

Title: Wednesday, April 26, 2006 Public Accounts Committee

Date: 06/04/26

Time: 8:30 a.m.

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like to call the meeting to order. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I would like to welcome everyone in attendance. Perhaps we can start by quickly going around and introducing ourselves.

[The following members introduced themselves: Mr. Bonko, Dr. Brown, Mr. Chase, Mr. Eggen, Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Johnston, Mr. Lindsay, Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Prins, Mr. Rogers, and Mr. Webber]

Mr. Backs: Good morning. Dan Backs, Edmonton-Manning.

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

[The following departmental support staff introduced themselves: Mr. Asbell, Mr. Campbell, Ms Howe, Mr. Pheasey, and Mr. Stewart]

Mr. Cardinal: Mike Cardinal, MLA for Athabasca-Redwater and Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Corinne Dacyshyn, committee clerk.

The Chair: I would like to advise members that the agenda packages were sent out on Friday with copies of the follow-up response from the Hon. Guy Boutilier, Minister of Environment, related to his visit to this committee on March 22 and that copies of Mr. Cenaiko's written follow-up responses are currently being distributed.

The agenda was sent around. Could I please have approval of the agenda? Thank you, Mr. Webber. Moved by Mr. Webber that the agenda for the April 26, 2006, meeting be approved as distributed. All in favour? Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

Could we also please have approval of the committee meeting minutes of April 12, 2006? Mr. Rogers. Thank you. Moved by Mr. Rogers that the minutes for the April 12, 2006, committee meeting be adopted as circulated. Approved? Opposed? Seeing none, thank you.

On behalf, again, of all committee members I would like to thank the Hon. Mike Cardinal and his staff of the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment for their attendance this morning, and I now invite the minister to give a brief overview, no longer than 10 minutes, please, on the activities of his ministry.

I would like to advise all staff members as well that they do not need to touch any of the microphones. If individual users press the button, it actually turns it off for the *Hansard* console operator. Thank you.

Please proceed, Mr. Cardinal.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I really appreciate having the opportunity to do the presentation this morning. Of course, as you are aware, I'm here to present the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment 2004-05 annual report for your review. It includes the Department of Alberta Human Resources and Employment, the personnel administration office, the Alberta Labour Relations Board, the Appeals Commission for Alberta Workers' Compensation, and financial information from the Workers' Compensation Board.

As you are aware, there are a number of staff here with me that will be assisting me today. I have an abscessed tooth that I have to

look after almost immediately after this meeting. To save time, I won't go into introductions again because they just introduced themselves and it's in the records as to what part they play.

First, I'd like to report that we had a very good audit with no new recommendations in '04-05. It was the second year in a row that the ministry had a clean bill of health from the Auditor General. Thank you.

The reach of the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment is very broad, dealing with workers and employers, people who can't afford basic needs, and people who want to improve their skills.

Let me turn first to the Department of Human Resources and Employment, or HR and E. In '04-05 HR and E invested over \$713 million to offer training and career planning, to ensure that workplaces were safe and fair, and provided support to Albertans who need it. I am pleased to report that the majority of the department's business plan targets were met or exceeded. One measure that we did not achieve was the target for the percentage of clients who had child support orders or agreements when they stopped receiving child support services. The target was set at 80 per cent, and we came in at 78 per cent. While this is slightly below the target, it is a definite improvement from the 72 per cent of '03-04 and the 61 per cent in '02-03.

We, of course, deliberately set a very ambitious target for Work Safe Alberta. We targeted it for a lost-time claim rate of 2 or lower and achieved an actual lost-time rate of 2.6, the lowest rate in over 10 years, resulting in a significant savings in workers' compensation claim costs.

There were two big changes for our department last year. To ensure a more co-ordinated delivery of services for Albertans with disabilities, the assured income for the severely handicapped program, better known as AISH, was transferred to Seniors and Community Supports, and the responsibility for immigration was transferred to us from Advanced Education. These changes, of course, prompted the department to focus more resources on building Alberta's workforce.

I would now like to briefly walk through the four goals we had in '04-05 and highlight some of our accomplishments.

Goal 1. Almost 67,000 children received premium-free health benefits through the Alberta child health benefit program, or about 2,000 more than the previous year. Eighty-eight per cent of their parents said that they could now get additional health services for their children, which is good news. Human Resources and Employment provided more supplementary benefits also and improved others to better respond to specific client needs and assist them in moving towards health sufficiency. An escape family violence benefit of a thousand dollars was introduced to help people set up a new household after leaving an abusive situation.

I'd also like to detail the number of people and families helped. Alberta's economy is strong, and by working with stakeholders, our support and services help people get jobs and keep jobs. As a result, we achieved a decrease in the expected to work category of income support, from 15,540 to 13,432. In the not expected to work category there was an increase of almost 2,000, up from 9,299 to 11,153, mostly due to the increase in Alberta's population.

Goal 2. Almost \$270 million was spent to train people for jobs that are in demand and to provide other services to help people find and keep work. We began supporting people to take part-time occupational training also. In '04-05 Albertans made over 1.6 million visits to labour market information centres, and I believe we have 59 centres. The Alberta learning information service also provides information about education, careers, and employment. The website received 2.3 million visits, an increase of over 500,000 from the previous year.

Our third goal. Skill shortages were and are a real challenge, as most of you are aware. There are jobs, lots of them, but not enough workers with the right skills. Part of the department's role is to help employers and job seekers connect with each other. A priority is also to help people underrepresented in the workforce, such as aboriginals, people with developmental disabilities, immigrants, youth, and of course older workers. Eighty-one per cent of people who benefited from the department's training and employment services ended up with a job. Eighty-three per cent of participants who completed the First Nations training to employment program were employed in their field of training within three months. We also funded programs to help internationally trained professionals upgrade their skills and get Canadian work experience.

Goal 4. We continued the Work Safe Alberta Choose Safe Not Sorry campaign. Under Work Safe Alberta we reduced the lost-time claim rate to 2.6, the lowest in over 10 years, in spite of an increase in employment of over 40,000 jobs in 2004. In addition, Alberta continued to have one of the most stable labour relations climate in Canada. Over 99.9 per cent of collective agreements were settled without a legal work stoppage. This exceeds the target of 98 per cent. The minimum wage increased to \$7 per hour on September 1, '05, giving Albertans at the time the fourth highest minimum wage of 10 provinces after taxes.

