



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Justice and Attorney General

Wednesday, October 22, 2008
8:30 a.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
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First Session**

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (L), Chair
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC), Deputy Chair

Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (L)
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
Denis, Jonathan, Calgary-Egmont (PC)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)
Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (L)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)

Also in Attendance

Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC)

Department of Justice and Attorney General Participants

Ray Bodnarek, QC	Acting Deputy Minister and Acting Deputy Attorney General
Manuel da Costa	Executive Director, Maintenance Enforcement
R. Neil Dunne, QC	Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Legal Services
Barb Hookenson	Assistant Deputy Minister, Court Services
Gerald Lamoureux	SafeCom Leader, Safe Communities Secretariat
Greg Lepp, QC	Assistant Deputy Minister, Criminal Justice
Bruce Perry	Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services
Shawkat Sabur	Executive Director/Senior Financial Officer, Financial Services

Auditor General's Office Participants

Vivek Dharap	Executive Director
Patrick Dunnigan	Principal
Betty LaFave	Principal
Doug Wylie	Assistant Auditor General

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Support Staff

W.J. David McNeil	Clerk
Louise J. Kamuchik	Clerk Assistant/Director of House Services
Micheline S. Gravel	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> /Table Research
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Erin Norton	Committee Clerk
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[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like to call the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order, please. On behalf of all members of the committee I would like to welcome our guests. Perhaps we can quickly go around and introduce ourselves, starting with the vice-chair.

Mr. Griffiths: Good morning. Doug Griffiths, MLA for Battle River-Wainwright.

Dr. Massolin: Good morning. I'm Philip Massolin. I'm the committee research co-ordinator, Legislative Assembly Office.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Good morning. Naresh Bhardwaj, MLA, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Denis: Good morning. Jonathan Denis, MLA for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Dallas: Good morning. Cal Dallas, MLA, Red Deer-South.

Mr. Chase: Good morning. Harry Chase, MLA, Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Sabur: Good morning. Shawkat Sabur. I'm a senior financial officer with the Department of Justice.

Mr. da Costa: Good morning. Manuel da Costa, maintenance enforcement, Justice.

Ms Hookenson: Good morning. Barb Hookenson, court services, Justice.

Mr. Bodnarek: Good morning. Ray Bodnarek, acting deputy minister.

Mr. Perry: Good morning. Bruce Perry, corporate services.

Mr. Dunne: Good morning. Neil Dunne, acting ADM of legal services, Justice.

Mr. Lepp: Greg Lepp, ADM, criminal justice.

Ms LaFave: Good morning. Betty LaFave, office of the Auditor General of Alberta.

Mr. Wylie: Doug Wylie, office of the Auditor General.

Mr. Dunnigan: Patrick Dunnigan, office of the Auditor General.

Mr. Dharap: Vivek Dharap, Auditor General's office.

Ms Woo-Paw: Good morning. Teresa Woo-Paw, MLA for Calgary-Mackay.

Mr. Fawcett: Hello. Kyle Fawcett, MLA, Calgary-North Hill.

Ms Rempel: Jody Rempel, committee clerk with the Legislative Assembly.

The Chair: Hugh MacDonald, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

I would like to advise everyone that they do not need to touch microphones. This is taken care of by our *Hansard* staff behind you. The meeting is recorded by *Hansard*, of course, and also audio-streamed live on the Internet.

Now, item 2 on our agenda. Can I have approval of our agenda for this morning's meeting? Moved by Mr. Denis that the agenda for the October 22, 2008, meeting be approved as distributed. All those in favour? None opposed. Thank you.

Item 3, approval of the minutes of the October 15 meeting that were circulated. Moved by Ms Woo-Paw that the minutes for the October 15, 2008, meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed. Anyone opposed? Thank you.

Now, of course, this gets us to our meeting with officials from Alberta Justice and Attorney General. We are dealing with reports from the Auditor General's office from October 2008; the annual report of the government of Alberta 2007-08, which includes consolidated financial statements of the government of Alberta; the Measuring Up progress report on the government of Alberta business plan for 2007-08 as well; and, of course, the Justice and Attorney General annual report from 2007-08, which we all received near the end of September. I would like to at this point remind everyone of the research material provided through the LAO research co-ordinator and that this material is available to the public from the committee clerk after the meeting.

Now, I would like to note in attendance this morning – and the gentleman is welcome to participate if he would like – the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks. Yes. Good morning, sir, and welcome.

Mr. Doerksen: Good morning, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: If we could have the opening remarks from whichever one of you that so chooses from the Department of Justice.

Mr. Bodnarek: Yes, indeed.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Bodnarek: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's very much my pleasure and privilege to speak to this committee this morning on the ministry's financial results for 2007-2008. Before I get into our results, I would just like to introduce a few additional Alberta Justice staff that are sitting in the back. We have Gerald Lamoureux, who is our acting executive leader of the Safe Communities Secretariat. We also have Sharon Lepetich, a senior adviser to the deputy minister's office. We've got David Dear, our assistant director of communications, and Cindy Bentz, our Public Trustee.

I'll start by going over the ministry's overall expenditures for 2007-2008. Our authorized budget of \$396.1 million consisted of \$387.2 million in approved business plan estimates plus an additional \$9.6 million in supplementary funding less \$700,000 for dedicated revenue shortfalls. Actual expenses for the ministry in 2007-2008 were \$8.8 million less than budgeted, so this was 2.2 per cent lower than the authorized budget.

There were three major components to the supplementary funding obtained and allocated to ministry programs: \$5.2 million for increased compensation for the department's legal officers to address staff retention concerns, \$3.3 million for the increased cost of staff salary settlements in all ministry program areas, \$1.1 million for 34 additional Crown prosecutors.

Statutory spending occurred in the following areas: \$26.5 million for motor vehicle accident claims – expenditures for the program were \$0.3 million less than the authorized budget – \$0.3 million in

valuation adjustments for the estimated future payment obligations for vacation pay and allowances.

I will provide just a few words on the operations of each component of Alberta Justice and our justice system that, hopefully, will assist members in understanding the financial information contained in pages 57 through 86 of the ministry's annual report. Program 1, ministry support services, provides support functions to the program areas of the ministry. These functions include policy co-ordination and research, business planning and annual reporting, performance measurement, information technology management, financial management and reporting, administrative services, human resource programs, communications and media relations, cross-ministry co-ordination. The important work of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force also falls under ministry support services programs for 2007-2008. Ministry support services program spending in '07-08 was \$25 million. Expenditures for the program were \$3.9 million, or 13.5 per cent, less than the authorized budget.

