but we also are going to be recruiting people that are mid-level lawyers as well as senior lawyers to balance that out, to get to that \$10 million number with the support staff.

As far as the allocations go, it's typically based on the demand of the regions, how they allocate staff going forward. Typically speaking, though, now that we have the 16 that we did do the hiring of, about half are in the big cities of Calgary and Edmonton, and then the other half would be spread out into smaller communities. When we started the process, it was a new initiative to grow by that amount, and we were late in the game because we were hiring people that are graduating, you know, right now, effectively this spring. We were able to get qualified young lawyers that wanted to go into rural Alberta to start their practices, and we were actually optimistic that we were going to get really talented applicants that came into the process.

5:50

We did an announcement. I don't have it at my fingertips, but I know we got them into Grande Prairie and other smaller centres across Alberta based on the demand. Just when I was down in Lethbridge earlier on, you know, they didn't have the demand for it, but I talked to them about maybe taking a student next year.

I think it's going to be that ongoing discussion within our department saying – sometimes lawyers get busy in their own practices, but they have to remember that giving back is a big part of it. Training the next generation is really part of what we do as lawyers to make sure we have that ongoing knowledge passed down. I think that that is really important, building that into the

culture of the department to make sure people have a meaningful articling experience. For some of our smaller centres, you want to make sure the young students have well-rounded articles, that they get exposed to different areas of law, so we're as well exploring how to make sure that they have that meaningful articling experience so that they can get called to the bar.

The idea here, too, is that with our growing demand in filling vacancies that we have – and to your question on that front there, when we came in, we were kind of sitting in that 25 to 30 vacancies. We've been hiring, but the feds have been poaching at the same rate as we've been hiring, unfortunately. I don't want to put that – that's kind of one way to put it. But we're continuing to hire. We believe that we'll get an upward trajectory here in the next little while to help put a dent into our current vacancies that we have in the department.

With respect to the longer term savings that we're looking at in our department, our budget when we started was about 1.4 and a half billion dollars, and then you look in the out-years and you look at the full costs of it: it goes down a little bit, into the lower \$1.4 billion range, in those out-years. But if you look at the net costs – the net cost is one of the interesting things if you take a look at it – originally the net cost was about \$1.1 billion to taxpayers, and in the out-years the net cost goes down to about \$950 million. When you heard Minister Toews talk about our department and \$400 million, that's where he was kind of looking at that number, the net cost to taxpayers. That's one of the things that we're looking at there.

I do believe, as I was mentioning earlier on, you know, that we're continuing to drive efficiencies: getting fax machines out of our courthouses, digitization, hopefully eliminating MS-DOS so I don't have to talk about Darth Vader in question period. Things like that are ways that we're going to try and find these savings to make sure we have a sustainable Justice department for the long term in Alberta.

The Chair: Thirty-five seconds.

Mr. Amery: Summer internships: do you have these?

Mr. Schweitzer: On summer internships, there's no road map yet for a complete summer internship program. I do believe that the department will occasionally hire summer students, but it's not what I would say would be a sophisticated program yet that you would see more in a private-sector law firm. One of the things that I'd like to see in the long term – and, again, this isn't a commitment to actually doing it, but this is one of the things that I'd like to see – would be that type of an initiative brought into government as well so that we can bring people in for a meaningful summer student experience and with articles as well attached to that.

The Chair: Wonderful. Thank you, Minister.

We're back to the Official Opposition.

Ms Ganley: Okay. I've just been going back through my notes here, and one of the questions, I think, that I still have outstanding, just with respect to sort of managing the corrections budget, was whether or not one of the options that we're looking at in terms of finding those efficiencies or those vacancies in prisons is closing one of the prisons in the northern part of the province or, really, anywhere in the province.

The other question I had is that – and this is just my recollection, so you can correct me if I'm wrong – when we increased funding to combat rural crime, the federal government did not automatically appear at the table; we had to sort of ask them. It was less of a tell and more of an ask, whether they would come up with their 30 per

cent of the funding. I'm wondering if you've made that ask and what the response was, whether they have agreed to come to the table and provide that funding. The money that's coming from municipalities will account for 70 per cent, and then the federal government is supposed to put in 30 per cent, so I'm just wondering if they have agreed to put in that share next year and in subsequent years.

