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on
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Department of Service Alberta
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, April 15, 2009
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[Mr. Kang in the chair]

**Department of Service Alberta
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The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the meeting to order, please. Welcome to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services. I'd ask the members to introduce themselves for the record, and I would also ask the minister to introduce her officials as well.

Dr. Brown: Neil Brown, Calgary-Nose Hill.

Mr. MacDonald: Good evening. Hugh MacDonald, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Pellis: Paul Pellis, Deputy Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Heather Klimchuk, Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Fischer: Brian Fischer, ADM, financial services, Service Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Brian Mason, MLA for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Jacobs: Good evening. Bryce Jacobs, Cardston-Taber-Warner.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, everyone. Unfortunately, Mr. VanderBurg, who would normally chair our meeting this evening, is unable to do so. Although I'm the deputy chair of the committee, I'm also here tonight as the official critic for the Department of Service Alberta. Therefore, in order to facilitate the review of the department's estimates, according to Standing Order 54(3) I would request that one of the members of the committee serve as acting chair for this meeting. The acting chair must be a committee member. Would anybody like to make a motion? I'm asking for nominations.

Mr. Jacobs: I'd like to move that we appoint Dr. Neil Brown as acting chair of the committee this evening, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. All in favour?

Mr. MacDonald: Could you clarify that, Mr. Jacobs? Acting chair?

Mr. Jacobs: Acting chair for this evening, yes.

Mr. MacDonald: I'll vote for that.

The Deputy Chair: All in favour? Thank you.

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

The Acting Chair: Well, I appreciate the confidence that the opposition members have in me.

Some additional members have joined us. I would just welcome Ms Woo-Paw, Mr. Cao, and Ms Calahasen before we start.

We have been through the procedures for this committee at last week's meeting, so I think members are familiar with the procedures

that we have established under the standing orders, but I would like to remind members that the vote on the estimates is going to be deferred until we are in Committee of Supply. Any amendments that are moved this evening similarly will be considered and deferred until such time as we are in Committee of Supply in the House. Any members wishing to propose amendments were to have given them to Parliamentary Counsel no later than 6 p.m. this evening, so if you have not done so already, you're too late.

As far as the speaking order goes, the standing orders of the Assembly, all members are eligible to speak at these proceedings. Department officials, I would just remind them, are not permitted to speak; however, they can give advice or notations to the minister if they so wish to assist in answering any of the questions given by members. Members can speak more than once. However, their speaking time is limited to 10 minutes at a time unless they advise the chair in advance that they wish to combine their speaking time with the minister's, in which case it will be for 20 minutes combined.

We have three hours to consider the estimates of Service Alberta this evening. With that, I will invite the Minister of Service Alberta to – sorry. Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Just a clarification if you would. I know that you didn't draw up the rules, but I'm just curious. If as a result of our questioning we decide that we would like to make an amendment, then according to the way you outlined them, we wouldn't be able to. Is that correct?

The Acting Chair: That's my understanding.

Mr. Mason: What's the point of asking questions, then?

The Acting Chair: You're talking about an amendment that relates specifically to the estimates of Service Alberta?

Mr. Mason: Yeah. I don't have one, but it just strikes me that the point of asking questions is to get information, and if you find something that you disagree with and you might want to make an amendment, you can't.

The Acting Chair: What you say makes perfect sense to me. I don't know what the logic was. I was just reiterating what I understand the rules to be.

Mr. Anderson: Don't we just vote on the estimates as a whole at the end, and if there's an amendment . . .

The Acting Chair: Well, we vote on amendments as well.

Mr. Anderson: Well, that's what I'm saying. Would that be the time to bring forth amendments to the specific areas?

The Acting Chair: My instructions are that on any amendments with respect to specific departments the advice ought to be given in advance of the meeting.

You make a very good point, Mr. Mason.

Ms Woo-Paw: My understanding is that the motion can be presented at the table but voted later. It can be presented at the table.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Minister, I will invite you to make some opening remarks, not to exceed 10 minutes, please.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for the opportunity to present the 2009-10 estimates for the Ministry of Service Alberta. Before getting to some of the financial figures, I'd first like to provide some background about the ministry and its focus. Since becoming minister, I've become more and more impressed by the breadth and depth of services delivered by Service Alberta. It's no accident that service is in the ministry's name because that's exactly what we're all about.

The work of Service Alberta is often behind the scenes and under the surface, but it impacts an incredible amount of day-to-day life in our province as well as the ability of the government as a whole to operate efficiently and effectively. We have achieved some great things in the past year, and I'm looking forward to more successes in the year ahead even with the challenges of a world-wide recession and the resulting budget pressures.

Before I briefly explain what the ministry does and outline the department's estimates, I would like to introduce some of the department officials who are with us that were not introduced previously: my executive assistant, Carol Anderson; Cheryl Arseneau, executive assistant to the deputy minister; and Cam Traynor, my communications director. Thank you for coming.

6:40

Service Alberta's vision. Mr. Chairman, Service Alberta is the thread running through the entire government and the economy, providing essential support and valuable services each and every day. The ministry provides services directly to Albertans and provides critical support to other government ministries. Programs for Albertans include registries, licensing, landlord and tenant services, vital statistics, consumer protection, and many other services. Services provided to government include technology support, procurement services, interdepartmental mail and courier services, payroll, records management, and government libraries. Regardless of what role we're playing, our guiding mission and purpose is always to provide excellent customer service to our clients, whether it's directly to Albertans or internal to government. The ministry's vision is simple: one government, one enterprise, and one employer, driving innovation and excellence in service delivery. This vision is achieved each and every day by the hard-working staff within the ministry.

The business plan. Service Alberta's business plan outlines goals for the next three years that link closely with the priorities assigned to me by the Premier as well as government's overall priorities. The business plan outlines the two core services of the ministry. First, the ministry provides services to Albertans. Under this core service we have numerous initiatives planned for the coming year to ensure that the people of our province have accessible, integrated, and quality services. We plan to continue protecting consumers in many different ways, working with other jurisdictions to investigate identity theft, consumer fraud, introducing regulations for the payday loan industry, and developing new consumer awareness tools. We plan to introduce BizPal in even more municipalities in the province. This is an online service where businesses can go to one source to get a full list of all the permits and licences they need from all levels of government. We plan to expand the highly successful residential tenancy dispute resolution service across the province so that landlords and tenants can resolve disputes without having to go to court. We plan to implement a renewed mandate and scope for the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. We also plan to improve access to Alberta legislation through the Queen's Printer. These are just a few examples.

Our second core business is providing services to government. Service Alberta provides corporate and shared services to ministries

in a standardized, efficient, and effective manner. For example, Service Alberta is responsible for the timely delivery of tens of millions of pieces of mail each year to government departments, and every year the ministry handles the photocopying of millions of documents for government ministries. The ministry worked collaboratively across government to improve the ability of departments to deliver government programs and services, reducing duplication of services, and ultimately better serving the public.

In the business plan there are a number of strategies planned over the next three years: number one, enabling high-speed broadband service through the SuperNet to schools, hospitals, libraries, and colleges regardless of their location in the province; providing more capacity within data centres to meet immediate and short-term requirements for government-wide technology; continuing to implement the information communications technology initiative, a common approach to technology across government; and ensuring a corporate approach to the security of government's information management assets and to identify further standardization of processes to improve efficiency across government.

Mr. Chairman, these are just some of the initiatives Service Alberta has planned over the next three years that will improve services provided both to Albertans and to government.

