

Title: Wednesday, March 24, 2004 Public Accounts Committee

Date: 04/03/24

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like to call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order.

There has been an agenda circulated to the members. If there are no questions, may I please have a motion to approve the agenda? Mr. Mason, thank you very much. Is everyone in favour?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Carried.

Can I also now have approval of the minutes of the previous meeting from March 17, 2004? Mr. Mason. All in favour?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Carried. Thank you.

We're meeting this morning with the Hon. Gene Zwozdesky, Minister of Community Development, and his staff. Before we get to that part of the agenda, perhaps it would be beneficial to the members of his staff if we were to quickly go around the table and introduce ourselves.

[The following members introduced themselves: Ms Blakeman, Mr. Broda, Mr. Cao, Ms DeLong, Mr. Lukaszuk, Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Mason, Mr. Shariff]

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Corinne Dacyshyn, committee clerk.

[The following staff of the Auditor General's office introduced themselves: Mr. Dunn, Mr. Rajoo, and Ms White]

Mr. Zwozdesky: Gene Zwozdesky, Minister of Community Development.

[The following departmental support staff introduced themselves: Ms Arnston, Ms Barlow, Mr. Batra, Dr. Byrne]

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Zwozdesky, if any other members of your staff that are seated behind us would like to assist in a question today, they're quite welcome to participate, and they're quite welcome to sit at the table if they'd like, as well.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Are you guys comfortable where you are? They're okay where they are, I guess.

The Chair: Thank you. Please proceed, Mr. Zwozdesky.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, everybody. To our colleagues, to our support staff, and in particular to our Auditor General and his staff, thank you for this opportunity to present the 2002-2003 annual report for the Ministry of Community Development.

Mr. Chairman, with your permission I'd like to begin with a brief overview of some of the ministry's key achievements for 2003, and then I'd like to comment and provide a brief overview of the financial results for that same period. Then if time permits, I'd like to conclude with some specific comments in relation to the office of the Auditor General's recommendations and observations.

As everyone here likely knows, Alberta Community Development is one of the most interesting, fascinating, and at the same time

challenging ministries in all of government because it truly is the most diverse one in government. But as we prepare for this morning's discussion, please keep in mind the two sort of fundamentals that drive this ministry. One is the title itself, Community Development, and what we can do to assist the community in its development in various areas, and secondly, what we do to help improve and enhance the quality of life for individuals who live in our communities.

Under the headline of achievements, Mr. Chair, I want to begin by commenting that during 2002-2003 our ministry was awarded six Premier's awards of excellence for some truly outstanding work of our staff and their partners in the community. For example, we received one gold medal, which we shared with other participating ministries, for our work on the Alberta Future Summit in 2002. We received one silver medal for work related to the Oil Sands Discovery Centre gallery redevelopment project. We received four bronze medals as well. They were for, one, the advance ticket management system at the Royal Tyrrell Museum, another one for the Alberta main street program, a third one for connecting Albertans to a world of information through our public libraries program, and fourth, for the ongoing excellent work of our volunteer services branch.

Now, moving on to another important achievement. We have several of them. I'll be quick about them. We strengthened and initiated successful partnerships in the sport and recreation area, including providing financial and consultative assistance to Team Alberta at the 2003 Canada Winter Games in New Brunswick, where our Alberta team achieved an all-time first for our province. It was the best ever medal performance we have witnessed.

We initiated and provided some assistance toward the recreation corridors legislative review process, which went on to include a public consultation across the province regarding the operation and management of recreation trails in our province. As most members here would know, we have somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 kilometres of existing trails. There are some concerns in that regard, and they are being addressed through that report, which we are now in receipt of and reviewing.

We also initiated an awareness and education campaign called Live Outside The Box to increase physical activity among 10 to 14 year olds.

Through our Wild Rose Foundation we supported the annual Vitalize conference, with about 1,200 Albertans participating who are involved with volunteering. We provided participants with opportunities to further develop their knowledge and skill levels and to strengthen their abilities to achieve organizational goals and, generally speaking, to enhance networking in the voluntary sector. I'm sure people here would recognize that volunteers are a critical part of the success in this province, as in other provinces as well. In fact, our volunteer services branch does provide very high-quality facilitation services for many clients throughout the province, and I'm happy to report, Mr. Chair, that 98 per cent of our clients indicated that they were satisfied with the services provided with, through, and by the volunteer services branch.

In the area of the arts our Alberta Foundation for the Arts launched the Life is a Masterpiece campaign, which was aimed at increasing public awareness about the value and importance of the arts. After consultation with the education community a new artists and education program was introduced to provide arts participation opportunity for Alberta students.

The ministry carried out public consultations during the review of the libraries regulations and partnered with public libraries and Service Alberta to establish and integrate the libraries as Service Alberta information centres.

In the area of human rights and citizenship, as members here will

know, we do have a commission, and it has increased its efforts to support employers in reducing discrimination and in building more inclusive workplaces following a major consultation that was done with Alberta employers. These efforts coincided with the release of the results of the employers' perspective research project, which was considered the first of its kind anywhere in Canada. We acknowledged the contributions of young Albertans in the areas of citizenship, community participation, and leadership through the Premier's citizenship awards. Five exceptional students received the Queen's Golden Jubilee Citizenship Medal along with a \$5,000 scholarship.

Our 2002 Alberta future leaders program, which is targeted toward aboriginal youth, was delivered in several communities, aboriginal communities specifically, across Alberta with a focus on recreation, sport, arts, and leadership.

We released the report on the public review of the Blind Persons' Rights Act following the review of the act and the guide dog qualifications regulations from the previous year.

The Alberta Brain Injury Network is another important initiative of ours, and we continued our consultations with the brain injury community. Funding was made available to service providers for individualized support for community inclusion, and of course we developed and distributed the survivor guide, which was immediately snapped up by many people. In fact, I think we had to go to a second printing on that one. This is essentially a resource guide for brain injury survivors and their families and caregivers.

8:40

Our Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities of course tabled their Alberta Disability Strategy and released the document to the public. It contains eight key recommendations backed up by 168 specific recommendations that serve to foster greater inclusion and citizenship of persons with disabilities.

Turning to our PDD program, which members here will know as being the persons with developmental disabilities program, our provincial board continued to address the recommendations and the strategic directions that arose from the Building Better Bridges final report which, some people will recall, I had the privilege to author a few years earlier.

As well, the central Alberta community board specifically assumed governance responsibility for Michener services in the Red Deer area. This is one of six regional community boards serving the PDD sector. All PDD boards were involved in the completion of a three-year project to ensure ongoing certification of all board-funded service providers. Three projects were established to demonstrate the practical implementation of a new approach to funding services for adults with developmental disabilities. Our provincial PDD board also funded wage increases for service providers to reduce staff turnover in this sector, and members here will recall how important training, recruitment, and retention are to this growing sector.

