

8:30 a.m.

[Mr. White in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the meeting to order. Ladies and gentlemen, you have an agenda before you. Might we have a motion on the agenda?

MR. SAPERS: I move.

THE CHAIRMAN: With enthusiasm we have Edmonton-Glenora moving. Is it agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's carried.

We have a motion that was put as notice. Mrs. O'Neill not being here, might we have someone move the motion so it may be amended? Mr. Johnson, would you so move?

MR. JOHNSON: I move. Sure.

THE CHAIRMAN: The motion as presented in the minutes has been moved. Is there some discussion?

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to propose an amendment to the motion, and I've circulated the amendment to every member here in the House. For the record I'd like to read it in.

Whereas the proceedings of the March 10, 1999, meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts are recorded in *Hansard*, it is moved that the current practice of summary minutes be forgone in favour of a brief and separate record of any decisions or motions that have been made and a record of the voting response to be noted.

THE CHAIRMAN: Further discussion on the amendment? Ms Blakeman.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. My thanks to the member for proposing this amendment. I have had some brief discussion on the amendment. I think I would be in favour of the amendment. I would not have been in favour of the original motion because the minutes that are taken of the proceedings of the Public Accounts Committee are what compile the official report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, which is tabled in front of this Legislative Assembly. So I would not be in favour of changing the way we do all of the minutes, because they do become the official record. But because there is an unease about the specific minutes for March 10, which we have had several attempts at trying to resolve here, I would be willing to make adjustments to that one and only set of minutes, that being the minutes, the proceedings for March 10, 1999, in order to satisfy some of the points that have been raised by various members of the Public Accounts Committee.

So I'm speaking in favour of the amendment but against the original motion. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Further discussion? Mr. Sapers.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I guess I just want to make it clear -- and I don't know whether it will require a further amendment or not. I hope it won't, because I'd like to just get on with this. But I'd like to make it clear, if the motion is amended, that the process of only including decisions and motions relates only to March 10 and we go back to having summary minutes for previous and subsequent meetings of this committee included in the report of the committee. I would like to recommend that the draft

minutes of the March 10 meeting, which were presented to this committee at our last meeting, be included in the annual report clearly identified as draft minutes because they do, of course, reflect the majority of discussion. That's a procedural issue. I don't think it requires further amendment. But it's a request from at least this member of the committee that we make it clear that this change only relates to March 10 and, further, that the clearly identified draft minutes become part of the annual report that's tabled from this committee.

THE CHAIRMAN: Speaking to the amendment, Mr. Shariff.

MR. SHARIFF: Well, I guess the minutes become the official record, and what the hon. member is proposing is a request. It's not a motion before the House, before this committee. If he would like to bring in a motion to deal with that separately, certainly we can entertain another vote on it. But I believe that currently the practice is that the minutes as approved will be part of the official report, and therefore I would not support the hon. member's request to include the draft minutes. That's not the practice, and I don't want to begin a new practice. I don't recommend that we do that.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair concurs with the Member for Calgary-McCall that the minutes are the official record in the filing. If the tradition in parliamentary procedure is to have a motion, an amendment, and then an amendment on the amendment, if the member wishes to amend the amendment by the addition, then that can be done.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Chairman, no. As I said, I don't want to complicate this. I don't want to add amendments and subamendments. I'll just simply table the draft minutes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Great.

On the amendment to the motion, is it agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those not concurring? Being none, on the motion as amended, is it agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's carried. Terrific.

On to the business at hand. We have approval of the minutes of the 17th and the 24th. The minutes of the 10th will be redrafted and brought forward next meeting.

A motion on the minutes of March 17 and March 24. Mr. Yankowsky. Is it agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's carried.

Today we have the Hon. Murray Smith with us, the Minister of Labour, and some of his staff.

Mr. Minister, if you'd like to introduce your staff, then we'll introduce the Auditor General's staff. Then perhaps you can lead us in a dissertation on the highlights of that year that we have in question.

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. To my right is Gerry Brygidyr, Chief Blue Goose Kahuna for financial services, Department of Labour. To his right is Brian Boon from the WCB, and to his right is David Renwick from the WCB, representing the

Workers' Compensation Board. They will be here to answer specific questions reflected in the financial statements released by the WCB on their calendar year ended December 31, 1997.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Auditor General, if you might.

MR. VALENTINE: Good morning, Mr. Chairman. On my right is Ronda White, a principal in the office whose responsibility is for the engagement of the audit of the Department of Labour. On my left is Jim Hug, Assistant Auditor General, whose portfolio engagements include the Department of Labour.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Mr. Minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to be here today before your committee to discuss Alberta Labour's performance over the 1997-98 fiscal year. I will reiterate that the WCB does operate at arm's length from the government. It's entirely funded by employer dollars, with no funds from general revenue. They do provide \$6 million through the collection of the OH and S levy that is then forwarded over to the Department of Labour for work on occupational health and safety.

Today's process provides some accountability, as the WCB is subject to some of the provisions affecting statutory corporations, including scrutiny by the Auditor General's office. A few weeks ago when I was appearing before estimates, I heard positive comments about the important work that Alberta Labour does in our workplaces and for Albertans. It just reconfirms, Mr. Chairman, what we already knew: that we are on the right track, committed to developing partnerships with our stakeholders and focusing on customer service.

When we look back to the beginning of the fiscal year, it was the beginning of economic good times. Alberta's unemployment rate was 6.3 percent. The really good news, of course, Mr. Chairman, was in the regional statistics. For example, the Grande Prairie area had an unemployment rate of 3.1 percent, while the Drumheller-Wainwright region reported 3.5 percent. By March of 1998 the unemployment rate for Alberta was down to 5.7 percent. The healthy economy, growing workforce, and increased business activities meant that there would be significant demands on the staff and services of Alberta Labour. With the changes to our organization, a businesslike approach, and a focus on customer service, the department was well prepared.

Our primary strategy focused on the provincial government's themes of jobs and the economy and supporting individuals, families, and communities to deal with change. The health and safety of Alberta's job sites are our responsibility. Our field compliance programs targeted high-risk industries, specific hazards, and companies with poor safety records.

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One of our performance measures is the workplace lost-time claim injury rate. During the past three years our rate of 3.4 lost-time claims per 100 persons working has remained unchanged. Given that the Alberta workforce had grown to 1.5 million people during that fiscal year, it speaks volumes about the ongoing efforts in the area of health and safety undertaken by both employers and employees.