Now let's move on to the estimates. I will now outline the funding we require as I present the ministry's estimates for the 2009-10 fiscal year. The overall amount to be voted for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$366 million, as noted on page 339 of the 2009-10 government estimates book.

Expenses. Ministry support services. Of the overall estimate \$11.8 million is for ministry support services. This includes funding for the minister's office, the deputy minister's office, and corporate services.

Services to Albertans. The estimated budget for the ministry's first key program, services to Albertans, is \$67.6 million, including equipment purchases. This funding will support registries, which include land titles, motor vehicles, and other registry services. It also supports consumer services, which include consumer awareness and advocacy and the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

Services to government. The estimated budget for the ministry's second key program is \$286.5 million, including amortization and equipment purchases, which will help Service Alberta continue providing efficient and effective services to other government ministries. These services provided to government include many key responsibilities: mail and courier services, records management, government libraries, procurement services, processing government invoices, Crown debt collections, management of the government's payroll system, vehicle services, data centre operations, software licences, the running of the SuperNet, and the support and security of government's computers.

As well, there is \$92.5 million estimated for capital investment, primarily for initiatives under the information management and technology strategy. This includes case management, the justice information management system, the IMAGIS upgrade, SuperNet, and standardized infrastructure.

In conclusion, these are the 2009-10 estimates for Service Alberta. The estimates you'll be voting on will support us in our overarching goal to achieve service excellence within and outside government. Before we conclude, I would just like to emphasize one more thing. There is no doubt that the world has changed dramatically since last year's budget and business plan were introduced. With tighter finances we've had to carefully review our priorities for the upcoming year and to make adjustments accordingly, the most prominent example of which is postponing the introduction of a new licence plate, a savings of \$15 million. We've looked across the

board at all priorities, and we've made prudent changes where necessary.

I want to emphasize that challenging times like these, in my mind, present opportunities. This is an excellent time for our ministry to look carefully at its core mandate and critical services and make sure that we're delivering them as efficiently and effectively as possible. It's at times like these when it's more important than ever to think creatively and come up with a better way of doing things. Service Alberta is in a very unique position to introduce corporate approaches that will make the government as a whole more efficient and improve the way services are delivered to Albertans. I have to say that in recent months Service Alberta officials have impressed me with their ability to do just that. They are a talented group approaching these challenging times as an opportunity to make improvements. I am looking forward to the coming year to see what we can achieve together.

While budgets, business plans, and mandate letters are important, the work of Service Alberta hinges on its people. Service Alberta staff are a shining example of excellent public service, and we can all be very proud of the work they do.

That concludes my presentation, Mr. Chairman. Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The first hour, pursuant to standing orders, is allocated to the Official Opposition. I'll call on Mr. Kang as the Official Opposition critic to lead off with his questions. Mr. Kang, do you wish to combine your time with the minister's for a total of 20 minutes?

Mr. Kang: I think that would be a good idea.

The Acting Chair: Minister, are you okay with that?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Sure.

The Acting Chair: Okay. That's agreed, then.
Go ahead, Mr. Kang, please.

Mr. MacDonald: The hour starts now?

Mr. Kang: The hour starts now, yeah.

Thank you, Minister, for the overview of things to come. I think I want to congratulate you on being much more prudent, efficient, you know, with the department, with the budget. I think it was a good overview. Sure, we are in tough economic times, and we have to keep everything in mind: where we can cut back or reallocate or watch where the funds go.

I've got some questions here. I'd be glad if you gave me details on those. I think we will get to business right away. Page 25 of the government of Alberta strategic business plan lists the following goals for Service Alberta as part of the three-year strategic focus. The first one is a single-enterprise approach to information technology. It goes on to say:

Continue to implement a single enterprise approach to information technology development and operations for the Government of Alberta, thereby increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery to Albertans. Enhanced integrity and transparency of the information the Government of Alberta provides to Albertans is a key outcome of this priority.

Could you please give us the details of the strategy that you're going to implement on the single-enterprise approach to information technology?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Sure. When I look at the mandate letter and my particular business plan, I think that the mandate of a single-enterprise approach is really important for Albertans, just to make it easier for Albertans to access information. It's always interesting to me, when we get calls as MLAs or as ministers, that it's very confusing for people to find out information on how to do things. That's why the one-enterprise approach is critical. I think the work that we're doing is cross-ministry with all the 23 departments, so we can work together, and the information is all at people's fingertips. That's really, really important to me.

6:50

Relating to that, too, is the security of Albertans' information. It was a great process this last year putting in place a chief security officer for the whole government of Alberta, which resides within Service Alberta. That's a critical, critical position moving forward. As you know, we're always trying to stay ahead of people who are trying to cause problems. That has been a great process. Many of the changes we've made with the good work of the Auditor General, moving forward and also just looking at things differently and being respectful of what we're faced with and being realistic too. I mean, that's what it is: being realistic. That whole area, when I look at the one-enterprise approach, the information management technology, is all about being innovative and providing better service to Albertans.

Mr. Kang: Another one of my biggest concerns is the security that the public information department is going to have. In Bill 9 I think, you know, that you've tried to correct some of the security issues. We are going to have almost 18 million transactions a year. With Alberta health care coming to private registries as well, I think that's going to increase the number of transactions, and more personal information will be coming under Service Alberta. That's my biggest concern. How will that all be handled? Are we prepared for all of that, or have you got some plan put in place for the security of personal information?

Mrs. Klimchuk: You know, Bill 9, the accountability framework, which is currently moving through the House, a pivotal piece of legislation and accountability for the registry agents across Alberta. When I became minister, I started to visit with some of the registry agents. With the good work that they're doing, it's a pivotal document in that we kind of revised some things and made better standards. The registry agents having Albertans' information is a privilege, and we want to make sure as a government that they have the best tools to make sure it's protected.

We have something in place called the CARS system so that everything is tracked on the system with respect to if someone comes in to renew a licence or that kind of thing. That's very important to us. We support the registry agents on that basis. We get regular updates on what's happening, so we're able to get a much better handle of, well, the number of transactions as well as what people are coming to a registry office for, which is really important to me because, again, it's about serving consumers.

With respect to the Alberta health care we have a pilot project in 20 offices across Alberta. Don't forget that before you could only get your Alberta health care card in Edmonton or in Calgary or over the phone. This is a huge innovation, working with Health and Wellness, to make sure that if people move to Alberta, they can go to the closest location to register, and then the card is mailed out through Alberta Health and Wellness. It's a pilot project we started in 20 communities. Once we go over these next few months, we'll review it. Already we're hearing people say: well, how come it's

not in my community? That's a good thing. That to me is a really positive, collaborative approach to government.

I know that the registry agents are more than able and willing to do many things to support their businesses and to support the government of Alberta. It's a great partnership. I have every confidence that with this accountability framework that we've got, we've got some really good measures in place to make sure that Albertans' information is protected.

Mr. Kang: Okay. Since we are talking about health care, given the recent announcement, you know, that the registry will become the place for Albertans to register a change or change their information with the Alberta health care insurance plan, how much money has been allocated to pay the cost of this transition?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, right now the pilot project is between Alberta Health and Service Alberta. It's a joint project that we started, well, I guess, a couple of weeks ago. So I'd have to get back to you on the exact amount because we're working on it together. Part of it is about, you know, Alberta Health officials supporting the registry agents so that they have the information and they know what to do. I'd be happy to get that number back to you.

Mr. Kang: Okay. Another question is: what will be the cost to the consumer? I believe there is no cost now if they do their business with the registries, but in the future, you know, I believe there will be some cost to the consumer. Is that in the plans?