Turning to our Francophone Secretariat, it was very instrumental in assisting our Alberta francophone community school jurisdictions in benefiting from funding made available through Alberta Infrastructure's century plan.

With respect to cultural tourism, despite a world-wide downturn in the travel and tourism industry for the period in question we still had over 900,000 visitors come to our provincial historic sites, museums, and interpretive centres. For the fifth year in a row the satisfaction level of visitors was 98 per cent or higher, a true testament to the efforts of our staff and the sites that they look after.

Our Provincial Museum of Alberta introduced a very successful mammoth pass. The first season's pass in the history of the museum generated over \$60,000 in revenue in its first five and a half months

of operation. Our Royal Tyrrell Museum presented a special exhibit in Kofu City, Japan, that drew 60,000 visitors and brought in a net profit of \$250,000.

Community Development also participated in overall government planning of the 2002 G-8 summit in Kananaskis Country by completing operational support as well as logistical, security, and safety preparations. Our conservation officers ensured a high level of environmental protection, Mr. Chair, and continued to be involved in the provision of important services throughout Kananaskis Country during that particular G-8 event.

We initiated an education strategy as a key part of the revitalization of the heritage appreciation program which will help to diversify education services, will reach new audiences, and will increase public knowledge about the role and value of Alberta's parks and protected areas. We also initiated and/or completed a number of interdivisional projects between our parks and protected areas sector and our cultural facilities and historical resources sector. These included the integration of advertising for historic sites and cultural facilities in parks promotional products in order to increase the profile of our many sites.

Mr. Chair, specific to our parks and protected areas portfolio, where I have responsibility for I believe over 500 sites throughout the province, management plans were completed, approved, and released to the public for, for example, Crimson Lake, Miquelon Lake, Young's Point and Williamson provincial parks, Hay-Zama Lakes wild-land park, the Bow Valley protected areas, and Poachers' Landing provincial recreation area.

I'd like to now comment quickly on the key performance measures and targets, and I want to begin with a brief overview of performance measure highlights and general trends in my ministry's results in attaining the targets that were set. Out of 27 performance measures our ministry exceeded the target by a significant amount for four measures. We were at or very near the target for 13 measures. In eight cases, unfortunately, we did not meet the expected target, and there are some reasons for that. I should explain, Mr. Chair, that two measures did not have any target set because one was in fact a new measure and for the other the methodology had changed from the previous year.

In any case, my ministry exceeded its targets for the following four specific measures: one, value-added economic impact of provincial historic sites, museums, and interpretive centres; two, taxation revenue from provincial historic sites, museums, and interpretive centres; three, total visitation to parks and protected areas; and, four, percentage of individuals with developmental disabilities satisfied with PDD-funded services.

The actual results of the economic impact of our provincial historic sites, museums, and interpretive centres are not yet available for 2002-03. However, the results for '01-02 show that the value-added economic impact of these heritage resources was \$55 million, and that exceeded our expectations by over \$12 million. Taxation revenue returned to the three levels of government was over \$20 million, which means we outpaced our target in this area by about \$5 million. The latest figures show that there were over 8.5 million visitors at our provincial parks and recreation areas, which surpasses the target set of 8 million.

In the PDD area over 94 per cent of individuals with developmental disabilities were satisfied with the services funded by our ministry.

Mr. Chairman, I should point out that in our annual report 12 performance measures were dropped in the '03-06 business plan. I'd like to just briefly explain and indicate why. To begin with, we found that some measures were far outside the influence of my ministry. They addressed global issues related more to perceptions

of quality of life and not necessarily to the ministry's role in delivering services that affect quality of life. One example of such a measure is the following: "Percentage of adult Albertans who consider arts and culture important in contributing to overall quality of life." Now, arts and culture are obviously extremely important, but as worded, that particular measure did not give us any meaningful comment on the effectiveness of our provincial programs impacting this particular area.

However, for some of the measures that we dropped, data is still being collected and used nonetheless for such things as management decisions, direction setting, and it is reported and commented on in the annual report but not necessarily as a performance measure. Examples include the following: one, visitation at provincial historic sites, museums, and interpretive centres; and two, visitation at provincial parks and recreation areas. Mr. Chair, these changes were initiated through the ministry's overall effort to make our business plan much more strategic. In fact, these changes were based on a comprehensive review of our ministry's performance measures.

Now my ministry has a concise yet very comprehensive set of 15 performance measures that accurately reflect the full range of activities within the ministry. This current set of 15 performance measures exhibits the characteristics of a very good set of performance measures. They are comprehensive and meaningful, and now they directly relate to my ministry's mission and goals. They are more readily understandable, they are timely, they are valid and reliable, and they are based on sound data collection methodologies while also being sensitive to data collection costs.

To sum it up, Mr. Chair, our current performance measures focus on the outcomes that fall directly within the sphere, purview, and influence of the ministry. Together they provide a ministry profile that is not vulnerable to false signals or perhaps wrongly arrived at conclusions. This, in turn, will allow for better and more appropriate management actions and decision-making.

Before I turn to address the Auditor General's recommendations, I'd like to just comment briefly on two other areas. First is the matter of future challenges within Alberta Community Development. The following three key strategic priorities will be of primary importance in focusing our ministry on achieving its goals in the future years: one, fostering equality, strengthening community inclusion for persons with disabilities, and supporting the reduction of discrimination and barriers that may exist to full or fuller participation in society; two, upgrading, renewing, and maintaining infrastructure for our provincial historic sites, museums, interpretive centres, parks, and protected areas; and three, increasing local capacity in the arts and culture, film, sport, recreation, library, and volunteer sectors.

8:50

Now to the second matter, which is a brief financial overview, Mr. Chair. The financial results of my ministry for the year ended March 31, 2003, demonstrate effective stewardship of our resources. Ministry revenues in 2002-2003 totalled \$90.6 million and consisted of the following: \$56.3 million primarily from the lottery fund, \$15.4 million in transfers from the government of Canada relating to the provision of services for adults with developmental disabilities, \$8.3 million in fees, \$1.2 million in investment income, and \$9.4 million in other revenue.

Ministry expenses for the same period, 2002-2003, were \$573 million, and they consisted of the following: \$74.8 million for promoting community development; \$4.5 million for protecting human rights and promoting fairness and access; \$408.4 million for supporting inclusion and participation for Albertans with disabilities and protecting persons in care; \$38.2 million for preserving,

protecting, and presenting Alberta's history and culture; \$37.4 million for preserving, protecting, and presenting Alberta's provincial parks and protected areas; \$8.9 million for ministry support services; and \$0.8 million for the provision of vacation pay and doubtful accounts.

With respect to the Auditor General's recommendations I'd like to begin by thanking the Auditor General for the work done by himself and his staff and to say that we as a ministry have now complied with every single recommendation the Auditor General has made. For example, the Auditor General recommended that "the Ministry of Community Development evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the service delivery alternatives for operating [our] parks and protected areas" and "improve [our] system for selecting private operators to run provincially-owned parks and for monitoring contract performance."