The role of the Department of Alberta Human Resources and Employment is to help Albertans and therefore Alberta to prosper. The department's work supported Albertans who were unable to meet their basic needs, the development of a skilled workforce, and a safe and healthy work environment.

8:40

I would now like to speak about human resources in the Alberta government. That's the PAO. The personnel administration office works with other ministries to develop corporate human resource strategies so that employees can do their best work delivering government programs and services. This supports goals 5 and 6 of the ministry's business plan.

PAO achievements in '04-05 are many. The succession management framework was revised to enhance building capacity and leadership development. Marketing strategy and website enhancements helped promote the government as an employer of choice. Current employees were provided with information about the public service as a long-term career choice during an employee expo. The ambassador program promoted the public service to potential new employees. The internship program provided recent graduates with job experience. Forty-three teams were recognized during the 2004 Premier's awards of excellence ceremony. An integrated workplace health framework for the public service was implemented, and workplace health was highlighted at a conference attended by 700 employees.

As of March 31, '05, the number of salaried public service employees was just over 23,000. According to the '04 corporate employee survey 79 per cent of employees said that they were satisfied with their work in the Alberta public service. I would like to acknowledge all members of the public service for their continued commitment to excellence and dedication to ensuring high-quality programs and services provided to all Albertans.

The Labour Relations Board is the independent and impartial board responding to the day-to-day application and interpretation of Alberta's labour laws. In '04-05 the board sponsored mediation services to deal with some of the outstanding collective bargaining issues related to the '03 restructuring of the regional health authorities. I am pleased to report that 79 per cent of applications with board involvement were settled before reaching the formal hearing process.

The Appeals Commission for Alberta Workers' Compensation is the final level of appeal for workers' compensation matters in Alberta. The independence of the Appeals Commission is important to ensure an open, transparent, and accountable appeals process. In '04-05 over 1,300 appeals were filed with the commission. This is 19 per cent more than the previous five-year average. Because of the significant increase in workload, the commission was unable to meet the target of issuing a decision within 134 days of the appeal. To adjust for the increased workload, the commission, of course, increased its staff. By the end of '04-05 the commission had 16 hearing chairs and 22 part-time commissioners. The commission continues to work towards staffing levels that will accommodate the projected increased caseload.

In conclusion, overall the ministry has a very high clientele satisfaction and success rate. All reporting entities in the ministry received a clean bill of health from the Auditor General. I am proud to say that the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment achieved excellence in service and success for the government of Alberta and Albertans. In fact, the ministry received seven Premier's awards of excellence last year, six by the department and one by the personnel administration office.

That is the report, and again I'd like to thank you for having the patience to listen. Between my staff and myself we'll try and answer as much as possible, and anything we can't answer, we'll do in writing by reviewing the *Hansard*.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Cardinal.

Mr. Dunn, please.

Mr. Dunn: Yes. I'll be brief, Mr. Chairman. Our comments on the ministry and the Workers' Compensation Board start on page 237 of last year's annual report. Our work at the department last year focused on following up a prior year recommendation to improve its contract management administration system. The department has made satisfactory progress in implementing this recommendation by improving the capability of the information system to meet the users' needs and by providing upgraded training and more help resources to the users of the system.

At the Workers' Compensation Board, in addition to auditing the financial statements and the performance measures, our work focused on two areas. On the accountability information we recommended that the WCB improve the performance-reporting information that is provided to its stakeholders, and we had a follow-up of our prior year recommendation to improve controls over a program called the economic loss payments. We found that the WCB has made satisfactory progress in improving its control over the ELP system by requiring periodic reviews of these entitlements and strengthening the review and approval processes when determining economic loss entitlement.

Those, Mr. Chairman, are my brief comments. I and my staff will answer any questions directed to us.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dunn.

Before we proceed with Mr. Bonko, I would like to remind all MLAs that are not committee members that they certainly are entitled to participate in the meeting but not to vote, according to the Legislative Assembly Standing Orders.

Mr. Bonko, please proceed, followed by Mr. Johnston.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I understand that public and semiprivate golf courses receive gambling revenue through the community facility enhancement fund as well as the community

initiatives program. However, I'm not sure exactly why Human Resources and Employment paid Athabasca Golf and Country Club \$5,856 as indicated in the blue book grants on page 50.

Mr. Stewart: We have a program called the STEP program, which you may be familiar with, under which we provide grants to organizations like the Athabasca Golf and Country Club to provide career experience for students during the summertime. So it is likely – I don't know the details of the exact project – that that would hire probably two or three students doing ground maintenance, greenskeeping, that type of work for the summertime.

Mr. Cardinal: The budget for the STEP program is about \$8 million a year, and it's available to nonprofit organizations.

Mr. Bonko: Okay. Would that be similar for the Barrhead Golf and Recreation Area Society, that also received about \$2,700 and change?

Mr. Stewart: Yes. Those grants that you see, small grants like that, will be under the STEP program. They're to provide students with summer employment, career-related employment.

Mr. Bonko: Which would be matched by the association or the golf course as well? Because, you know, \$2,700 for the summer . . .

Mr. Stewart: Yeah. It provides a subsidy. We paid up to, I believe, back in 2004-05 probably about \$5 an hour, and the organization is expected to provide over and above that up to a market wage.

Mr. Cardinal: They have to follow the minimum wage guidelines. For those people that might not be aware, STEP, summer temporary employment program, has been around since 1974.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Johnston, please, followed by David Eggen.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, Minister. My questions will take us to the ministry's annual report, page 92, 10(a). The Alberta Labour Relations Board failed to meet some of the targets: the 90 calendar days in the completion of formal hearings. Can you explain that, please?