Mrs. Klimchuk: No.

Mr. Kang: With these budget cutbacks, you know, maybe coming in the future, that's what we sense. So who's going to pay the registries? Is it going to be Service Alberta or Alberta Health Services? Who's going to pay them for their business?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Right now, as before when an individual went to go pick up an Alberta health care card, you know, there is no charge. Currently when an individual goes there, there is no charge for that service. That to me is a service that Albertans require. At this point, frankly, I wouldn't be comfortable charging for that particular thing. We know that registry agents do charge for a number of services, but going through this pilot project, I think this is, as I said before, a really good example of departments working together to make sure that Albertans are served better.

Mr. Kang: But when we are serving Albertans better – that's my question – is there going to be some cost coming in the future? Is there any anticipated cost to the consumer? There must have been some discussion because before it was with the government, and now this is going to go to private registries, you know, the Alberta health care.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Right. Well, that's why we started it with the 20 offices, just the 20 pilot offices across Alberta. There will be no cost to the consumer to get their Alberta health care card.

Mr. Kang: My next question is: is there any annual projected cost for Service Alberta to manage health information going into the future?

Mrs. Klimchuk: I think that being in new territory, an annualized cost – I guess part of it depends. We've had, you know, thousands of people move to Alberta these last few years. So I guess it

depends on population and those kinds of things. I can't predict that. But moving forward, if after the six months we are able to put it across Alberta, then we'll be able to have a better handle on exactly how many people are using the offices to get their Alberta health care card.

Mr. Kang: Okay. My next question is: how much money will specifically go towards training those registry agents in their new dual role and ensuring the security of health information within the registries?

Mrs. Klimchuk: With respect to the information that's being retained, Alberta Health and Wellness mails out the cards. We take the information, and then pass it on to Health and Wellness. We're not taking any other private information. It's nothing to do with – it's your typical name and address, that kind of thing. It's very straightforward.

The cost of that. Again, as you had previously asked about the cost of the project, I'd be happy to get back to you just to figure out exactly what is in that. Ultimately, we are more or less working with Alberta Health to provide that information. They send it out. The security of information that's being provided is guarded, and that's taken very seriously.

Mr. Kang: So that information stays with the registries, or it goes to Alberta Health?

Mrs. Klimchuk: It goes to Alberta Health.

Mr. Kang: But Alberta Health does take the information the first time? When you go apply for Alberta health care, you know, they take, I think, a photocopy of the passport and a photocopy of the PR card and all that information. That's very sensitive information.

7:00

Mrs. Klimchuk: When we collect that information, all of that information is not held in the registries office. It's taken away, those IDs and all those copies. No. It's not left in the registry offices for people to get their hands on. That does not happen.

Mr. Kang: Everything is going to come under Service Alberta. I think Service Alberta will be overwhelmed – overwhelmed – with all the information from right across the province. With Bill 9 – I'm talking about security only – you know, we are trying to tighten up on the security part. Were there any issues there since 1993? Were there any issues about the security of the information previously?

Mrs. Klimchuk: You know the history of when the registries were first opened. Over the years there have been issues. I think that this is why this accountability framework – it was worked on for the last two years. Before I became minister, it was worked on. So it's a very well-thought-out piece of legislation, and the accountability is there for a good reason. You're right. People are demanding more of our registry agents, so we want to make sure that they have the tools to take information and know it's safe and secure and it gets to the right places. That's why this Bill 9 is a critical piece moving forward.

You know, the thing, too, is with technology. You always like to be ahead of the parade, and that's what we're attempting to achieve here to make sure that we are ahead. As well, the agents need to get back and say, "Hey, this is happening," or "That's happening," or "Why don't you do this or do that?" So it's kind of a give and take between Service Alberta and the agents across Alberta through the

Association of Alberta Registry Agents so that we can all work together and do a good job. That's what that's about.

Mr. Kang: Thank you. Okay. Coming back to that single-enterprise approach to information technology, how much funding has been allocated towards the ministry's goal to implement a single-enterprise approach to information technology?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Just let me go to that page there, please.

Mr. Kang: Page 25.

Mrs. Klimchuk: It's approximately an \$11.7 million increase for the information management and technology strategy operating cost.

Mr. Kang: Okay. I think we're still on page 25. "Improve Service Delivery to Albertans": that's one of the goals as well. This goes on to say:

Improve service delivery, whether in person, by phone or through the Internet, to Albertans by creating innovative approaches, while maintaining information security and integrity. Continue to improve the quality and range of services provided, and encourage and support the use of electronic business initiatives to make it easier for Albertans to access government. This will result in simplified and standardized electronic business processes, and a single point of access to government for customers, vendors, partners, citizens and employees.

Okay. This goes on to say that the ministry will improve the service – right? – by creating the innovative approaches. Can the minister explain what innovative approaches will be used and how best practices for improving service delivery will be determined?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, I think one of the innovative approaches with respect to service delivery – and I spoke about them previously – is talking about, you know, working with the registry agents to provide the services that we are providing, with respect to the health cards is a good example.

The other thing is BizPal, what I talked about previously, how people can go online if they want to open up a business and get all the licences from which level of government: federal, provincial, municipal.

As well, just having access, whether it's the Queen's Printer, whether it's, you know, getting a land title service delivery. It's just making sure when someone comes on the Service Alberta website, they know where to access that information. So it's working with our partners, whether, as we've said, registry agents or with people across Alberta, and working with other ministries as well. It's a tremendous opportunity to do some great work with other ministries to make sure that we're not duplicating and we are thinking differently and we are approaching things differently.

When I think of innovation, I think, of course, of the whole area of online services. There's a huge shift in that direction. Coupled with that, you also want to have, which is the beauty of the registry agencies, face-to-face contact as well as online and telephone, which is really important. It's attempting to make sure that we provide the best choices possible for Albertans when they need something from the government.

Mr. Kang: You're saying, you know, we provide the best choices. With more workload coming down to registries, will we be opening more registries? Will more licences be issued for registries, or are there still going to be the same number of registries in the province?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, I think the number of registries that are

across Alberta is approximately 220, I believe. You're right. Many of the registries that are in place currently all across Alberta have been there right from the beginning in 1993, and we've had a population increase of 1.1 million since 1993, you know, across Alberta. I think that looking ahead from a strategic point of view, we need to have a conversation about: do we need more registry offices? What do we need to do? Looking ahead, working with AARA and the AMA, I think it's a very good discussion to have. If there's a need for more of those services, we need to have that discussion because of how they were set up in 1993 until now. That's why it's critical with Bill 9, the accountability framework, so we can have that discussion and know that we have a really good skeleton in place to support whatever we do in the future. So that's a discussion that I'm looking forward to having as we move ahead.

Mr. Kang: Thank you. Okay. You've got the funding to implement all these innovations and approaches. Do you have just one pool of funding for everything, or do you just have money allocated for different projects?

Mrs. Klimchuk: As I mentioned in my opening comments about services to Albertans and services to government, you know, it's all in that package, the numbers that I mentioned when I first spoke about the services that we provide within government, between government departments, and working with all the other government departments, and all the things we do, mail and all those things I mentioned previously. You're right. We have a pool that we work with. It's not an unlimited pool, so that's why for me as minister I have to make sure that we work together with the departments and try to come together with good solutions.

Mr. Kang: So you're saying you've got an unlimited pool?

Mrs. Klimchuk: No. I didn't say I had an unlimited pool; I said limited.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kang.

The time has expired for the first speaker, and I now recognize Mr. MacDonald.