In response to these recommendations from the Auditor General, Community Development will conduct periodic reviews of our overall approaches to private-sector involvement in park operations in order to assess the costs and benefits of a range of options. Secondly, we will ensure that our existing processes to compare the potential advantages of facility operating agreements versus service contracts at the park level are followed and that the results of those comparisons are improved in their documentation. In furtherance of this point, facility operating agreements or maintenance service contracts will continue to be used when . . .

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry; I'm having trouble hearing the minister. If you'd like to invite the members that want to discuss everything to do it in the coffee room. I'm sorry; I don't want to embarrass anyone, but I'm having trouble hearing.

The Chair: Certainly. Perhaps the chair was delinquent in keeping order. Could we have order, please. If you would like to converse with your colleagues, we have a lovely room outside here with lovely furniture in it, and if your name is up on the speaking list, I will personally come and escort you back.

I'm sorry. Please proceed, Mr. Zwozdesky.

Ms Blakeman: Sorry; I didn't mean to interrupt.

The Chair: If you could wrap it up, there are a considerable number of members who have advised the chair that they'd like to ask questions.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes. I was targeting 15 minutes, and I have two minutes left to go and I shall be done in that time period.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I was commenting on facility operating agreements or maintenance service contracts, and I just wanted to indicate to all members that we will continue to use these agreements or contracts when it has been determined that they are the most cost-effective method of quality service delivery.

The Auditor General also stated that the capital redevelopment budget for Community Development is inadequate. He referred to the 2001 business case where it indicated that "there is growing deferred maintenance for the Parks and Protected Areas program." In the 2004 televised Premier's address members here will recall that our Premier did announce that an additional \$21 million would be allocated to the parks and protected areas, specifically for water and sewer system upgrades in our protected areas, over the next three-year period, beginning in '04-05 one would hope, perhaps, with the

introduction of the budget today. So we'll have to wait for that.

Additionally, the Auditor General recommended that this ministry "record in its financial statements all revenues, expenses and surpluses generated through the operation of provincially-owned facilities." However, as all members here would know, certain aspects of the operations of both the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium and the Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium have been contracted out, very successfully I might add, to the respective not-for-profit societies, or what we frequently refer to as the "friends of" groups. Nonetheless, to specifically address the numbered recommendation from the Auditor General's annual report and to remove the audit qualification, my ministry and I have agreed to seek approval to start recording the net revenues of these not-for-profit societies – in other words, of the Friends of the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium and the Friends of the Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium – on a prospective basis starting in the '05-06 fiscal year, and I'm sure that's music to the AG's ears.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, the quality of programs and activities undertaken by my ministry in '02-03 and the dedication of the individuals with whom I'm privileged to work and work with collaboratively in turn with communities across Alberta were very important components in ensuring that Albertans experience very fair opportunities and the quality of life to which they aspire.

I want to conclude, finally, by thanking my ministry staff, our agencies and foundations, our partners, all of my colleagues in government and on the opposition side who have contributed in one way or another to help my ministry accomplish its goals and objectives in 2002. And thank you, once again, to the Auditor General and his staff for all of their work.

Any questions that might be forthcoming I will endeavour to answer and/or get some of my officials to help out where needed. If there is something that time does not permit us to answer or that we cannot, for whatever reason, answer at this time, I will undertake to do my best to provide some further enlightenment in writing after we're done. In all the questions, Mr. Chair, I would only ask that if there's a page reference that can be offered at the top of the question, that would be helpful in guiding us.

Thank you for your kind attention.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dunn, please proceed.

Mr. Dunn: I'll be very brief since the minister has covered most of the comments I was going to make, and I thank him for the update on some of that, which we'll obviously be following up.

Just one brief comment to supplement what you heard from the minister. The first two recommendations that came out in our report on Community Development this year did come from a systems value-for-money audit that we completed there, and it was as a result of doing more in-depth value-for-money work that we came up with that recommendation 8 and the unnumbered recommendation. You heard from the minister as to the response that the ministry has taken and their acceptance of those recommendations and their commitment to have that implemented this year, which we'll be following up and will report on next year.

Those will be my opening comments, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We will now proceed with questions from the members, starting with Ms Blakeman, followed by Mr. Shariff.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much.

An Hon. Member: At a loss for words?

Ms Blakeman: No. I'll skip the editorial comments I was going to make.

I'm on recommendation 8 appearing on page 80 of the Auditor General's report, around the cost-effectiveness of service delivery alternatives for operating parks and protected areas. Specifically, what I'm wondering is: what evaluation does the ministry perform on private operators before they're allowed to assume responsibilities for operating parks and protected areas? What's your system? What's your criteria for evaluating those private operators?

Mr. Zwodzesky: You mean in terms of whether they are suitable or not or whether they have the depth, breadth, experience? That kind of thing?

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. I notice under the findings that appear on page 80 that there's some discussion about, you know, private operators and looking at other service delivery alternatives and that kind of thing.

Mr. Zwodzesky: It's a very good question, Mr. Chair. Let me say that we use a fairly standardized call for proposals process, which also involves a tendering process through which we not only solicit but also evaluate and select specific proposals for possible or potential facility-operating agreements and service contracts at the park level. In fact, our ministry does ensure to the best of our ability that these processes are followed and adhered to.

I would just say briefly that some of the issues that we look at would include documentation relative to insurance issues, safety programs, and inspection reports that have been placed on file. We look at different formats and processes that we already have in place to support other contract processes which might improve our information gathering and collection systems as we look at and regard the bids and the contracts that we monitor.

9:00

I think I could safely say that in all cases we're looking at the commitment that a potential service provider brings to the table if it's an operating agreement. If it's a service provision agreement such as waste removal or sewage treatment or whatever it might be, we would also look at the experience that particular operator has, and we're always evaluating that against the costs of the particular bid in question in comparison with others. Some have longer and larger track records, Mr. Chair, than others, but I think I'm quite comfortable in saying that the process is really very open, very fair, and very thorough.

Ms Blakeman: I'm having some trouble reconciling what the minister just said with what I'm reading in the Auditor General's report. For example, there's no evaluation of effectiveness. "The Ministry does not get summarized performance information from the area offices and has not determined if contracting with private operators is achieving the intended results." When we look under this recommendation and the findings specific to the second unnumbered recommendation, "The Ministry did not consistently use the criteria to select operators," there's a schism here. Would you like to comment on that?

Mr. Zwodzesky: I can, and I can provide more of a detailed written response later if you wish. I think it's important to recognize that we look after over 500 sites in the province. They all have different conditions, terms, and what have you in that respect. But specific to

the 116 or so provincial campgrounds, for example, where we may or may not consider some form of contracting out, we do do periodic reviews.

I think the Auditor General, if I read his comments correctly, has said: try and ensure greater consistency and perhaps do a little more thorough follow-up. We have undertaken to do that. So we have agreed with the Auditor General's recommendation, and we will ensure that whatever existing processes we have, where those kinds of comparisons are made, do spell out more clearly the potential advantages.