In the area of employment standards our target was to reduce the number of complaints registered for investigation as a percentage of Alberta's eligible workforce. Since 1995, Mr. Chairman, there has been a slight drop in complaints, but with the upswing in the economy and an increase in employment opportunities the situation has changed. In 1997, 5,805 individuals registered employment

standards complaints compared to 5,521 in 1996. There were a couple of reasons for the increase. One, new employers are entering the marketplace who may not be familiar with their obligations under the Employment Standards Code. Secondly, more employees are aware of their rights and are filing claims.

We should point out that only approximately 15 percent of claims need to be enforced through measures such as issuing orders to pay, filing judgments in the Court of Queen's Bench, and using third-party collection methods. The transformation to using an umpire-directed order has cut down cases in the courts by 68 percent and is a testimony to the productivity of the employment standards branch as well as lightening the loads in the courts and bringing about fair and just results.

Public consultation with our customers and stakeholders is also vital to effective and consistent delivery of services. Employment standards commenced its review of the employment standards regulations, including the minimum wage. I know all members present here today know that stage two kicks in tomorrow, and that'll be moving to \$5.65 an hour. That will be moving to \$5.90 an hour in October. Mr. Chairman, this three-stage increase from last July has merely reflected the change in productivity of Albertans and Albertans' output as a measure of gross domestic output divided by employees' work.

Strategic decisions were also made, Mr. Chairman. We looked at logical opportunities for privatization, outsourcing, or partnering. We completed the transfer of the Alberta Fire Training School to the Lakeland College in Vermilion and the international qualifications assessment unit to Advanced Education and Career Development. Both transfers were completed by April of 1998. To improve communications processes, the outsourcing of Alberta Labour's computer systems operation was completed by December of '97. CGI Information Systems and Management Consultants Inc. entered into contract with Alberta Labour to provide these services for the next five years. This was after a complete and open and transparent tendering process took place.

We have taken the words "strong financial management" very seriously and continue to find innovative ways to manage financial and human resources. Another example, Mr. Chairman, is that we have subcontracted out our human resources and personnel function. We now share that with Treasury, with another savings of some one-quarter of a million dollars.

We need our partners like delegated administrative organizations, accredited municipalities, and other agencies and industry associations just to deal with Alberta's phenomenal growth. Some of these jobs like safety code inspections, approval of boiler and pressure vessels, and elevator safety are delivered by these partners.

Let me deal now with the numbers, Mr. Chairman, and they are impressive. In 1997-98 the department's annual spending dropped \$2.8 million from the previous year. Some of these savings came as a result of the transfer of the underground storage tank program to Environmental Protection and operational productivity and safety services. We have also identified efficiencies within the department and streamlined our administration with the sharing of human resources services with Treasury, as I mentioned, and realignment of regional office operations. We will continue to focus on customers, and we will continue to provide the most efficient and effective service at a price the Alberta taxpayer can afford.

I look forward to discussing Alberta Labour's achievements and possible criticisms, Mr. Chairman, with members of the committee. Thanks to you for the time for the opening remarks. I'd be pleased to respond to questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Sapers.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, Mr. Minister, and to your staff. Thanks again to the Auditor General and his staff for being with us.

MS BLAKEMAN: There's staff in the gallery.

MR. SAPERS: Staff in the gallery as well? They weren't introduced. I can't see behind me.

Mr. Minister, I want to ask you some questions this morning, to start off, about the presentation of your financial reports. The Auditor General in his last year's report on pages 170, 171 made comments about the operations of the Safety Codes Council and the four DAOs, those being the Alberta Boilers Safety Association, the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association, the Alberta Propane Vehicle Administration Organization, and the Petroleum Tank Management Association. The concern is that these results and operations are not consolidated with those of the Department of Labour. We've had some fairly entertaining discussions in this committee about the pros and cons of the consolidation. What steps did your department take during '97-98 to consider the recommendation of the Auditor General to consolidate the results and operations of the Safety Codes Council and those four DAOs?

MR. SMITH: Thank you. Good question. The DAOs, the delegated administrative organizations, do issue their own financial statements and annual reports. The separate reporting, Mr. Chairman, does reveal a clearer picture of how each entity is performing. Of course, we do want to continue to point out that the DAOs do not use taxpayers' dollars and operate at arm's length from the department. We believe that including them with the department would add unnecessary complexity and confusion for readers of our financial statements, especially as these organizations do not utilize our revenues, do not form part of our expenses, and acquire and manage their own assets.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. Embedded in your answer I think is a reflection of the concern. In fact, the Auditor General notes that the entities under discussion

are required to submit an annual report to the Minister and are responsible to the Minister for the performance of their delegated functions.

Yet as minister you control

the operations of the entity through the approval of bylaws and fees related to their delegated functions. In addition, revenues earned by these delegated entities must be applied to costs arising from the performance of their delegated functions and cannot be used for another purpose.

So it seems to me that with that kind of control and influence that flows from your office, we would get a much clearer picture if their operations were reported in a consolidated fashion.

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Chairman, did you want me to respond to that?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, we do. I have one question, an administrative question. I can't seem to find the DAOs in your report. Is it not here?

MR. BRYGIDYR: It's in the Auditor General's report.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Yes. But it's not in your annual?

MR. BRYGIDYR: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

We do have, right after your answer or perhaps before your answer, the Auditor General.

MR. VALENTINE: The minister first.

MR. SMITH: I always defer to the Auditor General.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, he deferred first, so you're first.

MR. SMITH: Let me defer after his deferral.

MR. VALENTINE: Well, for the readers of the record of this meeting, I want to draw their attention to discussions we've had on previous occasions in this session of the Legislative Assembly where I have expressed my views about control and the need for consolidation. I would draw the readers' attention and that of members present to the third full paragraph on page 170 of my most recent report. The arguments for consolidation are there. They're clear. In my professional opinion, consolidation is appropriate. That is the reason I reserve my opinion with respect to the consolidation.

8:50

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister, if you wish.

MR. SMITH: Thank you. I certainly take the Auditor General's comments with the gravity and accuracy that they're given. Also, to reflect that we've worked hard on this issue. The issue is of course not a new issue; it's not a new debate. I'm sure that's why it became the first question, because it's of keen interest to the opposition as well as to the government. Of course, I always notice that when the public reports of the delegated administrative offices are tabled in the Legislature, the first place the opposition goes to is to get a copy of that tabling and ensure that they dig diligently through that to ensure that the fees and dollars collected by that organization from the members in that organization are dealt with with accuracy and generally accepted accounting principles.