Program 2 is our court services division, which provides administrative, financial, and judicial support services to all courts in Alberta, including the Court of Appeal, the Court of Queen's Bench, and the provincial court of Alberta. The three courts maintain records and accept a variety of documents for filing from the public, lawyers, law enforcement agencies, and other government departments. Court services employees record all proceedings, swear in or affirm witnesses and interpreters, mark and ensure the safekeeping of exhibits, process fines and other payments into court, perform searches, and provide general assistance to the public and lawyers. This division manages the civil enforcement program and operates numerous law information centres that provide legal information to judges, Crown prosecutors, other lawyers, and the public.

One of our other major initiatives, the justice information management system, falls under the court services program. The Justice information management system is a multiyear, multiphased initiative that will implement new information systems to complement, support, and automate improved business processes and interface with our key partners. Spending in 2007-2008 for court services totalled \$161 million, which was under budget by \$3 million, or 1.8 per cent.

8:40

Program 3. Included in program 3, legal services, is the Legislative Counsel office, which drafts all government public bills, regulations, and orders in council. To draft these documents, staff consult with ministers, deputy ministers, board chairpersons, and senior officials in all ministries and agencies of government.

The civil law division, which also falls under program 3, supports legal strategic advice and assistance to all government ministries, representing them in matters before court and tribunals. Civil law's constitutional and aboriginal law branch provides specialized legal advice to the government concerning constitutional and aboriginal matters. The legislative reform branch provides advice and policy.

Our criminal justice division is also part of program 3. Its primary function is the prosecution of all offences under the Criminal Code of Canada, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, and the provincial statutes in all courts of this province. In addition, criminal justice is responsible for criminal appeals to the Court of Appeal and to the Supreme Court of Canada. The criminal justice division works with justice system stakeholders and the community to provide and promote safe communities and implement alternative approaches to the administration of justice. The division develops criminal law policy for the province and supports consultation on criminal justice issues with other jurisdictions.

The maintenance enforcement program is also included under program 3. This area collects and disburses child and spousal

support on behalf of all Alberta families, effectively reducing social assistance costs and recouping the social assistance and child welfare costs.

Altogether actual spending in 2007-2008 for the legal services program was \$109.1 million. This amount was under the authorized budget by \$1.2 million, or 1.1 per cent.

Program 4 is the government's support for legal aid in this province. Alberta Justice provides a grant to the Legal Aid Society of Alberta, which improves access to justice by making innovative and cost-effective legal services available to persons in need. In 2007-2008 the province's grant to legal aid was \$45.3 million, which was an increase of \$2.1 million from the previous year. The Legal Aid Society of Alberta operates pursuant to an agreement with Alberta Justice and the Law Society of Alberta. The Legal Aid Society depends on government funding to continue assisting individuals of modest means in obtaining legal representation in serious criminal and civil matters.

Program 5 refers to our Public Trustee office. The Public Trustee protects the financial interests of vulnerable Albertans by administering the estates of dependent adults, descendants, and minors where there is no one else to do so. In 2007-2008 the Public Trustee's office spent \$12.6 million, which was \$197,000, or 1.5 per cent, less than the authorized budget.

Program 6 refers to the provincial medical examiner's office. The medical examiner investigates all unexplained natural and unnatural deaths in Alberta. These investigations are used in resolving civil and criminal law matters that often arise after death. The Fatality Review Board reviews certain deaths investigated by the medical examiner's office and recommends to the Justice minister which cases warrant a public fatality inquiry. Inquiries are held before the provincial court. Actual spending in 2007-2008 for this program was \$7.3 million, which was \$269,000 over the authorized budget. Surplus funds from other program areas were used to offset this overexpenditure and address the critical needs of the medical examiner's office.

With respect to revenue. Turning to the revenue schedule on page 73, the ministry's revenue for 2007-2008 totalled \$155 million, representing an increase of \$12.4 million, or 8.7 per cent, from the previous year. You will also note that there was virtually no change in overall federal payments.

Investment income, \$1.7 million, increased by \$276,000 from the previous year. This increase is primarily due to higher interest on investment accounts.

Revenue from fees, permits, and licences was \$37.5 million in 2007-2008, \$155,000 higher than the previous year. Almost \$1 million of the increase was in the motor vehicle accident claims and court fees, partially offset by a decrease in Public Trustee fees.

Other revenue increased by \$11.9 million, or 13.2 per cent, in 2007-2008; \$9.5 million of the increase was due to increased fine revenue and fined late penalties, which resulted from increased enforcement in the province. The remaining \$2.4 million is attributed to increased collections for amounts subrogated by the Crown for maintenance enforcement payments and increased revenue from the motor vehicle accident claims recovery program.

In terms of this past year's achievements it was an exceptionally busy year, and Alberta Justice has accomplished a great number of things. The ministry led one of the government's top five priorities: to promote strong and vibrant communities and to reduce crime so that Albertans feel safe. In the spring of 2007, after meeting with over 17,000 Albertans in 14 communities, the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force issued the Keeping Communities Safe report. The report contained 31 recommendations which called for a balance of prevention, treatment, and enforcement initiatives to

address crime in Alberta. In the fall of 2007 the Alberta government accepted 29 of the recommendations, and cross-ministry work began to implement them.

Another highlight from the past year was the Justice information management system initiative. This initiative was a major undertaking for Alberta Justice and the courts. The goal of the initiative is to find a more technologically streamlined business process that increases the ministry's ability to provide initiatives and programs, improves access to justice, and strengthens the justice system. The Justice information management system will convert vast amounts of paper to an electronic format to improve trial processes and make information instantly available to judges, Crown prosecutors, defence counsel, court services staff, and other partners.

Also in '07-08 Alberta Justice celebrated the opening of the Calgary Courts Centre. The courthouse is one of the largest and most technologically advanced buildings of its kind in North America. The new courthouse hosts the Court of Queen's Bench, the provincial court of Alberta, and 73 courtrooms under one roof and has replaced five smaller court facilities that were scattered in downtown Calgary. Having one central location helps improve access to justice for Albertans.

As more Albertans choose to represent themselves in court, the ministry has enhanced access to justice for self-represented litigants. In '07-08 law information centres opened in Edmonton, Red Deer, and Grande Prairie. Self-represented litigants visit these centres to learn about general court procedures, view online videos of courtroom procedures, find out about alternatives to court, and obtain general legal information. In 2007-2008 law information centre staff helped thousands of self-represented litigants navigate through civil and criminal matters in person, over the phone, and by e-mail.

8:50

Reducing family violence is also an imperative for Alberta Justice. Alberta Justice is involved in several initiatives to address family violence. The Alberta relationship threat assessment and management initiative was launched in November 2007, which brings together experts from various fields to reduce and prevent relationship violence and stalking in Alberta. To increase awareness of family violence issues in the province, Crown prosecutors continue to receive cross-sector family violence training with the police and other Justice partners.