Mr. Chair, I think I should point out that in some cases it's not easy to attract private services for contracting and/or operating. In some cases we ourselves are operating some of our provincial parks and campgrounds, and in other cases we have very effective and economically well proven, advantageous contracts with other service providers. Nonetheless, these facility operating agreements or maintenance service contracts or whatever you wish to call them will continue to be used when they are determined to be the most cost-effective approach. I think that's part of what the Auditor General was saying, if I read him correctly, and I may ask him to perhaps comment if I've not hit the mark squarely.

The Chair: Mr. Dunn?

Mr. Dunn: Ronda White will comment.

Ms White: I'll comment on that. The first recommendation was around the overall cost-effectiveness of the program, evaluating whether the approach to outsourcing the parks and protected areas is valid.

In response to your question, Ms Blakeman, for the contract management recommendation on page 81, what we found was that they had policies and procedures in place with appropriate selection criteria to determine if an operator was appropriately selected. Those criteria weren't always used as they conducted the process.

Ms Blakeman: I think that was the point I was making to the minister.

Ms White: So the ministry is committed to improving the application of the policies and procedures.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Shariff, followed by Mr. Mason.

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Minister and your staff, for coming before us today. I also want to thank the Auditor General and his staff for coming before us today. I think you made a wonderful presentation, and if I were to believe everything, which I want to, we should probably just finish it here with all the accolades.

But I have a few questions, and for the first one I just want a little clarification from the Auditor General. When I hear words like, you know, "reservation of opinion," I start asking the question: what does it mean? So, Auditor, if you can help me understand page 83, number 4, where you are making reference that your "report on the financial statements of the Persons with Developmental Disabilities South Alberta Board had a reservation of opinion for not disclosing payments totalling \$4.6 million to two health authorities." Can you just explain to me in lay terms what that means?

Ms White: The financial statements do not include the disclosure of the amount of the transactions with the regional health authorities,

so under generally accepted accounting policies we would expect that they would include the disclosure of the transaction with the RHAs given that we consider them related parties. So it's information for you to evaluate the costs of those, and maybe Fred can supplement.

Mr. Dunn: So where you're at is on the bottom of page 83?

Mr. Shariff: Right.

Mr. Dunn: The RHAs are related to the PDDs as related parties, and the related party requirements are normally to show where one receives resources and is there an economic dependency on those resources, and thus is it likely for those resources to continue to come in in future operating periods? In this case there were \$4.6 million of payments to two health authorities that had not been described as related parties, leaving the reader of the financial statement to assume that certain of those dollars were paid to unrelated parties.

So it's merely a disclosure requirement that is needed in order that you can tell who is arm's length and who is not arm's length, and you want to have all your non arm's-length transactions described so you can see who are related parties and who are not related.

Mr. Shariff: Okay. So it just wasn't on part of the ministry's reporting. That's fine.

That leads me now to the question for the minister. Page 74 of your annual report under note 16, the second paragraph, talks about grandfathered clients. We did grandfather them in the past, and there was an understanding that you were directed by the government to continue providing these services until service responsibility was handed over to a more appropriate provincial program. I'd like to know from you: what's the progress on that, and when do you expect that transfer to happen?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you for the question. I think you've sort of hit the nail on the head with the comment about: until some other government program can be there to help out those individuals.

Mr. Chair, the brief history of this is that this particular point goes back to the Building Better Bridges report, which, in fact, referenced the fact that we did have some individuals to whom some of our contracted agencies may have been providing PDD services, but those individuals either did not fit one hundred per cent the criteria or the mandate or the age group or whatever.

I'll give you an example. We know that in one or two let me call them remote areas of the province we might have a PDD agency set up to deliver a service, which, as we all know, is intended for adult Albertans with a developmental disability, but there may have been one person who was 16 years of age. Technically and strictly speaking, that person does not fall within the mandate of being an adult under the PDD system and therefore should not be receiving services from us. But it would make no sense in that remote area to establish a whole other bureaucracy to service one individual who, obviously, is under age. So that person may have been receiving services from a PDD agency that we would have had a contract for and funded. I'm just telling you that that's one type of individual that we looked at.

The other type of condition might be where we had some dual diagnoses or we had individuals who had a form of difficulty that was not specified in the legislation or in the policy, but quite frankly without our PDD system they may not be receiving services anywhere, again usually because of a remote living circumstance.

So when I put together the Building Better Bridges report, Mr.

Chair, I had indicated that we should try to continue to ensure that those services are provided for those individuals, and we grandfathered them in. Now, over the few years we've been working on this, we've tried to ensure that there's an orderly hand-off, if you like, of service provision to those individuals. We've had some successes, but we still have a little ways to go, and we've been in contact with the Auditor General's department to try and reduce the number of individuals who have been grandfathered.

Typically, Mr. Chair, it's important that those individuals do receive some kind of service because we're dealing with the most vulnerable citizens in this whole province, and until I'm satisfied and my staff are satisfied that they're being looked after in some other program within our government circle, they need to remain somewhere. Otherwise, they will not be getting any service whatsoever. So we've undertaken to move that, and we have rolled that forward. I don't know if the AG wants to comment further or not, but that's a little bit of background to where we're at.

9:10

Mr. Dunn: Yeah. This is obviously a very, very sensitive area. We take no exception whatsoever with what the minister has just said. These are clearly individuals that deserve care. The question came as they did not meet the criteria under which the legislation was formed, and it really is a comment around the legislation. The legislation did not contemplate that grandfathering. The ministry has been handling this for many years, has been living with the situation for many, many years. You've had these grandfathered individuals as they've been aging, going through their care and attention, but they haven't yet met the specific requirements of the legislation. So it's more of a comment around the legislation than it is a comment around the conduct or the costs that are being incurred by the ministry.

Mr. Shariff: Thank you so very much, and I hope you'll respond to this with some changes in your regulations. Thank you so very much.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, in 10 seconds let me tell you that we have been speaking with the office of the Auditor General, as he's just indicated, and we have also been speaking with officials in Alberta Justice just to see if there is some legal offside here that we obviously need to address. Again, I stress that it's important that we come up with a place for these individuals to receive the services they require, and that's what we're pledged to try and do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mason, followed by Mr. Cao.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. My question relates to page 15 of your department's annual report, respecting libraries. One of the statements is that "library card fees, permitted by provincial legislation, is one of the factors that may influence public library usage." When I served on the Edmonton public library board, we had quite vigorous debates about library fees and their impact on the accessibility of the service and so on. I guess one of the things that occurs to me is that the proportion of funding for libraries, at least in the Edmonton public, was quite low relative to the municipal contribution. I'm wondering if the department has any plans to phase out library fees and offset them with an increase in provincial funding, and if not, why not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: That's a very good question, Mr. Chair. Let me say a couple of things. First of all, as the members here will know,

I was very pleased that we were able to restore the funding this past year to the levels that it was at in 1992, '93, '94, and that's a good thing. We also recognize that there's still a way to go to address the increased costs of doing business in that sector. In that context, the fees collected by those libraries who are doing that are an important part of their overall revenue.

