



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Service Alberta
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, March 16, 2021
7 p.m.

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Second Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participant

Ministry of Service Alberta
Hon. Nate Glubish, Minister

7 p.m.

Tuesday, March 16, 2021

[Ms Goodridge in the chair]

**Ministry of Service Alberta
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: I would like to call this meeting to order and welcome everybody here today. The committee has under consideration the estimates for the Ministry of Service Alberta for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022.

I would ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. My name is Laila Goodridge. I am the MLA for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche and the chair of this committee. We will begin, starting to my right.

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

Mr. Amery: Good evening. Mickey Amery, MLA, Calgary-Cross.

Mr. Carson: Good evening. MLA Jon Carson for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Nielsen: Good evening, everyone. Chris Nielsen, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

Ms Robert: Good evening. Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and substitute for the committee clerk.

The Chair: Now we will go on to our members that are participating virtually. When I call your name, please introduce yourself for the record. Michaela Glasgo.

Ms Glasgo: Good evening. Michaela Glasgo, MLA for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

The Chair: Richard Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Good evening. Richard Gotfried, MLA, Calgary-Fish Creek.

The Chair: Jackie Lovely.

Ms Lovely: Good evening, everyone. Jackie Lovely, Camrose constituency.

The Chair: Brad Rutherford.

Mr. Rutherford: Good evening. Brad Rutherford, MLA, Leduc-Beaumont.

The Chair: Last but not least, Mark Smith.

Mr. Smith: Good evening, everybody. Mark Smith, MLA, Drayton Valley-Devon.

The Chair: Actually, I was wrong. We still have one more virtually. Mr. Loyola.

Member Loyola: Rod Loyola for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

The Chair: Due to the current landscape we are all in, all ministry staff will be participating in the estimates virtually.

Minister, I would ask if you'd please introduce yourself and any of the officials you have in the room with you.

Mr. Glubish: Hello. Nate Glubish, MLA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park and Minister of Service Alberta. I'm joined today by Deputy Minister David James. I have Richard Isaak, who is Service Alberta's senior financial officer. I have Stephen Bull, the chief corporate information officer, and Brandy Cox, assistant deputy minister of consumer, registry, and strategic services, and acting assistant deputy minister of shared services. I do have a couple of other staff here with me, too, who are available to assist if extra information is needed.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I would like to note the following substitution for the record: Member Loyola as deputy chair for Ms Sigurdson.

Before we begin, I would like to note that in accordance with the recommendations from the chief medical officer of health attendees at today's meeting are advised to leave the appropriate distance between themselves and other meeting participants.

In addition, as indicated in the February 25, 2021, memo from the hon. Speaker Cooper, I would remind everybody of committee room protocols in line with the health guidelines, which require members to wear masks in committee rooms and while seated except when speaking, at which time they may choose not to wear a face covering.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV, and the audio- and videostream and transcripts of the meeting can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Those participating virtually are asked to turn on their camera while speaking and please mute their microphone when not speaking. To be placed on the speakers list, virtual participants should e-mail or send a message in the group chat to the committee clerk, and members in the room are asked to wave or otherwise signal to the chair. I would ask that everyone please set their cellphones and any other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. A total of two hours has been scheduled for consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Service Alberta. Standing Order 59.01(7) establishes the speaking rotation and speaking times. 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 his comments, then a 50-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition begins, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for independent members, if any, and then a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus.

Individuals may only speak for up to 10 minutes at a time, but time may be combined between the member and the minister. The rotation of speaking time will then follow the same rotation of the Official Opposition, independent members, and the government caucus, with individual speaking times set to five minutes for both the ministry and the member. These times may be combined into a 10-minute block. One final note. I would remind everyone that all discussions should flow through the chair at all times regardless as to whether speaking times are combined. If a member has a question regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send an e-mail or message to the committee clerk about the process.

Ministry officials, at the direction of the minister, may address the committee, and ministry officials are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commenting. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit appropriately distanced at the table

to assist members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

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

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 estimates and any amendments will occur in the Committee of Supply tomorrow, March 17, 2021. 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 as a courtesy an electronic version of the signed original should be provided to the committee clerk for distribution to committee members.

I will now invite the Minister of Service Alberta to begin with his opening remarks. Minister, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Glubish: Okay. Thank you, Chair, and thank you, everyone, for joining me this evening. I'm pleased to speak to the 2021 Service Alberta budget by presenting our estimates for the upcoming fiscal year. Earlier, at the beginning at this meeting, I introduced the many members of my department staff who are here joining me to assist as needed, so I won't introduce them again, but I want to thank them all for joining me and supporting me in this effort.

Service Alberta is extremely vital to government operations. Our mandate is complex, and our oversight is diverse, which puts Service Alberta in a unique position to help deliver government services to Albertans each and every day. Service Alberta is focused on making life better for Albertans and making government information, programs, and services more accessible. We protect Alberta's marketplace by ensuring fair treatment for consumers and fair competition for businesses. We oversee a number of registry services, from vehicles to businesses to life events. We facilitate access to government information through FOIP and open government. We also power our government's information technology infrastructure and security, a key focus for my department in the upcoming fiscal year. There are few corners of government that Service Alberta does not influence in some capacity, which creates an opportunity and also a responsibility that my department takes very seriously.

The government of Alberta's Budget 2021 continues to make health care investments that save lives during the pandemic and continues to support Alberta's recovery plan, a bold strategy to create jobs, build infrastructure, and diversify our economy. Our focus on protecting the lives and livelihoods of Albertans means more investment in priority areas like health care, where we are seeing additional funding for continuing care and to reduce the surgical backlog as well as job creation through our capital investments.

Alberta's government is delivering on its ongoing commitments to responsible spending by identifying goals to get Alberta's finances back on track. For Service Alberta Budget 2021 supports a renewed commitment to the ministry's foundational and strategic role of modernizing government, driving efficiency, driving innovation, and fostering efficient delivery of government programs. One of the best ways for Service Alberta to support Alberta's focus on protecting lives and livelihoods in Budget 2021 is by placing innovation at the centre of everything we do. By applying more technology and modernizing the services we deliver to Albertans, we can help to maintain or improve the quality of

services that Albertans can rely on while also saving Alberta taxpayers money.

With that in mind, Service Alberta's 2021-24 business plan has a heavy focus on innovation and technology. Throughout the fiscal year Service Alberta will seek out innovations and new technologies that we can implement to support our province and to prepare us for the future. As part of this process we will optimize delivery of programs and services to meet the needs of Albertans while providing better value to taxpayers.

With this in mind, Budget 2021 invests \$529.1 million in operating expenses to fund Service Alberta programs and services. A total of \$438.3 million is dedicated to enterprise and shared services provided across government. This funding accounts for the majority of Service Alberta's budget and includes investments of \$383.4 million directly into information technology, telecommunications, and modernizations. Another \$84.6 million will be invested in capital improvements for information management technology; \$54.9 million will allow Service Alberta to provide crossgovernment services such as fleet vehicles, records management, and payroll and benefits administration systems.

7:10

To support our goal of protecting both Alberta consumers and businesses, Budget 2021 invests \$23 million into consumer protection programs, and a further \$6.8 million will be invested into the Utilities Consumer Advocate. Budget 2021 also invests in motor vehicle registries and licensing with \$13 million, and an investment of \$19.1 million will ensure delivery of corporate and other registry services across Alberta.

Budget 2021 also invests \$11.4 million in the administration of FOIP. This represents a \$1.1 million decrease from Budget 2020, that can be attributed to efficiencies stemming from the new FOIP request service, which introduced streamlined back-end processes. This is a real-life example of how harnessing new technologies and innovative tools can help us to maintain or improve services while delivering real savings to Albertans.

Service Alberta expects to generate approximately \$660.5 million in revenues. Of that, motor vehicle services generates the majority, at approximately \$530.2 million. As this government promotes fiscal responsibility across the organization, Service Alberta will reduce spending in the upcoming fiscal year by a total of \$23.4 million, or 5 per cent, compared to the last fiscal year. At the risk of being repetitive, these savings will come from better and more innovative use of technology in everything we do.

To support other departments in meeting their fiscal targets and to prepare Alberta's government for the future, Service Alberta is renewing its focus on harnessing technology to drive organizational efficiency. The government of Alberta, like most public-sector agencies, lags behind when it comes to being innovative and adopting new technologies. This has been a problem for decades, but it presents us with an exciting opportunity to make up for lost time and to foster a culture of innovation all across government.

Budget 2021 invests in modernization, allowing Service Alberta to introduce higher quality services and simplified processes and to solve problems in new and more innovative ways. By rethinking how we offer services, we have the opportunity to make government more accessible to Albertans, regardless of where they live, and reduce the amount of time and frustration that they experience when accessing services. For example, this year work will continue to introduce more online registry services, including the first steps towards an online driver's licence or ID card renewal option, a service already available in several other jurisdictions across Canada. Albertans have told us they want registry services to be accessible online, a trend that only increased as COVID-19

affected regular business operations across the private and public sectors. I want to meet and exceed that expectation.

Service Alberta's priority doesn't simply lie in adopting new platforms and solutions. We want to save money by doing better, not by doing less. This government has a responsibility to get the highest possible value for every dollar we spend on behalf of Albertans, and one of the biggest opportunities we have is to invest in modernizing and applying more technology in everything we do. This will be a guiding principle for my department throughout this fiscal year.