Mr. MacDonald: No. Mr. Chairman, I would like to defer to my colleague, please.

The Acting Chair: Very good. I'll start the second 20 minutes, then.

Mr. Kang: Okay. You know, we have talked about security a lot, and this is one of the goals as well. That's on page 25, that a goal of the ministry is to strengthen information technology security systems. Can you provide some specific details of how the goals will be accomplished?

Mrs. Klimchuk: When I talk about the information management and the technology strategy, I think one of the key things that we have done is, as I mentioned earlier, having the chief security officer for the whole government of Alberta residing within the Department of Service Alberta. Up until a year ago this was not there. With that in place there's a team of chief information officers that meet from every department on a regular basis with my deputy. It's an excellent process because it's about getting together and working together, whether it's discussing about solutions, problems. So that has been a huge positive with Service Alberta, the fact that we are in charge of that now. I'm very proud of that because there are so many things that we can do when we're all working together.

7:10

I'll give you one example, the whole issue of licensing, you know, the licences that you all pay for all of our different computer programs. Well, the whole cost of enterprise licensing is something that I'm really interested in because it's about looking at one licence, not 10. There's some really neat stuff. With all the departments coming together, we can share that information and then make sure it's more efficient and effective. That's one positive.

Mr. Kang: Thank you. On page 111 of the capital plan it shows \$93 million going to information management and technology strategy in 2009-10 and \$60 million in 2010-11, and there's zero dollars, you know, in 2011-12, for a three-year total of \$153 million. How will the \$93 million budgeted for information and technology strategy be allocated, and what are the priority areas for this goal?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Your first question was about moving forward with a current project. The IMT strategy and some of the things that we're working at are – I guess, you always have to pick and choose what you want to start with first. What we started with was with respect to the case management. That's something that's between four ministries. It's Children's Services, Seniors, Housing, and Service Alberta. What we're doing is we're working together so when someone comes to government and accesses a service, part of it is that we want to be able to help that individual. Sometimes people may access a government for a long period of time. Let's not reinvent the wheel. Let's not redo applications. Let's get them in the system. So it's working together with those ministries so we have those all in place. That's what case management is.

The other one is the justice information system, which is through the Department of Justice. Again, it's their system; it's with the legal system there.

The other one is the IMAGIS upgrade. That's to do with some of the kind of things that we do in-government, payroll and some of those areas of procurement and all of that, making that a better system.

The SuperNet, of course, is very exciting to me. When I became minister – and I said this last year in my estimates – I was concerned that we had done so much; there's so much at stake that we need to make sure that it's finished and that we continue to use it and leverage it. What we've done is we're doing ring closures all across Alberta. We have to take a chunk at a time. Those ring closures ensure that the SuperNet service provided to all the people who are using across Alberta is secure, it's safe, and it's got the redundancy component in it. So that's very important.

The last thing is standardized infrastructure, working through the GOA domain. That is with the desktop servers that individuals have. For example, when we go into some office buildings now, there won't be all the servers there. You'll just have everything there and the servers will be elsewhere. So that's some of those things that we're looking at in that area.

Mr. Kang: Okay. Coming back to the security again, what models in other jurisdictions has the ministry used to develop the best practices for strengthening the information technology security system in Alberta? Is there any other jurisdiction using some models?

Mrs. Klimchuk: I think that just looking at other jurisdictions is really important, within our ministries across Canada and international standards as well, which is really, really important, whether it's a website or, as well, working with the Department of Infrastructure to make sure that the physical security of all data facilities is

there across Alberta. I think that's really important. It's ironic because with the system we've got in place with the central security officer, recently we had the government of New Brunswick come and visit us. We had a two-day meeting with them, with the deputy, and I was able to meet with some of them. It was great because they were looking at some of our shared services and how we do things and looking at their system. That to me is a good thing because we know we're on the right track. We're doing some really good work, and it's something that is looked at every day. There's no question.

Mr. Kang: So we are the leaders in this, then? That's what you're saying.

Mrs. Klimchuk: I would like to say that. But as leaders we can always learn. You know, you can always learn new things. I would like to say that with Service Alberta taking the lead on this, I think the opportunity we have to make it that much better is really important.

Mr. Kang: I know that. I congratulate you for that.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you.

Mr. Kang: Okay. On the Auditor General's recommendations, going to page 159. The AG made a few recommendations. Given that the ministry accepted all the recommendations by the Auditor General to improve the various aspects of Service Alberta's information technology system, how much funding has been directed to each of the recommendations? What is the projected time when the recommendation changes will be fully implemented?

Mrs. Klimchuk: With respect to all the Auditor General's recommendations?

Mr. Kang: Yeah.

Mrs. Klimchuk: That is something I would have to get back to you on, the cost of each one. I'd be happy to get back to you on that.

Mr. Kang: Okay. What specific steps are being taken to implement the general recommendations – you're going to get back to me on the cost – and when will they be fully implemented?

Mrs. Klimchuk: I have to say that from the Auditor General's report we accepted them all. Many of them are in place, and we are working with them. We accepted them and moved quite quickly on many of them because we were in the midst of doing that already when we started, you know, looking. It's about being consistent and making sure that it's consistent across the whole government of Alberta. We accepted them all, and I would say that they're in place. There's no question.

Mr. Kang: Okay. Thank you. Coming back to the human resource services on page 9 of the annual report, 2007-08, Service Alberta is responsible for developing and implementing "human resource planning initiatives, policies and programs." Their services include "employee attraction and retention, occupational health and safety, employee learning and development, workplace wellness and recognition." As Service Alberta is responsible for the human resource services for the government – that would include all of the above that I said – what, if any, changes have been made to these services as a result of the recession?

Mrs. Klimchuk: I would just say that that's with Treasury Board

now, under corporate human resources. It was with Service Alberta. That priority stayed with the President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Kang: But Service Alberta had it there for a while, human resources?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. We did have it when Minister Snelgrove was the Minister of Service Alberta with Treasury Board. When the new ministry was made last year, that stayed with the President of Treasury Board, so you would have to ask that minister those questions.

Mr. Kang: So all these questions.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. Thank you very much.

Mr. Kang: Okay. Thank you.

Coming back to licence plates, I know that you touched on it a bit. In February, you know, the minister announced that plans to redesign the licence plate in Alberta will be put on hold indefinitely. I just come back to you again: is there any plan maybe a year, two years down the road to come back to the new licence plates? Or are we still going to save this \$10 million, \$12 million that we were going to spend on the changeover?

7:20

Mrs. Klimchuk: Right. When I became minister, the consultation was finishing up with respect to licence plates with a new logo, a new colour, all of those things. The licence plate issue was approximately \$15 million over two years, the cost of it going forward, and I made the announcement previously because I just felt it was not prudent at this time to move ahead with that. The licence plates will have a fourth digit added to them beginning this September because we are indeed running out of numbers, but I am hopeful – hopeful – that we can continue to roll them out when the time is right.

I can't predict what's going to happen in the future, but I can say that there was some great input from Albertans across Alberta. You know, over 30,000 people responded on the issue of licence plates, which to me was incredible. We have lots of good input. A lot of work has been done. Some of the technology that we found to make these licence plates – which is why we had a little bit higher cost, \$15 million over two years – is even environmentally friendly, which is very important to me, to make sure that when we produce them, it's done the right way. I'm not going to say, but I hope we can do it sooner than later.

Mr. Kang: Even though we will need the money elsewhere, you will still do it, or this will take precedence?