The Chair: Excuse me, sir. We have a long list of members anxious to question you and your associates. We have also to hear from the Auditor General's office. In the letter requesting your attendance this morning, it was outlined that you had 10 minutes for your opening presentation, and we've exceeded the 10 minutes, so if you could conclude quickly, please.

Mr. Bodnarek: Yes, indeed, Mr. Chair. My apologies for going over the time limit. I'm almost done.

Alberta Justice has also streamlined the family justice services across the province. In 2007 family justice services merged with family law information centres into a single organization.

Mr. Chairman, the vision of Alberta Justice is a fair and safe society supported by a trusted justice system. We are extremely proud of the work we did in 2007-2008 to help achieve this vision, and I can say without hesitation that our successes were due to the hard work and commitment of our Alberta Justice staff.

At this point, Mr. Chairman, I invite questions and comments from the members and thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Wylie, on behalf of the Auditor General's office if you have any opening remarks or statements, proceed.

Mr. Wylie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The results of our work for the ministry are reported on pages 331 and 332 of our October report. We made one new recommendation to the office of the Public Trustee. We recommended that the office "update administrative policies for client assets." We issued unqualified audit opinions on the financial statements of the ministry and the office of the Public Trustee for the year ended March 31, 2008. We did not find any exceptions when we completed specified auditing procedures on the ministry's performance measures.

We note on page 385 of our October report outstanding prior-year recommendations made to the ministry. These recommendations all relate to information technology and focus on making improvements to IT security, IT disaster recovery plans, and IT access controls within the ministry. These recommendations were included on pages 127 through 134 in volume 2 of our 2007 annual report. They are also referred to on page 174 of our April 2008 report in the context of developing IT control frameworks.

Mr. Chairman, we'd be pleased to answer any questions you or the committee members may have of us. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wylie. I appreciate that.

We'll proceed quickly to questions. Mr. Chase, followed by Mr. Griffiths, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Last November our Legislative Assembly unanimously adopted Motion 511 calling for a unified family court process, which the majority of other Canadian provinces have already implemented. My first question: what provincial progress has been made over the past 11 months in realizing the intent of this motion, which was to co-ordinate activities between the Court of Queen's Bench and the provincial court?

Mr. Bodnarek: Thank you very much. I will refer this question to our ADM of court services.

Ms Hookenson: In the last 11 months we've been working toward having common procedures for family justice matters in both the provincial court and the Court of Queen's Bench. We actually started this process about three years ago when we made the decision that rather than setting up the traditional court process of having a unified family court, we would look at providing front-end services so that families were given options early on in the process and were not having to actually go to court to resolve their disputes.

Through that process we've set up family law information centres in a number of our court locations throughout the province. We have family court counsellors at a number of the court locations, we have family mediators, and we have an intake process that we use so that when families come into the court, they are referred by the courts to our family justice services, where they have the opportunity to make some decisions about the best avenues to follow to resolve their matters. So it's not the official court process, where you don't get your matter taken care of until you get into court; we're concentrating on those front-end services that we provide to families early on in the process.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Unfortunately, my constituents that I've spoken to have gotten embroiled in the process, and 43 hearings later they're still embroiled.

What obstacles, challenges remain to reducing court time and court costs for children and families seeking justice?

Ms Hookenson: Well, you know, I think we still have a long way to go, obviously, in the court system to provide that access to justice and to provide it early on and to have a mechanism to assist people in resolving their disputes early on in the process. We've made some really good headway in doing that over the last few years.

We are now in the process of working through an evaluation that has been taking place with our Family Law Act and implementing some of the recommendations coming out of that evaluation. That will provide better assistance to the families in Alberta and provide that assistance through all of the court locations in the province so that we're not just concentrating on the larger urban centres but also providing the same services in northern Alberta and in the southern locations of the province.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Before we get to Mr. Griffiths, I would like to recognize Peter Sandhu this morning.

Mr. Sandhu: Good morning. Peter Sandhu, MLA, Edmonton-Manning.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Griffiths, please.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you. I was perusing the numbers on page 77 of the 2007-2008 annual report. Maybe I don't fully understand this, or maybe you can help explain this to me. In the final column on the right it talks about the amount that's unexpended. Eight million dollars, if I understand that correctly, was unexpended in the department, but there was an authorized supplementary of 9 and a half million dollars. Why would you not spend \$8 million that you had budgeted already and then ask for 9 and a half million dollars after the fact?

Mr. Bodnarek: That's a very good question. In large part the reason for the surplus was that we had vacancy discounts; we thought we were going to be able to fill positions much sooner than we could have. That led to a good portion of this.

I'll turn it over to Bruce Perry, our ADM of corporate services, to supplement.

Mr. Perry: There were two events that were occurring about the same time. One, there was a review of the salaries for the legal profession in about the spring, early summer, and we were asked to prepare a supplementary estimate for that cost, which was roughly about \$9 million. That had to go in, obviously, for the fall session. By the latter part of the year we were recognizing that we had, for example, in the previous budget about 200 new positions. Hiring them, bringing them on stream was starting to be a bit of a challenge. So we were tracking in the latter part of the year a surplus, as the deputy was mentioning.

Two events: we put in a request for the new money, which we spent, and then we lapsed about a similar amount of money for activity volume of just getting the people in the door.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay. Thank you. That makes it very clear.

The Auditor General's report of October 2008 lists four outstanding recommendations, all from 2006-2007, and 3 out of 4 are around information technology. We had a report from the Auditor General previously that expressed concerns about information and the public's ability to access very private information. I'm wondering why these recommendations haven't been implemented or what you're doing to implement them now.

9:00

Mr. Perry: In fact, the Auditor will be back to review our progress. In the exit conference with the Auditor General a lot of the recommendations from the previous year are around having security protocols, doing the same protocols for each of our major legacy systems. Upon the next review, the next cycle they will check our progress. A lot of our initiatives are not dissimilar to what was in this year's auditor report, but they are around, basically: do you have sufficient security policies? Do you do password checking? I don't want to underestimate it, but the fairly basic fundamentals you need. We have put the policies in place, and we are now moving to the next phase, which is ensuring compliance and that they're universally translated throughout the Ministry of Justice. So when the Auditor returns, we're hoping that we'll have met the spirit and the intention of the recommendations.

Mr. Griffiths: Excellent. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, followed by Mr. Denis, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. As a major element of criminal behaviour results from an individual's social circumstances and available resources, what steps has the ministry taken to address these issues as they relate to crime prevention?