Part of doing better and achieving the highest possible value for taxpayers is reimagining the way government works, which is why this year Service Alberta will introduce a government-wide digital strategy that will chart a path towards a more technologically responsive future. It will allow our organization to improve efficiency by adopting advanced technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning, and robotic process automation. For example, we are looking to introduce self-service options for the government's telephone contact centres, including a chatbot powered by artificial intelligence. Such technology is standard for many organizations and enables consumers to more quickly access the information that they need. We believe that this technology can also be beneficial for Albertans when they call our government contact centres. This will allow our content experts to focus on the more complicated questions that they receive rather than the run-of-the-mill queries that are relatively simple and frequent. This approach will reduce the amount of time Albertans spend waiting to get the information they need, regardless of whether it is simple or complex.

A significant shift like this to more advanced technologies will require significant changes in how we manage data. That's why my department is also working on a plan to enhance how Alberta's government collects, uses, and shares its data. By changing the way departments share information internally, we can bring about a better experience for Albertans as they interact with government while ensuring that protecting Albertans' privacy remains at the root of this entire exercise.

As government operations are modernized, I'm sure that there are many Albertans who will be excited to hear that Service Alberta will also focus on implementing a provincial broadband strategy, set for release later this year. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the fact that Albertans' lives and livelihoods depend upon a reliable high-speed Internet connection as educational and business and social interactions are moving increasingly online. Internet speeds outside of urban centres simply cannot meet the rising demand. Alberta's connectivity lags behind the national average, and we cannot allow rural and remote and indigenous communities to fall further behind.

Our broadband strategy will focus on closing this connectivity gap by improving access to high-speed networks that Albertans and businesses need to compete and succeed in the global digital economy. This will help protect the viability of Alberta's rural communities, diversify our economy, and support the creation of good-paying jobs all across our province.

Ensuring all of Alberta's communities can access high-speed broadband connectivity will generate between \$500 million and \$1.7 billion in GDP growth for the province. Service Alberta has been working with all orders of government and the private sector as we carve a successful path forward together. There's a lot of opportunity in the digital space. I'm looking forward to how we can capitalize on it.

In closing, I'd like to thank you, all, for this opportunity to share Service Alberta's plans for Budget 2021. I'd be happy to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Minister. Perfect timing on your speech.

For the 50 minutes that follow, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Do the members and the minister wish to share their time?

Mr. Carson: I would prefer that. Yes. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Minister.

Mr. Glubish: I think I'd like to go with block time. Thanks.

The Chair: Then, with that, we will go to block time. Mr. Carson, you are up.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Chair. First of all, I just want to thank everyone for the opportunity to join you this evening. Thanks to all the members for being here, Chair, Minister, and thank you to all the department staff for their work in preparing the documents this year. I did have a speech laid out about interjecting, but I suppose that won't need to happen based on your decision, Minister, so thanks for that.

Now, I guess I'll just get started here. Through the chair, question 1, I suppose. The 2021 ministry business plans went from eight pages in 2019 to the same, eight pages, in 2020, down to five pages in this year's, 2021. Was there a specific direction given to you that resulted in such a drastic reduction in pages and metrics to the ministry business plans? Was there any direction on this from the office of the Premier? If so, why?

Now, moving on to my first round of questions here, regarding FOIP, one of the many performance measures and metrics which has been completely removed from the ministry's business plans this year is targets regarding FOIP timelines. In the two previous budgets put forward by the ministry, there are clear targets and metrics regarding FOIP requests being completed by government/public bodies within 60 days or less. Now, in the 2019 budget those targets were 95 per cent or greater from 2019-2023. In the 2020 budget those targets fell to 90 per cent in '20-21 and 91 per cent in '21-22 and 93 per cent in '22-23. Of course, in the most recent business plans, once again, those targets have been completely removed from your plans.

First of all, why did the ministry make the decision to remove those metrics from this year's budget? A supplemental to that: though they are no longer in the budget, is the ministry still tracking these valuable performance metrics, and if so, can you share what those targets are and also explain, as a percentage, how many FOIP requests are currently being completed within 60 days or less, as was the previous target? For reference, the previous two budget documents showed that 88 per cent of FOIP requests were being completed on time.

Traditionally we see ministry annual reports acknowledging these important performance measures, as was the case in the last two budget cycles. Can the minister explain, through the chair, whether FOIP targets will continue to be included in the Service Alberta ministry annual report even though these outcomes have been completely removed from, as far as we can tell, this year's business plan documents?

I've never done it this way before, Madam Chair, so you'll have to accept my apologies. Also regarding FOIP outcomes, in the previous two budgets there were metrics regarding the percentage of FOIP requests handled without complaint to the Information and Privacy Commissioner. In both of those documents there was a target of 95 per cent across the board, and it explained what the current percentage was at the time of that document being produced. Even though you have removed these metrics from this

year's budget documents, are these targets still being tracked? Can we expect an update in the annual report on these targets, and can you tell me what the actual percentage of FOIP requests handled without complaint are this year?

How much time do I have left, Madam Chair?

7:20

The Chair: Six minutes and 35 seconds.

Mr. Carson: Wonderful. Thank you.

Of course, due to the pandemic my opportunity to question you on budget documents last year was greatly diminished, and I can understand that, but I do want to take a moment to ask . . .

The Chair: Mr. Carson, through the chair.

Mr. Carson: . . . through the chair – Madam Chair, thank you.

Budget '19-20 explained that there was an additional \$600,000 added to FOIP to reflect the implementation of a new case management system. Has that work been completed? Can you share why, in the year following this work and the modernization of these services, the minister or the ministry decided not to include metrics regarding FOIP in this year's documents? In my opinion, it would be good for the public to be able to see how these changes are supporting their needs regarding targeted metrics. Do you have any metrics on how this modernization is working internally? What has been the impact on the FOIP system and FOIP co-ordinators?

Still on FOIP, through the chair, does the minister or the ministry have an estimate on the impact of COVID on the FOIP system? Have there been any delays or increased backlog? How do you plan to tackle those backlogs if that is the case?

Now, just a final line of questioning on this. I think these two questions may be related, and if this is the case, then I would be happy to accept that. Can the minister explain, through the chair, why the 2019 forecast for the FOIP line item was \$12,465,000 but the actual, as shown in this year's budget for that year, was \$13,740,000, an additional nearly \$1.3 million compared to the budget targets?

A supplemental to that. Budget 2020 showed a 2021-22 spend for the FOIP line item of \$12,460,000, and looking at this year's budget, the target for '21-22 is now more than \$1 million lower, at \$11,377,000. Can you explain why your initial target was so far off your new estimate or if this was, in fact, just a matter of money moving through to support this program in an earlier budget year? That might address that.

The Chair: Mr. Carson, I'd just remind you: through the chair.

Mr. Carson: Oh. Thank you, Chair.

Through the chair, just moving on here, with the time I have, to a different subject that is of great importance to Albertans. Publicly the ministry has said that it will cost \$600,000 to replace health care cards. I'm hoping that, through the chair, you might be able to point to a line item for this expense in this year's budget. You know, when we look at the population, through the chair, of greater than 4 million people, replacing every single card, the administration of that, can you please provide a cost breakdown of this and how, through the chair, you came to that conclusion, that \$600,000 would cover those costs?

Now, through the chair, if the \$600,000 doesn't cover that cost, how will you recover the cost of these cards? Through the chair, are you considering increased fees for receiving a new health care identification card in the future, and will you today make a commitment that there will be no fee increases based on the modernization of our health care cards? I'll be clear. I think this is

an initiative that I am willing to support, but I think it's important, through the chair, that we have a full understanding of the costs and how you came to the conclusion that \$600,000 was going to be enough to administer that. Once again, through the chair, I'm looking for a commitment from you today, from your ministry, that there will be no fee increases based on the implementation of this process.

Madam Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: Two minutes and 30 seconds.

Mr. Carson: Okay. Perfect. Thank you.

We are going to move on now, through the chair, to – let me see here – just a couple of questions on broadband high-speed Internet. I appreciate that earlier in your comments you discussed that later this year we will see a broadband strategy. Hopefully, I'm still able to address some of these. Through the chair, page 97 of your ministry's business plan, under Initiatives Supporting Key Objectives, shows that in '21-22 \$150,000 will be invested to "test remote community broadband services that can be provided by Low . . . Orbit satellites."

Through the chair, can you explain how that program will roll out? Has any funding already been allocated for that program or committed? Is it going to municipalities, nonprofits, private corporations? Also, how did you, through the chair, come to the conclusion of whatever decision is there through your ministry? Was there an expression of interest or further consultations done with stakeholders? That would be greatly appreciated, through the chair.

In your opening remarks your ministry committed to a strategy later this year, as I mentioned. Now, is the \$150,000 the only new money in this year's budget to support the expansion of rural broadband high-speed Internet, or is there more funding? Maybe you can point to a line item on that.

Now, through the chair, while developing a broadband strategy is mentioned twice in the government fiscal plan on page 10 and once in the overview of the ministry's Budget '21 business plans on page 95, there weren't any initiatives supporting key objectives that would indicate any new dollars to implement such a strategy past the \$150,000 that was previously mentioned. Can the minister, through the chair, point to another line item that would provide funding for the rollout of a province-wide broadband strategy? That is relatively similar to the previous question, so just a supplemental on that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carson.

We now go to . . .

Mr. Neudorf: Sorry, Madam Chair. Just a point of clarification. Just very quickly, just to make sure, was the member opposite on page 195 of the government estimates?

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Chair. That was referring to page 97 of the ministry business plans. That was discussing the \$150,000.

Thank you.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Chair. This gobbledygook just gets me confused once in a while.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Neudorf.