Mr. Cardinal: Yeah. Thank you very much. That's a good question. In 2004-05 the board experienced an increase of around 49 per cent in the number of hours spent in hearings mainly as a result of contentious files out of its Calgary office, I understand. Of course, the more time spent in hearings takes away from the time reserved for writing decisions. This was one of the largest factors that contributed to the 9 per cent shortfall for the performance measures.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you. My second question was answered in the preamble. So thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johnston.

Please proceed, and you will be followed by Mr. Rogers.

8:50

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I just want to thank the minister and his management team as well for being here this

morning. My questions are in reference to strategies 3.3 and 3.5 in the HRE annual report. I think it's on page 60. It refers to building Alberta's workforce and to collaborating with partners to improve human resource development. As we know, the controversy over the use of temporary foreign workers has been ongoing over these past several years, so I would like to ask how the importation of what appears to be at least 836 temporary foreign workers addresses strategies 3.3 and 3.5 specifically?

Mr. Cardinal: I think that we're all aware of what the Alberta policy is. You know, we are in the process right now. Number one, we want to continue promoting a strong economy so that there are jobs out there. That's a priority we have as a government. Of course, the economy is so hot now in Alberta. There are more jobs out there than people that are available immediately here in Alberta. Still, our top priority is to hire Albertans first, and that includes persons with development disabilities, people that may require additional training and supports to make the transition from Alberta Works to become self-sufficient and independent. Then we have the youth and some of the older workers that may be displaced.

The area I want to spend a bit more time with is the issue that there are over 200,000 aboriginal youth between the ages of 15 and 24 right now. I am going to be meeting with the minister of Indian affairs to look at how we may work together with them, even as a pilot project in Alberta, to look at reforming the social support system on the reserves so that people can get off welfare and get back into training programs and into employment. There are thousands of people. The Wabasca community, that used to be in my riding but is in Lesser Slave Lake now, has a population of about 5,000 on the reserve, and the unemployment is still 70 to 80 per cent and lots of poverty yet. So we have a lot of work here locally as a top priority to try and get our own people placed.

In addition to that, then, our second policy is to deal with other Canadians that may want to work in Alberta. Of course, even that may not provide enough workers to fill all the jobs, so we need to look at other areas. I've already had my first meeting with the new federal minister of immigration. He's definitely impressed with the hot economy in Alberta, and he understands the challenges we're faced with in relation to maybe not having the ability to fill all the jobs that are out there. So he's willing to sit down with us and lay out some policies that will accommodate our needs, keeping in mind again, you know, that we need to look after our people here first.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you. Specific to that, then, I would like to ask what your ministry has undertaken to work with unions to fill the labour shortage here in this province with Albertans and Canadians first, interfacing with the unions.

Mr. Cardinal: The staff may want to add to this answer. Basically, I have an open-door policy to meet with industry and, of course, all the unions also. We have never had a problem. Any time a request has been made to our department to meet with any union, we have, in fact. You know, the Lakeside Packers issue where some unions were involved in the strike: I toured that plant with a union member, the local management there, and gave assurance to the local representative of the union in that plant that any issue that they're not comfortable with, he'd phone me directly. I gave him my cell number. Our doors are open.

Alberta is a good place to live. It's got a good economy. It's got a good future. The government alone cannot resolve all the labour shortages. It's going to have to be up to industry, unions, opposition, our government, and others to participate in the process.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks.

The Chair: Mr. Rogers, followed by Mr. Backs, please.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I just want to thank you and your team for an excellent report, and I'd also like to commend you for the second year in a row receiving a clean bill of health from the Auditor General. Mr. Minister, my question is with regards to the caseload information found on page 51 of your annual report. In the area of the Alberta child benefit it shows an increase year over year of about 2,000 cases, representing about a 4 per cent increase. I'm just wondering if you can explain to us why we saw such an increase in that year over year?

Mr. Cardinal: I think that's a good-news story because at one time, before the introduction of the child health benefit program under my department, families would purposely stay on welfare – and I know this for a fact because I experienced this in my constituency – because of high health care costs, did not try to get off, could not afford to get off because the jobs they would get didn't pay enough to cover all the health care costs also. That is why this government introduced this particular program to assist families as quickly as possible to get off social assistance and back into the workforce. Of course, as the economy grows and more people become aware of these benefits and changes take place, we do make a special effort also to encourage families – in fact, we would be promoting and encouraging families to take advantage of the benefits provided, and that is why you see the changes in the caseload. This matches the increase in the number of people back into the workforce. I think it matches almost identically, around 2,000 – this went up about 2,000 – so a lot of those would be getting the transitional supports while they are working. I believe that the income criteria on that is also adjusted.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Well, then, just to follow up on your last point, what is the qualifying income level for a two-adult family with one child, and how much is that increase?

Mr. Cardinal: Under this budget for a two-income family with one child it's \$24,397.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Backs, please, followed by Mr. Lindsay.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Excuse me; I don't have much of a voice because of the hockey game last night.

Congratulations, Mr. Minister, on your concise report on the operations in many areas of your department. There are many good people that work for the human resources department, have had many strong accomplishments for the people of Alberta, but in my view there are still many things that can be done in the department. On page 64 of the annual report, strategy 4.7 states that "in 2004/05, work in successfully implementing the Work Safe Alberta strategy continued as evidenced by further reductions in Alberta's injury rate to an all-time low." However, there were 124 recorded workplace deaths in 2004 and 143 in 2005, last year, representing a steady rise seen over the last seven years, as well as 1.3 million workdays lost due to accidents and almost 170,000 incidents that were WCB claims. That's a rate of almost 500 a day, and that does not even touch on the incidents because many are not filed as WCB claims.

There have been huge advances over the years. This does not really include much of the . . .

The Chair: Question, please.

Mr. Backs: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The question is: why is the ministry not providing proper supervision on many of the non oil sands plants, and why is the rate of prosecution almost 50 times higher in Ontario for occupational injuries and fatalities?

9:00

Mr. Cardinal: In fact, with the prosecutions, for example – I don't remember exactly what the initial figures were – I know that under this budget it was over \$500,000, I believe, with 12 charges made. Like I said in the House yesterday or the day before, it is very unfortunate that we would have any deaths or any accidents, you know, when you have a hot economy like we do in Alberta. But that is no excuse for us to be maybe a bit weak in that area.