Mr. Bodnarek: I'll start with the response to that. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, Alberta Justice led a task force review that looked at not only enforcement in terms of the criminal justice system but the prevention component and the treatment component, recognizing that we have to address the root causes of crime, and much of that is around supporting individuals and families and giving them what they need to be successful members of society. So we built a Safe Communities Secretariat, that is looking at implementing 29 of the 31 task force recommendations. Many of those recommendations address the prevention component of the criminal justice system.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My supplemental: has the ministry been in consultation with other ministries to work collaboratively on addressing issues such as poverty, homelessness, and mental health that may lead to criminal behaviour, and if so, what commitments have been made?

Mr. Bodnarek: Thank you. Yes, indeed. I reference the Safe Communities Secretariat that's under the Justice ministry responsibility. That secretariat has members from nine of our partnering ministries. They work in the same office. They collaborate on a full range of issues, including homelessness, including mental illness. We have worked very closely on the 10-year homelessness plan with our partnering ministry, Housing. We've worked very closely with Alberta Health in terms of mental illness funding, treatment bed funding. The collaboration is ongoing and will continue.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Denis, please.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. First of all, thank you to you and your department staff for appearing before the committee today. You talk about the Safe Communities Secretariat, that's also on page 6 of the report. Obviously, crime is becoming more and

more of an issue, specifically in our major cities. My question to you is: with this new program what performance measures are in place, basically, just to audit how this program is having an impact on crime in our streets?

Mr. Bodnarek: Thank you. The Safe Communities Secretariat as we speak is working very diligently on developing performance measures.

I'm just going to call upon our executive lead of the Safe Communities Secretariat to supplement.

Mr. Lamoureux: Good morning. Developing performance measures for the Safe Communities Secretariat and the work we're doing is somewhat of a daunting task. We've never looked at something this broad, so we're actually in the early stages. We're working with Prairie Research Associates out of Winnipeg to help us structure sort of a comprehensive package of performance measures that would look at not only the impact of the various projects we're working on but the overall impact on crime and the success of the secretariat itself. So we're in the early stages right now, and we expect that we'll have those performance measures defined by the end of this fiscal year.

Mr. Denis: Just a supplementary: when would that report be available?

Mr. Lamoureux: The performance measures?

Mr. Denis: That's correct.

Mr. Lamoureux: We're looking at the end of this fiscal, so March 31.

Mr. Denis: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

The chair would like to welcome Mr. Quest, Strathcona. Mr. Fawcett, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The question that I have is on pages 41 and 42 of the annual report, the public confidence in the justice system, that performance measurement. Over the past four years there's been a steady decline in the public's confidence in the justice system. In fact, the actual measurement is significantly behind the target of 80 per cent. When I see that, that puts up a red flag for me, so I went to the discussion and analysis portion. In my opinion, there was nothing in there that indicated what needs to be done to get to that 80 per cent. What strategies, I guess, are you looking at to try to increase that?

Mr. Bodnarek: Okay. I will start out. Having public confidence in the justice system as a performance measure is consistent with many jurisdictions in terms of a measurement for the justice system. It's tracked nationally through the Canadian institute of justice statistics. It's one of those performance measures that we have some ability to influence, but the Alberta Justice employees aren't in full control of the public's confidence in the justice system.

There are a range of other influences, but in terms of what we can do in terms of strategies, having a court system that operates efficiently and effectively we believe contributes to public confidence; having a strong prosecution service contributes to public confidence; having a government response to crime that looks at not only enforcement but also looks at prevention and treatment

enhances public confidence. So we have a range of strategies that we look at to approach this fairly broad performance measure.

I would just ask if either Bruce Perry or our ADM criminal justice would like to supplement.

Mr. Perry: If I could start, these are public opinion surveys that are done at a certain time of the year. As the discussion and analysis speaks to, things could be happening when people are approached for their comments. We also balance it with a few other questions about safety in the neighbourhood, and those numbers are actually staying high. I'm not saying there's a contradiction, but I think you need to get a balance. I think that on the discussion of SafeCom we need to have more measures. In the planning for the next upcoming business plan we are adding new performance measures. Our future is to get more at "How does Justice impact this?" as opposed to "This measure impacts both Justice/Sol Gen, basically anyone that's delivering a program." We need to narrow, but at this point it's a measure that we've tracked because it does have benefit in our planning.

Mr. Lepp: I would just add to that that as the acting deputy pointed out, a lot of the factors that affect this particular measure are outside of our control. I would highlight two of them, one being sentences imposed by members of the judiciary and something that's been topical of late, the results of bail hearings, where there's a perception in some circles that people are being released when they shouldn't be released. We do have an independent judiciary, of course, in Alberta. Alberta Justice officials cannot and should not attempt to influence decisions made by members of the judiciary, but their decisions do and can impact public confidence in the administration of justice.

9:10

With respect to the issues of bail and sentencing, however, we can take steps and we are taking steps in relation to those concerns. We have been very successful in the last few years lobbying the federal government to address concerns that members of the public and, frankly, members of our own organization have had with respect to sentencing rules relating to conditional sentences, for example. Our minister is quite keen and plans to write the new federal Minister of Justice, following the recent federal election, in the next few days to advocate in favour of some changes to the laws relating to bail to, hopefully, impact some of those concerns. That's one area that we don't have direct control over, the judiciary. The other is the media. The vast majority of people, of course, who are surveyed get their information on the justice system through the media and not directly from the Department of Justice.

Crime has been going down steadily since the 1960s. The only area, really, that's increasing is youth violent crime and organized crime, and that, I think, translates into what Mr. Perry has highlighted. People generally feel reasonably safe in their own neighbourhoods, but it could be that their confidence in the justice system relating to issues relating to organized crime, which doesn't affect them in their day-to-day lives in their communities, drives some of these figures. We are taking concrete steps in relation to our approach to organized crime on a variety of different fronts that would take me quite a few minutes to outline, but I can assure you that we're attempting to stay on top of that issue as well.

Mr. Fawcett: While I appreciate that this is a very complex issue with a number of factors, some of the answers could be used to justify, maybe, a one-year aberration to the trend, but this is a very clear trend of going down over four years. This is a huge concern, I think, for society at large, particularly here in Alberta when we've

gone through so much growth that we need to be able to manage some of the negative consequences of that growth and that's, I guess, the criminal activities. So confidence in our justice system is significantly important, I believe, in a lot of our communities. I don't know if I have a follow-up question. I'm concerned about us not putting enough attention on this trend. That is quite disturbing.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to Mr. Chase, please, followed by Ms Woo-Paw.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Four hundred and sixty-eight million dollars to support the recommendations of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force have been allocated. I'd like to know: how many new addiction treatment beds will this money create, and when will those beds be operating?

Mr. Bodnarek: Thank you. I will have our acting executive lead, Gerald Lamoureux, respond.