You know, every year I meet with the library community. Well, I meet with them throughout the year, but I specifically go and have one-on-ones with library systems and with the individual library boards and so on. I have to tell you, Mr. Chair, that we don't yet have a consensus on this issue from within the library community itself, and that is not any form of castigation. I'm just saying that the reality is that some library boards prefer to continue to have fees because there's a recognized value to the purchaser of the membership. There is obviously the revenue gained from it. In other cases people would like to get rid of the fees, but we don't seem to have unanimity on that point yet.

Nonetheless, we are looking at providing additional monies to help the libraries. The per capita grants that I alluded to earlier were increased and so, too, were the system grants increased, and we're looking at further increases this past year in one-time operating costs. I can't remember the figure just offhand, but it was probably between \$1 million and \$2 million . . .

Mr. Byrne: Slightly over \$2 million.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Slightly over \$2 million, which helped a great deal for operating and maintenance issues. I'm looking forward to having some additional financial help being provided as we approach the hookup for the SuperNet project, for example. So there's much to that, hon. member, and I wish we had unanimity on it one way or the other, but at this time we simply don't.

Mr. Mason: My supplementary, then, Mr. Chairman, to the minister: given that your report indicates that you believe that these fees may influence the usage of libraries, are there any steps you're taking to determine or to measure what impact they may have on accessibility to our public library system? Rather than wait for a consensus in the library community, why don't we just take the bull by the horns and make a determination? If indeed it is affecting library accessibility, then let's just do away with them.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Chair, we did do some tracking on this issue. I don't recall, to be honest, whether it was formal or informal, but I recall doing some kind of tracking to see if in fact there was an impact. I think, again, that some parts of the province would probably say, "Yes, there was," and perhaps their membership fell. Whether it was specifically because of the fee, which is what I think you're asking, I couldn't tell you at this time. I don't mind visiting that issue and taking it under some advisement and see if I can come back to you with a little more rounded answer with the background necessary, because it is an important point.

The Chair: Mr. Zwozdesky, if you could reply in writing, please, to the committee through the clerk, and she will provide the response to all members.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much for that direction.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cao, followed by Ms Blakeman.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister and the

department staff, for providing us excellent service. I could say that besides family units, community is very important to the fabric of our society. I can understand your department spending tangible money, but the intangible benefits tend to be dominant. So in a way it's a tough job.

I also thank you, Auditor General, for providing some information regarding this.

My focus still, as I've said many times before, is looking at effective, efficient, economical, and ethical kinds of perspectives. Today I just want to focus on page 24 of the minister's report, on the subject of Alberta brain injury initiatives. I'm probably not asking a question but suggesting an idea if you haven't done it that way. I remember my grandfather always told me that if you pick up things on the river, it almost never ends, so you go to where they throw it in and find out. So it's more on the prevention side. My question is: do you have any co-ordination with other ministries regarding brain injury accident causes, either in transportation or human resource work and safety?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, we have a lot of co-ordination and cross-ministry work that gets done to try and help prevent the huge number of injury-related accidents. In the strictest sense of the sort of definition, if you will, of persons with an acquired brain injury, we are dealing with or trying to deal with those individuals who weren't necessarily born with a brain injury, because if they were, they would be automatically, depending on the severity and so on, coming up through the system and making their way into the PDD area.

But acquired brain injury is a different thing because it has many different causes. It can be, as you're suggesting, from a motor vehicle accident or a sports-related accident or as a result of a stroke or some other form of medical condition. It can be as simple as slipping on your stairs and banging your head on the sidewalk, and suddenly there you are with a brain injury.

9:20

In most of those cases we're seeing some fairly good results based on our conversations with Health and Wellness about rehabilitative programs that are there to help these individuals regain their memory loss, if that's the case, or their mobility loss, if that's the case, and so on and to reintegrate themselves into our society, hopefully perhaps back to the level they were at before, and we're doing some of the same stuff with other ministries.

Let me just say that the intention of our Alberta Brain Injury Network or our Alberta brain injury initiative was to provide a provincially co-ordinated regional delivery system that recognizes and assists the recapacitation of individuals. In other words, how can we help these people to feel like there's a support network in place? So, yes, we are working with other ministries to help accomplish that.

My final point would simply be that it isn't enough in our programs and services throughout the government to simply say: you've had a brain injury. You go to the hospital, you get attention, and then you're let back out onto the street or back home or wherever you go without there being a support mechanism in place to help you. I can tell you that in most of the cases that I've dealt with, nobody expected to have a brain injury at 5 o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon, and suddenly they did. Into the health system they go, they come out, and there was a lack of a co-ordinated approach to helping them rehabilitate. They did not know where to go.

The survivor's guide, that I commented on earlier, was one of the very best parts of this initiative. Now these regional service

contracts that we have through the increased funding that we have, which started at \$1 million – it went to \$2 million, and now I think it's up around \$4 million or \$4.5 million – are really beginning to make a big difference, and an important part of that is the co-ordination that you talk about.

So our single largest partner, if you will, will certainly be Health and Wellness, as it has been in on the development of this program, but this is very much Community Development driven.

Mr. Cao: Okay. Well, I'll follow up on that question. In fact, again talking about co-ordination with other departments, I noticed that under the Wild Rose Foundation there is a line called international development, and also within your portfolio there is a citizenship education fund. Because international development relates to foreign trade, my question is: do you have such a co-ordination where, you know, you help overseas programs? Do you have any ideas? If you haven't, I'd suggest you think about co-ordinating economic development with foreign trade.

Mr. Zwozdesky: We do to some extent. To understand the international development program would be to sort of look at it from the area of projects that meet criteria such as a need for a project to be funded because of compassionate grounds, because of humanitarian grounds, because of some relief effort, or because of some world disaster, and I could give you examples.

Now, remember that the Wild Rose Foundation will provide or consider providing monies to eligible projects where an Alberta partner, a not-for-profit Alberta partner, exists and is the applicant, and that particular applicant then has a compatriot organization that is also a not-for-profit in whichever international location the aid is being requested for. So we would work through in some cases . . .

The Chair: Mr. Zwozdesky, if I could interrupt you for a second, please. You're referring to page 212 of your annual report; correct?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'm not referring to any particular page. I'm just trying to answer the member's question.

The Chair: The international development program, \$1.6 million. Just for the chair's clarification.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Right.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm sorry. Please proceed.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Okay. Just to conclude, where it's appropriate, hon. member, we would work with International and Intergovernmental Relations. For example, I know that we have contacted them on several of these for some background information prior to perhaps awarding a grant so that we're more well rounded on it. In some cases where employment for women has been cited as one of the compassionate or humanitarian relief grounds for considering a project, we have looked at what the economic impact would be and how and if we are truly going to see the intended objective met. In other cases we would also do similar things with Economic Development.