Mrs. Klimchuk: I would only make the decision when the time is right, when my budget says that I can actually do it in my budget. It's not feasible and it's not realistic and it's not prudent right now with what we're facing, you know, as we go through this economic time.

Mr. Kang: Since we are not coming out with a new licence plate, adding that fourth number on the licence plate, what kind of cost is going to be involved in that, to add the new fourth number to the licence plate in comparison to the original cost?

Mrs. Klimchuk: It's cost neutral. There will not be any extra cost for Albertans just adding that one number. There won't be any extra.

Mr. Kang: Okay. Coming to payday loans on page 247 of the ministry's business plan. It's page 247.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you.

Mr. Kang: You're welcome. The ministry's business plan states that a key strategy for the ministry is to modernize consumer legislation regarding the payday loan industry, yet no timeline or any details on the legislation were given. Will you provide any details as to when the legislation protecting consumers from payday loans will be tabled, as the goal is listed in the key strategies in the ministry's business plan?

Mrs. Klimchuk: I know that you asked an excellent question the other day in the House, and I thank you for that. This fall we had a debate. The Member for Edmonton-Centre brought a private member's motion, which was passed last fall. The whole payday loan area is something that when I became minister, I was quite concerned about some of the aspects of the industry. As I've said before, we've actually been able to consult with people who are using this service, which to me is really, really helpful because we need to know why people are using it, whether it's for credit or for whatever reasons, convenience. Those are the kinds of things we've been able to get at. We've contacted, you know, the major players in there, the major companies that are out there, and there are a bunch of other smaller operators.

Moving forward, I am intent on doing something in these next couple of months to provide regulation. I know that many provinces across Canada have already moved in a certain direction, and this is one of my projects, that I am quite committed to. We drive all over our cities, and in parts of your constituency and my constituency we know that there are tons of offices versus not very many in other areas, so I'm concerned from that point of view but also respectful of the fact that people are using them for a certain reason. So when I do bring it forward, it's because we've had a great consultation on it, and that's important to me. What we do here in Alberta will be right for Albertans. I know there have been situations across Canada where there have been some issues, but in Alberta we're going to do it the right way.

Mr. Kang: That was my next question because it's not, you know, the Albertans who have lots of money. It's just the working-class families, low-income families. They use them the most. When they go to them, there's a big cut they lose from their paycheque, and they cannot get out of this vicious circle. I was wondering if you have some plan in place where you can educate the people or you can get to the root cause of the problem, how we can solve this. I'm not against the businesses that are doing business. They are probably legitimate, the businesses, but still I think we should go after the root cause of the problem, why people are using it, and try to help those people out. This is like giving the guy the fishing net, not giving the fish, you know? That's where I'm coming from.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, I agree totally with you because it's about giving individuals tools to succeed, and when individuals go through a bad time in their credit rating, when for whatever reason they can't go to a bank and they go to a payday loan place, we have to be able to empower them and make sure that when they're ready, we have to support them. That's the role of, you know, educating. I firmly believe in that because I guess part of it is giving people a second chance. Sometimes we need to give people a second chance so that they can get their lives in order.

What I said previously was about credit records. Also what was

disturbing to me is that it was people at \$70,000 incomes using this service, not just people at, you know, the lower end. That's when I found that out, last fall, and I stated that in the House. I was quite concerned about that. It's convenience, too. It's our society, where people are working 24 hours a day and that whole thing. But you're right: we need to assist the vulnerable, to make sure that they have the right tools to move on with their life. There's no question.

Mr. Kang: Yeah. As far as the convenience is concerned, you said, like, we've got ATMs. I think that's no excuse for people to go to payday loans. Since a recession is coming, I think there will be a lot more people getting hurt by this, and I think whatever we need to be doing should be done as soon as we can do it.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Sooner than later.

Mr. Kang: Sooner than later, yeah. You know, you were talking about when you consulted some stakeholders on this. Who were consulted by the department?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, we consulted with the payday loans companies – Cash Canada, the two big companies – as well as individuals, social agencies. So a lot of this has been going on for a while, and you're right: we're at the point where we need to make a decision. In this time that we're in right now, you and I know there are people out there in tough situations. It's about people being taken advantage of, and that's something that I won't tolerate. So you're right: the time is coming.

Mr. Kang: This is just the beginning.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, the second 20-minute period has now expired, and I'll ask Mr. MacDonald once more whether he wishes to be involved. I don't see any other members of the Official Opposition present. Mr. MacDonald, do you wish to speak now, or do you wish to yield the floor to Mr. Kang?

Mr. MacDonald: I'm going to yield the floor, please, to my colleague from Calgary-McCall.

The Acting Chair: Very well.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Coming back to this: because of the recession, we haven't felt it yet. It's just the tip of the iceberg. Worse things are yet to come, I believe, in 2009. I'm not painting this doomsday kind of scenario, you know. It is coming. When we look out there, all the economists, everybody is predicting that. I appreciate that you're taking this very, very seriously. With this legislation will we have any cap on interest rates being charged by these payday loan companies?

7:30

Mrs. Klimchuk: Oh, we're looking at the caps on the interest rates, the rollovers, also the rules for businesses when they open. There are a whole number of areas that we're looking at just so that it's a very comprehensive approach versus a piecemeal approach, so that when people go to one of those places, they know exactly what's expected, and the owner knows what's expected as well.

You and I have seen them pop up overnight, and the ones that have been there for a while are there. The Canadian Payday Loan Association has standards across Canada, and they take pride in the service they provide. That's something that we're looking at in terms of what some of the other operators are offering. The

rollovers, the interest rates: no question, those are the areas that we're moving into.

Mr. Kang: Will it be only for these payday loan companies, or will you be expanding it to pawnshops or whoever? The pawnshops are probably doing that, too. Will you be tying the interest rates to the prime? How will it be in the legislation?

Mrs. Klimchuk: That's a very good point, the whole issue of pawnshops. That's a whole other area. We know that many pawnshops do provide that service, you know, in the community across Alberta. It's ironic that you raise that because that's an area that we are looking into very seriously. With respect to businesses if they're doing payday loans within a pawnshop, of course, they would have to abide by the rules. There's no question.

Mr. Kang: Okay. Thanks.

Mrs. Klimchuk: I have to say that behind my constituency office I have payday loans, and then I have a pawnshop and payday loan. It's all there, so I know what's out there.

Mr. Kang: I think they are springing up like mushrooms now, all these pawnshops or payday loans.

The next one is coming to the submetering. I looked at my own bill – I live here in the David Thompson building – and it was about \$70 or \$80, and I couldn't figure it out. You know, that really bothers me when they say: delivery charge, then this kind of charge, that kind of charge. Right? I think we should be doing something with that, too. Make it plain and simple. As far as I'm concerned, on my bill it should say that this is it and say how many units I burn on the electricity or the gas. That's what it should be. It should be one charge, maybe two at the most, service provided and whatever I use. But here there are so many of them, delivery charge – I don't have my bill with me. On the submetering it says in the ministry business plan that it plans to prioritize the need to promote consumer confidence by reviewing and enforcing marketplace legislation. My question is: why isn't the minister also modernizing the legislation to protect renters against submetering?

Mrs. Klimchuk: You're at the David Thompson building. Just to clarify, your bill is changing every month? Is that what you're experiencing?

Mr. Kang: No. I haven't even looked at the bill. I just give the company \$500, \$600, or whatever, you know, and I look at maybe four or five months. The bill is so high, I don't know how they do it. Like, it was \$70, \$80. I could bring the bill next time. I was just giving you an example. I'm not necessarily going after the David Thompson building management or whatever, right? I'm just giving you an example. I think there should be a simplified billing formula where people understand what they're paying for.