With that, we will go to the minister for 10 minutes of reply.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Chair. Thank you for the questions, a lot of questions surrounding FOIP. Happy to bring some clarity to

that. Certainly, you know, our government really – we know that Albertans value access to information. That's one of the reasons why the government of Alberta regularly and proactively discloses information online, and we take our responsibility for responding to information requests very seriously. We remain committed to providing accurate and timely responses to FOIP access requests and ensuring that the information that the government releases in response to these requests is in compliance with the FOIP Act.

We've also been working hard to make sure that it becomes more easy for Albertans to submit freedom of information requests. That's why in December we launched a new online tool, the FOIP request service, which allows applicants to submit and track FOIP requests, pay their fees, provide identification and documents and, as well, receive the response packages, all within a secure environment. I'm really proud of the work of the department for what they've done on this. You know, again, this is a real example of how we are applying actual technology and innovation improvements to improve how we deliver an important service that Albertans have told us is very important to them.

You know, again, I know that the member highlighted the budget numbers on line 5 of the budget estimates related to FOIP. It is because of these technology improvements that we are able to maintain or improve the services that Albertans have through FOIP and access to information while achieving the savings that we've highlighted and that I mentioned in my opening remarks. I think that Albertans certainly expect that their government should look to be as responsible as possible at getting the most value they can out of every dollar that they spend in the effort to deliver services, and this is just one example of how we're working to do that by being more innovative and responsive to the needs of Albertans.

7:30

I know the member also was asking about the request close on time percentage, and I can say that for the year to date fiscal 2020-21, that is at 90 per cent, and we will of course continue to be tracking these important metrics.

You know, at the end of the day, coming back to some of the initial comments that the member brought up about the business plan, I think I'm really proud of this business plan because it is highlighting our focus on innovation and technology and our commitment to using these tools to solve problems in new ways and to be more proactive at anticipating the needs of Albertans and meeting those needs in a way that improves the quality of services that they can expect, gives them more choice and more convenience in how they access those services, and ultimately can also achieve savings for the taxpayer, again, as I said in my opening remarks, by doing better, not by doing less.

This business plan outlines a lot of the strategic direction and focus on how we're going to do these things by modernizing and innovating and applying more technology, and the opportunities for Albertans, for us to accomplish these important objectives are enormous. It's really important work. I'm proud of the work of my department as they've been carrying out my vision to articulate this both in the business plan but also developing the work in the trenches to get this done and to get these initiatives across the finish line.

I think that Albertans, you know, care most about outcomes. They care about: are we doing the things that are going to make their lives better, are we doing things that are going to give them more choice and convenience, are we doing things that are going to give them better quality services, and are we doing things that will save them money? I'm confident that the strategic direction outlined in this business plan will get us to where we need to go to

be able to say: yes, we are doing the things that will achieve those objectives.

In terms of the comment about health care cards, you know, I would just remind everyone who is watching today that this is something that we talked about in the election period. It was in our platform commitment that we would work towards combining the old paper health care cards with the highly secure Alberta drivers' licences and Alberta ID cards. Our drivers' licences and ID cards in Alberta are among the best in the country when it comes to their security measures, and it's a form of ID that the majority of Albertans are familiar with and already have. I'm excited to continue that important work to deliver on that platform commitment.

You know, the items mentioned by the member in his questions about some of the funding from my department is a part of the next steps required to prepare our systems to support such a change, and I'm happy to continue working with my colleague the Minister of Health on dealing with the appropriate next steps that are necessary to deliver on this commitment. I know that this is something that's really important to Albertans. I've heard it a lot. I heard it during the election, and I hear it all the time since. Folks just know that the old paper health care cards need to go. It makes sense for us to have something more secure. So this is an important exercise. My budget outlines the funding that will go to one of the next steps to deliver on that, and the important work here will continue.

In terms of broadband, you know, there are some good questions that the member raised I'd like to provide some clarity on. Certainly, this is a topic that's near and dear to my heart. I think that in previous discussions with other members who are present today, they've heard me talk about how in the first summer after the election I toured all across the province to meet with rural and remote municipalities and members of the business communities in those jurisdictions that are underserved or unserved today by high-speed connectivity. This is a significant challenge and a problem we need to tackle in order to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of rural Alberta communities. There are so many reasons why it's important for us to be able to find a path forward to improving connectivity infrastructure, and that's why the broadband strategy that my department and I are continuing to work on is so important a priority. As a part of that, it's important that we consider that there are different modalities, different technology options for delivering high-speed connectivity, and depending on the community and depending on the region of the province, it's going to require different modalities to get the job done.

In some communities we know that delivering fibre to the premises will make sense. In some cases, you know, that's the way to go. In other cases it's just cost prohibitive. It's not realistic to deliver fibre to the premises. An alternative to that is to use fixed wireless, which is, essentially, using wireless technology to broadcast from a fibre backbone and delivering that signal farther out into the remote communities and amplifying that so that those communities can get access to a higher speed connection.

But we also know that there are some areas in a province as large as Alberta that are so remote that even fixed wireless will not be a realistic option. That is why we continue to explore what might be possible with low Earth orbit satellite technology. As the member mentioned, there is a line item in the business plan that outlines a bit of a pilot exercise where we are exploring just that. I believe it's important for Albertans that we determine what tools are available and what they can realistically accomplish. This is an important exercise that forms a part of the broadband strategy, and that work will continue so that we can chart the best path forward that will help us to meet Albertans' needs when it comes to connectivity.

In terms of, you know, the broader broadband strategy I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the importance of working with the telcos as well as the Internet service providers who operate here in Alberta and have infrastructure and continue to invest in infrastructure to serve Albertans. That's an important ongoing part of the broadband strategy and the work that I and my department are doing. I've met with all of the telcos and the ISPs to make sure that I understand the challenges they face but also the opportunities they see on how they can leverage their networks to expand into more rural and remote communities in the months and years to come as we seek to improve the overall connectivity infrastructure and serve more Albertans.

The Chair: Minister, I will very quickly let you finish that sentence.

Mr. Glubish: [Inaudible] important. Thank you.

The Chair: Minister, do you want to restart that sentence? We missed it.

Mr. Glubish: I was just saying that we know that this is very important, and that work will continue.

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we will go back to Member Carson.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Chair. You know, I have a lot of questions here, and a few, you know, you were able to answer to what I was looking for. Hopefully, you can appreciate that for some of them, I am looking for a greater clarity through your ministry. Once again, just looking at the changes that we've seen from these business plans from 2019 to 2020, both eight pages long, down to five pages this year, was the minister, through the chair, given a specific direction to reduce the pages that are encompassing the metrics and ministry business plans, was this a direction from the office of the Premier – we've heard that in other estimates processes; I'm just hoping that you might be able to provide clarity – and if so, why?

Now, just regarding some of the further questions I have around FOIP, through the chair, I had asked: why did the minister make the decision to remove FOIP metrics entirely from Budget 2021? I can appreciate that the ministry discusses the importance of ensuring that this is, you know, available to the public. Specifically to a point the minister made that the ministry cares about outcomes and the public cares about outcomes, I believe that was the point. I would completely agree, through you, Chair, that they do care about the outcomes, and I feel that through the ministry business plans were a great opportunity through performance measures and metrics. We so often see that that is a very good opportunity to see whether the government and the ministry are hitting those targets. So just to once again reflect on why your department or your ministry made the decision to remove all metrics regarding FOIP in this year's business plans.

Further to that point, I had asked a question, through you, Chair, about the ministry annual reports and how they so often reflect the performance measures and the metrics that are specific within each ministry. They directly reflect back on that, so I'm wondering, with the major changes that we've seen to the performance measures and metrics in this year's business plan, if we can expect a more substantial measuring of the measures and targets in the annual report. Will you commit to that?

7:40

Is the minister, through the chair, even planning to submit an annual report? I guess that is another important question, hopefully, but the more important question is that while many of these metrics

have been removed, the minister is committed to ensuring that they are in the annual report still. I appreciate, I think, the one metric that the ministry was able to provide around the 2021 target being 90 per cent. I'm hoping that the minister could provide, through the chair, if that is going to be the same target for the following year.

Of course, looking at this business plan, it is from '21 to '24. If those targets have changed from that 90 per cent, are they going up, or are they going down? That is an important question for myself and many Albertans, I imagine, as we reflect on the changes that have been made to FOIP and, well, the lack of measurement that we're seeing within this business plan. Those are a few questions, once again, regarding FOIP, and I'm hoping to get some more clarity on that.

Back to the health care cards – and I appreciate the minister touching on that – I don't feel that there was a clear enough answer for me to take back to my constituents regarding if the minister can provide a specific line item where the \$600,000 expense is to be found in this year's budget. Once again, I'm wondering how the ministry came to the conclusion that \$600,000 was going to be enough to implement this process. It somewhat sounded from the minister's words, through the chair – and please correct me if I'm wrong – that this was just the beginning of a process, that it could very well cost more than \$600,000 to implement. I'm hoping once again, Minister, through the chair, that you are willing to commit this evening.

While I understand that it's a complex issue, it is a very important one, as protecting every single dollar that Albertans are counting on right now is just as important. I'm hoping for a commitment from the minister that no matter how much this ends up costing – it is an important initiative – there aren't going to be fee increases on Albertans who are simply trying to get identification. You know, there are many instances, whether it's somebody who lost it, whether it's somebody who is potentially currently houseless that are trying to get their hands on identification, and if we're talking about modernizing ID in the province and health care identification specifically, is there going to be a cost in the future to Albertans? Once again, I'm hoping that the minister is willing to commit that that won't be the case.