One of the things I wanted to also identify that we are working on is that close to 30 per cent of the accidents and deaths that happen are not on a work site. They're people travelling to the work site and back home. There was no process before to monitor it, and we are now putting in a process to identify that so that we can work on that to start with. I'll maybe ask the staff to expand on that specific question.

Mr. Stewart: Briefly, we are concerned with the statistics that you've identified, and one of the objectives of our Work Safe Alberta initiative is to educate, make employers more aware, and try to in a preventative way reduce the number of fatalities. One of the things that we've done is work with the WCB to secure additional dollars, that will allow us to hire additional workplace health and safety inspectors. We have a program called the targeted employer program where we identify employers who have a bad record both in terms of the number of injuries and fatalities, and we have our inspectors target those employers to work with them to try to improve the level of hazard assessment identification and workplace health and safety practices on the work site.

Secondarily, we're also working with Alberta Justice to hire additional prosecutors to allow us to prosecute those employers where we've been unable to prevent and where we think there's a need to prosecute. So we're providing additional resources to the system to address the kind of situation that you're describing.

Mr. Backs: One supplementary question. It actually deals with WCB and is regarding, really, performance. I suppose it might be addressed broadly in 3.2, page 242 of the annual report, I believe. It's the reports that I'm getting from a number of people that there are performance bonuses for WCB caseworkers. Surely, that might be seen to be for closing cases on time, which is a good thing, and people want to see that, but in many cases it's being interpreted and seen as being a bonus to deny benefits. Is this performance bonus being communicated to any caseworkers or understood by any of them as a reason to quickly get rid of the claim and deny benefits?

Mr. Stewart: That's a question that was actually raised during our SPC last fall. Guy Kerr, the executive director of the board, was in attendance. He's not here today, and I'd be reluctant to answer that question on his behalf, so I think we should take that question under advisement. We'll connect with Guy and provide you with a written answer to that question.

Mr. Cardinal: I think just one further clarification on the workers' compensation. As you all know, no doubt, with the workers' compensation all we have is the legislation. The whole operation is

owned by the stakeholders, the companies that belong to that organization, and they run the process a hundred per cent.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lindsay, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to commend the minister for another excellent annual report. On page 231 of your annual report under Future Challenges under the heading of Social in the second paragraph it talks about: "The 2004 unemployment rate for Aboriginals and Albertans aged 15 to 24 was 9.2% and 8.5% respectively." I guess my first question is in reference to that. When you reference aboriginals, does that include aboriginals that are living in First Nations communities as well as not living in First Nations communities?

Mr. Cardinal: Basically, I believe it's off-reserve aboriginals.

Mr. Lindsay: Okay. My supplemental, then, would be: I'd like to know what the rate of unemployment is in First Nation communities, and how many aboriginals living in those communities are enrolled in employment and upgrading training programs?

Mr. Cardinal: Okay. Of course, we have had admin agreements between the federal government and the province in the past that we do provide certain services to aboriginal people living off the reserve. As I mentioned before, the success of the welfare reforms in Alberta, where we do not really have any welfare offices anymore – I believe we have about 59 employment centres; that's the labour information centres, and 85 per cent of the people we deal with are just the normal Albertan that is looking for career counselling, job placement, resumé writing, and finances in some cases. Only a small percentage are dealt with through just specifically financial or social supports.

The unemployment rate of aboriginals off the reserve, because they're tied into the welfare reforms also, is about 7.5 per cent. When you go to the reserves next door, like the Bigstone band I belong to, it's still about 70 to 80 per cent unemployment and underemployment. The reforms we did here in Alberta back in '92-'93 have worked well, and that was always the target: to reduce the number of people on social supports.

That is why it's very critical that as a government we meet with the minister of Indian affairs very soon to talk about the push to do some social reforms on the reserves, so people can become independent and self-sufficient. You know, when you go back to '92-'93, the welfare caseload then was 97,000 cases, \$1.7 billion budget, 5,400 staff, and we had welfare offices all over. In fact, there were months where we opened 10,000 files and closed 10,000 files in Edmonton. That's how loose the system was. That's been completely reformed now. You walk into an office; it's an employment office, and the chance of getting a job for you is there. It works very well. It's something for all Albertans, I think, to be proud of.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Chase, please, followed by Ray Prins.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'll beg the committee's indulgence. I have to leave early due to a precommitment with the Minister of Community Development.

I'm referencing blue book figures that were sent earlier this week to the ministry of human resources. To begin with, the pages I'm referencing are 1592 and 1591. As the elected MLA for Calgary-

Varsity representing the University of Calgary I would like to know why the University of Calgary received less service funding, in fact \$42,832 – and that's the page 1592 reference that I made – than the University of Alberta, which received \$666,747, a rather dramatic difference. Obviously, I'm pushing for more funding for my university.

Mr. Stewart: The primary reason why there's such a discrepancy between the two institutions is that the corporate executive development program that we run for our employees is mostly done through the University of Alberta. Most of the funding that you see here listed beside the University of Alberta is to fund our corporate executive development program, which we do through the University of Alberta because we have a lot more employees residing in Edmonton than we do in Calgary. That's the main reason why you see that discrepancy.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My supplementary question has to do with competitive bids. I note again in the blue book – the reference page is 1276 – that Highwood Communications received work for \$547,760. I was just wondering: to what extent was the bid for the work they did a competitive one?

9:10

Mr. Stewart: Any contract that's over \$100,000 we will put to tender. I know that in this particular situation there was a competitive process undertaken to select Highwood Communications as the provider of that service, so the particular dollar figure you see there was subject to a competitive process.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Prins, please, followed by Bill Bonko.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the minister: I believe also that you've done an excellent job in this very challenging job market and somewhat exciting situation in Alberta where everybody seems to be employed if they want to be. My question. Go to page 130 of your annual report, and in the bottom section there it talks about program 3, skills investments. The budget for skills investments was \$287 million last year, and the expenditures were \$269 million, leaving a surplus or an underexpenditure of about 17 and a half million dollars. I'm just wondering if you could explain why we didn't spend that money.