Mr. Lamoureux: Funding has been set aside for the department of health for additional treatment beds for mental health issues, for addiction issues as well as concurrent issues. There are 40 concurrent treatment beds that they're looking at, and those should be in place by the end of this fiscal year. There are some additional addiction treatment beds that they're looking at, and I'm not sure of the number, but it's around 30 or so. We can get back to you with the exact numbers on those.

Mr. Chase: Just to summarize, approximately 70 are proposed by the end of this fiscal year.

Mr. Lamoureux: That's right.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms Woo-Paw, please, followed by Mr. Dallas.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. My first question is around the deputy minister's office, annual report pages 78 and 83, 84. On page 78 it's indicated that the deputy minister's office had an overexpenditure of \$69,000, and on pages 83, 84, there is an increase of \$43,000 from that same office. My question is if you could explain the overexpenditure and the increase of \$43,000 in the deputy minister's office. Also, how does that compare with the private and nonprofit sectors in terms of compensation?

Mr. Bodnarek: I'm going to ask our senior financial officer, Shawkat Sabur, to respond.

Mr. Sabur: The deputy's office was overspent mainly because of salary costs. We had to increase by one support staff in the deputy's office in order to keep up with the demands. When we were doing the budget, we did not take that into account.

Ms Woo-Paw: So it was an additional staff.

Mr. Sabur: Yes. A support staff.

Ms Woo-Paw: Right. And the same for the \$43,000?

Mr. Sabur: Based on the salary budget that we get from Treasury Board, that was the share of the staff in the deputy's office.

Ms Woo-Paw: Okay. What is the salary of the deputy minister?

The Chair: That would be on page 84.

Mr. Sabur: Yes. On page 84 we have the salaries listed for all the officials.

Ms Woo-Paw: The second part of my question is: how does that compare with the private sector for a similar kind of position?

Mr. Sabur: I guess it depends what sort of private companies you are comparing with. I would say that the deputy's salary is quite modest compared to some in the private sector. The Department of Justice has now a budget of about \$500 million, and that's a big, huge department to run. We have about 3,000 full-time equivalents that the deputy would be in charge of.

Mr. Bodnarek: I'll just supplement. The Deputy Minister of Justice's salary is not set in isolation. Our corporate human resource organization for government when setting deputy compensation goes through a very rigorous process of comparison across the country in terms of other public-sector comparators and private-sector comparators. That is how deputy compensation is set and reviewed on a regular basis.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. I also see in the annual report that within the ministry there are a number of agencies and boards and commissions. Can you just explain very briefly the recruitment, evaluation, and compensation management for the CEOs of those agencies and boards?

Mr. Perry: Perhaps I can respond to that question. The boards and agencies, which you'll see on pages 8 and 9, are all formed for specific purposes, such as providing nominations to provincial court. We have notaries public. None of the committees under the Justice ministry have CEOs. There are chairs. They are all part-time. They all come together for specific purposes. Essentially, the remuneration they get is under the board governance regulations, where all board members get a per diem fee and, of course, any travel expenses. We don't have the CEO structure. We don't have a board of directors. We have committees.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dallas, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll refer to page 60 of the annual report, Statement of Operations. Specifically, I'm looking at the voted expenses in 2008 of \$355.7 million and comparing that to the prior year of about just under \$313 million. This represents an increase of just under \$43 million year over year. I guess, without running a calculator on it, it looks like about 13 per cent. Given the metrics of wage increase barometers that you would use – growth in population, services, that type of thing – it still far exceeds those. My question is: what pressures have you addressed with those additional funds given that these types of increases would not be deemed to be sustainable?

9:20

Mr. Perry: It was a busy year, 2007-08. As I had mentioned in some of the opening comments – and I'll further expand on it – there were several new initiatives. We had approximately 200 new positions last year. A large part of the salary component would be there. We had the start-up of several initiatives such as the

ARTAMI initiative on violence. We had a major systems initiative commence, which is called our justice information management system. But primarily between the salary increases which have been coming in the last couple years and just filling positions in the Crown prosecution office and the courts, it was a fairly significant growth year. I think that if you go back years in the Ministry of Justice, we were probably more baseline, and 2007-08 was a growth year for us. So primarily salaries and starting some of the initiatives.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you. Just to supplement that, do you anticipate that some of that investment that you've made in terms of information technology and sharing information will result in some savings in terms of delivering services?

Mr. Perry: Absolutely. The justice information management initiative is one of our two top priorities. I guess SafeCom would be number one, and this would probably be a close number two. The justice system, you can see in some of the evidence of the performance measures, is how we do our current business: very manual intensive, very paper-based, very old legacy type systems, very hard to show a public face when you have some very ancient technologies. Part of this is, I would say, a bottom-up approach as to – and this is currently what's happening in this initiative – looking at the way we're doing business, working with all the stakeholders – the judiciary, the Crown prosecutors – and coming up with a better model. This will in the years to come deliver huge benefits. I'm not saying it'll be cheaper, but I think the services and our ability to manage what's going on today will be less reactive and more, I guess, proactive.

We are now witnessing this transformation, but like most things you've got to put the investment up front. It's not about technology. It's about changing the way we do business. So we'll have more to speak to this in the Public Accounts to come.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I very much appreciate the alternating opportunities between the government and opposition committee members to ask questions. I have several questions which I hope to ask, and if you could continue to return me to the list, that would be appreciated. I will continue to signal my intent.

How much funding went towards the aboriginal justice initiative unit?

Mr. Bodnarek: Let me start before we get into specifics by saying that the aboriginal justice initiative unit is housed within another ministry, Solicitor General and Public Security, so Alberta Justice provided no funding for that particular initiative. We can certainly comment on what funding they did receive. It's in the order of just under half a million dollars. However, Alberta Justice does fund a number of other aboriginal-related areas, including our aboriginal court worker program administered through court services. We have a fairly large aboriginal law team that provides strategic advice and direction to the provincial government on aboriginal matters.

Anything to supplement, Bruce?

Mr. Perry: I would only add that we have many strategies in our business plan in the annual report where we are participating in cross-ministry initiatives. We're not always the lead, and we're not always asked to fund the initiatives. In this case, as the deputy had mentioned, it's a Solicitor General led initiative, but it doesn't diminish the activities between the various representatives of the ministries. So there's a lot of activity going on, and it's not always about who pays the bill and who gets to report on the progress. In

this case activity would be probably noted through our sister ministry.

Mr. Chase: Within the ministry, then, of Justice and Attorney General what changes are made to funding levels to match the needs of the various aboriginal justice initiatives? Basically, how do you keep up? Is there some form of indexing to support the rapidly growing First Nations population? Is it an automatic increase based on population, or how are those needs determined?

Mr. Perry: If I could take a stab at it: primarily through our core businesses, whether it's court or whether it's through prosecution or some of the new initiatives around the educational component. Like most budget cycles groups do make submissions. We review as a department with our minister what the risks are, what the environmental scan is, what's happening in the province. We do have an intake of these requests.