We will continue discussions, of course, with the Auditor General to ensure that we can come to some hopeful end of this issue.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Johnson, followed by Ms Blakeman.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning to the minister and Auditor General and staff members who are here this morning. The Auditor General's report on pages 173 and 174 continues to express concerns about the handling of boiler and pressure vessel inspections, specifically regarding the backlog of inspections. To the minister: what is your department doing to address this issue?

MR. SMITH: Thank you, LeRoy. The Auditor again recognizes that Labour and ABSA, the Alberta Boilers Safety Association, have made some progress in reducing the backlog of in-service inspections, and of course the matter was addressed most recently in this year's estimates as well.

The inspection of boilers and pressure vessels is being managed by ABSA. It is a delegated administrative organization representing the industry which commenced in April of 1995. They did inherit a substantial backlog of overdue inspections, which grew during their start-up period and reached a peak in October of 1995 at 48,236 items, roughly 65 percent of the total in-service vessels at that time.

As of March 1, 1999, there were a total of 22,853 vessels with inspections overdue. This is a significant reduction since October 1995. The overdue vessels now represent 28 percent of the total registered vessels, which is 81,000, as opposed to the 65 percent in

'95. The number of vessels overdue five years or more is 13,000, which represents 16 percent of the total number.

They have adopted an effective plan to manage the inspections, including the inspection backlog. They prioritize activities and performance based on assessed risks, and the highest priority is assigned to boilers and pressure vessels in public facilities and all cargo transport because of the public exposure. In terms of the high-risk vessels, there were about 455 vessels overdue for inspection as of March 1, which represent about 3.5 percent of the total number of high-pressure vessels.

They developed a four-year plan in 1997 to eliminate the inspection backlog completely. We feel the target for elimination is achievable. We will continue to monitor that progress, hon. member, but I would like to add that without having the structure that we have and the ability for membership in the board of directors to drive this organization, it would not have reached the success that it's reached in such a short time, had we had it consolidated and controlled totally within the Department of Labour. So I think just this particular example in terms of output and results probably reinforces the position of the Department of Labour on the earlier question.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you. My supplementary question. To reduce this backlog, then, I assume that more inspectors will have to be put on the job; that is, Alberta Boilers Safety Association inspectors. Is there any indication that they are planning to do so?

MR. SMITH: That's a really good question. The paucity of manpower in a skilled profession such as this is one of the issues that they've had to grapple with. In the first full year of operation they had 13 inspectors available to handle the workload. In '97-98 the number increased to 18 inspectors, and this year they've been able to assign 21 inspectors to deal with in-service inspections. Resources, we believe, we hope, we expect to be appropriate and adequate to manage the inspection plan. They will monitor and report monthly to ensure processes and resources meet the agreed target.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Ms Blakeman, followed by Mr. Yankowsky and Dr. Pannu.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I thank the Auditor General and his staff for being with us again today and the minister and his staff, and I think there's additional staff joining us in the balcony.

MR. SAPERS: There's George. Hi, George.

MS BLAKEMAN: That's fine. We still welcome George.

I'm referring to the Auditor General's recommendation 35, found on page 172 of the Auditor General's report. I'm concerned about the 600 delegated entities for which we don't appear to have any benchmarks, and I'm wondering how the minister or how the department can evaluate the effectiveness of these entities during of course the fiscal year we're examining, 1997-98, when there doesn't appear to be any financial or performance information that's available.

MR. SMITH: Six hundred?

MS BLAKEMAN: That's what is in the Auditor General's report: approximately 600 delegated entities have not been assessed by the department.

MR. SMITH: Oh, okay. Not all are the Department of Labour's.

Actually, I'm sure after the budget you were digging through our business plan and having a look at the work that's being done on the Safety Codes Council and accredited agencies. At this stage we've obtained monitoring results of about 40 percent of the 321 accredited municipalities. We expect to complete the monitoring by July 31, 1999. Performance results are being compiled, monthly reports produced by April 30, '99, and then a monitoring of the hundred accredited corporations is scheduled to begin in May of '99 with estimated completion by December 31 of '99.

We are developing better information systems in partnership with the Safety Codes Council. We do want to have them support our monitoring activities and serve our customers better. I think it's been a very important part of our business plan over the last two years, and we estimate completing it by the end of this millennium.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, I certainly am pleased to hear that, Mr. Minister, and certainly encourage you to do so, because ultimately the person on the street looks to this ministry if something goes wrong. There is a responsibility there as well as an authority, and I am most perturbed at the lack of information and benchmarks and performance measurements.

My supplementary question . . . I'm sorry. I'm being called to account by the chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: It would be awfully nice to get to it.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you.

What assessment of risks associated with the nature of the services that are provided by these same 600 entities was undertaken by the department in this fiscal year?

MR. SMITH: Would you define "risk" for me?

MS BLAKEMAN: I'm looking for guidelines, policies, procedures for monitoring.

MR. SMITH: The whole program, hon. member, is a risk-based approach. One difficulty we encountered early was the proclivity of many QMPs, quality management plans, as opposed to quality management plans that would be single, which would have some common body to them, common framework, that then would allow people to assess risk not only from the area of, for example, the accredited municipalities Safety Codes Council but also the Alberta Boilers Safety Association. It is a risk-based approach, but what happened is that we started out as a full basket of risk parameters as opposed to a skeletal framework that would overlay into different areas of the department. So that has been part of the growth and change of the safety codes division of the Department of Labour, and that's a fundamental component in this year's business plan and toward creating that deliverability of those accounts to the department and subsequently through to members by the end of the millennium.

9:00

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Yankowsky, followed by Dr. Pannu.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning everyone.

I have some general questions regarding safety services this morning. The safety services program's performance measurement raises some questions about the extent to which the Safety Codes Act is being complied with by the private sector. The questions I have: are we at risk here, and does your department need to overhaul the system?

MR. SMITH: Thank you for that question, because I think it builds on the question from the Member for Edmonton-Centre. The process and framework that we use to manage risk and that we have used to develop the safety system is available from our department. I would encourage either the Member for Edmonton-Centre or yourself, who has a great deal of experience on these matters, to go through them and comment on them.