Mr. Cao: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms Blakeman, followed by Alana DeLong.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I'm looking at page 34 of the Community Development annual report, specifically at measure 4.5. Now, this is the "percentage of adult Albertans who believe that, overall, historical resources are being adequately protected and preserved in Alberta communities." This has been declining, not by stupendous percentages but steadily declining, over the last several years and is significantly off from the target. In the discussion points that follow the graph, there are a number of reasons put forward why the department obviously thinks there has been this decline, most of them sort of blaming the participant, that they didn't understand what a historical resource was, for example. I'm wondering if I could get the minister to comment on this gradual decline. I think, in fact, that you are dropping this measurement, but I'm struggling to believe that it's all the fault of the people who just don't get it. What else is involved here?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Hon. member, it's a delicate, sensitive, and tough question, but the measurement, the way it was worded, is really beyond our influence. If you look at it, Mr. Chair, we're asking what percentage of adult Albertans "believe that, overall, historical resources are being adequately protected and preserved in Alberta communities." I guess we're more interested in knowing how our role in that regard is than we are in knowing about the perception that people might have about it. So we're looking for something more tangible, more concrete to measure.

Now, we do do satisfaction surveys at virtually all of our historic sites . . .

Ms Blakeman: Sorry. This is a better one than the satisfaction surveys. I mean, at least it's whether people believe it or not. But continue.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I mean, let's not get silly about this. What we're trying to tell you is that we're trying to improve the measurement so that we can track better and help provide a better service at our 18 historic sites, cultural places, and interpretive centres. I'm sorry if you don't agree with that, but that's what we're trying to do: improve the service. This is a little too airy-fairy a performance measure against the strategic business plan that we're trying to develop.

So we're truly trying to help this situation, because based on that information, we will be able to hopefully set some new directions and make some long-awaited improvements at these centres, and that will increase visitation. It will increase satisfaction and participation, educational programming, and so on.

Ms Blakeman: Well, outside of the city of Edmonton the government is the only one that has the power to designate an historical resource, so it does fall back to you.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Correct. But what's your question?

The Chair: That was the question. Thank you.
Ms DeLong.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. If we could go to your annual report, page 22, measure 2.2.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Page 22, measure 2.2?

Ms DeLong: Yes. "Percentage of adult Albertans who believe human rights are fairly well or very well protected in Alberta." I seem to see a change within Albertans in terms of the understanding

of gender equality. The concern that I have, you know, sort of where I come from, is that the number one indicator of a child's future success in life is not education, is not health. It's the involvement of both parents in their child's life.

So that sort of gets me into the area of access after divorce, and access after divorce is very much what could be considered a man's issue. I notice that on the page before, one of your strategies is to "collaborate with other jurisdictions in support of initiatives by Ministers responsible for the Status of Women." Now, in terms of gender equality, is this one of your strategies that you will be changing in the future or adding to in the future so that you do have gender equality? You're supporting women's issues. Will you also be supporting men's issues?

9:30

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I would like to think that we're doing both because gender equality, obviously, is important for everybody. I want to tell you, hon. member, that at the federal/provincial/territorial tables when we discuss specifically women's issues, we also talk about the impact, the role, and the contribution of others beyond the sphere of just women. In that context, we do discuss, if you like, the equality of men.

I think that it's a given understanding – at least I hope it is – that women do face unique circumstances that in many cases men do not, child-bearing being the most obvious one. We have a very large number of women in this province as in other provinces – and it grows as you go into the north, unfortunately – who are displaced for one reason or another from their homes. They may be on the streets. So, too, are many men. However, in most cases when you're dealing with women, they have children with them, so we have these extensive shelter programs and so on. But I would like to think that the act serves to address individuals fairly and equally regardless of gender or age.

Now, if there's something specific you have in mind that perhaps we might want to follow up on with you, then, through the chair I'd be happy to do that. I'm not sure if there's some other part to your question still coming.

Ms DeLong: No. That's fine. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms DeLong.

Ms Blakeman, followed by Mr. Broda.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Referring to page 40 of the ministry's annual report, this has the total area of parks and protected area. You said that there was an emphasis on ensuring long-term protection of existing areas. Then I'm wondering why the total area of parks and protected areas is targeted to decline. You're going from 82,000 square kilometres and change to 81,000 and change. In the remarks that follow, it talks about how there will be no more increase because the Special Places 2000 program is now finished. So there'll be no more; I'm wondering why you're anticipating less.

Mr. Zwozdesky: That's a good question. Let me say that when we concluded the Special Places 2000 program – I believe it was on or about my birthday, Mr. Chairman, in July of 2001 – we saw the addition of numerous new parks. We saw the addition of thousands of hectares of land. That was a very, very long and involved process that goes back to about 1988 or '89, so we were quite pleased to have concluded that particular Special Places 2000 program. That program under that name is now done, save for the fact that we have some management plans that are still being finalized

Now, it's always debatable whether or not there should be some

new program that might come forward to serve the same intents and purposes of the Special Places 2000 program. At the moment we do not have that, but I would tell you that in a few cases we have already added some additional land for protection or we've changed the status of that land for additional protection. I'm thinking of some initiatives in the Bow Valley corridor, if my memory serves correctly, where we have in fact done that.

To try and answer the specific question, we don't see a huge amount of Crown land, at this point at least, being designated or considered for designation as new protected territories. Yes, there have been some, and, yes, I would think there might be some more. Yesterday in the House hon. members would recall that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie asked me a similar sort of question arising out of the Evan Thomas PRA. So those considerations in a few limited cases at this stage are on the table.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I understand the minister saying that there may be new stuff added but not likely. I'm still wondering why you're planning for a decline.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I think this was in relation, Mr. Chair, to the target that had been set at the time. Three years before?

Ms Barlow: Two years before.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Two years before. So there was a decline experienced during that period.

Dr. Byrne: No, no. The target was set . . .

Mr. Zwozdesky: Let me get my deputy to comment on this.

Dr. Byrne: Yes. Excuse me.

The target had been set previously during the planning period. Now, as it turned out, when the special places program was completed, as the hon. minister has alluded to, we had actually exceeded the target. But there certainly is no intention of reducing the target. Fortunately, we had been able to cover more than we thought we might.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. That's the answer. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Broda.

Mr. Broda: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister and staff and Mr. Dunn and his staff, thank you for being here today. I've got a question here that I almost answered for myself after I've been looking at it. However, I will be asking you this question. On page 31 of your annual report, Mr. Minister, strategy 4.10 has some of the improvements in conjunction with Alberta Infrastructure at some of our sites for access to heritage facilities for persons with disabilities. My question was: what has actually been done to improve access for the disabled in these areas? Basically it's identified in the report here, but what additionally do you see has to be done at these sites? Are we covering all the sites in the province? You've identified four or five major ones, but there are other sites that are there. What program have you got to implement further improvements for disabilities?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, hon. member, for the question. It's a good one because it's very timely and it's very appropriate as we move forward with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons

with Disabilities strategy, the Alberta strategy, and we're looking at that report now.