Just reflecting on some of the comments regarding broadband, I think a few of my questions were answered, so I appreciate that, Minister. Just once again looking at the \$150,000 that has been committed through, well, initially page 97 of your ministry business plan, I would ask once more if this is the only new money in this year's budget to support the expansion of rural broadband high-speed. I mentioned that we see developing a broadband strategy twice in the government fiscal plan, on page 10 and again in the overview of the Budget '21 business plans on page 95, but once again there are no initiative-supporting key objectives that would indicate there are any new dollars to implement such a strategy past the \$150,000 that you mentioned. Hopefully, the minister, through the chair, might be able to clarify if there are further dollars and what line item we can find that in.

You know, just remembering back to an interview that the minister had done for St. Albert, this once again is regarding the development of a broadband strategy, which is key, I would say, to the minister's work over the last two years and into the next year and a half, two years. In an interview that the minister had done with St. Albert *Today* in August 2019, the minister referenced CRTC targets and explained that we have to figure out a way to get to 90 from 80 in the next two years. That was referencing the target access of 50 megabytes per second for download and 10 megabytes for upload speeds if that matters. It's important to rural Albertans, but if those specific criteria matter to you, Minister. Minister, it's

now been two years since that original commitment, and I'm asking if your ministry is any closer to hitting those targets than they were two years ago. If you can be specific with how far you've come, if there's a certain amount of the population that has achieved those targets since those comments were made, that would be greatly appreciated.

These are, you know, as you've stated and as I have before, important issues across the province. While reflecting on some of the work that has been done on this issue, we see even in our big or major municipalities that they aren't hitting those targets. It's not just about rural. While they are most definitely disproportionately affected by these issues, it is a matter of across the province, not just in rural communities.

To move on from those original questions, does the minister have any specific targets for the number of Albertans that the ministry would like to see connected to high-speed broadband by 2024, which is the last year of these budget estimates? I think that's an important question, which we do not see reflected in this budget, unfortunately, or in the business plans as have been presented.

Now, on the same topic – we had the opportunity to discuss this to some extent during the 2019 budget deliberations – in the development of the strategy that the ministry is promising later this year, do you have a commitment from the federal government to support the implementation? Was there any consultation on the availability of funds through the universal broadband fund, which has been put forward by the federal government to further broadband initiatives in our province, and will the department be supporting any of the proposals put forward by Alberta stakeholders? Finally, Minister, have there been any missed deadlines to secure federal funding through programs like the universal broadband fund? The deadline for that, as far as I remember, came up in January 2021. Once again, if you can provide whether there are any stakeholders who will be able to access provincial funding . . .

The Chair: I will let you finish your thought process, Mr. Carson.

Mr. Carson: Thank you. Once again, if there are any stakeholders that will be accessing provincial funding based on that program and if we missed any deadlines.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we move on to the minister for 10 minutes of reply.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for those questions. Just to touch first on the health card comment, the \$600,000, and say that that is found in the capital investment envelope funding on line 8.4 of the estimates. Again, I referenced that that is an investment being made as one of the next steps required to ensure that our systems are prepared to support this important platform commitment, and the work on that will certainly continue.

You know, tying back to some of the broadband comments here, I think that you referenced some comments I had made back in 2019 in a discussion with a St. Albert news outlet when we were talking about the CRTC targets. Those targets, just for anyone who's maybe not familiar, are the universal targets for minimum speeds. The CRTC has set those targets to say that all Canadians should have access to 50 megabytes a second download speeds and 10 megabytes a second upload speeds by, I believe, the year 2030, and there are some intermediate targets as well. I believe it was averaging 90 per cent coverage by 2021.

With that in mind, I know that the member had asked me a question of – you know, I had referenced needing to go from 80 per cent to 90 per cent in the next two years – do I know where we're at right now? I'm pleased to say that we've been doing a lot of work on this to ensure that we have a really accurate understanding of how many households and communities in Alberta are not achieving those target speeds today so that we can get a better understanding of "How big is this problem?" and also figuring out, then, "How do we start tackling this problem one byte at a time?" and ensuring that the resources that go to tackling this problem are going to their maximum effect.

7:50

I'm pleased to share with the committee that Alberta is currently at 88 per cent coverage. You know, of course, work continues, and there are many telecommunication companies and Internet service providers who continue to invest in expanding their connectivity infrastructure all across Alberta. I think that puts us in a good position to continue with some momentum to shooting for that 90 per cent accessibility target for the year 2021.

In terms of specific interactions with the federal government, who, as you mentioned, have a program called the universal broadband fund, which is \$1.57 billion, I believe, for the entire country over the next seven years to support investments in connectivity infrastructure, it will be important for Alberta to obtain its fair share of this universal broadband fund. Of course, I've been working hard to advocate on behalf of Alberta projects and, you know, Alberta broadband stakeholders to ensure that they have the support they need from me and from my department in their applications to the universal broadband fund.

Because this is a program that is going to go over seven years – you know, I know the member had mentioned some deadlines and was asking some questions around missed deadlines, and he referenced a date in January. I just want to highlight that there are actually multiple sets of deadlines for various milestones in the program. There were some deadlines for some early fast-track projects, but more recently – there originally had been a deadline of February 15. In the conversations that I'd had with all of the telcos and ISPs and municipalities and all of the folks who are working so hard to try and tackle this problem, they shared with me: "You know what? It's unrealistic for us to be able to in such a short time frame." From when the federal government had announced that this segment of the universal broadband fund would be open for applications and the deadline that they had set, there was not enough time to put forward comprehensive submissions seeking support from the federal government.

I spent some time, you know, working with my counterparts in Ottawa. I wrote to Minister Monsef on this issue, explaining that this was a problem, advocating and encouraging them to consider extending that application time frame, and I'm pleased to say that, in part because of the work that I did and that my department did on this, we were successful in convincing the federal government to move that deadline back to March 15 of this year. I'm confident that that helped a number of Alberta projects who otherwise would not have been able to get their proposals in to be able to get something in on time.

Certainly, for all of the telcos and ISPs that talked to me and to my department about their ambitions and their plans to seek UBF funding, I worked very closely with them to ensure that they had a letter of support outlining the critical importance of those projects to expanding connectivity infrastructure for rural and remote and indigenous communities in Alberta.

I'm actually pleased to say that there was some news today that came out related to the UBF of some projects that were approved. They are projects that will serve the communities of Faust, Assumption, New Sarepta, Waskatenau, Islay, Ashmont, Radway, Fort Assiniboine, Peers, Tomahawk, Warspite, Newbrook, Hythe, Eaglesham, Grouard, Wanham, Joussard, Brownvale, Woking, Dixonville, DeBolt, Duchess, Rumsey, Youngstown, Strome, Torrington, Hughenden, Elnora, Galahad, Cereal, Alliance, Czar, Acadia Valley, Halkirk, New Norway, Lake Louise, Bragg Creek, Stavely, Blackie, Milo, Standard, Rockyford, Lomond, Arrowwood, and Enchant.

So 45 different communities representing about 4,771 premises will be in line for some significant investments from Alberta telcos, who got approval from the universal broadband fund. I think that the work that we've been doing to work with telcos to understand the challenges they face and the opportunities they see and their plans to leverage their existing infrastructure to expand into rural and remote communities that need better service and then working with the federal government and municipalities to understand, you know, how we can bring everyone together so that we're pulling in the same direction: that work is resulting in very real positive change to expand infrastructure for better connectivity in rural and remote Alberta. This is a step in the right direction, but of course there's a lot of work that continues that needs to be done. This is evidence that the approach we're taking is generating positive results.

You know, I think it's so important to be working with all of the different stakeholders who have a hand in trying to tackle this problem, ranging from the telcos and ISPs to the municipalities themselves, to the business communities or the regional economic development associations, who all see the importance of making these improvements and who have worked so hard to support their communities and to work with us to ensure that we all are working from the same information and can collaborate on tackling this challenge.

We know that the federal government has set some targets. They want a hundred per cent universal access to these speeds by the year 2030. It's going to take some time to get there, of course, and that's why this strategy is so important. It's why we need to work collaboratively with all of the stakeholders and organizations that are putting effort and resources towards meeting these important needs.

I think, you know, a part of that good news, that announcement that was announced today about the UBF: I believe it's over \$5 million of support that was included there. This is real money being announced, and we had a hand in trying to unlock that and making sure that the folks looking to deploy their resources with these supports had the support they needed from us to ensure that they maximize their probability of success at getting that funding from the federal government.

More work to be done but some really good progress, and it's timely that that was an announcement today.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Minister.

With that, we have nine minutes left in the first 50-minute block. Do the member and the minister wish to share their time?

Mr. Carson: Yes. I would appreciate that. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Minister.

Mr. Glubish: I'm happy to stick with the block time. Thank you.

The Chair: So the entire block is to the Official Opposition.

Mr. Carson: Wonderful. Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that.

I want to circle back – we've gotten a little away from these points – to FOIP for just, hopefully, one more time here, Minister. As far as I remember – I apologize; the days are long here – I don't believe that I received an answer for this one. Maybe I did, but I apologize in that case. You had mentioned, once again, in the 2021 business plan, regarding FOIP, that 2021 targets were 90 per cent of people receiving their FOIP back within I believe it was 60 days. I'm wondering if the targets have changed for the years to follow. So 2021 you've committed to 90 per cent. What are the years to follow that in terms of targets? Once again, are they going up? Are you expecting that more FOIP requests will be responded to in a timely manner as per the metrics that used to be in your business plan? If that's the case or not.