We think that through the business plan we have focused the activities of staff of the Department of Labour on the management side. We're becoming an audit function. We're becoming a directive function. That's been one of the big transitions of the Department of Labour, moving from hands-on to audit to management, more to, I think, delivering the system in which the activities actually function.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you for that answer. The performance measure for safety services explains that the results achieved for 1997 only apply to 26 accredited agencies. Incidentally, I understand that 85 percent of the organizations achieved a satisfactory rating. The question here is: does that mean that a lot of activity is going on unchecked?

MR. SMITH: I think it's important to note that if we have our targets in place and we have an economy that's kicking out approximately \$104 billion worth of goods and services and there are over 1.542 million working Albertans with an average weekly wage about 10 percent above the Canadian average and we have an area of over 660,000 square kilometers in which to function, we're not going to be everywhere at all times. We're not going to have 10,000 inspectors that are able to go out and inspect every turn and every move.

We do have a system that puts a framework through, that puts forth specific responsibilities from the Department of Labour as it's charged by legislation, also a very clear sense of what moves from what we'll call government supervision to civil actions and course of business transactions. We believe that when we compare it with what's happening in other economies and we compare benchmark records of our business plan against other Department of Labour business plans across Canada and certain parts of the United States, we in fact are doing a good job and we have the right skeletal framework that allows us to measure the things that we do.

Are we perfect? Not by a long shot. Will there be something that falls through the cracks in \$106 billion worth of economic activity in this province? Absolutely. Will we manage by exception? When we find out about issues, we move quickly on them. That's why we've been so blessed by a good critic from the opposition, who raises something up and off we go; we march in that direction. In terms of what we put forth from the business plan and how we monitor our activities and how we see the work in the private sector, absolutely we're managing the case.

THE CHAIRMAN: Dr. Pannu, followed by Mr. Ducharme.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to follow up on the question that the minister just addressed, workplace safety. Mr. Minister, you referred to the fact that in the Alberta economy now there are about 1.4 million workers?

MR. SMITH: It's 1.521 million or 1.5421 million.

DR. PANNU: We're talking about 1997-98. So I would assume it would be 1.4 million to 1.5 million, somewhere in there?

MR. SMITH: Last year's estimate was about 57,000 new jobs created, so you'd be at 1.45 million.

DR. PANNU: My question to you is: with the growth in the labour force that's employed over the past two years -- I'm particularly talking about the year '97-98 -- has the department made any additions to its own inspection staff that's commensurate with the increases in the activity in the labour market and in the economy? Could you give us some figures? What additions to staff have been made in order to ensure that the public duty that your department has to monitor and ensure minimum levels of workplace safety are indeed manageable and can be carried out?

MR. SMITH: In the area of workplace safety we do have our occupational health and safety division, which reports to the assistant deputy minister of OH and S services. We have not added staff. The staff does not do inspections. The staff works with the agencies. They work with the safety associations. They work with organizations that are involved in the safety function.

Two things have occurred out of that. One is that we've become a particularly lucrative raiding ground for the private sector. This year we've lost over eight OH and S inspectors to the private sector. They've moved to the Novas, to the pipeline companies, and to the other organizations which are growing and have viewed the Department of Labour training and the Department of Labour workplace as a credit and a benefit to the individual in terms of their training. Now, we have just about replaced the entire shortage that occurred.

The other thing that has occurred in the area has been the development of the safety associations and the work with the WCB and the partnerships in an injury reduction program which has resulted not only in cash rebates but has resulted, as you can see from the achievement indicators in the business plan -- I'd point to the lost time claim rate, which you'll see is the lowest rate ever recorded in Alberta. So I think that's a measure of putting safety where it should be: in the hands of and empowering the workforce, the workers and the employers, giving them avenues in which they can work together, and actually giving them hard cash results as a manifestation of the work they do together to reduce injuries and lost time claim rates. I think the system that we have here today, as is backed up by the statistics in the business plan and the performance measures, is a better system than ever before in the province of Alberta.

9:10

The other thing that I'd also like to point out is that I think the young workers entering the workforce today are smarter than we were when we entered the workforce many long years ago. They don't believe they're as bulletproof as we did when we started working. They pay more attention to the training programs. I think we have better training facilities. There is a better safety framework in Alberta today than ever before.

DR. PANNU: I can relate to that, Mr. Chairman.

The health and safety committees designated by your department have been on the decline in numbers for several years including the year under question. Could you explain: what's the impact of the decline in the number of these committees on health and safety regulation enforcement and compliance?

MR. SMITH: Could you give me some examples of the committees to which you're referring?

DR. PANNU: I don't see any performance indicator either in your report or in the business plan on this, but it is, I think, reported somewhere in the literature. I can't give you the exact reference. I will do it later on, if you like. My information is that the number of joint occupational health and safety committees has been on the decline.

MR. SMITH: What would be a joint occupational health and safety committee?

DR. PANNU: I have no idea. Your staff can help us, I guess, understand that.

MR. SMITH: Are you referring, then, to a work site? That occurs primarily in the mining industry, where you'll see that there have actually been long-standing differences in collective agreements, negotiation between management and the unions on the issue of joint worker/management committees. Would that possibly be what you referred to?

DR. PANNU: That would be one example, I guess. Yeah.

MR. SMITH: It's a reasonable question, because I think it points out the natural evolution of what occupational health and safety has done in Alberta by moving towards the safety associations and then involving the workers and also management in participation in the safety associations. Now, the safety associations will work on behalf of an industry, and they will work with the WCB. They will work through joint work site programs, through management programs, through worker programs to reduce injury in the workplace. When that occurs, they get cash, and the cash is divided by both company and employees or is put to specific objectives.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Chairman, the minister is giving me the functions of these associations. I'm asking about the decline in numbers. Can you report, first of all? Do you concur that there's a decrease in numbers and why?

MR. SMITH: I can report to you that there is an increase in the amount of safety associations, that safety associations across Alberta are increasing because there are more coming up. Now, in terms of committees, joint management/worker committees at the workplace as negotiated by collective agreement or as negotiated by agreement in the workplace, we don't track those.

DR. PANNU: You don't?

MR. SMITH: We don't, nor do I think we should.

MR. DUCHARME: Good morning, everyone. My question relates to performance measures. Mr. Minister, as you are aware, labour relations are becoming a prominent issue in Alberta. Your performance measure indicates that in 1997 about 98.2 percent of bargaining negotiations were resolved without work stoppages. This is the first time that your performance level has dropped below 99 percent in the past five years. Is this drop due to changing your practices in how you deal with bargaining issues?