I want to say that we have made considerable improvements to help persons with disabilities gain better and more expedient access to many, if not all, of these sites in one way or another, and others are on schedule now for review. I recall having been recently at the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre – I hope I've got the name exactly right – and also at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Interpretive Centre and at the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, and the list goes on. I see where in some cases we've expanded the walkway so that it's easier for wheelchairs to go, for example, or for people with walkers to go. We've made further improvements in our planning for seniors' groups as well, who may not be in the strictest sense disabled, obviously, but have mobility-related issues, and in order to help them, we've put in some automated doors, larger public washroom access, larger toilets, and so on.

So it is a good issue. We have made some improvements, and I do acknowledge that we need to do more, but we're doing the best we can within the budgets we have, and I'm pretty proud of the improvements we've made. We do get comments, by the way, thanking us for what we have done in some areas. We also get some criticisms, knowing that we need to do more.

Mr. Broda: Okay. Thank you for that answer.

My supplementary question – and maybe it's not appropriate here, but I'm going to throw it out anyhow because we're talking about the sites that we are involved in and operate. When you have communities that have sites like museums that have no public access, where they have to fund it all and can't afford it, is there anything that we're looking at for those sites? I'm going to use specifics. Smoky Lake in my constituency has no access, and they are continually saying: we don't have the resources to put it in. What's happening?

9:40

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, let me just give you three quick ways that they might wish to consider addressing the problem. One of them would be through the community facility enhancement program; there are dollars available there for this very idea. The community initiatives program considers the same thing. Some of them are on a matching basis, some of them up to \$10,000. In the case of CIP, for example, if memory serves, \$10,000 can be accessed without the matching component, and that's right in the criteria, which everybody knows. In a few other instances, depending on the specifics, hon. member, they might even qualify for assistance from our Wild Rose Foundation. It just depends on the exact nature of it, but the two best sources are CFEP and CIP for that very issue.

Mr. Broda: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mason, followed by Cindy Ady, the most patient member of this committee.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, page 99 of your department's report indicates a significant shortfall in the dedicated revenues. The largest one, nearly \$3 million, is for cultural facilities and historical resources, and there are a number of others. Anyway, it adds up to a \$4.8 million shortfall. I wonder if you could explain for the committee what's behind this.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'm going to get one of my financial officials to elaborate on the answer. But if you read the footnote on what

constitutes the background to the shortfall/excess component, you will note that this is related to the donations that we receive of artifacts and other items and how we evaluate and appraise them, come up with a dollar value if we're receiving them and if there's a tax receipt involved with it, what conditions might follow with that, and so on.

Now, I don't know if there's someone here – Mr. Batra, would you like to comment further and more specifically to the member's question, please?

Mr. Batra: Sure. The ministry had undertaken to take in a donation of a helicopter known as Grey Gull, and that donation did not materialize, while we went forward and budgeted for it, both the expense and the revenue. So that's primarily the difference, \$3 million which was never utilized.

Mr. Mason: Okay. I wonder if you can elaborate on the nearly half a million dollar shortfall under the government of Canada G-8 summit security agreement. What's the situation with that? The protesters just didn't materialize?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Why, you weren't there?

Mr. Mason: I was there, but no one else was.

Mr. Batra: Well, the government of Canada G-8 summit security agreement was a Canada-Alberta agreement pertaining to security measures required in connection with the holding of the G-8 summit. This agreement had been budgeted as a dedicated revenue initiative. However, after the government and lottery fund estimates were released, it was determined that this agreement would be recorded as a payment under agreement.

So what happened at the end of the day was that we didn't get any money from the feds in that particular year, but we did end up getting some money – I think it was about 100,000 and some odd dollars* – the next year from them after billing them. They did come to clean up the sites, and they spent some more money as well.

Mr. Mason: And where would that money be found?

Mr. Batra: We did set it up as a receivable, and that's the difference. Once you set it up as a receivable, that means the money is due, but it never showed up.

Mr. Zwozdesky: In that specific year.

The Chair: Thank you.

Cindy Ady, followed by Ms Blakeman.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. My original question got asked, but I found another one that I wanted to ask earlier. It's regarding page 15 of your annual report. I'm looking at the top of the page, participation in sport and recreation activities for adults in Alberta. I see that you've set your target at 90 per cent, a very lofty goal. I admire that. I'm looking at the numbers that you have been graphing for the participation levels, and, I mean, they're strong. When you look at them, they're fairly strong. What concerns me is that I see a trend where we're starting to drop off. It's not huge, but we are dropping off at a time when I feel like we've been trying in the province to get the message out about fitness in children as well as adults. Is there a reason that you see for this number starting to trend downward, on a downward slide? Measure 1.2.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Chairman, I would say that there are many, many factors that contribute to this overall equation of how many people participate, to what level and degree they participate and so on. I mean, just off the top of my head, some of those factors would be the amount of disposable income you might have, the amount of time commitment it might take, or the availability of a facility where you would like to do your physical participation. There might be other factors related to the cost of that participation and so on.

On the surface, when we discuss this issue at the federal/provincial/territorial table, we know that we have been successful in increasing the participation level by 10 per cent right across Canada, and that's a good thing. Each time we meet, we try to say: what can we do to increase it yet again? How do we win that ball game again? I'm not pleased whenever we see a slight downward trend, obviously, in that participation level.

We have been working with Health and Wellness on some cross-ministry initiatives to try and improve that situation, with a greater awareness. We have helped in the community by helping to build and co-partner the building of many new recreational facilities, which might serve as an incentive. I think there's a lot more focus now, I hope, on the preventative side of the health equation. We talk about obesity. We talk about malnutrition. We talk about proper diets and the general importance of physical activity.

I can tell you that in some examples that I've been made aware of, Mr. Chair, muscle-toning for seniors has made a huge difference at a couple of our seniors' lodges here in Edmonton that I've visited. Suddenly, because of proper instruction at that facility or perhaps just the availability of some instructor who knows something about fitness, we have seen individuals who literally couldn't pick up a book at the beginning of the session, and by the time a few months had elapsed, with the proper coaching and training through some physical activity workouts, they were able to not only pick up the book but pick up several books. I just cite that as one quick example.

So we are making an impact and a difference, but it's one of those which is a little bit difficult to measure finitely. Nonetheless, we're doing whatever we can to reverse any downward trends that may be developing, and there are some statistics and surveys available to help further explain what I'm driving at.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. Are you aware of any other studies out there that show how Albertans are doing compared to – you talk about meeting with other ministers on this area. Are there any studies being done to show some comparative? How is Alberta doing versus the rest of Canada in this area?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I have some of this information in my notes here. The short answer, Mr. Chair, while I look at my notes here, is yes.