I was also wondering, just from your conversation with the previous speaker around recruitment and retention of Crown prosecutors – and I fully admit that I was not able to get this one solved either – whether or not you are in a position to fix the anomalies problem with respect to Crown prosecutor salaries. I presume you know what I'm – yeah. Okay.

Then the other question I had was just with respect to – when we were talking about money coming in from municipalities to pay for the rural crime initiative, that money is coming in, and you can see it sort of come in under that other revenue line. Again, I'm on page 115 of the ministry business plan. That will go back out through the PPSA. Obviously, the PPSA isn't broken out on this page; it's under public security.

In the subsequent year, in 2021, the total budget for public security is \$531 million, which is down about \$4 million from the current forecast for the end of the year we're in presently although up slightly from estimates for the next year. With that \$4 million decrease and the \$31 million that will be going out through the PPSA, that's over \$35 million that needs to be accounted for in other areas of public security in that year. I just want to confirm that the sheriffs aren't going to take an additional decrease in that year, because I think, like, they're already seeing the increased work. They're already seeing, I mean, certainly a certain amount of backfilling to fill that other 15 per cent in terms of their decrease but not quite all the way. I think I'm concerned about that, so I'm curious if there's sort of a plan for where that \$35 million is coming from.

I think that for now those are my questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Minister, there is a minute and 18 seconds remaining.

Mr. Schweitzer: Perfect. When it comes to the police funding . . .

The Chair: Oh, sorry. Five minutes.

Mr. Schweitzer: Oh, five. I thought that was quick. Okay.

When it comes to the rural police funding, again, as I mentioned earlier on, all that money would go right back into rural policing with the matching money; 30 per cent from the federal government would be put into that. That's how we got to the \$286 million over five years.

It's my understanding that the RCMP is already in the process now of ramping up its services, ramping up the people to deliver on that commitment because they knew that this was coming. We gave them enough lead time last year, so that is well under way with the RCMP to satisfy the ongoing demand. One of the reasons why we brought it in over that period of time was to give the RCMP time to scale up in that process, time to hire people. If you jumped it right to the 30 per cent, they wouldn't be able to satisfy that in the first year. That's why we went to the 10 per cent, 15 per cent, 20 per cent, and then ultimately to 30 per cent, to give them time to scale up on their end to meet that demand.

Right now, from a corrections standpoint, there's no decision that's been made to close any facilities in the province of Alberta on that side of things there.

With respect to your question about Crown prosecutors and their freeze on salaries, the MacKinnon report identified this as one of

the areas that we should take a look at. I'm sure that when you were in this chair, you had the occasional visit from our Crown prosecution service members to talk about this challenging issue. It remains there, and the MacKinnon report highlighted it. It's one of those areas where I want to continue to talk to them to see what we can do in the long term. Again, it's not part of our immediate plans here today, but it's one of those ones where I do think that it's worth continuing to have the dialogue and discussion with them – if you have a creative solution, I'm all ears – as it was there for many years, that we've inherited. Hopefully, over the longer term we can solve this issue for our Crown prosecutors.

Oh, you also had questions about sheriffs. There's no plan to decrease the sheriffs. That's not part of the plan. Again, as we were mentioning, it's a bit beyond the scope of what we're trying to get here today from the detail level of it, but we're continuing to work towards operational efficiencies across the whole department, particularly in the public security area, as to how we can do that. As well, as I mentioned earlier on, we are planning, with the broadened scope of the fund, to expand that up to \$69 million in those other years as well. We're going to be expanding additional services provided there for other commitments that we've made for scope and funding. No decisions have been made yet as to how that'll fully be used, but that's an additional option there as well, that we do have to hit our budget targets overall.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Back to Ms Ganley. I believe there are three minutes and 20 seconds left in this block. Apologies for my confusion earlier.

6:00

Ms Ganley: That's all good. There have been a lot of numbers flying around this room today.

Sorry. Just returning to that PPSA conversation – I may have missed it because I looked down for a minute – I know that the RCMP is certainly prepared to sort of start scaling in those new folks. I guess what I'm asking is that there is \$82 million over the four years, roughly, that has to come from the federal government. I'm just wondering if they've committed to put that money in. My recollection is that that was an ask, not a tell, when it came to the federal government.

There's enough time for an answer – right? – if I just stop now.

The Chair: Yeah. Two minutes and 24 seconds.

Mr. Schweitzer: Yes.