MR. SMITH: I probably wouldn't be here if I got through university with those kind of percentages.

If you look at moving from 99 percent to 98.2 percent, I think it indicates that the approach and the practices are sound. The labour laws have established a level playing field that both parties in a dispute require to resolve their differences. The good work of the Labour Relations Board has ensured that the laws are met. There have been suggestions to compel mediation in disputes even when one of the disputing parties is not in favour of mediation, the calls for intervention. We have resisted that approach, and we will continue to resist the approach.

Upon review we have examined the legislative framework. We believe it works well. We believe that generally it has the support

of customers and stakeholders. We believe also very strongly that long-term solutions will not come from imposed or restrictive legislated practice, and we believe that it would discourage parties from making serious attempts to resolve their differences.

We are interested in increasing the use of alternative dispute resolution practices, and we believe it is more effective in the environment. There is more interest in collective bargaining and expanding the approach. One of the things that we have discussed and that I would like two parties to experiment with would be the concept of final offer selection, similar to what is done in the national baseball league with agents and managers, where they both submit their best and final offer. Then an arbitrator, in their case the commissioner, will pick the final offer that most closely reflects the marketplace. I wouldn't want to impose that, but I would certainly welcome the opportunity of two parties that would be prepared to try an outcome such as that in Alberta. I believe there is record both in public service and in private sector that there are examples of finding different ways to resolve the conflicts.

We see now, again, a business plan that moves through the past of the Safeway work stoppages, which is reflected in this year's under discussion activity. We've seen now, 12 months later, as I tabled in the Assembly, that Alberta has 1/100 of the days lost due to strike of the lowest strike days of the G-8 countries, that being Japan. So Alberta clearly has an enviable record. I believe part of the reason of the record is the tremendous growth in wages, the wages that continue to grow in Alberta in comparison with average weekly earnings across Canada, also the fact that when you have a tax decrease, that's in effect a hundred percent increase to your bottom line. So I think the government of Alberta can help assist in collective bargaining dispute resolutions by continuing to keep downward pressure on taxes.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you. My supplemental is: what portion of the Alberta workforce is unionized, and what are the perceived trends?

MR. SMITH: Good question. Currently 23 percent of the Alberta workforce is unionized. The trend put forth by a chapter in a book on collective bargaining across Canada indicates that Alberta is not increasing its organized workforce. The public-sector unionization rate is set at about 70 percent. The private-sector rate is about 12 percent. The work that we've seen in Alberta with the presence of the oil and gas industry, the effectiveness of employee associations in that industry and the downstream petrochemical industry, all these factors have led to less of an organized environment.

We do notice that last year in the activity at the Labour Relations Board, certification applications were up by 69 percent, but certification approvals were down actually 3 percent, from 39 percent to 36 percent. The increase in jobs over the last six years has been about 300,000. We look at a workforce that's gone from about 1.2 million to 1.54 million. We look at a GDP that's gone from \$73 billion to about \$106 billion, about a 26, 27 percent increase over the six-year period. We have seen no substantial increase in organized labour. We also see that salaries and remuneration for nonorganized labour is consistently either above or the same as organized labour. So the environment continues to pay benefits to the citizens of Alberta. I think there are three private-sector strikes right now in the province of 1.5 million working Albertans, that of Georgia-Pacific here in Edmonton, Weldwood in Hinton, and Dynamic Furniture in Calgary.

9:20

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Sapers, followed by Mr. Melchin.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. Mr. Minister, on page 20 of your annual

report you indicate that the outsourcing of information technology, the upgrading of your systems infrastructure, and modifications that were made in the Calgary office resulted in a \$1.4 million cost overrun. I wonder if you can help me understand this. Can you explain this \$1.4 million excess in expenditure in terms of increased efficiencies? If so, what were those efficiencies? What was achieved from the outsourcing of your computer system operations to CGI?

MR. SMITH: I get the gist of the question. I think you're looking for an answer in light of the overall continued savings from the global budget of the Department of Labour and how this idiosyncratic variation fits into the overall savings.

MR. SAPERS: You wouldn't be putting words in my mouth; would you, Mr. Minister?

MR. SMITH: Never. That's why Mr. Brygidyr is prepared to respond to the question.

MR. BRYGIDYR: Thank you. The \$1.4 million is roughly attributed to about \$700,000 of computer-related equipment for the upgrades of our systems, our networks, our desktops. It was sort of an across-the-board kind of upgrade. The Calgary offices: we were required to modify some regional office services we have for workplace health and safety, and that caused about a \$300,000 cost to us in providing the necessary space and everything in the Calgary area. The outsourcing of our systems involved some severance costs to former staff, cost of contracting during the transition between the in-house operation and the contract being finalized with CGI. So that contributed to the cost. We had about a \$400,000 cost as a result of the changeover and the transition just on the systems management itself.

MR. SAPERS: Okay. I was interested in the efficiencies that have been achieved as a result of all of that. I appreciate the explanation of how we got there, but I was a little more interested in some of the rationale for why you went down that road.

MR. SMITH: I'd like to take a run at that. Could you maybe just also expand on what you mean by efficiencies then?

MR. SAPERS: Sure. I'd be happy to. The terms and the conditions of the contract. What performance measures did you build in? What kind of oversight is there now that you've outsourced? How do you know that you're going to get better value going down this road? While I'm making this a multipart question, Mr. Minister, I was intrigued that you didn't say anything about year 2000 compliance in your answer, so I'm wondering whether your contract performance specified some guarantee from CGI Information Systems about Y2K issues. If so, what is the nature of that guarantee?

MR. BRYGIDYR: On the efficiencies part associated with the contract, our contract builds in performance requirements in all aspects of the service, whether it's the maintenance, planning the applications, anything that we have by way of service being provided by CGI. That contract has a provision for us. For example, if we're asking CGI to develop a new system for us, our safeguard there that we're getting quality for money is that we can go to the market and have any other private provider bid on that system. If we're not happy with the makeup of it, we have the opportunity to take it to the market for a competitive bid if we want. They do have performance measures that they have to meet in things

such as user satisfaction.