I'm also going to circle back, Minister, through the chair, on this question. I don't think that we've heard a commitment from the ministry, and I'm really hoping that we get one because this issue is top of mind for Albertans as they're seeing these changes take place, changes that I, once again, support, but we need to make sure that they're being done in a manner that reflects the importance that we are placing as a government right now on protecting every single dollar that we can for Albertans.

8:00

When it comes to the \$600,000 cost – and you've provided a line item for that in your budget, and I greatly appreciate that. But I'm hoping that the minister, through the chair, can make a commitment this evening that there will be no new fees or costs on Albertans because of the changes that the ministry and this government are making to modernize health care identification cards. That is a very important question. I hope that the minister will make that commitment.

Just looking back at the broadband high-speed Internet and your ministry business plans, the minister once again committed to a strategy later this year, and I appreciate that very much. I pointed out that as far as I can see, the \$150,000 is the only new money in this year's budget to support the expansion of high-speed broadband Internet. I, once again, appreciate that the minister laid out many communities who are going to be able to access the federal program. That is great news. Absolutely no doubt about it. But I guess I would ask the minister if the department has had any actual hand in moving those cases forward. The minister talked about, you know, loosely, that potentially a lot has been learned or that they've been able to share their expertise. Is there any line item in the minister's budget that reflects actually supporting moving that program forward and helping communities access that program?

Minister, a comment was made regarding the federal program. It was said that the time frame was too short. I'm just wondering if – the minister said that that was because municipalities were not prepared for this. I have had the opportunity to talk to a lot of these nonprofits and municipalities, that seem very prepared to move forward. So I would just have to circle back in and ask once again if, to clarify, the minister is clear that it was the municipalities who were not prepared to do this or if it was indeed the ministry who was not able to either help support these municipalities or – whether that's the case or not.

Finally, when we reflect on the federal program and talked a lot about the opportunities that are there and the communities that will be accessing that, was there any commitment that the minister made to tie any provincial dollars to that? In a lot of instances we hear about a 33 per cent split between different levels of government. As far as I can tell, that hasn't been the case. Has the minister

committed any dollars to help implement these strategies and these programs that are being accessed through that federal program? Thank you.

Looking back at another important service, the SuperNet, the ministry added performance metrics regarding the number of sites transitioned to new SuperNet services in the 2020 ministry business plans, 3(a) on page 149, but they are noticeably, once again, missing from this year's plan. I'm hoping that the minister can explain why that happened. In the 2020 business plans these metrics show that a target of 1,358 sites would be transitioned to the new SuperNet services in the '21-22 budget. Is the ministry on schedule to meet these targets? Are there targets past the '21-22 budget cycle? Once again, it's been removed from your business plan, so people have questions about this, whether the minister is meeting the targets that are in place for this year or if you're still tracking that in the years to follow.

Similarly, 3(a) in the 2020 business plans explains that the site transition would offer "new enhanced services, improved metrics, and is more fiscally responsible." Can the minister take – well, I suppose the minister can take as long as he wants at this point – just a moment to explain how we can ensure that this has been the case? What savings have been made that show that your ministry's target of fiscal responsibility is being met? And can the minister point to a line item that shows that that responsibility is being met?

School districts have been receiving subsidies for SuperNet coverage from the province. Can the minister please point to which line item that is under and how it's been impacted, if there are fewer subsidies going to support these important services, if it's the same, if it's more? I would appreciate that very much, Minister.

Now, just finally, I suppose a broader question about high-speed Internet and rural connectivity. I know that comments have been made, whether at the AUMA or elsewhere throughout the province, on the importance of broadband to the minister's government. I'm hoping that you can expand on where the plan is. The minister mentions that it will be released later this year, but I'm hoping that the minister can also explain who specifically has been consulted with, if there's a formal process for that consultation, and, as far as I can tell, why we haven't heard anything about it, if that consultation is still going to happen before the broadband strategy is put forward or if the minister believes that that consultation has already taken place.

Now, moving on to another important piece of the Service Alberta portfolio, on page 97 of the ministry business plan, under initiatives supporting key objectives, the minister lists that there is a \$10.7 million investment in updating services. Can you explain why that investment is being made at a time when you have expressions of interest out to privatize what may or may not be in these services? Maybe the minister can clarify that that is indeed the wrong budget line item to be looking at, or if it is, in fact, that line item, why is that investment being made at the same time as there is an expression of interest to privatize these services?

Page 121 of this year's fiscal plan explains that the ministry is also evaluating the sale of land titles and surveys, corporate registry co-operatives, and personal property registries to create efficiencies and promote effectiveness. In the expression of interest that this government has put forward to privatize these services, it explains that in the last fiscal year there was revenue generation of \$123 million. I'm hoping that the ministry could provide the revenue projections for this fiscal year and how these numbers relate to profit. Do these numbers include operating expenses as well . . .

The Chair: I will just let you very quickly finish your sentence.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that.

If that also included operating expenses, if it was net or gross. Thank you.

The Chair: That concludes the first portion of questions from the Official Opposition.

With that, we now move on to the government caucus for 20 minutes of questions from members. I see Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Would the minister agree to back and forth, or would he prefer block time?

The Chair: To the minister.

Mr. Glubish: Sure. Let's go with block time.

Mr. Gotfried: All right. Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister and his hard-working staff for appearing in front of our committee this evening. It's very clear to all of us that technology is really the future and something that's having an incredible impact, perhaps even more marked during the current pandemic across all sectors of society and certainly in all levels of government. That's why it's so important for Alberta to embrace the opportunities that technology and innovation present.

Certainly, one example that I'm very familiar with is in Calgary at SAIT, or the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. In their own 2020-2025 strategic plan they committed to embedding digital and leadership literacy in all of their programs, which is really great to see, our postsecondaries moving forward with that initiative and never more so again than during this pandemic, when they've been forced to really embed that technology in terms of their learning as well. They did this, actually, by establishing the School for Advanced Digital Technology, which will quite truly act as a catalyst to push the institution to embrace a future driven by cutting-edge digital innovation, which I think is very timely indeed.

Through the chair, when you look at where Service Alberta was when you first became minister and compare it to the course you're plotting ahead, I'd be very interested in your comments around what Alberta-based initiatives you're most excited about. I know that you've got a deep background in innovation and technology and venture capital, so I'd be very, very interested in your thoughts and comments on the evolution of Service Alberta and how that will better serve our province and all Albertans.

The Chair: Mr. Gotfried, I would just remind you to make sure that you are directing your questions through the chair and not directly at the minister.

8:10

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I apologize.

Madam Chair, despite the pandemic 2020 was gratefully and perhaps surprisingly a record year for tech sector investment in Alberta. Probably a bit of a surprise to most of us that that occurred in the middle of this, really, very difficult time for us and a time of uncertainty for many sectors. One of the things I'm personally most excited about is the recent announcement by Infosys, a global digital services company based in India that is dramatically expanding its operations in Calgary from seven employees to 500, with the potential of creating in excess of over 2,000 jobs in the years ahead.

Again through the chair, I know the minister has a background in this investment world of high tech, so I know that this is just one example of the demonstrable success of our government's policies, business-friendly and job-creation policies like the job-creation tax

cut. Hopefully, this will signal a game change with respect to attraction of more investments and jobs in the future as we build critical mass in this all-important sector.

Again to the minister, through the chair: leaders in this sector have been asking for many, many years for collaboration, for innovation, for support of their entrepreneurial spirit but also for well-reasoned risks associated with development of emergent technology and the world-leading applications and commercialization that we all hope will come from that and establish Alberta as a centre for innovation and commercialization of that technology. We're renowned, I think, around the world for our embedding and use of technology in the energy sector particularly. We have so many well-educated people in that sector, some looking for retraining in other sectors and diversification. So we're very blessed to have that.

Very broadly, please feel free, when your time comes back again, through the chair, to elaborate and share your passion for the sector with us, how your budget and associated business plan will fulfill this request from our leaders in the technology sector, and how our shared business and economic diversification objectives will be met through that budget and through the business plan that is in front of us during this time.

I'd like to move on, Chair and again to the minister, to some discussions about the mandate and structure on page 95 and outcome 1 on page 97 of the budget with respect to some of the other aspects of your plan for 2021-22. Again, through the chair, Minister, our government has committed to reducing red tape by one-third by the end of our mandate. I know that that's not just through the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction; that's across all ministries in our government. Last year in partnership with British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba you announced a new online service that simplified the registration process across provincial lines, making it easier for owners to grow their businesses without barriers, which we face. I know that Alberta has been a leader in trying to break those barriers down.

Again, through the chair, I was interested to read about Service Alberta's plans for – I'll quote from the business plan – “developing advances in technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning, and robotic process automation,” again, many of the buzzwords that we hear. That's on page 95 of your business plan. The pandemic more than anything else has certainly highlighted where there may be technology gaps. We all are relying even more on technology in many respects today than we were just a year ago. But I think that I and maybe most Albertans consider the digital gap in relation to being able to access more online services. Again, through the chair, to the minister: in what ways are these three technologies – just to recap that: artificial intelligence, machine learning, and robotic process automation – important to Service Alberta? How could they be used within your department to, again, enhance the offerings to Albertans through the ministry?

Further on that particular point, in what ways can government innovate, and how does that ultimately achieve broader government goals? I know that Service Alberta sometimes becomes a hub of so much innovation and activity and processes, so I'm very interested, again, through the chair, in what ways our government, your government, can innovate and ultimately achieve the broader goals of Albertans.