I think you have time for one more, then.

Ms Ganley: Okay. That was pretty easy. All right.

Sorry; there are a lot of papers involved in this particular operation.

Mr. Schweitzer: There are.

Ms Ganley: Oh, one of the things I did want to ask about with respect to the unified family court, because you've sort of left the door open to that in the future, is whether or not – certainly, one of the challenges we had and one of the reasons it was meant to be implemented in the last sitting – it didn't occur – but one of the reasons it didn't happen in the one before that was because we were having challenges with judges of the Provincial Court moving to be appointed as justices because of a pension misalignment issue, shall we say. We had sort of been unable to resolve that challenge. I had had a conversation scheduled with the minister, but the minister at that time federally was replaced shortly thereafter.

Mr. Schweitzer: I think I know which one you're talking about.

Ms Ganley: So that never came to fruition, shall we say. I'm just curious as to whether or not you were ever able to resolve that issue because I know it was a problem in order to move forward with the unified family court.

I think I can leave it at that for now without moving into another area.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Ganley.
Minister, you have 37 seconds.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thirty-seven seconds.

We hadn't run that issue all the way to ground. It was still in the discussions about how we could do the infrastructure here. Again, there was no firm commitment as to how many judges could potentially move from the Provincial Court to QB. That would be necessary, though, to make the numbers work in any scenario. You'd have to have people, some members of the provincial judiciary, moved over to help cover the costs. When we looked at the numbers overall to date, it was going to be additional money on top of the savings that you could potentially get from judicial salaries at the Provincial Court level. Again, like I mentioned earlier on, this is something that I think is worth having a continued discussion on in the future, but at this point I would think it's kind of run its course in the immediate term.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With that, we're back to the government caucus, and I believe it's Mr. Rutherford.

Mr. Rutherford: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister, for being with us today. Basically, I'm just going to start out around key objective 1.1 on page 110 of the business plan. It's basically talking about the development of the rural Alberta provincial integrated defence force, or RAPID. I can attest that in law enforcement we all appreciate a good acronym, so thank you for lining that one up for us. We talked about the topic in the fall, Minister. You mentioned that the powers of sheriffs, fish and wildlife officers, and commercial vehicle enforcement inspectors would be expanded, so if you can comment on that and what status it is at. I also want to thank you for taking the initiative and getting such ideas as RAPID moving forward. Basically, having those sheriffs on the highway or commercial vehicle inspectors out with fish and game being able to respond to calls and be a part of that response is important because we all know that the response times to rural calls are an issue. Making sure that we're getting somebody there: I think that that's part of the program that you're rolling out.

In terms of rural crime I also just wanted to mention again that I appreciated you attending the rural crime event as part of your tour in Leduc. It was much appreciated having you out and hearing from residents as well as getting that first-hand knowledge about what their concerns are.

Again on response times, many rural Albertans – and I heard it in urban centres as well, that response times were long. Even with the Edmonton Police Service the call volumes were picking up. Rural crime, of course, is an issue, but urban crime as well is seeing an uptick, as I've noticed in the last few years of my time there. Making sure that we're dealing with those response times – if somebody calls 911, they expect a response. I think you heard that tonight and you've heard elsewhere that at times people are phoning 911 and nobody is coming. That really reduces the amount of trust, of course, in law enforcement. They're doing what they can. Obviously, if they can respond, they will. The distances are an issue as well.

I was wondering if you could just give us an update on the implementation of the RAPID force and how it's progressing and if

you can let us know when you feel it might be fully operational. It would be beneficial for the folks in and around my riding. One of the main issues in rural areas, like I mentioned, is the response time with RCMP. If you can explain how this is going to improve that response time and how those additional personnel are going to be utilized, just so that we can take that information back to folks, it would be quite helpful.

I also noticed with some interest that in January the federal-provincial-territorial ministers of justice had a public safety meeting in Victoria. I was wondering if you could comment on your work with the federal and provincial counterparts in raising the issue of rural crime on the national stage. It would be helpful to hear that as well.

I know you've said a few times already about advocating to the federal government. I think an obvious part of addressing crime and issues around that is having the federal government do their part as well. I was also wondering if you could provide some indication as to whether the federal government is going to be providing any funding to help combat rural crime and if they're going to be a part of this solution as well.

I'll just turn it back to you on that list of questions.