I know that we have some health surveys that have been done. I know that we have a fitness and lifestyle research project that has been done, and 52 per cent of Albertans in one of these surveys said that they were either physically active or moderately active. That compared to about 46.5 per cent of Canadians, so we're a little ahead of the average but not high enough for the overall picture, in my opinion. Similarly, we had 48 per cent of Albertans compared to 53.5 per cent of Canadians who indicated that they were physically inactive, so we've won on both sides. But that's still a fairly low number, I'm sure members here would acknowledge.

So we're doing some tracking. We're working with some institutes, and we're involved in some of the national debates and in telephone surveys on how to go about better impacting this to get the improvements that we're all seeking. But we did achieve our objective Canada-wide, and Alberta was a large driver in helping

*See p. PA-65, right col., para. 11

achieve that objective of increasing physical activity by 10 per cent. I think that statistic goes back a couple of years, and we've set a similar objective Canada-wide, with Alberta, hopefully, leading the pack for the coming year.

9:50

Mrs. Ady: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.
Ms Blakeman.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. I'm redirecting attention to page 81 of the Auditor General's report around the unnumbered recommendation on improving systems "for selecting private operators to run provincially-owned parks and for monitoring contract performance." In the findings I note that "the Ministry could not provide [the Auditor General's audit staff] with evidence that it conducted site inspections," and I'm wondering why the ministry couldn't provide proof that it conducted site inspections.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'm going to get my assistant deputy minister to perhaps comment on this if he wishes. I think we tried to answer some of this before, and maybe we didn't quite hit the mark. So let me see if one of my officials has a more pointed answer for the hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

Mr. Kristensen: We do actually conduct site visits. It's just that in some of those cases that were selected randomly, we did not. We know we can do a much better job. We have criteria, as the minister pointed out previously, and we know that we can do a better job of applying them. There are lots of reasons why we're not able to, let's say, visit our contractors individually as often as we should each operating season when the camping season is going on. But we're doing our best with the limited staff and resources that we have, and we're going to address that. We've already had training sessions for our staff both in terms of selection of contractors and in terms of contract monitoring, so they've had special training sessions to beef up their ability to do what the office of the Auditor General has asked us to do.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Just before you go to your supplementary, could you . . .

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Zwozdesky. Just for the record, could we have the name of your official, please.

Mr. Kristensen: John Kristensen.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I just wanted to say, before John leaves the microphone, that I think we actually recently hired a program co-ordinator – did we not? – to help out in this regard.

Mr. Kristensen: Yes. We actually have program co-ordinators in each of our seven areas now, including Kananaskis Country, to enhance our ability to do exactly what you've been speaking about.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Several positions; sorry. Not one, but several.

The Chair: Thank you.
Ms Blakeman.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. My supplementary question is from the same section. The Auditor General notes that there was no evidence that "operators were remitting all provincial levy funds they collect for the province." So I'm wondering why the ministry wasn't more diligent in ensuring that the private operators did remit all of the provincial levies that they collected.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, in a perfect world I guess they'd all be remitted as they should be, and I thought that was happening. I'll get one of my finance officials here to comment, perhaps, or maybe the Auditor General can expand if necessary. Mr. Kristensen will address this for the hon. member.

Mr. Kristensen: Thank you, Mr. Minister. No doubt there is a bit of a gap between the cup and the lip in terms of the extent to which we match up the dollars that the individual contractors give us and then our going out and actually double-checking that for a given weekend. When they've submitted levy fees for 100 campers, we're not always able to go out and count for that weekend: were there indeed 100 campers, or were there 115? Did we get a bit short-changed? It's extremely difficult to always match up the exact funding that we were provided by the facility operators and our double-checking to make sure.

There is some sense of trust associated with the contract that we sign with the facility operator, but we're also going to improve our monitoring of that. It's almost an impossible task to always double-check that there actually were only that number of campers there to represent that income that we're being given.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes this portion of our meeting. On behalf of all committee members I would like to thank the hon. minister and his staff for their responses today. I wish them all the best in their future endeavours. It's a department vital to the community and to the province.

Mr. Zwozdesky, would you like to briefly . . .

Mr. Zwozdesky: If you don't mind, I would just request that Mr. Batra be able to provide one brief sentence of clarification on a point.

The Chair: Oh, please do.

Mr. Batra: This is in response to Mr. Mason's questions relative to the federal revenue for the G-8 summit not being realized. We did have, in fact, \$211,000 come in, which was set up as a receivable. I misquoted when I said that it was 100,000 and some odd dollars, so I wish to correct myself on it.*

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Zwozdesky, you and your staff are free to leave now if you so wish. Again, thank you very much. Also, to the Auditor General, thank you for time, your attention, and your patience as well. We appreciate it.

Mr. Zwozdesky: And may I just say thank you in return to everyone. Much appreciated.

The Chair: Okay.

We have some more items on the agenda to discuss this morning.

*See p. PA-64, left col., para. 8

I would like to note for the committee members, please, a revised committee schedule for the review of the 2002-2003 ministerial annual reports and the Auditor General's 2002-2003 report. Please be aware of the following three updates.

The Hon. Mark Norris on very short notice has agreed to appear at next week's meeting on March 31. The Minister of Economic Development and his officials with less than two weeks' notice have agreed to appear next week. We really appreciated it. The chair does, the deputy chair does, and the clerk. We had an opening in our schedule, and the chair would like to note the co-operation of the minister and his department.

The Premier, the Hon. Ralph Klein, has been scheduled to appear before the committee on May 5, 2004. He has agreed in writing to come to the committee to discuss the issues surrounding his 2002-2003 Executive Council annual report.

We will reschedule the visit of the Hon. Gary Mar. The Hon. Greg Melchin, Minister of Revenue, has been scheduled for May 19, 2004. He was originally scheduled for May 5. Oh, pardon me. No. It was the other way around. The Hon. Gary Mar was scheduled for May 5.

Those are the changes. The chair would like to note that the clerk has worked diligently on our behalf to have these arrangements successfully concluded.

Now, under item 6, Other Business, the vice-chair, Mr. Shariff, would like to speak.

Mr. Shariff: As you know, we do have our annual Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees conferences around the

nation, and this year the conference is going to happen in Fredericton, New Brunswick. So I move that

the following individuals be approved to attend the annual Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees conference in Fredericton, New Brunswick, from August 28 to 31, 2004: the chair or his designate, the deputy chair or his designate, and the committee clerk.

The Chair: We have a motion. We don't need a seconder on this. All in favour?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed, if any? Motion carried. Thank you.

Now we have the date of the next meeting, which of course is going to be next Wednesday, March 31, and we are meeting, as I said earlier, with the Hon. Mark Norris, Minister of Economic Development.

May I have a motion to adjourn, please. Mr. Lukaszuk. All those in favour of the motion to adjourn?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Seeing none, carried.

Thank you very much, and we shall see you next week.

[The committee adjourned at 9:59 a.m.]