Lastly on that point, are you able to put a time frame on what government and when government can complete this work? Again, through the chair, Minister, an aggressive timeline on this might make you the terminator of old, outdated processes. You know, I can get back to that later.

Through the chair again, I think these are just enough for us to digest. There's a lot of work, I know, going on, Minister, through the chair, in your department, some incredible innovation going on, some attraction of some of the world's leaders in technology. I'm very interested. I know, again, your passion for technology and investment attraction and innovation and how we can engage that through government to make Alberta stand out amongst jurisdictions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gotfried. I believe you will be ceding the rest of your time over to Mr. Rutherford. Is that correct?

Mr. Gotfried: Yes. I'll cede to MLA Rutherford, please, to finish this round.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Rutherford, the floor is yours.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the minister and his staff for being here this evening to answer our questions. With just a few minutes left, I'll just jump right into it. Minister, I'm looking now at key objective 1.1, which is on page 97. It has a focus on “a digital strategy that ensures [that] new systems are digital by default.” That reminds me of your announcement last summer establishing an online birth registry accessible from, really, any location, you know, by computer, smart phone, et cetera, really any device connecting to the Internet. What I was wondering: aside from the intention of new systems being digital by default, what else does your digital strategy aim to do, and when will Albertans get to see this strategy?

Also, what kind of costs are there in reviewing a strategy and bringing it into being, and which line item would that be included under? That would be good to know as well, please.

Does the transition to digital by default change staffing requirements from your current FTE positions to requiring more in other areas, you know, of Service Alberta? Depending on how big of a thing that we're growing here, something similar to SkyNet or along those lines, how many people is it going to require? It would be helpful to know.

Can you give us an example of what a digital by default system might be? That would be helpful, I think, for people to be able to, you know, have a reference to draw from so that they can see the vision that you're putting together here.

I think I've got time to squeeze in one more question. Is there an additional time requirement to create digital systems as opposed to the regular systems that we currently have?

I hope you got those questions. If there's something that was missed there, I'd be happy to repeat it as we get back to our block in just a few minutes. I think that with a just few seconds left, I'll turn it over to the minister.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rutherford.

With that, we go to a 10-minute block to Minister Glubish.

Mr. Glubish: Okay. Thank you, Chair, and thank you to my colleagues for those thoughtful questions. I'll start with MLA Gotfried's questions. I know he was just starting to talk a little bit about, you know: what am I generally excited about when it comes to the innovation and technology piece of our strategic direction as a ministry and how that factors into our budget? Certainly, this has always been my passion. Long before I was an MLA, I spent the better part of a 15-year career as a venture capital investor, where I worked to invest millions and millions of dollars into Alberta-headquartered technology companies, helping them to commercialize their intellectual property, develop their technology

solutions, growing their customer bases, attracting more investment, and creating jobs here in Alberta and, ultimately, supporting their technologies all around the world. In fact, one of those companies now sells their medical diagnostics technology in over 45 countries to over 1,500 hospitals all around the world. They're a leader in their space.

That work showed me the power of technology and what it can do when you can find a way to apply these new tools and these new innovative technologies to solve a problem in a new way. You can sometimes completely disrupt an industry. You can completely transform how the world does things. By doing so, you can improve the quality of service that is being delivered, whether it be to someone's customers in the case of a business or whether in our case, as a government, that be to the residents that we represent and serve.

8:20

You know, that time as a venture capital investor really prepared me, I think, for this role by helping me to understand the power of technology and the transformations that are possible and how that can allow us as a public-sector organization to really make significant strides in improving the quality of services we deliver to Albertans while also finding ways to save taxpayer money, which in some cases will allow us to free that up to reinvest in other priorities in helping us to meet the key objectives that Albertans have told us are important to them.

That's one of the things I'm really excited about as a part of this budget and as part of our business plan and our focus on innovation and technology. You know, you referenced the Infosys move to expanding into Alberta with 500 new employees. I think that's a great-news story for Alberta. I think that over time my hope is that we're going to see a lot more of that. With the government being a user and a customer of technology, we can, I think, impact that technology ecosystem in a very positive way by demonstrating to folks who work in the technology space, who invest in the technology space that there is a lot of opportunity to ply their trade and to develop new tools right here in Alberta. That's why I think it's so important that we focus on developing a culture of innovation here at the government of Alberta.

You know, you talked a little bit about leaders in technology who are here in Alberta. I've worked very closely with a lot of those folks who are in that space for my previous career, and I kept in touch with them since. It's important for me to hear from them on what they see as being possible with the tools and technologies and expertise that they have and that they see among their peers in the industry so that we can keep an eye out for: what are some tools that we can adopt in the government of Alberta to be better at what we do and ultimately doing better, not doing less?

You know, you talked a bit about some of the reducing red tape comments, and you referenced the MRAS system, which is what we brought forward with those other jurisdictions that you mentioned. This is something that I was really excited about. It was an opportunity for crossborder collaboration to streamline corporate registry services. That allowed for corporations as well as our New West Partnership trade agreement partners to register a business in Alberta and to pay for an Alberta newly updated automated name search report online. Those are the important first steps of registering a business in this province, and we were able to successfully deliver on that to make that happen. This is a part of Alberta being open for business. This is one step where we were able to apply technology to make Alberta more open for business and remove unnecessary costs and barriers for those job creators that wanted to come and expand into Alberta. That's just one important example of modernization and applying technology.

You know, in terms of artificial intelligence and machine learning and robotic process automation these are really important technologies, and we know there's a lot of great expertise right here in Alberta. The Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute out of the University of Alberta is a great example. We have some of the brightest minds in the world, who have expertise in artificial intelligence and machine learning. Looking for ways to harness those tools in a practical sense in analyzing the data we have in government and analyzing how we anticipate the needs of Albertans and meet those needs so we can be more proactive and deliver a higher quality of service with a faster turnaround time and in some cases saving the taxpayer money: these are some of the great, exciting opportunities that we face by harnessing these technologies to improve everything that we do.

You know, in terms of just, "How can we innovate and achieve these broader goals of Albertans?" I think the key is building a culture of innovation so that everyone in the public service and everyone who is an elected official is always thinking: hey, the technology transforms at a rapid rate; how can we make sure that we are always mindful of what tools are out there and what technologies are available, and how can we adopt those to improve the way in which we interact with Albertans and serve them and meet their needs?

I think this is ultimately, with respect to time frame, an evergreen exercise. This is something that should be ongoing all of the time. There's a whole philosophy in business of continuous improvement. I think the Japanese really did a great job. You know, companies like Toyota pioneered this whole thought process of continuous improvement. I think that if we were to apply that way of thinking, combined with the passion for innovation, we will do wonders for improving the quality of services that Albertans can expect from their government while also addressing cost pressures and finding savings at the same time.

Moving maybe on to some of the questions from MLA Rutherford, you know, in terms of the digital strategy and the concept of digital by default, I mean, ultimately this is, again, another part that I'm really excited about, and it ties into that culture comment that I was making. If we can ensure that through any program that we're designing, any service that we're offering, any public policy consideration that we have before us, we're thinking: "In what ways could this be delivered digitally? In what way could we facilitate this digitally?" – when we're asking that at the beginning of the conversation, we can unlock significant opportunities for better quality of service, lower cost of delivery of service, and ultimately, at its core, better outcomes for Albertans. This is something that I've ensured that my department knows needs to be at the core of everything we do, and it's got to be at the root of all of the thinking we put into the work that we're doing.

You mentioned the online birth registry. I mean, that's certainly something I can relate to as a father. I just wish we would have been able to get this done before my son Max was born a year and a half ago. Nevertheless, it is operational now and has been for some time and is a great new choice and a new convenient way for new parents in Alberta to register the birth of their child and to do so electronically instead of having to fill out those forms. I remember what it was like for my wife and I when Max was born; you know, the sleep deprivation and just the whirlwind of welcoming a new member to your family. Having that online tool would have been a great amount of convenience to me at a stressful time, so I'm so glad that we've been able to bring that forward.

We're going to continue to see many other new services that we're working on to bring things online. I think I talked earlier

about the work that's ongoing in terms of renewals of drivers' licences and ID cards. We've got some work going on in the expansion of online vehicle registrations for farm and some commercial registrations. We have major life events registrations, ordering your personal driver's abstract online, ordering duplicate registration certificates online, ordering vehicle information reports, ordering specialty plates online. Ensuring that Albertans can immediately download documents that they order, like a driver's abstract or a vehicle registration certificate, so they don't have to wait for them to arrive by mail, I think, will be a bit of a game changer. It adds a lot of value and convenience for Albertans. It's a snapshot of some of the things that we're working on.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Minister. I appreciate that.

The government members' first block of questioning has now ended.

We now move on to our next round, which consists of five minutes of questions from the members, followed by five minutes of response from the minister. As mentioned, members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. Please remember that discussions should flow through the chair at all times regardless as to whether or not speaking time is combined.

With that, I see Mr. Carson for the ND caucus.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just to clarify, I think it would benefit all members of the public as well as the committee members if we had the opportunity to go back and forth here.

Mr. Glubish: Happy to stick with block time. Thanks.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Chair. That's unfortunate but, of course, up to the discretion of the minister. I just want to circle back, appreciating that I had a lot of questions in the last block. Maybe, hopefully, the minister will be able to provide clarity to some of them. For the sake of the minister, I will repeat some of them though likely not all of them.