Mr. Schweitzer: Perfect. I'll start, yeah, first with your last one there, talking about the meeting that we had in Victoria. That was my first opportunity to sit down with justice ministers from across the country to talk about different challenges. We had to, you know, advocate hard to actually get rural crime on the agenda. I think some of our federal counterparts were actually a little bit surprised by the overwhelming feedback from provincial justice ministers from the Maritimes to Ontario to our neighbours in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and British Columbia: similar challenges with scrap metal dealers, similar challenges that we're seeing with people, particularly as they get further and further away from major urban centres, the challenges that we have for policing and the increase in crime. It is more pronounced still in the prairie provinces. Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba are facing challenges that are a little bit more pronounced than in other areas of the country, but it is a national issue.

We were successful there with the joint communication coming out of that meeting to have the working group, to say that it was established, a pan-Canadian working group to come up with solutions to tackle rural crime. The committee is meeting again, I believe, in October. We're to report back on the progress with recommendations and suggestions for rural crime.

I did advocate at that meeting that, you know, quite often what we see out of our federal government are solutions for organized crime that target our major urban centres like the Torontos of the world. This is a significant issue that they need to come up with a national strategy on, and I encouraged them that they needed to put money behind that as well to help deal with rural crime issues. Those voices were conveyed.

Again, back to what I mentioned earlier on, I think it is a credit to all of our colleagues that represent rural communities and their advocacy on this issue that it has now gotten to that national stage, where it has received national coverage. There are many reports in the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post* as well as, you know, the fact that we have this working group going. We won't let that go. We're continuing to work with Members of Parliament as well on suggested Criminal Code changes. That is one of the areas, too, that they're exploring, potential Criminal Code changes, to help make sure we have a deterrence effect at sentencing, particularly focused on remoteness and people being targeted in rural communities. That is one of the areas that we're working hard on in addition to, hopefully, funding at some point in time from the federal government.

That's not going to change our provincial drive on this issue. I mean, we've made our commitments to get, you know, the largest investment in policing since the March West, investing in RAPID force, investing in the Alberta law enforcement response teams. All of these things I believe are going to have a compounding effect to allow us to deliver on safer communities across rural Alberta.

On to your point about the RAPID force: the training is ongoing now. Making sure we have the right equipment, making sure that training is in place is ongoing right now. The target is to have it operational this fall with the beginning stages. It'll be rolling as people get the proper amount of training. We don't want to put somebody in a dangerous situation that they're not trained to handle. That safety is key. That is one of the reasons why we need to stage this over time, but the beginning of it would be later this year to get that part done.

6:10

I think as far as the types of calls that they can help respond to, there's more roadwork that they can do. You know, they can do more work to support the police when it comes to people that are impaired or maintaining continuity on scenes. Those are some of the areas where they can help relieve some of the work that the police are doing.

On top of that, you know, being a secondary car in a situation that would require a second car, having somebody from the RAPID force there to support the police, connecting them into the 911 program as well is part of this whole initiative as well as dealing with certain situations where it may be that secondary priority. Maybe somebody's realized that they've been broken into, and they call 911. There's no longer somebody on the scene, but they deserve to have somebody come. You need to know that when you call, someone's going to show up. That's the initiative here behind RAPID force, to make sure we can be a release valve for some of the pressure on our police in the short term and also in the long term. There would be that support there.

Right now we're at about 1,600 police officers in the province of Alberta. That will grow to about 1,900 through the police funding model plus the additional 200 support staff to provide for policing. On top of that, you know, if we have 400 people out there in the RAPID force able to respond, that's far more boots on the ground than we currently have in the province of Alberta. That'll be the additional resource that we have there. Again, we're going to want to monitor this as we roll it out to make sure it's successful on both fronts, both for the people in the RAPID force to make sure that they have the training that they need but also making sure that it's working on the ground and providing that relief to police.