Mr. Cardinal: Yeah. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, because of Alberta's strong economy there are lots of good paying jobs out there. We believe that in some cases people were choosing work over training, and I know that institutions across the north, Alberta in particular, are having some challenging times keeping trainees.

[Mr. Griffiths in the chair]

The department also started to require learners getting EI to make a contribution towards the cost of their schooling because they were getting money. This is consistent with our philosophy that education is a shared responsibility rather than all government.

Mr. Prins: Thanks. In relation to that, are you actually doing anything to increase participation in training programs? There are still segments of society that are underemployed. Are you going to try to increase training in some areas?

Mr. Cardinal: Yeah, we are. Our department will be revisiting its part-time training policies to fund higher cost courses in certain occupation and job skills and to actually in fact increase the value of grants up to \$1,200 per term to a maximum of \$3,600 so we encourage more people to participate in the process. This would cover, of course, tuition, books, transportation, and even child care in some cases.

Mr. Prins: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much.
Bill Bonko, followed by Reverend Abbott.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On page 98 of your annual report, goal 11, it says, “to provide a timely appeal service.” When I go to performance measure 11(a), the average number of days in 2003-04 was 202. Last year it was 243. What is your department doing to speed up the process to ensure that the workers are in fact dealt with in a timely manner, as proposed in your goal 11?

Mr. Cardinal: George will explain that.

Mr. Pheseay: We’ve taken a number of measures in that regard. We have added a number of appeal commissioners, which are the individuals directly involved in the actual hearing of the appeals, and we’ve continued to add those resources directed to reducing appeal timelines. We’ve also added staff in the preparation of appeals, and we’ve taken steps to revise the appeal process to try and streamline the appeal process, to have matters move forward to hearing only when they’re ready to proceed.

Mr. Bonko: The second supplemental question is: how do you come up with an ideal number of days that a person may have to wait before their case or their appeal is heard or at least remediated?

Mr. Pheseay: The 134 days is an aggressive target, and we’ve set that specifically so that we’re constantly challenged to reduce that number. I’m not sure what would be considered to be an ideal number, but we’ve set an aggressive target to try and ensure that we’re continually reducing that time to process appeals.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Reverend Abbott, followed by Dave Eggen.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again, thanks to the minister and the whole department. I guess I have a question also from page 130. I was looking at this page along with the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, and I noticed that under program 2, people investments, I guess the income support elements have a combined deficit of \$29.7 million, if I’m doing the math right there. I see that that is partially offset by an authorized supplementary estimate of \$14.9 million, but it still leaves us with a deficit of about \$14.8 million. I guess I need you, Mr. Minister, to explain to us how you can get away with that, having a deficit. Why do you have a deficit in this department?

Mr. Cardinal: Well, the reason for a deficit is, you know, that sometimes it’s hard to predict. It’s income support being about \$70 per caseload higher. The reason for that is, of course, as I mentioned earlier, more utilization of some of our transitional support programs; for example, health care. Drug costs are higher. There are utility arrears, in some cases reconnection fees – we do that when

families move or have difficulties – and of course daycare and other supports.

Rev. Abbott: Okay. I guess my supplementary, then, is: what is your department doing to reduce or eliminate this deficit? How do you deal with that? Do you just take it to the next year’s supplementary, or do you get it from, say, for example, the skills investments? How do you deal with that?

Mr. Cardinal: I think the way we do it is probably pretty positive. The department has developed and implemented strategies to better connect Albertans with the supports and services they need to become self-reliant. We’ve been doing that now for at least 15, 16 years. So I think that the department is reasonably good at knowing what areas to change or improve to ensure that we continue providing a smooth service for those people that are making the transition from being on social supports to becoming independent and completely self-sufficient.

At the same time, for those people that are not expected to work, we provide high-quality services for them also. That always costs money. You know, because our caseload is as low as it is in Alberta, in about 50 per cent of the 25,000 caseloads we’re dealing with hard-core caseloads. People are faced with many challenges: lots of poverty, lots of need for supports from our department. And it is a priority. We’re going to definitely deal with it.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.
Dave Eggen, followed by Ray Danyluk.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. My question has to do with the first goal, goal 1, in the AHRE annual report. It says there, and I quote: to ensure services provided to meet the basic needs of Albertans. I would like to ask: why has there not been progress made on introducing a market-basket measure to determine support levels for people on social assistance to have an accurate measuring stick based on the needs in a particular community?

Mr. Cardinal: The staff may want to expand on this also. We do, I believe, use that particular measure only as a guide to determine if we’re in line with the supports.

You know, when you look at the whole structure of this department, going back even to ’92-93, as I mentioned earlier, under the ministry of family and social services and aboriginal affairs, which was the department I was in charge of, aboriginal affairs was in there running all the aboriginal affairs programs. Persons with developmental disabilities was in that ministry also, and children’s services was in that ministry, and also, of course, the supports for independence, which was a welfare program. When you look at that big budget of \$1.7 billion, it looked after all these areas.

What we found with that back in ’92-93 – and it ties in with this budget – is that 80 per cent of the people on that system were single people or couples without children that were employable and trainable and using up all the dollars that these high-needs areas needed. What we did when we restructured was first of all move those thousands of employable and trainable single people and couples without children off the system. They’re gone. They’ll never come back to the system. While we did that, we also created a plan to develop a Ministry of Children’s Services that would concentrate on delivering good services to children, and there is a ministry now for Children’s Services. Along with that, of course, also PDD, persons with developmental disabilities, now has its own

ministry. That was the original plan back in '92-93: to have those high-needs areas dealt with by their own ministries.

9:20

The third one, of course, is aboriginal affairs because it's another high-needs area. The plan was not to have it under this big department but to have its own ministry. That has been completed, and of course also the department we operate, Human Resources and Employment. The concentration is still to have employment services and career development services for the people.

So it's an overall plan. It sometimes takes a little longer to explain, but until you see why there are now these new departments and what they're doing – they've got larger budgets, more time and money to concentrate on providing a high quality of service for those people that are disadvantaged. Hopefully, we can continue doing that.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks.