Now, I want to circle back on this question one more time – for the third, maybe fourth time now – regarding the health care identification process that the minister is planning on implementing. There's a \$600,000 cost associated with it. I'm hoping that the minister, with the time that follows, will commit that no new fees will be put onto Albertans based on the cost of implementing this program. This, Minister, could be a very beneficial and successful program for your government. Alternatively, if fees increase or if there is a cost associated with receiving these health care identification cards, I imagine that it is going to be quite the opposite.

8:30

Now, just touching on some of the questions I asked earlier regarding land titles, surveys, corporate registries, co-operatives, and personal property registries, on page 97 of the ministry business plan, under Initiatives Supporting Key Objectives, it lists that there is a \$10.7 million investment in updating services. I previously asked if you can explain if this budget line item is tied to these registry services that I just listed, and if that is the case, why is the minister putting money into it at a time when the ministry is also putting out expressions of interest to privatize these services?

Now, page 121 of this year's fiscal plan explains that the ministry is also evaluating the sale of these registries, as I explained, to "create efficiencies and promote effectiveness." In the expression of interest the minister and the government put forward to privatize

these services, it explains that in the last fiscal year there was revenue of \$123 million. What are the projections from the ministry for this fiscal year? How do these numbers relate to profit? Do they include operating expenses?

Now, further to that, if it is the case that the \$123 million is clear profit for the government, why, in a time when the government should be doing everything it can to strengthen any opportunities for revenue generation, is this minister moving forward with a plan to privatize these services, which, as far as we can tell, are generating revenue? I would appreciate it if the minister wanted to correct the record on that.

Now, regarding the recent expression of interest for the privatization of these services, the closing time for the expression, as described by the expression, was February 12 of this year. Can the ministry confirm that the binding proposal submission deadline continues to be late Q2 or early Q3? This is relative to the budget because this will change line items that we see in this budget, and I'm interested to see how these potential sales of these services might affect it.

Now, I'm wondering why the minister decided on a 35-year sole-source contract. Can the minister explain the consultation process for how that 35-year sole-source contract came to be, and was there any formal public consultation that led to those conclusions? Can the minister table a list of the parties who put forward a submission through that expression? After, of course, the contract is awarded, I imagine there is an NDA around that – I can appreciate that – but I think it's important for all Albertans that they understand exactly the process that took place and whether it was to the benefit of all Albertans.

Will the minister make a commitment to Albertans that over the next three to four years of the budget cycle that we have before us, Albertans will not see an increase to the fees they pay for the services that are currently being considered for privatization? I'm wondering, Minister, if this was part of the expression of interest or any of the discussions and consultations that went into the proposal of privatizing these services, and if not, why not? I think it's important, once again, that Albertans have the opportunity to understand the value that this government is so certain is there for them in the privatization of these services.

Finally, Minister, on this topic, has your ministry done any valuations of land titles and registries to determine how much they are worth?

Thank you.

The Chair: Perfect timing on that one, Mr. Carson.

Now to the minister for five minutes of reply.

Mr. Glubish: Okay. Great. I know that I'm trying to make up for lost time, because there was a block where I didn't get an opportunity to respond to the member for his questions, so I'm going to try and catch up on some of these.

Maybe I'll just start, though, with the land titles topic because that is, you know, an important conversation. First of all, I would just like to correct the member. He's talked about a 35-year sole-source contract. That is not accurate. This is a 35-year concession agreement that we were exploring, and those are very different things.

When I looked at the potential opportunity to collaborate with the private sector to improve the quality of services that we deliver to Albertans through the land titles, corporate, and personal property registries, it was very important to me that if we were going to explore this, we had to do it in an open and transparent manner.

That is why we began this with a public request for expression of interest that was posted on the Alberta Purchasing Connection website in accordance with all of our procurement rules and regulations. To allege that this is a sole-source contract is completely inaccurate, and I just want to get on the record clarifying that.

All of the details of this proposed exercise are outlined in this public request for expression of interest document. For example, the timelines that the member was asking about are all listed in section 3.2 of the request for expression of interest. In the interests of time and to make sure that I get to more questions, I'm going to leave it for the member to review that document at his leisure. So why, at the end of the day, are we looking at this? You know, the member was asking questions about: why would we consider this if this brings in revenues to the Alberta government? Well, at the end of the day, this is about making sure that we find the best way to deliver the best quality of service to Albertans and to maximize value for Albertans and to ensure that we're able to modernize and innovate.

We have learned from other jurisdictions who have had some great success at partnering with the private sector on these types of registries, and we believe that we can learn from them and explore whether or not Albertans could experience similar benefits from a similar partnership. No final decisions have been made on this. We are going through the process that's outlined in the request for expression of interest. This has all been publicly disclosed in an open and transparent manner, and that process is going to continue. That's super important to me, to ensure that Albertans can follow along. Ultimately, you know, my goal is to make sure that I represent the best interests of Albertans through this entire exercise.

Circling back to another thing that I know was important to the member and, again, because I didn't have an opportunity to respond to his last block of questions, I'll jump to it now. That is just related to the FOIP stuff about the metrics. I can assure the member that in the annual plan the metrics will continue to be reported, and that document is a publicly available document. I think that should be some helpful context for the member related to that question that was important to him.

In terms of the registry modernization, the \$10.7 million that the member mentioned, these are primarily focused on the motor vehicle registry systems and the vital statistics systems; they are not relevant to the land titles, corporate, or personal property registries that are the subject of this request for expression of interest. I've outlined in some of my previous comments to both the government members as well as just general discussion some of the different modernization efforts that I am undertaking, so in the interests of time I won't rehash those here.

In terms of the broadband conversation, first of all, I never said that the municipalities were not prepared for the UBF applications. In fact, mostly it's not municipalities that are making those applications; it's the private-sector telcos and ISPs that are making those applications. Obviously, there's a lot of collaboration with municipalities because they're the ultimate communities that need better service, but the ones doing the work to deliver that service for the most part are those private-sector telcos. It was in those discussions that we learned that they would need more time in order to increase the volume and quality of applications they could make. It was important that we advocate for that extension, and we got that extension. It resulted in better quality and more applications, and we've seen today, just today, some approvals from the . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I will let you very quickly finish your sentence so that we get that on the record.

Mr. Glubish: I just was saying that the work we did in that regard succeeded in improving the outcomes.

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we go back to the government caucus, and I believe we have Mr. Smith.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can you hear me?

The Chair: Yes, we can, Mr. Smith.

Mr. Smith: Okay. Thank you very much.

Through the chair to the minister, would the minister like to move forward with block time or with back and forth?

The Chair: Minister, we couldn't hear you.

Mr. Glubish: Yes, please. Block time.

8:40

Mr. Smith: Okay. Thank you very much, Minister. Through the chair and to the minister, your outcome 2, page 97, continues the narrative around technology improvements. Considering your stated goal of modernizing the way the government's data information is managed, I have a question about the government's website. You know, I've had the opportunity to look at the government's new web page, livesandlivelife.alberta.ca, and for an old codger like me, that still works in smoke signals most of the time in his life, I found it fresh and modern and easy to navigate, and I want to stress the "easy."

You know, when I took a look at the web page and I saw the COVID restrictions, I thought: that's something that my constituents would really want to look at. I can see the current restrictions, the path forward, non-English resources, isolation supports and mental health supports, a live chat under mental health. It was all very easy to navigate. So I guess the first question I've got that I'd like you to consider as we go into the question here is, through the chair to you: are there any plans to update the full Service Alberta site to have a look and a feel that's more like that page?

Secondly, I'm curious about the language under your key objective 2.1 on page 97, which says that you're looking to introduce "common and consistent ways of classification, organization and access." Now, to me, that sounds like there has been previously, perhaps, and maybe even still an office-by-office approach to information. You know, maybe I misunderstand this, but when I was a teacher, we used to talk about the Industrial Revolution, and we used to look at a thing called interchangeable parts and how that really made the manufacturing process move much more smoothly. I think that that's maybe an analogy – maybe it breaks down at some point in time – that we can use when you refer to this whole lay of common and consistent ways of classification, organization, and access. So the question I'd like you to answer, through the chair to you, would be: in what ways does this lack of consistency make it more difficult for government to do its work?

Thirdly, with your first identified initiative on page 97, you've allocated about what looks like \$5.1 million to modernize information management tools. What types of services do these tools actually provide, and how are they expected to improve functions as people interface with them?

Lastly, can you explain for us how the \$2.5 million allocated in your second initiative on page 97 – that's \$2.5 million allocated in your second initiative on page 97 – will help ensure better policy and program decisions?

Madam Chair, how much time do we have left?

The Chair: Mr. Smith, you have a minute left.

Mr. Smith: Okay. I guess, lastly, then, I would just ask that when you provide me with those answers, help me, help the people of Alberta to understand how these changes that I'm asking you to talk about tonight and the monies that you're placing before these initiatives are going to help government to work for Albertans. I think that probably all these things ultimately, I believe, can help Albertans to interface with government, which is sometimes very difficult to do. So if you could consider, in the course of answering these questions: just how is it going to help Albertans?

Madam Chair, is there significant time? Do we need to cede it over to somebody else?

The Chair: No. There is not significant time left, and I just need to remind you to make sure that you are directing your questions through the chair and not directly at the minister.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: To the minister for five minutes of reply.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to my colleague for those questions. You know, on the first question, about the plans for the overall Service Alberta site, I guess a point of clarification is that communications and public engagement is responsible for both the site livesandlivelihoods.alberta.ca as well as the government's main site, alberta.ca. We do work with and support CPE on the delivery of those web properties. You know, our core web platform, alberta.ca, does continue to expand to ensure usability, accessibility, availability, efficiency, et cetera. Over the last few years a lot of government web content has been migrated to alberta.ca, and individual department websites have also been incorporated into alberta.ca, which does help to also achieve efficiencies and reduce some costs. We do collaborate with CPE on the design and user experience together for all government websites and applications as part of our ongoing work, but any specific, I think, questions related to those sites would be best directed to CPE.