I've mentioned this many other times, too. We're trying to find lots of different ways that we can find efficiencies that save police time as well. I think you were telling me the story where sometimes if you had two calls, it might take up your whole day, like, your whole shift because you have to file your reports, you have to go back into the office, all those different things that you have to do. We're trying to find different ways that we can work. Part of the reason why the police funding model, we believe, will be so successful long term is those additional bodies for support.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Back to the Official Opposition. I believe it's Ms Pancholi.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here today and to your senior staff as well for being here to answer our questions. I have a few short questions. I don't know if they'll take up the whole time. First, I wanted to ask quickly about the implementation of Clare's law. I sat in on the estimates with the

Minister of Community and Social Services yesterday, and I noticed that within that ministry they have allocated some funds to support the implementation of Clare's law. As you will know, Minister, that does require a significant amount of training and supports, particularly with police and various other judicial officers, and some education and training around what to do when an application is made under Clare's law for disclosure of a domestic partner's previous criminal record. There is some money that has been allocated from Community and Social Services. I'm wondering if you could tell me if there's any money that's allocated under any of the budget lines – I couldn't parse out from the budget if that's covered – and what amount that might be and what that's going towards.

The next question I had is with respect to – it's line item 8 on the budget – Alberta human rights, both the commission and the assistance to the human rights education and multiculturalism fund. With respect to line item 8.1, which is the Alberta Human Rights Commission, as I'm sure you're well aware, Minister, the slow pace of dealing with the number of complaints at the Alberta Human Rights Commission has been an ongoing challenge, I think, for many actors in the system for some time. I know that in 2019 there was a revision to the complaint resolution process in an effort to sort of triage those and move things further along through the system. I know that at one point for myself in my previous practice, sometimes human rights complaints would take almost two years before they would really even be assessed, so it was very challenging for all involved.

I'm wondering if you can update the progress that's been made with respect to caseloads and the handling of those complaints under the Alberta Human Rights Commission and whether or not we do see an increase there within the budget to the Alberta Human Rights Commission, if that is related to increased staff or what that's being used for, perhaps to potentially deal with that backlog of complaints.

Lastly, with respect to line item 8.2 I do notice that the assistance to the human rights education and multiculturalism fund, which previously had a budget of \$500,000, has been eliminated in this budget. I'm wondering if you could speak to if that has simply been moved somewhere else or if that fund no longer exists and if there is going to be perhaps another part of government that might be responsible for that now. Just some clarification around that issue.

Thank you.

Mr. Schweitzer: Starting with your last point there regarding the grants, the Human Rights Commission has been in a couple of different ministries over time. We used to have a minister of multiculturalism. Now we do again, so we looked at the grant function of the Human Rights Commission. If we didn't have a minister of multiculturalism, it might make more sense to keep the grants there, but now that we do have a minister of multiculturalism, we thought it'd be more accountable to taxpayers to have grants going, you know, through that ministry versus having them here in the Human Rights Commission.

I believe there's about \$3 million sitting in a reserve fund for the Human Rights Commission relating to historical grants that are sitting there as part of a reserve fund. The plan is not to use that fund in this budget. It is sitting there, though, about \$3 million in the reserve fund for grants maybe in the future. We may have a discussion with them as well as to the future use of that fund, maybe providing additional resources or tools to the Human Rights Commission a bit beyond the scope of what we're looking at today, but that money is sitting there from historical money that has been allocated towards grants.

As far as the backlog, we have a new, you know, director of the Human Rights Commission. I'm going to actually give credit to the former government in hiring an individual that actually had an immense amount of success. He has a long track record in this area coming from Ontario, and he's been really successful. We were initially looking at potentially going to a direct access model to help him with backlogs, but he's actually had an immense amount of success to date in dealing with some of the backlogs that we do have there, so he's heading in the right direction on that. We're hoping that some of these additional resources will help him continue to deal with the challenges and pressures that come into the Human Rights Commission, but I do think that he's heading in the right direction. Again, hats off to the former government's recruitment of him. He's amazing to work with. He's capable, and he's doing excellent work over there.

When it comes to Clare's law, what we'll do here – we're managing this within existing policing resources. It'll depend on where in Alberta the call comes in from. They'll do the assessment for risk in that front there. We do have to work with the RCMP as well. Obviously, we're working with different channels in Ottawa and here to make sure that we can implement Clare's law to its full intent. Again, the intent there is to manage that within existing police budgets that we have in the province of Alberta.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
Back to Ms Pancholi.

Ms Pancholi: Can I just ask a follow-up question with respect to the additional resources that you mentioned that were being put in by the current director of the Human Rights Commission? I agree: he is very reputable and has tons of experience and has been a real asset. When you say additional resources, has that meant extra staff, or has that meant, I don't know, extra capacity in other ways such as resources – I'm thinking like electronic management of files. What were those additional resources? Yeah. Go ahead.