Mr. Stewart: I was going to quickly add to what the minister has said. We actually provide different levels of benefit rates to what we call people expected to work and not expected to work. Our benefit rates on the expected-to-work side are very low. That's a conscious decision on our part because what we want to do with people who are expected to work is spend our time providing them with supports to get them into employment. So we have lower rates on that side because our intention is to have that particular service stay on the caseload only for a very short period of time, move them into employment, as the minister was saying. On the not-expected-to-work side of the equation we do provide higher benefit rates, and we constantly monitor our comparability with other provinces. For people who are not expected to work who are on our caseload, the benefit rate is very comparable to other provinces.

The Deputy Chair: Mr. Eggen, your second question.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Wouldn't you agree that, in fact, a much more efficient mechanism would be for the level of social service provided to people not expected to work? Right?

The Deputy Chair: That's a policy question. We're dealing with the budget for last year.

Mr. Eggen: Right. So I'm asking why, then, have you not reformed this mechanism to reflect the inflationary and economic needs of people in the province as opposed to comparing to other provinces? The recommendations of the low-income review have not been entirely implemented. I'm just looking for a smoother mechanism by which we could set the rate for people especially who are not expected to work.

The Deputy Chair: In the context of this budget.

Mr. Stewart: In the context of this budget. I think the minister has already answered that. The mechanism, the market-basket measure that you referenced, is one of the indicators that we use in trying to identify what we think is a fair rate for all of our income-support clients. We also use other province's. So those are the kind of indicators. We don't have a scientific mechanism, but we look at a number of different indicators and identify what we think is a fair rate.

The Deputy Chair: Mr. Danyluk, followed by Dan Backs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. An excellent job. We've been kind of moving on page 130 and discussing the Alberta adult health benefit. We've also been discussing the not-expected-to-work health benefit. So I'm going to ask my question and my supplemental together, if I can. You know, I realize that you do budgeting and you do estimations, but I really have a question in regard to the Alberta adult health benefit, where you exceeded your budget by \$2.8 million. That's 66 per cent. Now, could you please tell me why? That's on schedule 5, element 2.3.3. Also, my supplemental added in there is from the same schedule, 2.3.5. The not-expected-to-work health benefit increased by \$5.9 million. So could you tell me the differences? I would guess or I would hope that you would be able to predict closer those expenditures.

Mr. Stewart: In relation to your first question, first of all, yes, in a general sense we do budgeting, and we do look at past history and any policy changes we're making in trying to establish what we think is the right number of individuals on a caseload or the right number of dollars to put into the budget. So we do undertake that kind of an exercise. Sometimes we, as you point out, get it a little bit off.

To answer specifically your question on the adult health benefit, which is a program that we provide that allows individuals who leave income support to continue to receive their health benefits when they're working, we underestimated how many individuals would leave income support and move into the workforce. It's actually a good-news story that we happen to be off on that one. We had probably 700 or 800 more people leave income support to get into the workforce than we had expected. So the reason why you see a \$2.8 million overexpenditure is because more people moved off income support, got into the workplace, and continued to receive their health benefits as a result. So we underestimated how successful we would be.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Chairman, just for clarity then.

The Deputy Chair: No. Your second question, please.

Mr. Danyluk: Okay. My second question for clarity: why has the not-expected-to-work health benefit increased? Those should be predictable, and if those individuals have left that category and are working but still have maintained the benefits, why has the second one increased?

Mr. Stewart: Let me try and be as clear as I can. We had a couple of things happen here. The population grew more than we expected, had more of an impact on the not-expected-to-work caseload than we had expected. We had a second element that occurred during the year that we hadn't anticipated, where we moved what was called a transition support category into the not-expected-to-work category. That resulted in an extra about 1,400 individuals being in the not-expected-to-work category. In addition, we underestimated how much the drug costs would go up. We provide drug benefits under our health benefits, and the level of activity in terms of prescriptions and the cost of drugs was higher than we had anticipated. So all those factors contributed to the \$5.9 million figure that you cited.

Mr. Cardinal: The health issue itself was one of the biggest obstacles we had back in '92-93. People would not get off welfare because they could not afford the health care benefits. That is why that program was implemented, and that's helped thousands of people become independent, self-sufficient.

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Backs, please, followed by Dr. Brown.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In former committee work under a committee of your federal cousins back under the Mulroney administration I was on the Deputy Prime Minister's task force on program review and looked at procurement and specifically was tasked with some of the small-business procurement. I have a question about office products, which is actually part of that. RGO Office Products Edmonton Ltd. received a \$184,624 contract. Now, that's on page 1468 of the blue book. Was this contract competitively tendered, and was there some sort of a comparative value measure if it was not?

Mr. Campbell: I'm not sure that that's one contract. We're talking office products there, so there are likely a number of purchases from a number of different areas within the department. The government as a whole goes through a process and has selected vendors that they recommend that we go through to make our purchases, and those are done through a tendering process.

9:30

Mr. Backs: Just a supplementary. If you had RGO as a sole-source vendor, have the department and perhaps even government in general looked at developing local, even aboriginal manufacturers, contractors, whatever to supply this resource?

Mr. Campbell: We have the ability to make purchases locally, but a lot of the stuff comes through government catalogues that we have.

Mr. Backs: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Minister, my question is related to the certificate of recognition holders, for which there is some data outlined on page 68 of your annual report. In the construction and steel and metal fabrication industry it seems to indicate that that program is very beneficial, but for the oil and gas industries the data do not support the hypothesis that certificate of recognition is effective in reducing claims. In fact, they appear to be 70 per cent higher.

Now, in the text in there it says, on the one hand, that the implication could be that this is some sort of statistical anomaly, but on the other hand, it says that these are large administrative organizations. My question is whether or not private industry is doing a better job of reducing the lost-time rate here than the certificates of recognition. Maybe there are some lessons to be learned there.