We just did a recent survey of our labour users to make sure that the service is being well accepted throughout the department, and it becomes a benchmark. That's our first survey. We'll be comparing their performance in that regard to other areas. Turnaround times, downtimes, the priorities of our services are all stipulated in a contract, and the vendor is well aware that they have very small windows that they can work with in terms of downtime, lost time, production time. So, again, that's all specified in the contract, and the performance requirements are laid out in that contract.

The Y2K. We have an extensive plan that began with an initial assessment of all our system needs and the Y2K problem there. The vendor was required to do an assessment of our hardware networks applications and everything that was associated with sort of the broadest meaning of the word "systems" here and develop a plan of attack to make us all Y2K compliant. The bottom line there is that we will be compliant in all our systems by September of '99, and the overall cost estimate, as I recall, is somewhere in the \$400,000 to \$440,000 cost for all the Y2K work that's being done.

The certification and the guarantee of the Y2K compliancy is going to come at the final stages. We will have a compliancy test done to make sure we're in fact ready for it, and all that will be completed by September '99. The Y2K is being treated as an extremely high priority, of course, but any new developments we have have to be subjected to a productivity test with our business users. In other words, if it's work with health and safety or safety services, they have to be satisfied that there is a strong business case for the application. After that satisfaction is met, we have to do a cost-effectiveness; in other words, if what is being proposed can be offered more competitively in a market, whether it's a shrink-wrap application or some other form. Our policy is stipulated right in the contract. We will buy before we build so that we don't get into the reinventing-the-wheel syndrome and realize the economies there. So all of those tests take place on an application proposal, including the Y2K in this case, before anything is undertaken.

MR. SMITH: If I could just add to that, Mr. Chairman. It was an important initiative from the department because of the interaction that we have with the other sectors across government as well as the other private-sector partners that we have, but it's our corporate intention to ensure that we don't have this business in our business. The reason that we don't want this business in our business is that we can't keep up with it. It moves faster than we can. It moves faster than this bureaucracy can. Information technology moves at a pace that -- we have seen tremendous waste in government. We've seen a tremendous amount of chasing down the build-before-you-buy type scenario. It was a corporate intention not to be in the business, because we could obtain more economies and more service from outsourcing this completely than handling it as a contract administration function.

Secondly, from that -- and I know you'll be glad to hear about this because of your Edmonton location -- we believe it stimulates an economic development initiative in Edmonton. By contracting out your information technology function, you start to create areas of expertise surrounding government. Those areas of expertise can then start to work in other applications and work in other facets not only of the government but also other facets of the economy. So we think it was very purposeful from a corporate intention perspective.

9:30

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr. Melchin, followed by Ms Blakeman.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you. I'd like to address my remarks not just with respect to the pressure equipment backlogs but with regards to

the compliance aspect of reporting it to your department. It could be, you know, the building standards. It could be the pressure equipment. It could be that you've got 600 delegated entities and a number of comments being made as to backlogs or not being able to keep pace and the growth of the industry and having inspectors and the like. I guess my question would be: in light of those challenges, what is the methodology you've had to ensure that you've had those inspections? Why aren't they required to provide you with a certificate of compliance? Let the associations figure out how to provide that, be it through other mechanisms to get the audit work done or otherwise, and submit it to the department.

Is it a matter of the department having to chase them down all the time to try and go in and attend to it? Why can't there be a compliance where you set the terms, the frequency? Why does that not happen? For example, with your 600 delegated entities, you have a list of those 600 entities. Do you know what things they're supposed to be compliant on? Why aren't they reporting so that that's just a matter of fact?

MR. SMITH: I'm going to ask Gerry to talk to the basics of that. I think you've actually hit on the evolution of this program, moving from where some -- and one might say the opposition -- might be into bolting side arms onto the inspection staff and having an inspector behind every tree, an inspector in every trench, to moving into an audit function and moving into a certified or contractual business obligation relationship.

Gerry is going to talk about the specific frameworks.

MR. BRYGIDYR: The department works very closely with the Safety Codes Council in the area of safety services monitoring. They developed this monitoring framework that would ensure that there was a consistent, even test out there for compliance. So regardless of the discipline, whether it was mechanical, gas, or whatever, there had to be a consistent reporting framework that would address not so much the level of activity but how effective the activity was. As you saw in the performance measures here, we've launched that monitoring program. We've already got that 85 percent assessment saying that it's performing well to that monitoring program, and that's being expanded. By the time it's fully implemented, it will be December '99, and we'll have all those entities reporting compliance, competencies, and whether or not there's been any dissatisfaction with the services that are being provided out there.

The biggest difficulty has been when you're dealing with over 300 municipalities ranging in sophistication from a very small municipal service that cannot do its own inspections -- it doesn't have the resources, the manpower to do its inspections -- to something like the city of Calgary or Edmonton, where they have a very sophisticated in-house inspection service. In the small cases we have been ensuring that the inspections get done in those areas and reported on. We contract the inspection agents to go out there and work on behalf of that municipality and then make sure that the municipality is happy with the service and that the report and the service have been provided as required.

The reporting is taking place on the compliance and the competencies now. As I say, we're probably doing 40 percent of the municipalities right now. We will be doing the balance by the end of the calendar year.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you. I guess as a follow-up to that then, let me pick one of the specifics that's been thrown out in front of all of us: the pressure equipment. This is a different side, maybe not the entities. Let's come back to the bodies that are required, where you have your own staff going out and looking at compliance. Is there

a shift, or is it still the same process where you have inspectors going out? In the interim, if you've got these backlogs, does that mean that we're not able to say that there's compliance and that the province assumes all the liability for property damage and personal injury?

MR. BRYGIDYR: In the case of the pressure vessels and the backlog that's being managed by ABSA, that organization is responsible for the assurances of that component of the industry. It's an association based on a membership of employers. They do the resourcing; they do the strategic planning. We make sure that they comply with the Safety Codes Act and the Safety Codes Council's requirements. The management of that backlog is determined by that association. In other words, we don't send out inspectors, we don't hire the inspectors, and we don't get involved in individual inspections.

When the minister spoke earlier about the fact that they use this risk-based program where they target these public facilities as the highest priority -- in other words, a hospital might be more important than a feed shop on a farm or something like that -- with that type of approach they then organize their inspection services to deliver on that. They go through their priority programs. In this particular case with the pressure vessels, they're trying to bring all the backlog to an end result within four years. With the scope of the number of vessels out there, 83,000 or so, we could never have enough inspection resources to manage a process like that, and it's a growing process each year. You just can't win that game in terms of the numbers. The industry is well positioned to be out there to form this type of organization to do that, given the standards that they have to meet.