I guess the first order of business is to try to introduce those into our core businesses, which is running courts and the people who come into face with that or the people who end up, you know, passing through and going on to some institutions. In terms of our core business it's not dissimilar from others as a group that will make submissions. Of course, they would be giving input through our stakeholder consultation processes, such as our JPAC committee. Information does come in, and it does go through a fairly rigorous process to determine where we're going to best put our dollars. Of course, at the end of the day we have limited dollars, and we have to apply them to keeping the lights on and then do what we can for the government's core priorities, the new priorities.

I don't know if that answers the question, but I don't have anything specific to say how we deal with this particular stakeholder group. I more talked about the process. Perhaps my colleague in court services can help.

Ms Hookenson: I think I could speak to the aboriginal court worker program as being an example. The aboriginal court worker program is cost shared with the federal government, so we do monitor the impact of the workload out in the criminal justice system and how that impacts the work of the aboriginal court worker program. We actually are in the process of working with the federal government to obtain additional funding coming into that program. At the same time we would be expected to provide a top-up as well for the program. Very much the aboriginal court worker program is assessed and the needs of that program are assessed based on what's happening out in the court system and the number of clients that aboriginal court workers are required to assist in their work.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

If you could please add me to the list.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Griffiths, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you. I ask every department that comes here one standard question, and I give a little speech before, so please bear with me.

Mr. Denis: Are we talking about your grandpa?

Mr. Griffiths: No, no. It's not about my grandpa this time. My grandpa – no, I'm just joking.

Performance measures are very important so that we can assess whether or not we're getting value for the money spent. The most basic type of performance measures are satisfaction surveys. I

mean, they're important to know whether or not you're satisfying clients, but they don't necessarily tell you the quality of the dollars being spent. So you can measure outputs, which is next, which is volume oriented, and then you can measure outcomes, which gets right down to the value for money and quality orientation.

Looking through your business plan, all of your performance measures are satisfaction surveys, client satisfaction surveys, and I'm wondering if you have a plan in place to improve the type of performance measures to get to more deep, meaningful measures?

Mr. Perry: Yes, we do. As previously mentioned, we are adding three new measures for the upcoming business plan cycle. They're not precision outputs, but they are getting us closer. Part of our strategy is to refine the question, get it a little bit more close to the business we do. These are fairly global in their nature and heavily influenced. The SafeCom initiative will basically drive this agenda. It is a recommendation in the report that we do have measurable performance measures.

9:30

I guess our next activity, as was mentioned, will be around developing these measures for that initiative, which will basically encompass a lot of the business that's happening in Justice today. That activity is under way and, as was mentioned earlier, will be available in the spring of 2009. That'll be our sort of first opportunity to change up some of the measures. But as an ongoing process we recognize that, and we're challenged because it's very hard to explain a ministry such as Justice when you're dealing with these sorts of measures.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you. Forgive me for missing that point.

If you laid out what the new three performance measures will be, forgive me for that, too.

My second question: why don't you measure legal aid wait times or recidivism rates or wait times for trial dates or the amount of money spent per person on legal aid to see how much it costs on average and if we can get the cost down. Why don't you measure things like that?

Mr. Perry: These are the external measures. As part of our management processes and reporting processes we do have a lot of internal measures. There are many more around than, for example, just the lead times we report here. We actually look at courts, we look at locations, we look at geographic issues because we use that to balance out where there may be a pressure point and, you know: do we have enough resources and locations? So we have a lot of internal.

The science around coming up with a measure you can put into a public document such as this is that you have to have a couple of years' historical practice at it; I mean, you have to demonstrate. Part of our incubation period is getting these measures, which are a little bit closer to output but linking them to some of the initiatives that we do because as stand-alone they beg even more questions, so building this historical reference so that we can actually go to a public document and say: here is what we're trying to do, and here's the history of this measure. We do have a couple that will be soon at the stage where you can do this.

The measures we are looking at for next year are around educational seminars, training: how many people are you training in knowledge of justice? We're looking at different ways in maintenance enforcement. You'll see in the measure that we are just about at a hundred per cent of receiving money. We're making it more proactive: on a monthly basis are you getting what you required? That would be more important to the recipient of that benefit than our current measure.

So there's some precision being added to these measures, but we have a little ways to go.

Mr. Griffiths: Excellent. Thank you.

Mr. Bodnarek: If I could just . . .

The Chair: Quickly, please.

Mr. Bodnarek: . . . very briefly supplement. I acknowledge that we are looking at new measures. I just don't want to diminish the value of existing public survey and other measures. Those are used across the country. In some cases there's really no better way to measure certain of our outcomes. So those are important as well.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chase, followed by Mr. Quest.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Given that talk is considerably cheaper than litigation and specifically referencing the performance measures on page 32, why does the ministry continue to set such low targets for the provincial court civil mediation settlement rate?

Ms Hookenson: For the civil mediation settlement rate our targets are really based on what our experience has been. The civil mediation program has now been in place for 10 years. In fact, we just had a 10-year celebration of the program last week. We view that program as being extremely successful. Although it may appear that a 67 per cent settlement rate is low, we actually view that as being fairly significant because it does mean that 67 per cent of cases do not go through the regular court process, which means that they're not taking up judges' time, courtroom time, staff time. We send as many of our matters as possible that are filed in the civil claims program to mediation. That's been our experience on what mediators can settle.

We have these matters mediated by two mediators. They're given a certain amount of time that they spend with the clients, and they're either able or not able to settle. They can determine very quickly if it's a matter that can be settled by mediation or if it is something that is going to have to go on through the regular court process.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My follow-up: this target reports on provincial rates, and on the same page it states that cities such as Calgary and Grande Prairie are actually rating below the 65 per cent average. What is the ministry doing to ensure that this measure is met in all cities across the province?

Ms Hookenson: Well, I'll answer your question specifically as it relates to Grande Prairie. We just introduced the civil mediation program in Grande Prairie within the last year. It takes some time when that program is introduced to develop the mediators, to ensure that we have a proper roster of mediators, to get the clients willing to have their matters go to mediation rather than to go through the traditional court process. We do believe that it's a bit of transition period in Grande Prairie and that it will just take time to get there.

In Calgary when I talked to the mediators last week at the event that I was at, they said that it really depends on the types of cases that are sent to them for mediation and how willing the parties are to mediate. I think we have very skilled, experienced mediators on our roster, but some matters are able to be mediated and some are not. We continue to train and develop our mediators and to refer as many matters as possible, and I think that, actually, we're doing a very good job in that area.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Given the fact that we have a wonderful new courthouse in Calgary, I would hate to think that the rooms weren't being sufficiently used by both judges and mediators.