Mr. Stewart: No. I don't think private industry is doing a better job. The reason why you see this anomaly that you've cited is that we had a figure for how much the COR holders have improved, the 1.7 figure there. The certificate of recognition holders in the upstream oil and gas industry actually improved substantially from the previous year. There were improvements in terms of workplace health and safety in those particular industries for employers that had certificates of recognition. The reason why the non COR holders are lower, as you point out in the narrative here, is that there are a number of very large employers, that have a large number of employees, who tend to be office-type environments. They don't have a certificate of recognition. They have a very low lost-time claim rate. So when you compare the two groups, you're really comparing apples and oranges. The composition of the COR holders is a different mix of employers than the non COR holders.

Dr. Brown: Well, I guess, a supplemental question. Would there be some way to do some statistical analysis and compare apples with apples, then, those people that are on the front lines of the upstream oil and gas industries with their counterparts in the COR program to see whether or not it really is effective in those industries?

Mr. Stewart: Yes, there would be, and that's something that we do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hinman, please, followed by Mr. Johnston.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. I appreciate the Minister of Human Resources and Employment being here this morning with his staff. My questions will be with regard to strategies 2.2 and 3.3 and specifically concerning youth.

Speaking with the Minister of Education yesterday, less than 50 per cent of our youth are going on to postsecondary education, and that includes this training. Being that you are Human Resources, on strategy 2.2 you talk about the work experience program and the number of youth there. What specifically? With the amount of money that's being put into this to get youth of the ages of 16 to 24 having some work experience and getting in there, it seems like we're losing our youth in this booming economy, and they're not being trained. Are there some numbers I couldn't find that you're actually putting towards that youth experience program and helping those kids get that experience?

Mr. Stewart: I don't think I can provide specific numbers. I can however tell you that we do encourage youth to stay in school, number one. I mean, that's one of the things we do attempt to do. In situations where youth have not completed high school, we have programming that helps them complete high school. In situations where work experience would seem to be a more appropriate alternative for them, we do put them into work experience opportunities through the youth connection program. I can't give you a number as to how many youth we have put through work experience opportunities through youth connections. We can undertake to find that number and provide it by a written response if you'd like.

Mr. Hinman: I'd appreciate that.

Just to go one step further, talking to industry and also to the Education people, they both indicate that the biggest problem with getting youth into these programs is the cost of insurance and workmen's compensation. There's no coverage there. Do you help and assist in that area? Do you have the numbers for workmen's compensation so that these areas, whether it's an employee or the school, can send these kids out and not have that fear? The number one fear I hear from them is: well, we can't afford to because of workplace insurance. Do you have any numbers on that, and are you looking at assisting in that area?

Mr. Stewart: You're quite right. One of the biggest obstacles to hiring, typically, is payroll-type costs like WCB and unemployment insurance and others. We have considered whether we would look at providing that type of assistance to employers. We've decided not to, and the reason is that in this type of economy we don't think it's a particularly big obstacle. Even though there are some ad hoc indications that it is an obstacle, we've found that we're able to provide work experience opportunities without providing any type of subsidization for those payroll costs.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Johnston, please, followed by Mr. Bonko.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On page 78 of your ministry annual report, under 6(a), performance measures, the percentage of employees who are satisfied with their employment in the Alberta public service, there was a shortfall there in the target and the actual. Can you explain, Minister, why that is?

Ms Howe: We've been surveying since 1996, and the results there were 68 per cent, so the result of 79 per cent is certainly an increase. This is something that continues to be very important to us, and we continue to look at supports for learning and performance management, recognition, and coaching to be able to improve that rate.

Mr. Johnston: Okay. Thank you.

My supplementary question is on page 84. There's an increase in salaried employees; 23,197 is an increase from 2004. Can you explain why, and does that represent significant growth? Obviously in numbers.

Ms Howe: There has been a slight increase over the past year. The Alberta public service has decreased in size by about 23 per cent since 1992. Over that same period the population of Alberta has grown by over 20 per cent, so part of the increase in the public service is due to being able to provide services to Albertans as the population has grown.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bonko, followed by Doug Griffiths, please.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On page 90 of the minister's annual report in detailed program results of Alberta Labour Relations Board, goal 8 says: "The Alberta labour relations community receives timely, effective and efficient services . . . that labour relations matters be dealt with as quickly as possible." In example, did Lakeside Packers not fall under the situation as outlined in strategy 8.1, to I guess hear it and resolve it as quickly as possible?

Mr. Cardinal: I'll get Mark to expand on that. Generally, you know, at least in Alberta – the dispute in this particular case was between a union and the company. The existing processes that we have in place – when you look at the success of all the collective agreements in Alberta, even with the hot economy, it is around 99 per cent or more. The process at Lakeside Packers was, number one, a strike that I thought would never happen, but it did. It didn't last that long, and I think the steps we took probably worked in that particular case. I had an opportunity to tour the facility after and an opportunity to meet the union representative in that area. He indicated that things were working well, and he was working with the management closely. Employees were treated quite well. I indicated that at any time he saw a problem, all he has to do is call me back – I gave him my number directly – and I'd go and meet with him and the company and the individuals there. That is just one process.

Mark maybe can expand on the issue.

9:40

Mr. Asbell: This goal actually deals with the number of days from date of application to date of first hearing. When I started as chair, the number of days from the date of application to the date of hearing was 118 on average. My goal was to reduce that, and we did so dramatically. Last year, because of the input of the Auditor General, they noted some anomalies in our case management

system. In actual fact, we had adjourned four large files, or they were sitting there, involving many applications. They made some suggestions about proper case management or how we could deal with those. Those came onto the books at that time, thereby pushing our average days up. Not taking those files into account, our days from date of application to date of hearing were actually reduced.

With regard to the Lakeside issues, again, there are many factors that come into play. We can only push a file along so quickly; it depends on the parties. We found, in my experience, that the quicker you move a file along, the quicker it's resolved, and the better it is for all parties involved. Sometimes parties don't want to move it along as quickly, so you have to kind of herd the cats, as it were.

Mr. Bonko: Okay. Following up then: is the ministry moving to consider the first contract legislation that has been requested by the industry?