MR. SMITH: Also, these are experts in their own business. Before, I think we were really fooling ourselves. There was no way that a government body could inspect that amount of vessels in that kind of a growth economy. It hadn't before, so in essence you're living with an unrealistic set of circumstances. These are experts. We have to appreciate that pressure vessel building technology in Alberta is world best. We set world-class standards. We're the best in cold weather and arctic climate assembly. We can do things with pressure vessels that nobody else in the world can do.

From that expertise flows an association of involved individuals. They file a quality management program through the safety association that large companies like Cessco and other pressure vessel building agencies use. You know that the quality of product is going to meet these exacting standards, so it's not as if nothing happens until the ABSA inspector goes out there and puts his check mark on the vessel. You know that the method of construction and the method of assembly are in accordance with a QMP that's filed with the Alberta Boilers Safety Association and that they're being built -- and the chairman would really understand this because of his past business experience -- to a tight codified and specified standard under a specific quality management plan.

9:40

MR. MELCHIN: There was part of the question that wasn't answered.

MR. SMITH: I can't believe that.

MR. MELCHIN: If we've set the standard that you have to have the inspection and we're not able to keep up with whatever process we say, can I just ask: who's liable if something goes wrong?

MR. SMITH: I think with the presence of the Auditor General here, I would not want to speculate on liability as a result of a court action. He may want to have some comments on that.

MR. VALENTINE: I've made it a habit for 40 years not to practise law.

THE CHAIRMAN: That is a question. If the department feels it right to answer Mr. Melchin's questions on that liability, we often have answers delivered through the secretary here to all members.

MR. SMITH: Would we be able to take reference opinion from the budget of Public Accounts, Mr. Chairman? If we had to determine a court reference opinion on the issue of liability, would the Public Accounts budget be prepared to cover that cost?

THE CHAIRMAN: Absolutely, sir. That and a few pens and pencils would kill the budget.

Ms Blakeman, followed by Mr. Stevens.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. My second series of questions is around employment standards and your key performance measurement. Really, to most of the people on the street, employment standards is their only recourse if things go wrong, so it's an important government function for them. I'm thinking of what we now know were, during this fiscal year, a number of unresolved and sometimes even uninvestigated complaints that were brought forward. Most of these were in the service sector. I'm thinking of examples that will be familiar: Buffet World and Earl's and some of those in the service sector. Of course, always being interested in analysis, I'm wondering if the department has done any gender analysis of who's bringing forward these complaints. Most of them, I think, are in the service sector, and I'd be interested in how those complaints break down.

MR. SMITH: The question of gender analysis is a good one. It's my information, hon. member, that we do not do that. We value every employee the same, and we view it in terms of output and contribution. We do not have specific gender information. I can find out if we can run something. What specifically would you be interested in?

MS BLAKEMAN: Of the cases in this fiscal year that were brought forward as complaints under this area, I'd like to know: how did they fall out on a gender breakdown?

MR. SMITH: Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: If that information is not available presently and it's possible to generate it, we'll leave it to the department.

MR. SMITH: We'll take that question under advisement, Mr. Chairman, and see if we can deliver that on a gender basis.

MS BLAKEMAN: Okay. Still on the same idea, when we talk about the 5 to 6 percent unemployed, I'll note that that does not include the people who have given up looking for work. That's the people that are still looking.

MR. SMITH: What would you estimate that number to be?

THE CHAIRMAN: We do have questions over here and sometimes answers over there.

MR. SMITH: Sorry. That's a good question; it's a good topic.

MS BLAKEMAN: I'm going off your numbers of 5 to 6 percent

unemployed. I'm wondering what analysis has been done on these unemployed and in some cases I think chronically unemployed. In particular, I'd like to know how many of that 5 to 6 percent are women, how many are youth, and how many are aboriginal. I appreciate the minister saying that all people are outcomes to him and that he doesn't distinguish, but I think if we're looking at employment and employment problems in this province, we must understand that there are areas in which improvement needs to be made and where improvement needs to be made because they're a specific group.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Chairman, the labour force statistics are a function of Advanced Education and Career Development. I know that more work on that will be forthcoming when they appear in front of Public Accounts, if they have not already appeared.

Secondly, to the extent that we can answer those specific questions, we'll take those under advisement and certainly return any information that we may have in the department.

MS BLAKEMAN: Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Stevens, followed by Dr. Pannu.

MR. STEVENS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, the first question I have arises as a result of some information on page 14 of your annual report under the heading Results Analysis -- Performance Measures. In particular, I'm looking at the ministry performance measure under "Goal: Alberta workplaces will have quality health and safety management systems." The KPI of lost time claim rate indicates that for the past three years the rate has remained the same at 3.4 when in fact your target is an annual reduction in the lost time claim rate. My question to you, Mr. Minister, is: can you advise as to why we appear to have a flat rate? At that point in time -- that is, for this particular year in question -- were there any initiatives under way to improve upon that rate so there would in fact be a reduction?

MR. SMITH: When you have the lowest rate ever recorded in Alberta for three years in a row, one would reflect: is it the measurement that's wrong, or is it the activity that's right? I think the goal is to move towards what we always like in a perfect world, which would be zero, but I think we're also cognizant that that's not always going to happen.

When we benchmark against national reported jurisdictions, we consistently have been the lowest or the second lowest among provinces. We see a growth of economy that brings in a tremendous, growing workforce. With an unemployment rate, as the previous questioner commented on, of 5.2 percent, the second lowest in Canada, and also the comment about how many people have given up looking for work, when you look at the employment rates and you look at the employment growth, I would say there are very few people in Alberta who have given up looking for work.

We do see new businesses, new industries, workers coming onstream, often with limited training and experience in safety programs. I get worried when I start to see trends such as in metal fabrication, which had a fatality on Christmas Eve day, December 24, another fatality in January, and then another fatality the day before yesterday. That seems to be a particular sector that is experiencing higher than average lost time claim rates and also where we're seeing fatalities. It's based on that that we are participating in the growth of the Metal Fabricating Health & Safety Association. We think the inducement of cash incentives from the AC, the maturation of the workforce, and the work of the industry associations and safety associations wherever possible are going to

assist on that. It'll be interesting to see the awareness of the Heads Up program, which the AC has recently initiated, to see if that'll have any sort of measurable benefits in lowering the safety rate.