Mrs. Klimchuk: On this whole submetering issue, as I've been questioned in the House as well on, one of the first things that I did was write a letter to Minister Clement because Measurement Canada is responsible for regulating heat meters. Measurement Canada – there were some issues there – hasn't gone into that area. Being that we have the federal and provincial responsibility, writing to the federal minister was important to me. But moving ahead and looking at how it is affecting Albertans, renters in Edmonton and Calgary and everywhere, it's a serious issue; there's no question. I am meeting with ARTAC, a board that advises me – it's all of the

apartment owners and buildings across Edmonton – in the next week or so. I'm looking forward to that meeting to get some input from them as to their experience with the whole issue.

Your comments about the different charges. That's been raised as well because you know how they have a delivery charge, service charge.

Mr. Kang: Service charges, so many. I don't remember so many of them, you know? Like four, five of them, I think.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. That has been brought to my attention as well. As well, you know, I hear of individuals not turning on their heat or keeping it very low and putting in a register that you plug into the wall, so it is a very serious issue. I have been in contact, you know, with the federal government. I'm working through some issues right now because I think that this is one area where, with the time that we're going through right now, if there's a job loss and you're down to one income, it's tough. I think this is a situation that, because Measurement Canada has not regulated these, is unfortunate because we know that it's happening here in Alberta. It's happening in other provinces as well.

Mr. Kang: The reason I'm raising this is because I think there should be some way getting around the federal government, you know, provincially, because right now people are hurting. There are certainly people losing their jobs. I think every little bit counts for everybody.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. I agree. Whatever we do, it's got to be effective and enforceable. I agree with you.

Mr. Kang: Okay. We're still on page 247. The ministry's business plan states that 75 per cent of clients were satisfied with the quality of the consumer tipsheet, yet there was no detail as to which consumer tipsheet is being referred to.

Mrs. Klimchuk: I think that when we look at the performance measures, which are, you know, important to me in terms of how Service Alberta deals with the public and the information that we have available, whether it's a tipsheet, whether it's a phone number so that people can access the information, when I look at this, I think that this refers to all quality of tipsheet information. It's a general category. It's not just one tipsheet. We have, like, 20 or 30 tipsheets in a number of different areas. That's something that we update on a regular basis because we all know that sometimes they don't start out perfect, so we have to make sure that we update them on a regular basis. They're excellent tools. So that's just the general thing. It's not just one tipsheet.

Mr. Kang: So this was not referring to submetering in any way, shape, or form?

Mrs. Klimchuk: No, no. Don't forget that submetering has just come up this year. Submetering really wasn't on the agenda until last fall, I believe. Last fall, that's when it appeared. So no, this would not be relating to that. Just in general to all of the tipsheets.

Mr. Kang: Okay. So there was nothing. Is there anything, like, any tipsheets set up for submetering?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. I delivered one to you in the House. We do have a tipsheet on submetering. I didn't bring it with me tonight, but that's something that we did put together on it, kind of tips just

because it is a complex area because of the nuances of the different jurisdictional issues. So we do have a tipsheet on submetering.

7:40

Mr. Kang: I remember now. With the surgery my memory's kind of, you know . . .

Mrs. Klimchuk: That's okay.

Mr. MacDonald: Mine's like that without any surgery.

Mr. Kang: Oh, I don't know. The doctor told me I'd be okay, you know, but it's not coming back yet.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, I can send you some more.

Mr. Kang: No. I got the tipsheet. Thanks, Minister. Because industry doesn't recognize this to be, you know, a legitimate document, are you trying to improve this tipsheet or not?

Mrs. Klimchuk: That's why I'm meeting with ARTAC and groups out there. I need to make sure that those tipsheets are updated on a regular basis; there's no question. If there's something in there that we have to adjust, I most certainly will make that adjustment. I view them as living documents.

Mr. Kang: Coming back to SuperNet – that's on page 247 as well – the ministry business plan states: to set up high-speed broadband availability to schools, health care SuperNets, and library and government facilities. Did you say how much money was for SuperNet only, allocated towards just the goal of expanding Alberta SuperNet's facilities right across the province?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, there was an amount underneath with respect to the ring closures that we're doing. That's probably what you're getting at. I'll let my officials find that for me under the amount for the ring closures. That would be those numbers I gave you of the \$92.5 million. That would be the ring closures on the SuperNet, \$16 million.

Mr. Kang: That's right across the province?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah.

Mr. Kang: What are the priority areas in establishing the broadband . . .

Mrs. Klimchuk: Connectivity?

Mr. Kang: Connectivity, yeah.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Okay. As I said previously, the whole issue of the SuperNet is a tremendous treasure that is kind of hidden across Alberta. People from other jurisdictions are always very appreciative of what we have here. Based on that, we know that we've done a great job in getting it to, you know, the libraries, health care, government, schools, et cetera, but we need to do better with respect to the whole idea of the rural connectivity. That's something I've been working very hard on with the rural electrification group, the gas co-op, some of the ISP providers, A and B and C, AUMA. There have been some incredible amounts of work done just moving forward for the final mile strategy.

You and I know that there are announcements on all sorts of great

technology out there, which is just fantastic. This will make our job better to make sure that we leverage the SuperNet and use it in conjunction with all of the other things that are kind of heading our way. There are so many incredible changes in technology. We know that I guess about a year ago Australia came to view what we had here in terms of what they're doing in their country.

I've been committed to meeting with as many ministers possible to talk about the SuperNet to make sure that it's everywhere and that we're all aware of how we can use it and how it can make our departments do our jobs better. Whether it's video conferencing, whether it's VOIP, there's incredible stuff that you can do to help departments do their job as well, whether it's Culture or any one of them.

Mr. Kang: I kind of find it hard to believe that, you know, Australians came here. Every time we have a problem here, we have been going to Australia to get the brains from them.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, I haven't been to Australia.

Mr. Kang: No, but with the health board, every other department – you know, I think we go to Australia to find the best brains to come fix our problems. I'm glad to hear that they came here.

Mrs. Klimchuk: They like our SuperNet, yes.

Mr. Kang: Is there any breakdown on the cost to set up, you know, the SuperNet in the rural areas? Are we giving any preference to one area over other areas? Any priorities?

Mrs. Klimchuk: The initial amount invested in the whole SuperNet across Alberta was \$193 million when it was rolled out, you know, many years ago, but the connectivity in the rural areas is an issue. There are many incredible ISP providers who are out there providing service, but if they go into a region that's not economically viable, that's where the problem is because the consumer doesn't have access to service. If the ISP provider can't deem it to be a good business model, they're not going to do it. That's been a huge issue.

We've also heard of areas where they've gone and moved on and done their own thing. Part of it is working with all of the stakeholders. Some of the ISP providers have already done some incredible things out there. We need to leverage it better across rural Alberta, and that's something that I've been working very hard on with my department and with all the people that have so many, you know, great ideas on this. I'm hoping in the next probably three to six months to come up with a final-mile strategy and move it forward so that we can get on with it.

Mr. Kang: Are we looking at some kind of subsidy provided to rural Albertans where it is not viable for any service provider to do the business?

Mrs. Klimchuk: I'm not going to make a comment in that regard. All I will say is that there are ways that we can do it with our providers, working with Bell to make sure that whatever we do, it's the best solution for everybody, and that does not necessarily mean providing a subsidy.

The Acting Chair: Member, that concludes the first hour, allocated to the Official Opposition.