Mr. Schweitzer: They used to have additional staff that were allocated to manage the grant program as well, so they're being repurposed now to provide additional services into the Human Rights Commission's other – it's kind of its core function. This additional money coming in is going to allow for them to have those additional resources to focus on their core function.

The Chair: Follow-up? Fantastic.

Ms Pancholi: Just with respect to the reserves you mentioned for that grant, it sounds like, I think what I'm hearing is that because there is now, well, a ministry that has multiculturalism as part of it, that's perhaps why there are no longer funds under Justice. Would that reserve fund also transfer over to that ministry as well?

Mr. Schweitzer: Right now it still sits here. Because we're still the designated department for the Human Rights Commission, it sits with us. This is a part of, I think, a broader government discussion that we could possibly have about how different reserve funds are used across government into different areas in the longer term and how they're accounted for, and as you deal with different funds – it is still part of the Human Rights Commission, so it still sits with our department.

Ms Pancholi: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

There are still three minutes and 22 seconds left in this block. Ms Ganley.

Ms Ganley: Excellent. I actually missed a question that was right up top on my page, so I'm really glad that I have the opportunity to jump back in with it. What I wanted to ask is whether there is anything specific being done in terms of the serious problems we're seeing in the northeast of Calgary around gun violence and specifically not just – people aren't just worried for the people who are committing the violence and sort of what the sentencing is, but they're worried as well about their children sort of being drawn into these matters and whether there are any steps being taken to address that.

6:20

Mr. Schweitzer: I have had the good fortune of going and participating in a couple of town halls in northeast Calgary, meeting with parents, meeting with concerned citizens in the communities. We do have work to do to help build bridges, particularly with new Canadians as well, to make sure that they build that level of trust with police, to make sure that they are comfortable calling when it is appropriate to call, to make sure that there isn't intimidation, so that they feel comfortable in that area. We're continuing to monitor the situation and work closely with our police chiefs across Alberta in this area in particular.

The Alberta law enforcement response teams, the additional investment there, making sure that we co-ordinate across jurisdictions, across the whole province – to go after organized crime is another big piece of it as well. Getting illegal guns off the street is a big part of it. We're proud of the work that they've done. I know you were there as well. ALERT has been here for many years. We didn't create it. But it's been doing good work for many years, and I think amplifying that is a big part of our strategy, to go after organized crime and keep our communities safe, particularly in the city of Calgary area.

There were many people that were concerned, particularly around the new year, when there was a bunch of – I'm advised there was some targeted activity amongst various factions of different gangs. We've seen that come down a little bit over the last few months. Hopefully, that trend continues in the city of Calgary.

The Chair: Ms Ganley, there's a minute and 15 seconds.

Ms Ganley: Oh. Wow. Okay. Well, thank you very much for that answer. I know that that's a huge concern for a lot of folks in that area.

The other interesting question that I had sort of relates to pressures on police budgets generally. I certainly know that a number of police services had indicated to me that their sort of labour relations model was problematic for them in a couple of different ways, and I was wondering whether work is ongoing on the Police Act review.

Mr. Schweitzer: We're continuing to look at that. When we met with the police chiefs on a regular basis – there's a desire there. I've met with some of the different policing organizations as well, on the labour side as well. There's a desire, I think, at some point in time to have that discussion about the future of the Police Act.

At this point in time, too, another kind of factor that's out there is that we are waiting for the Fair Deal Panel to come back with recommendations on different areas that could impact policing.

There are a few different pieces that are out there. I want to have some certainty around, you know, the direction that we are taking as a government. I think that'll be something that we'll have in the near term here as to different changes that may be required going forward. Again, I don't want to prejudge the Fair Deal Panel and what direction it is going, but the recommendations it provides could impact the direction that that discussion could go.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With that, we move on to our final round of questioning, and that'll be from Mr. Nixon on the government side.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here and being so thorough in answering the questions that we've had for you today. Also, you know, just a quick comment about drug courts. And thank you for the implementation of that. I know it will save lives. It will change lives. I'm really pleased to see us moving forward with that.