Ms Hookenson: Right.

Mr. Chase: If you could please add me to the list.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Quest, please.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just looking at page 77, some of the direct incurred expenses, equipment/inventory purchases, and capital. Just looking at the bigger totals, the 2007-2008 budget, just under \$360 million. Then there was a supplementary of \$9.5 million, so an authorized budget of \$368.5 million now. Then the actual came in at \$360,490,000 with an unexpended of \$8 million. Did that authorized supplementary just go unused? What happened there?

Mr. Perry: It was surplus, so, yes, it was unused. The explanation is in the timing of when we asked for the supplementary estimate, which was the fall, justified by the increase in the legal compensation. As you see the distribution, it's areas where we have either criminal or civil lawyers within the ministry, so that \$9.5 million was a request. In hindsight, had we known we would be surplus, we probably wouldn't have asked for it, and we would come pretty close to the actual budget, maybe off by about a million or so.

The lapsed money, we were starting to track that around the November through to March time frame. No ministry wants to be in this position of lapsing money, but no ministry wants to be foolish to go spend it on, you know, items that would have no benefit. Because we are a staff ministry, we knew at about November that we were not going to recruit all of these positions in, so we were aware that we would be leaving money on the table. It was the two incidents with about four months in between them. Again, if they happened at the same time, it probably would have been a different result than we see here today.

Mr. Quest: No supplemental, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, followed by Mr. Fawcett, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. On page 54 it states that "all core businesses were impacted by increased expenditures related to compensation increases." All throughout the report there are mentions of increased spending and supplementary requests for funding to address the higher expenditures for staff negotiations. Can the minister or ministry officials explain the justification for these increases?

9:40

Mr. Perry: The compensation in the province is done through – perhaps that would be best, to speak to just one particular group of them.

Mr. Bodnarek: Yeah. I think the obvious one that probably is one of the higher impact ones is the compensation package that went to Treasury Board around our legal officer compensation. There was a fairly extensive process in terms of looking at our salaries for Crown prosecutors and our civil lawyers. We had some significant pressures in the Crown prosecutors' offices, particularly in Edmonton and Calgary, and there was a significant retention issue. We would have young prosecutors coming in, staying for a year or two,

and heading out into the private sector. To address that, we did an extensive review of compensation, looked at some key comparator jurisdictions, including the federal government, Ontario, and British Columbia, and rejiggered the compensation package so that we were not losing Crown prosecutors, for example, to the federal government. That was a large component of the package.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My personal preference would be to see more judges and mediators hired to reduce court time costs, not leaving out the important role of the prosecutors.

My second question: which programs or initiatives were impacted by the emphasis on compensation increases? You've mentioned Crown prosecutors. What other areas? Where has the compensation gone to direct justice, so to speak?

Ms Hookenson: We were impacted to a certain extent by this in court services with the legal positions that we have within court services. We have a number of legal research positions within the courts that provide assistance to the judiciary. In total our numbers for lawyers in court services are small as compared to the criminal division and the civil division, but there was some impact on us in court services as well.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, if you could please add me to the list.

The Chair: Mr. Fawcett, please.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My next question has to do with, I guess, I don't see in here in the annual report any information or any indicators or statistics on customer service. The reason I'm asking this question is that actually I haven't had any interaction with the justice system, which, one would say, is a good thing. However, recently in the last two weeks I did have to go down to the Calgary courthouse for just picking up some documents, and I had a horrific experience.

Mr. Chase: Strip searched.

Mr. Fawcett: You know what? I wasn't so concerned about the security. It was actually when I went to go get the documents and the way that I was treated by one of the staff members there. I've never felt so demeaned in my entire life about how unintelligent I was. Here's the issue: regular citizens that are accessing these services don't have some of the understanding of the legalese and the complexities of what certain words mean in the legal community when trying to get documents and that sort of thing. So what are you doing to make sure that when people go down to the courthouse to do these simple things, they don't need to bring a lawyer along with them, feel demeaned by some of the staff that's there?

Ms Hookenson: Well, to start with, I apologize if you were treated that way because I think that is unusual in court services. We did do a client satisfaction survey about a year and a half ago, and in fact it was incredibly positive in all aspects, 90 per cent and above from the clients that were surveyed. But in saying that, I can tell you that in Calgary by the beginning of the new calendar year we are going to have established right on the main floor of the Calgary courthouse a centre that we'll call either a justice access centre or a law information centre, where people can go to when they actually come into the courthouse for assistance. We'll have staff in that centre that will be intake workers that will provide a triage service so that right at that point in time you get to the right place to get to the services that you will require.

There may be some services that will be able to be provided to you right in that particular office. If not, you will get moved to

where you will get the service and, hopefully, a very positive service when you get to the right place in the Calgary Courts Centre. That's certainly a goal that we have at all of our court locations throughout the province, and we've been working very hard over the last year and a half to two years to establish these types of centres in court locations.

I think that sometimes what happens is that the front-line staff at the registries in the court offices are so busy that they don't have the time to take the time to spend with clients coming into the court offices. It is our intent through these centres that we're establishing that the people in those centres have more time to spend with the clients that are coming in.

[Mr. Griffiths in the chair]

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Chair. When I knew that this department . . .

The Deputy Chair: You've asked two.

Mr. Fawcett: No, I haven't.

The Deputy Chair: Sorry. The chair has left, and he struck you off twice. Sorry. Proceed with your second question.

Mr. Fawcett: I just want to add that when I knew that your department was coming before the Public Accounts Committee – this isn't trying to correct something that happened to me personally. I was just looking for information to try to convince me that my situation was an aberration and not the way that many people feel they're treated when they go down there. I certainly appreciate your comments, and I think that service would be very much a value-added service to the citizens of Calgary.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. Sorry about that, Mr. Fawcett. Mr. Chase, followed by Ms Woo-Paw.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I can't help taking advantage of this opportunity to say how well treated I have been when I have gone into the Calgary courthouse and how specifically Justice is involved and Children and Youth Services have gone out of their way to provide me with time and explanations. A former chief justice of Children and Youth Services spent over two and a half hours providing me background at his own personal expense, and that was very much appreciated.

Referencing page 84, can the ministry explain the justification for increasing the salaries of department officials, some receiving a \$60,000 increase in their annual salary.

Mr. Bodnarek: Okay. I think I referred previously to the process that the government of Alberta uses to look at executive manager compensation. It's our corporate human resources area for the government at large. At Alberta Justice we have a number of executive managers. Our salaries are set based on the government-wide salaries for executive managers, and, as mentioned earlier, there is a fairly comprehensive review nationally to set these types of salaries, looking at key comparator jurisdictions and the private sector. The result was the increases.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I certainly wouldn't use the government methodology of salary increases, such as the 35 per cent that was awarded to the Premier and to ministers, as an example of salary increases.