Now, pursuant to the standing orders the next 20 minutes are allocated to Mr. Mason as representative of the New Democrat opposition. I'll ask you at the outset: do you wish to combine your questions and responses to the minister?

Mr. Mason: Yes. I think the minister is quite concise in her answers, so I think that'll work fine.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead. Proceed, Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. Thanks, Madam Minister. The total program expense for 2009-10 is budgeted to increase 1 per cent from last year's forecast expenditures. That's on page 340 of the government estimates on the line called Total Consolidated Expense. Now, the finance minister has indicated in her budget speech that a 3.7 per cent increase is required to adjust for inflation and population changes, so that really represents a small reduction in the buying power of your budget. The one area where there are cuts is in the funding for registries. The amount budgeted for registries has decreased by 7.2 per cent. My question is: what effect will that have on the services offered by registries in Alberta, and how will those reductions play out? Will they affect staffing or wait times or result in an increase in fees to the customers of the registries? How is that going to affect the operation of these registries?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you. An excellent question. As I discussed previously about the registries and, you know, the good work they do across Alberta, it's wonderful. With respect to the decrease in the budget, some of it is that when the registries were first rolled out, there was, more or less, support for them. We do provide that support, and it relates to the services that they already have in place. In terms of us putting in, they're putting in more services or better services. So the decrease you're seeing is not to make their job harder. That's certainly not the intent. I think that for the registry agents, with all of the things that we're doing, you know, the training that they're doing, in that regard we are there to support them.

7:50

As you are probably aware, the Alberta Association of Registry Agents has approached Service Alberta and asked for a fee increase as well. They haven't had a fee increase since 2005. So that's certainly on the table as well. They're looking at their challenges with respect to, you know, the salary, the staff, the cost of owning premises. I am very respectful and very much understanding of what they're facing on a daily basis.

As well, we know that this last year, in meeting with the AARA and the AMA folks, employees were coming through the door like a revolving door, and it's tough. What we're finding now is that employees are willing to stay a bit longer, and that's a good thing. It takes approximately six months to train a registry person to do that job because of the system and the CARS system that we have. I'm very, very well briefed on this whole area and the pressure that is on registries to provide services and the expectations that Albertans have of registries, too.

Mr. Mason: Can you tell us about the fee increase?

Mrs. Klimchuk: On the fee increase there's nothing. We've discussed it. Nothing has been decided. They approached me, oh, I guess last fall talking about a fee increase because they haven't had one since 2005.

Mr. Mason: How much have they requested?

Mrs. Klimchuk: It's changed. At one point it was always over a few years, like whether it's over two or three years. I think that currently on the books right now is about a \$2 to \$3 increase.

Mr. Mason: On what size of a fee?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Right now the fee that a registry agent charges is \$9. That would be to cover the costs of business, the costs of keeping staff, and all those things that I talked about previously. It's interesting because a lot the salaries they're paying are last year's, you know, when everyone's salaries went up, and they're still paying those salaries based on what we're doing now. But no decision has been made by government at this point about the ask for a fee increase.

Mr. Mason: The \$9 is their share. The government has a much bigger chunk that it collects.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. That goes into the general revenue fund.

Mr. Mason: You make quite a profit on the registries, don't you? Well, I guess profit isn't the right word when it's government.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, the money goes into the general revenue fund. You're right: the \$9 charge goes to the agents, and the rest goes into the GRF.

Mr. Mason: They're basically asking for a 33 per cent increase in what they receive. When will the decision be made?

Mrs. Klimchuk: We've been having, you know, a great dialogue. I anticipate probably in these next few months. Of course, the unfortunate part is the timing, when you ask for a fee increase when you're going through a time like this. Times have changed. It's tough for them doing their business and, of course, with the challenges that we face within Service Alberta and what Albertans expect and what Albertans want. Certainly, I am not at the point where a decision has been made.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you.

One of the challenges for the government in terms of managing the privatized registries is that there's a bit of a legacy on the part of some of these for the mishandling of people's personal information. One example is that just in March of last year the only registry in Smoky Lake had to be closed because they were granting class 1 truck-driving licences to people who had not been tested and were granting licences that created false identities. My question is whether or not the decrease in funding to registries in this year's budget will affect the monitoring of private registries to ensure that they're handling their powers properly. I'd like to know whether or not it will affect the ability of registries to keep people's personal information secure.

Mrs. Klimchuk: To your comment about Smoky Lake, that was my first day as minister, so I'm very well aware of that situation. I think, too, moving forward, we learn from some of the things that have gone on in the past and make sure that we do better. That's why the accountability framework currently before the House is critical. That will protect Albertans' information. As I mentioned earlier to the hon. member, we already have a lot of protections in place. This accountability framework validates those protections and makes it even that much more secure. Just being able to monitor and to see what's going is really, really critical. So, no, the security of Albertans' information will not be at risk, if I can say it that way.

Mr. Mason: Okay. When the Smoky Lake registry was closed, the ministry talked about working with stakeholders to create a new

accountability agreement that would govern the information-handling procedures of private registries. Could you give us an update on the status of that agreement and when you expect that it's all going to be in place?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, that's Bill 9 right now in the House. Right now 98 per cent of agents across Alberta have signed the agreement and the framework that we put in place. It's been great because it's been a great collaborative process working with all the agents. I met with the board when I first became minister and again. So 98 per cent have signed the agreement. Once it moves through the House – I believe it's in Committee of the Whole right now. That's a really important piece that we're working on and are very proud of, actually.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Now, you did respond to some earlier questions about the regulation of payday loan companies, but I wasn't sure if you were specific about when legislation or changes affecting that would be brought forward. I know that back in July of 2008 the ministry said that it would be amending the Fair Trading Act this spring. Is that still on track to happen?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Most definitely. It's still on track under the Fair Trading Act, yeah.

Mr. Mason: So we'll get that bill this session?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah.

Mr. Mason: Okay. That's great.

The ministry's business plan contains performance measures that assess client satisfaction with services, and that's in your business plan on pages 246 and 247. Some of those numbers were a bit troubling. The most recent results from 2007-08 say that only 65 per cent of Albertans were satisfied with access to government of Alberta services and information. Only 63 per cent of Albertans are satisfied with the timeliness of government of Alberta services and information. The target for both those measures was 80 per cent. I'd like to know what actions the ministry is planning to take to increase client satisfaction with these services and information, what the ministry has been doing to ascertain what the problems are that caused such significant amounts of dissatisfaction, and what the ministry plans to do about that.

Then the follow-up, which I'll give you in advance, is basically: how are you going to be able to do all that when your real budget is being reduced by about 3 per cent?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Just to clarify that chart – it's a really good question – a lot of this information is a year behind, so those figures do not reflect what has happened this last year. They reflect what's happened the previous year. I see those numbers, too. Certainly, when you see those lower numbers, you want to do better, and you want to be able to serve Albertans better. That's my first comment on that.

I believe some of the things that we can do and how to do it – one of the great things that we did was last session. We introduced with respect to the land titles a queuing system for the land titles department under Service Alberta. Now we are down to a turnaround time of about two and a half days. We were up to 26 days, and that was in the heyday, of course, when real estate was going crazy across Alberta. We are down to two and a half days' turnaround. That to me is a real positive service to Albertans. That's one positive. That's certainly not reflected in this because we only did it this last year.

8:00

The other positive is that when we announced the gift card legislation, a really good example, the number of hits that we had on our website was unbelievable. People wanted to know what to expect with the no expiry dates and no dormancy fees. That's another good thing, and that's not reflected in here either.