The other initiative that we've pursued this year is the introduction into the courts of the information that in 1998 the possible fine for OH and S violations resulting in a fatality is \$150,000. Traditionally, fines have been levied in the \$7,500 to \$12,000 range, and we felt that was far too cheap. We felt that it did not reflect the seriousness of the violation. We've worked hard with the Department of Justice to start to reflect the new rates that are in legislation. We believe a deterrent fine exceeding \$50,000 and moving into the \$100,000 to \$150,000 range will focus attention of workers at workplaces on occupational health and safety practices.

We are continuing to regenerate the OH and S practice inside our organization. As a matter of fact, when you bring the question up, I wonder about the effectiveness of perhaps assigning an elected individual to do exactly that: bring that information into the workplace, work hard on ensuring the public awareness of this, and try hard to maybe either move that 3.4 rate down or in effect take the secondary approach and maybe examine our business target and see if that is indeed the correct KPI.

Thanks for the question.

9:50

MR. STEVENS: Thank you.

My next question, Mr. Minister, is related to something that I've discussed with you before. You may recall that I have shared with you illiteracy literature demonstrating a connection between illiteracy and workplace health and safety, that being a correlation where illiteracy leads to increased risk of problems in the workplace. I recently had an opportunity to have some discussions with the Workers' Compensation Board people on this point specifically, and I found it of interest that the AC does not record in any fashion the relationship, if any, of illiteracy or lack of literacy to the injuries which come before it. I found it interesting because there is some literature out there that indicates that there is a relationship.

Mr. Minister, my question to you is basically one of responsibility for workplace safety. Clearly the AC has a responsibility for workplace safety. It seems to me that perhaps the Department of Labour is undertaking some responsibility in that area. Can you comment on whether in fact there is responsibility in your area and how you work with the AC to ensure that you are not duplicating services, or in the case of something like dealing with the problem of illiteracy and workplace safety, in fact omitting services that could be made available to address what I consider to be a significant problem.

MR. SMITH: A good question. Thanks, member. I'm going to ask Brian Boon of the AC to comment shortly on part of the partnerships perspective as he sees it from AC, and then I'll finish.

DR. BOON: Good morning, everyone. A very good point around literacy and its relationship to workplace accidents and some of the challenge that comes postinjury in terms of rehabilitation. While we don't in an official capacity track the percentage of workers who have a challenge around reading and comprehension, albeit English as a first language versus a second language, we endeavour to provide those services for many of our injured workers through translation services. We actually have the numbers of individuals who seek that service postinjury that we need to communicate with or when they go through the rehabilitation process, so we do have some type of information.

The difficulty we have is the degree of literacy that these individuals have and the contribution it made to the actual workplace accident. That's where we've been challenged a bit. We do know

from some of the best practices from some of our employers the importance of literacy on worksite safety. We've actually provided opportunities to showcase that in forums where employers get to present their best practices with workers in hand, their employees. We've had forums, but the difficulty is trying to determine the component of literacy and how that actually contributed to the cause of the accident when it's established that it's related. So we work with industry. That's been some of the efforts and the promotions through the various health and safety associations we work with when employers and labour are together.

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Brian. Also, there is a program where some health and safety skills are taught in the high schools through Job Safety Skills. That is in there.

The second thing we did, knowing that we'd have this discussion and it's been an ongoing issue of interest, is that last year I granted the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society \$25,000 to finish a manual on understanding workplace health and safety management and information systems in dealing with hazardous goods, WHMIS, and also translating the safety regulations into over 57 different languages. This organization developed this manual, and they moved it through employers in Calgary. They actually have an ongoing contract now with Cargill, out in High River, where they train in over 37 different languages.

As a matter of fact, because of our discussions of probably 15 or 20 months ago and your interest in that, we've tried some piloting to determine it in the case of English as a first language. In the labour force and general labour and in directing specific courses targeted at an illiterate workforce, there are areas where illiteracy is prominent. I think the symbols and the systems training in WHMIS and other hazardous goods at the worksite by the employer and by the work of the safety associations have helped. It would be a tough one to measure definitively, though, but the issue is recognized.

Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: We have almost had the time expire. Does the committee wish to have another round of questions from Dr. Pannu?

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry, Dr. Pannu. You lost again.

I should like to thank the minister and his staff for their attendance and answering the questions.

MR. SAPERS: Perhaps if there is an extensive list of questions, my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona could get his questions on the record, and maybe the minister could undertake to provide a written response.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's quite reasonable. Certainly, if that's agreeable, if he wishes to answer.

MR. SMITH: Sure.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Minister, for your willingness to receive my question. I want to go back to your key performance measures. One of them that you use has to do with the number of complaints registered with employment standards for investigation as a percentage of Alberta's workforce. I want to seek some clarification of the language here first of all. Registered or received number of complaints: is there a difference?

Second, workforce: what does the word "workforce" refer to? Does it refer to the part of the labour force that participates in the economy, or does it refer to the larger? It has implications for how

the numbers will come out. You can underreport or overreport as a result of this.

It's in that context that I ask a couple of other subquestions here. In answering a question earlier on, you talked about 12 percent of the labour force working in the private sector being unionized. Are these numbers here under complaints received? Do you have information on from which sector of the economy these complaints come?

MR. SMITH: It would be from the unionized side because they would have their employment standards.

DR. PANNU: I agree. Since the vast majority of the private sector is non-unionized, would you be able to provide us with information with respect to which industries, which sector of the economy these complaints come from? The reason for that is the following. I've concluded this. In my constituency -- and I've referred to this before -- there is a very large number of women, particularly young women, and young males too, working in the restaurant and fast-food industry. That's the area that's of a great deal of concern to them and to me. I want to know if you can draw a picture of where the complaints come from. Do they come from mostly female workers or male workers and from what part of the unorganized sector of the economy?

10:00

MR. SMITH: I'd be more than pleased to take that question under advisement and provide details and answers back through the chair, whom I commend for his usual good stewardship of another good Public Accounts meeting.

THE CHAIRMAN: I just sit here. You people do the work here.

I would thank the minister and his staff for attending and for the prompt answers. We'd like to remind members that next week we shall not have a meeting, but on the 14th of April we have the Hon. Jon Havelock, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, before us. Be prepared.

Nothing further? A motion for adjournment. Mr. Ducharme. Is it agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's carried. The committee stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:02 a.m.]