My second question. Are these significant salary increases relating to the increased expenditures due to compensation increases that were mentioned on page 54?

Mr. Perry: On this schedule 6, the disclosure of the executive salaries, this is only a portion of the executive group in the ministry. These are budgeted salary positions, so the salaries you see on the base salary are included in our budget. Those are factored as part of our annual budget process.

9:50

The other cash benefits. The performance bonus system used by the government is provided after the fact, after the conclusion of the year, so that would be the only addition. We found internal funding for the bonus system in our department. So, no, this is not related to the compensation. Those are actual classification changes to the person's salary.

Mr. Chase: I appreciate that. Far be it from me to suggest that public servants shouldn't receive fair compensation.

Mr. Perry: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chase: If I could be added to the list, please.

The Deputy Chair: Yes. Ms Woo-Paw.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. With your indulgence, Mr. Chair, I would like to provide a preamble before my question.

First of all, I do recognize the daily effort of all the people who work in the Justice department and all the really great initiatives that people are developing and working on every day. I do recognize the genuine intent of the people in the ministry to improve services. I hope that my comments, my questions, will not be overly unfairly critical to the ministry because in a way as a new MLA we've been monitoring and reviewing several ministries, and I think that what I'm going to say is probably quite equally applicable to other ministries.

First of all, I think there's a very strong focus around access to justice. I only had time to look at the 2007-08 report. My observation is that a lot of the access initiatives are around improving physical access and also increasing human resources to do the work to enhance efficiency, also providing some information support to people who want to represent themselves in the system. I'm generalizing and working with the assumption that most of these people will be English speaking, have a certain confidence level in representing themselves in a complex, powerful system, but I think nonetheless that it's great that we're increasing that kind of access to people.

Then I look at the aboriginal justice initiative.

The Deputy Chair: I'm going to have to say that you're stretching the indulgences here. We have five more minutes, and we have lots of questions.

Ms Woo-Paw: Okay. I'll just skip some of this. I guess that what I'm trying to get at: I look at goal number 4 on page 17 as an example, to increase public confidence. With the younger population, lower income, lower education, which intersect with aboriginal populations and some of the immigrant and minority communities and also to achieve your mission and other goals, isn't it time – I have to skip all the other preamble stuff. My question is: don't you think that it is time that we may look at employing a more systemic approach to looking at the issues of access, inclusion, and equitable access to quality service to underrepresented groups and disadvantaged groups beyond training?

The studies tell us that in order to do this well, we have to integrate this competency into governance, into organizational culture, communication, community relations, programs and services, human resources policy, as well as training. Right now what I see is that at best most of the ministries are providing some cultural competency training and not looking at policy, not looking at human resources, not looking at administration, not looking at community relations. Would it be time to take a more systemic approach and be more meaningful to set targets according to those areas?

The Deputy Chair: Excellent question.

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

Ms Hookenson: The concerns that you raise are very good concerns. We have now going on within the province of Alberta a mapping project that is being carried out by the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice. Alberta Justice is a partner in providing some funding to that particular initiative, that is under way. The mapping process is mapping all of the legal services and justice services and, truly, other services that are available to Albertans and through that mapping process also identifying the gaps that need to be addressed. The first step in the process is that this mapping is going on within Calgary and the Calgary region. The information coming out of that mapping process will be of assistance to us as we're establishing this centre in the Calgary Courts Centre, that I told you about.

We also used something very similar when we set up our law information centres in Edmonton and Red Deer and Grande Prairie. Through that initiative and through working with the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice on the mapping that took place and the programs that were identified to assist not only people coming into the court system but people that needed assistance with other areas and other issues and matters that they have, such as housing, we were able as well to connect with community organizations. So through these centres that we now have in place, we very much have a partnership with community organizations throughout those areas of the province where we have these centres, and we can make referrals back and forth and have assistance provided back and forth to the clients that we have coming into the courts. I do believe that as the mapping is completed throughout Alberta, that will help identify those gaps and also help us determine where we need to put our priorities and what we need to do to start addressing them.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. She answered the question.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

In the time that we have left, we will read our questions into the record. If officials from the Justice department could follow through in writing through the clerk to the committee, we would be grateful. We'll proceed with this process with Mr. Chase, followed by Mr. Sandhu, and then Mr. Dallas.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Referencing note 6 on page 68, can the ministry describe the nature of the service contracts that accounted for almost \$14 million in expenses for the ministry?

Referencing note 7 on page 68, can the ministry describe the nature of the 35 legal claims in which the ministry is a defendant? I'm just looking for commonalities, not specific details.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Sandhu, please.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Chairman. To the Justice department: it seems like you're doing a very good job. I've got a quick question from page 50 in the Auditor General's report about antiterrorism. What are we doing to safeguard Albertans?

Second question. When prosperity is happening in Alberta, a lot of Asian gangs come to Alberta, to big cities like Calgary and Edmonton. I got an invitation from the Indo-Canadian media yesterday for open dialogue with elected officials, councillors and MLAs, to happen at the end of the month. Would the Justice department provide any advice on how we can sit together, the community and elected officials, to deal with Asian gangs which are happening on the south side of the city?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dallas, please.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's clear that among the many challenges you folks are dealing with are recruitment and retention. We've heard about some of the strategies today to create adequate compensation, but in the long run I know that that's very expensive and the least effective of the retention tactics that you'll employ. My question is: which initiatives could you outline for us whereby you're working with postsecondary learning institutions in the province to develop training programs specific to your industry that would enhance both the ability of your work, first, to provide services and also to improve the work experience within the ministry?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes this portion of our agenda.

On behalf of the standing committee I would like to thank all of the officials from Alberta Justice for their time and attention this morning. We appreciate it. Mr. Bodnarek, I believe that QC stands for quality control. You do a very good job, and we appreciate your efforts. Thank you.

Mr. Bodnarek: Thank you very much.

10:00

The Chair: Just feel free to leave if you'd like. We have a couple of other items to proceed with on our agenda.

The chair would like to advise committee members that the remaining committee meetings in 2008 have been scheduled as follows. It's listed on our agenda. We have meetings scheduled, if required, through to December 10, 2008.

At this time under other business is there any other business committee members wish to raise? Seeing none, thank you very much.

Item 5, the date of our next meeting. As previously noted, the next meeting will be with the Ministry of Finance and Enterprise on Wednesday next week, October 29, at 8:30 in the usual room here.

Mr. Wylie, do you have any comments at this time?

Mr. Wylie: No, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

May I please have a motion to adjourn? Moved by Mr. Sandhu that the meeting be adjourned. All in favour? None opposed.

Thank you very much. Have a good week.

[The committee adjourned at 10:01 a.m.]