Mr. Cardinal: I know that that's an issue that has come up in the House, and I've asked my department officials to pull together all the information from other jurisdictions to see what they have. At this time that's where it's at: the information is being gathered. I have no commitments to put that in or not. We are going to look at what's available in Alberta, you know, keeping in mind that whatever we do has to keep the industry happy, to keep the employees, the unions, and others happy, to make sure that we have the best possible working conditions for Albertans, whatever that takes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Griffiths, please, and this will conclude this portion of our Public Accounts meeting this morning.

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Minister, I ask every minister the same question. I know that everyone is getting tired of hearing it, I'm sure. There are three different ways to measure performance. There are satisfaction surveys, which aren't that meaningful. There are input/output measurements, which are a little more useful. But the most useful measure of performance is outcome rather than output-based measurements.

I reviewed your department's performance measures, and I'm wondering what your department did to improve, to try and measure more the outcomes, the dollars spent by the department to actually get people fully employed, and measure whether or not they're employed?

Mr. Cardinal: I'll get the department to expand on that. First of all, I'd just like to say that this whole department in the government, when you look at the outcomes of the social support services we provide to our most high-needs areas of Albertans – the seniors, persons with developmental disabilities, First Nations, and of course other Albertans that are not expected to work or are caught in the process of some challenging times. We have 56 employment centres across Alberta. We do not really have a welfare office anymore, and I guess when you look at outcomes of an overall plan for a government, I think it's a good, positive measure.

Mr. Stewart: To add to what the minister said, I guess I would first of all say that I tend to agree with your position on what the most useful measures are although I think it is sometimes useful to have a variety of measures and satisfaction-type measures supplement the outcome measures. That's why you see some of those in the annual report.

We do try to have outcome measures, and I think the most

meaningful outcome measure that we have on one side of our business is the percentage of people who after leaving our programs are employed three months and six months later. I think the minister referenced that in his opening remarks, that we're in the order of 80 per cent. That's pretty good, we think, particularly when you take into account the kinds of individuals whom we're dealing with. Often they have many barriers, and they have obstacles to getting into employment. So we tend to focus a lot on that.

The second thing we'll focus on is success in keeping the number of individuals on income support down, which is related. As the minister pointed out, we did have about a 2,000 reduction in the number of individuals who are expected to work, and that's in an economy and in a labour market that's growing dramatically. On the other side of our business, we think the lost-time claim rate is a pretty good outcome measure. I mean, if the number of claims as a result of injury goes down, that's a real significant thing that's happening. That is saving people from injury; it's improving productivity. So we think we have a reasonably good mix in our report here.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you.
I have no follow-up.

The Chair: That concludes this portion of the meeting. I would like to thank the minister, and I would wish him well in his endeavours for the rest of the morning.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now, this takes us to Other Business on our agenda, and at this time I would like to update the committee on the conference that is going to be taking place very soon in Victoria. This is the 2006 Summit on Results Based Management, and I would like to advise all members of the committee that there are scheduling conflicts with one of the members and the alternate chosen last week. So now we are going to be represented, and ably so I would think, by Mr. Griffiths, deputy chair, and Mr. Johnston, who are going to the conference.

Now, the attendance at the joint Conference of Legislative Auditors and the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees is in Charlottetown, P.E.I., this year from September 10 to 12. I would like to advise the committee that in keeping with our past practice, the committee budget will support two members and the committee clerk to attend. In the past a member of this committee has proposed a motion that would be similar to this one. I will read this draft motion for the information of the members: that

the chair or his designate, the deputy chair or his designate, and the committee clerk be approved to attend the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees conference in Charlottetown, P.E.I., from September 10 to 12, 2006.

Rev. Abbott: So moved.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Reverend Abbott.

I would like to at this time advise you that if myself or Mr. Griffiths cannot attend, there will be the usual draw, and if members are interested, we will choose someone and then also an alternate in case there are arrangements that have to be changed. So we can proceed with this, then, at the will of the committee? Okay. Can I have a vote on that motion, please? All in favour? Opposed? Seeing none, thank you.

Now, we'll follow this up through the committee clerk, and we

will get this organized within the next week or two. Is that fair enough?

9:50

Mr. Rogers: Just a comment, Mr. Chairman. I would strongly encourage you as the chairman to attend. I think that certainly a conference of this nature would be beneficial to you in your role as chairman of this committee, and I would strongly, on behalf of the rest of the members, encourage you to make efforts to attend this conference.

The Chair: Well, I appreciate that, Mr. Rogers, and I will certainly take that into consideration.

Now, item C under Other Business. The Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation's latest research project is nearly finished, and it is titled Parliamentary Oversight – Committees and Relationships: A Guide to Strengthening Public Accounts Committees. This research report will be provided complimentary to myself and the committee clerk. I was delighted to receive information about a month ago that this was coming, and I'm looking forward to having a look at this. But the Auditor General – and thank you very much – has kindly offered to purchase copies for all members of this committee. On behalf of everyone here, Mr. Dunn, I would like to express our gratitude again to you for doing this. I think it is important. I appreciate it. We look forward to getting these reports here in the very, very near future.

At this time, if there's no other new business . . .

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Chairman, I just want to reiterate and I think try to make a very strong point if I possibly can that I really do want to suggest that it is very important that you as chairman and as lead of this committee go to conferences. I know that you have your personal biases about going to conferences, but I think it is imperative. I think it's imperative from two aspects: not only what you learn in the conferences but what you learn outside in the hallways because that will bring back to us different modes of operation, and I think that is critical. From those experiences, when you do bring forward different ways of doing things or different aspects to bringing forward the information from government to the public – I think that's the critical part. I think you need to be there because it is not the same if we do send a member as when we send the chairman. So from that aspect I think it's very critical, and I would very much encourage you. If it does help, do not think of yourself as going; think of the position going.

The Chair: Thank you. I will again take that under consideration, and I appreciate that.

Are there any other items under new business? Seeing none, thank you.

I would like to remind members that the date of the next meeting is Wednesday, May 3, with the hon. Mr. Luke Ouellette, Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

If there's no other business, can I please have a motion to adjourn?

Mr. Danyluk: Right here.

The Chair: Moved by Mr. Danyluk that the meeting be adjourned. All in favour?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 9:53 a.m.]