Last time we were here, we talked extensively about ALERT, and I just have a few follow-up questions about ALERT for you. Obviously, we know how important this is. Are you able to provide some general information about how many officer positions are in the ALERT team and their subunits? Earlier this week you announced that ALERT is adding positions to regional organized crime units around the province. Can you explain a little bit about what that means for ALERT and how this will help combat organized crime in Alberta? And then also, in addition to what was announced in Lethbridge earlier this week, are there any more significant changes planned for ALERT in the near future?

Those are my questions.

Mr. Schweitzer: When it comes to ALERT, the additional resources will be deployed across the province of Alberta. There are the major centres that have, you know, greater capacity to provide officers, but we do work in collaboration with different police services across the province: RCMP, we've got the Blood Tribe Police Service now integrated into ALERT. We're working across the whole province to build out the capabilities of the Alberta law enforcement response team to develop out the strategy for how we're going to tackle primarily things like organized crime, you know, child sex offences, child pornography, things like that, and going after those different co-ordinated areas and developing different tactical units as well to help provide those supports. When it comes to announcements like we made in Lethbridge with providing additional resources into a regional office, I do expect that there will be more of those types of announcements to come as a part of this. It has to be truly a provincial strategy for the province of Alberta, so those resources will continue to build out across our whole province.

I'm told that I do have those numbers. I was stalling until Dennis here could give me – apparently, it was in my folder here. While Dennis looks through that to find the exact numbers for you, if for some reason we can't find them – I think we only have a few minutes left here today – we can always undertake to get those final details to you as well. I know how to find you. It is a really rewarding program. The strategic leadership that is there is excellent. The sophistication that they've brought to policing in the province of Alberta is excellent, and that's why we're providing them with additional resources. I do believe we have some additional numbers here. The estimated number in ALERT is going to go up to 348 positions.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you.

The Chair: Any further questions?

Mr. Guthrie: First off, Minister, thanks for coming out to my constituency on the rural crime tour. I know that when we had set that up, we actually didn't get a lot of people notifying us that they were going to be there, and I thought: oh, jeez; maybe rural crime

is not a big deal. Then it was absolutely jammed that morning when we held that. We didn't even have enough seats in the room, and they were out in the hallway. Thank you for doing that. I know from everything I've heard from you that there was a tremendous amount of feedback that you got, and you're implementing that now. So thank you very much.

During the introduction you were talking about justice digital, which I know that you have a great desire to upgrade. Using MS-DOS still, I mean, that's a big surprise to me. I was using that in the '80s, and I can't imagine it still being in use 30-plus years later. Now, you had made a reference to *Star Wars*, but I also wanted to let you know that in 1981 it was the introduction of Indiana Jones.

Mr. Schweitzer: Ah.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah, and even he retired since then. I think we can agree that it's out-of-date technology. It requires upgrade. I guess my first question would be: what has the minister's office learned from other jurisdictions, you know, on their digital court systems? You know, are we one of the outliers here with this technology? Are there other successful jurisdictions that have implemented this that we can learn from so that we're not kind of reinventing the wheel, so to speak, on that? Can the minister also tell us, tell Albertans, what we can expect from the justice digital? Like, what are the benefits that the citizens are actually going to get from this? Then, more broadly, can you discuss sort of other technological improvements that your department or the justice system may be working to achieve?

Mr. Schweitzer: Yeah. A perfect example is the ability to pay traffic tickets, things like that. We're looking for different online tools that we can deploy for e-tickets to deal with different areas. We are the outlier right now actually in Canada. We're behind when it comes to digital services. Doing court searches in the province of British Columbia, for example, is very efficient. They've been on this for – over a decade ago they were investing in digital technologies, maybe even before that. So we do have a lot of catch-up, but that also means that we can catch up quickly because there are precedents out there. There are tools out there that pre-exist in different provinces and jurisdictions that we can build on. We can also learn from mistakes in other jurisdictions to do this quickly and in a cost-effective way. We would be one of the last movers. One of the bits of good news is that because we are a last mover, it does mean that we can do it, hopefully, pretty quickly here in the province of Alberta to get these different digital tools available to Albertans.

Just an Albertan dealing with the justice system as a whole, I think they're going to find it a little bit more user-friendly. The ability, hopefully, in the long term to get forms and different abilities to file documentation . . .

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

I would like to remind all committee members that we are scheduled to meet tomorrow morning, March 5, 2020, at 9 a.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Children's Services.

Thank you, everybody. This meeting is now adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 6:30 p.m.]