On the second question, you know, related to the common and consistent ways of classification, organization, and access that you outlined in the business plan and your question about that, the fact is that right now there is a lack of consistency that creates information silos, and when there are information silos, that limits access and limits the proactive sharing of data information. We're looking to make sure that the proactive sharing of data information can lead to a reduced administrative burden within government and improve the programs and services that we deliver to Albertans. At the end of the day, we're serving Albertans. Albertans are our customers, so if we can make sure that we're focused on the customer experience to say that when they're coming to the government for help, if they had a one-window approach, where you come here once and you tell your story once and everyone who needs to be involved in helping you to address the concern – that's going to make life a lot easier for Albertans. I think that's some important work ahead of us.

On your third question, in terms of the \$5.1 million to modernize information management tools, you know, a lot of this is tied to the work on upgrading and implementing the full Microsoft 365 and Microsoft cloud services, which will modernize our productivity tools and improve collaboration for all government employees. Also, another important part of that is improving security and information management capabilities. These will include the Exchange Online for e-mail services; Teams for instant messaging, meeting and collaboration spaces and tools; Stream video hosting and transcribing services; SharePoint online as a platform for enterprise content management; OneDrive for business for

document storage and sharing; and Planner for light project management collaboration. The list goes on, but in the interests of time I think that's a good enough highlight.

By managing all of our content through Microsoft 365, we expect to see a reduction in the number of cybersecurity incidents and information breaches, also a reduction in file duplication, improved information sharing, and quicker information gathering to respond to FOIP requests. There are a lot of benefits to this effort, and, you know, I appreciate the work that my department is putting into this exercise.

In terms of your other question about the \$2.5 million in our second initiative and how that will help ensure better policy and program decisions, I think I referred to this a couple of times in my earlier remarks and answers, the importance of embracing technology in everything we do and harnessing technologies that are out there that will allow us to better analyze the data we have so we can better understand the needs of Albertans and to be more proactive at meeting the needs of Albertans. Embracing data analytics tools is going to be a big part of how we can help to improve outcomes for Albertans.

I think that dovetails into your last question, which ultimately was: how will these changes and this focus on technology help the government to work for Albertans and to improve life for Albertans? I think that ultimately it's about making sure that we use the best tools for the job to make sure we can do the best job possible to serve Albertans, meet their needs, and save them money.

I hope that that was helpful to provide some insight.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With that, we move to our last block from the Official Opposition.

8:50

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and once again I appreciate the opportunity to speak to many of these important issues this evening. I will just have to voice my frustration that, you know, a relationship – looking back to 2019, we've had the opportunity to go through the estimates process. We had a very, I believe, cordial back and forth at that time. I question what has changed since then that the minister is not willing to go back and forth. Well, I guess we might need to decide that. I'm not sure, but I will just take it that nothing has changed. A little frustrating that there are a lot of answers that go unanswered, I suppose, or a lot of questions that go unanswered, based on the conversation here tonight, but I will continue.

Minister, through the chair, performance indicator 2(d) in Budget 2019 tracked external malicious attacks prevented by information security controls in '18-19. It went on to state that 5,338 malware infections were prevented by security controls; 92 per cent of the 347 million e-mails received were blocked due to detected malicious content. Now, while these indicators were in place in Budget 2019, they're noticeably gone from your ministry business plans in this 2021 cycle, and as far as I can tell, cybersecurity isn't addressed at all in any of your plans. I'm hoping that you can explain why. Will we see performance metrics on this issue in the annual report?

Today the Minister of Labour and Immigration, during supplemental supply, confirmed that hundreds of Albertans had their data breached through the administration of the critical workers' benefit portal, which is done through the Ministry of Service Alberta, so I'm hoping that the minister can explain if there have been any other breaches to personal information within the last year in the ministry, and if so, how many people have been affected by those breaches?

Further, the November 2020 Auditor General report's recommendations showed that there are still major shortfalls when it comes to protecting information assets, which includes, I quote: assessing the risk to public information, determining if we have adequate IT security policies, determining who is responsible and accountable for these protections. The status in the report at the time was that your ministry was still not ready to move forward on these recommendations, that had originally been put in place in October 2012. Minister, can you explain whether or not we can expect to see the status change in subsequent AG reports, perhaps the next one, and what line item highlights the importance that the ministry is placing on these recommendations?

Now, finally, while I have time, I want to get this on the record and hopefully in writing. That would be wonderful. In the expression of interest that your government put forward around privatization of certain registry services, it was explained that last fiscal year there was a revenue of \$123 million. What are the ministry's revenue projections for this fiscal year? How do these numbers relate, once again, for I believe the third time, to the profit? Do they include operating expenses?

Finally, have you done or has your ministry done any valuations on land titles and registries to determine how much they are worth? If so, how much are they valued at? If not, I have to ask: why not? When we're going through this process of talking about potentially privatizing these services, I think Albertans rightfully expect an answer on the actual valuations of these services and what private corporations are potentially about to take from what was potentially, as far as we can tell, a revenue-generating process.

Now, how much time do I have, Madam Chair?

The Chair: One minute, 17 seconds.

Mr. Carson: One minute. Perfect.

Performance metric 3(b) on page 98 of the business plan shows the percentage of urgent tenancy dispute resolutions completed within established timelines, which is 15 days. It explains that in 2021, 94 per cent of urgent tenancy applications were heard within the established timeline, which has been affected by the process – the process has been affected due to COVID. I'm hoping that you can explain that further, hoping that the minister can share why, while the same caveat has been placed on the years to follow, '21-22 shows a drastic drop in your targets down to 81 per cent even though one year earlier you were able to hit 94 per cent.

Finally, if we have time, can the minister confirm whether or not performance metrics 3(a) and 3(b) on page 98 of the ministry business plans are separated metrics which were previously combined into one, as seen on page 147 of your 2020 ministry business plans. If so, can the minister explain why the term "inspections" has been removed from the performance metrics? Can the minister share how an inspection might differ from an investigation, for example? If the ministry is now tracking this separately, can you share the minister's targets for inspections since they are no longer listed in the business plans as a metric?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carson.

With that, we go over to Minister Glubish for the remaining five minutes.

Mr. Glubish: Okay. Great. Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a couple of quick questions that I want to address from a previous round. One of them was on the broadband, and it related to school subsidies for access to the SuperNet. I just want to point out that that is something out of the Education department's budget, not

Service Alberta's. I thought that would be some helpful information for the member.

In terms of the REOI and the revenue projections and whatnot I'll just draw the member's attention to the estimates themselves and say that there's a line item for land titles revenue and there's a land titles line item for expenses. Those are the numbers relevant to the land titles registry, so I think, you know, that should be helpful to address those questions about revenues.

In terms of the RTDRS and tenant disputes and whatnot I think, you know, something that would be important to highlight in the context of the pandemic is the important initiatives that we undertook last year in terms of supports for renters, when the pandemic began, to ensure that they would not be unnecessarily evicted for nonpayment of rent. I think that we had some outstanding policy on this because what we had found, since the pandemic began and with year-to-date numbers, is that the volume of applications to the RTDRS system for disputes over evictions related to nonpayment of rent is down by a little over 16 per cent in that period of time relative to the same period the previous year.

That's evidence that the work we did to provide a path for tenants and landlords to work together to solve the challenges and to work on establishing a payment plan, ensuring that there was eviction protection for those who did, was striking the right balance between making sure that bad actors who choose not to pay their rent still have to be accountable for their bad actions but that those who are making every honest effort and simply are having issues related to the COVID pandemic would not be unfairly penalized. This was a fair balance that respected the needs and priorities and challenges of both tenants and landlords, and as a result, we saw a decrease in the number of applications to the RTDRS for disputes related to evictions for nonpayment of rent. This is evidence of good policy that responded to a significant need that arose out of the pandemic.

I think another thing that's important to point out is that it was a commitment that I had made and continue to make to supporting and giving resources to the RTDRS system. You may recall from some previous discussions we've had that I ensured that we would have additional resources in the RTDRS. I knew, number one, because of the pandemic but, number two, also because we expanded access to that system to residents in mobile-home communities to deal with their disputes with a landlord of a mobile-home community, that we wanted to make sure that they could handle the volume of requests that would be arising in that time. It was important to me to make sure that we dedicated those resources, and we have done that, and this budget continues to support that and to ensure that that will continue going forward.

This is another example of how our government inherited a problem that was left completely unaddressed by the previous government, which was that the mobile-home communities wanted access to the RTDRS system. They wanted to be treated fairly, like all other tenants of traditional homes and condos and apartment dwellings, and we were able to, in my second bill as minister, bring forward that change that would give them access to this much-asked-for service and to ensure that the resources would be there to support it so it could deliver the important adjudications required for any disputes. Again, this was something the previous government failed to do, failed to acknowledge as a serious concern. We were able to get the job done.

I think we have a good track record of identifying what the needs are of Albertans and ensuring that we rise to the occasion, that we, in a thoughtful way, develop policy and implement legislation and tools that will . . .

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for the consideration of this ministry's estimates has now concluded.

I would like to remind all committee members that we are scheduled to next meet tomorrow morning, March 17, 2021, at 9

a.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Seniors and Housing.

Thank you, everybody. The meeting is now adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9 p.m.]