I think that moving forward, you're right: what can we do better? I think that certainly the profile that Service Alberta has now, that it's a ministry on its own, is something. As the minister of consumers I try to be out there as much as possible on issues, whether they're new issues or old issues. You know, the whole issue of pawnshops coming up today is another issue that we're looking at. I think that moving forward, there are many areas where we can assist the consumer to make good choices. We can't control everything, but we can certainly give consumers good tools to make good choices.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. I want to ask a question that's just kind of a personal thing that I've wondered about. It has to do with licence plates. It's not the new licence plate; it has to do with old licence plates. As you know, the system, which I think has probably saved the government quite a bit of money, is that you put the little stickers on every year or every two years. Pretty soon you've got lots of stickers on them. Some of these licence plates are physically in very bad condition. What do you do as a department in order to make sure that these licence plates are replaced?

Mrs. Klimchuk: If they're damaged, they can be brought in for replacement, for which there would be no charge. The old licence plates are all recycled as well. So if you have a licence plate that's looking pretty sad and tragic – because you're right; 25 years is long, whether you've had the plate that long. Some of the plates some people have had for a long time. That was the crux of the issue, that moving forward, plates are wearing out, and the police and individuals in that area were having trouble seeing the plates. If an individual wants to bring it in, they can bring it in and get a new plate. What's interesting is that one of the reasons we've run out of numbers is that that old number will stay on the system. Your old licence plate will not be assigned to a new person.

An Hon. Member: That's the problem.

Mrs. Klimchuk: But that's security, too. That's your security. That's why, if your licence plate is in bad shape, then you should.

Mr. Mason: Okay. It's actually not, but I've seen some. So you leave it up to the individual. What if the individual doesn't bring it in? Should we consider replacing these plates every 10 years, for example, or something like that, on a mandatory basis?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, it's a very good point. If it's been 25 years, I think it's a long time, and we have to maybe do it on a regular basis. Of course, the new technology that we have now versus 25 years ago is more or less night and day. We know that the police do encourage replacement of licence plates. They'll stop you if they have an issue with the plate, and they'll encourage you to go replace it. The law enforcement folks have been very good in that regard. You know, we all see it while driving. You look, and you can't see it for whatever reason.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Well, I guess it's not the biggest issue that we're grappling with. I just was curious.

I want to turn to the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

Your business plan indicates that you want to

implement a renewed scope, mandate, structure, and governance model for the Office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, by exploring alignment and collaboration with other consumer protection initiatives and organizations both within and outside Service Alberta.

My question is: what exactly has the Utilities Consumer Advocate done specifically in the area of electricity prices to ensure that electricity prices remain affordable?

Mrs. Klimchuk: That's another excellent question. With the Utilities Consumer Advocate right now we are going through the final hoops of getting an advocate in place. We've had an acting advocate through the department who's been doing that. That's going to be a step in the right direction.

With respect to electricity or gas the UCA is on a regular basis going on interventions on those issues on behalf of Albertans, which is really important. As well, it's the contracts that are being sold and all of the rules around the contracts. Many people don't know that, you know, when you sign a contract, you have a 10-day cooling-off period, so we want to make sure. We've been pretty intense with how we're monitoring some of those contracts, how they're being signed. Frankly, Service Alberta gets a lot of calls on those, and we deal with them. The providers have been excellent. They've worked with us to make sure that consumers, if they want to get out, can get out. It is a serious issue. As long as the consumers know what they're getting into, it's okay, but if there's some misinformation or things going on, that's where the UCA gets involved.

Mr. Mason: If you get basically swindled at the front door into signing a contract and you miss the 10-day cooling-off period, what can the Utilities Consumer Advocate do for you at that point?

Mrs. Klimchuk: We investigate. We have a number of investigations going on as we sit here tonight. We investigate, and in a number of situations they've had to cancel the contract after the 10-day period.

Mr. Mason: You have the legal authority to order that?

Mrs. Klimchuk: It's more or less working together, being collaborative and working together from a good business point of view. They're going out and selling their contracts, and we want to make sure to support, you know, what they're doing, but they have to be respectful of the rules that Service Alberta has with respect to the contracts that are going out.

Also, another key part of this is the education awareness of the UCA, empowering consumers with information so that they know what to do when an energy provider comes to their door.

Mr. Mason: Close it.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, it's your choice.

Mr. Mason: I just am concerned. I mean, do you review the contracts that the service providers ask people to sign? Do they have to be approved by the advocate or by your department?

Mrs. Klimchuk: The retailers have been very open with us, providing us with the agreements. With some of the agreements we've actually worked with them and made some changes to make it fair and make it more – what's it called when you want to read something?

Mr. Mason: Plain language.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. Plain language. Thank you. Sorry. See, even I can't say that.

The plain-language approach: they've been very good with this. Since I've been the minister, it's been a very good process, and that's very important to me, the plain language. We all know that we get caught up in some of this stuff. So that has been a positive. They've been very open with showing the contracts when they do their business.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member. That concludes the 20 minutes allocated to the ND opposition.

I'll now recognize Mr. Anderson, followed by Mr. MacDonald.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. Minister, I appreciate your being here and answering the questions like you have been. You've been very clear, and it's been a good discussion.

I am very concerned about our fiscal position in the province and, specifically, that we're running a deficit currently. I'm going to ask you a few questions concerning possible cost savings. These are genuine questions that I don't know the answer to, that you will know the answer to.

The first is that on page 342 of the estimates under Services to Albertans we have \$22 million for consumer awareness and advocacy. Could you maybe go through a little bit what that would include as well as why there was a roughly \$2 million increase from last year?

8:10

Mrs. Klimchuk: Great question. I can tell you why there was. One of the positives I've been able to increase is in the area of the residential tenancy dispute resolution service. That's where this is. That's why you've seen that shift there. As you know, this is in Edmonton, Calgary, and in other locations across Alberta. We want to expand that service. That was one of the things that I more or less fought for at the table because I think it's very important to consumers to have this service available and to know that they can go and solve their problems with their landlord. Ultimately the costs are reduced because of less days in court, and that to me is really important. That's where you're going to see that blip. The other part is the call centre that we have, too. The call centre takes a lot of calls on – you name it – all sorts of different areas. Those to me are really tangible things that we can put our money where the money should be going to assist the consumer. I think it's a good-news thing. Again, I had to, you know, go through the hoops, but I got it, and I'm proud that we have that here.

Mr. Anderson: So the call centre is under consumer awareness and advocacy? Like, when someone calls into the government of Alberta, that's what that falls under?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. The expanded residential dispute resolution service: is there any way that there could be any kind of cost recovery done for that?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yes. From the point of view of cost recovery we do charge a \$75 fee for individuals when they come forward, when you sit down with a counsellor and speak with them. That fee is one of the ways of cost recovery, but certainly that's just one small part of it because of what they're getting and because what potentially it

could have cost. You know, it could have cost the whole government in the court system.

Mr. Anderson: Has there been any kind of analysis done as to the cost savings to government for that program?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Cost savings to government for that program?

Mr. Anderson: You know, the lack of resources. You were just saying that it would cost the government a lot.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. The program is still relatively new. When I came on, it had just begun, and that's the information we're gathering. We will be gathering that information, and we can certainly provide that information to you. It's very successful just in terms of the numbers of people that are using it. What's really neat is that it's not just for tenants; it's for landlords, too. We know that in some of the situations out there the landlords have tough issues as well, so it's been really great to be able to bring both parties in to solve problems. But we can get that for you.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you for those answers.

The balance of that \$20 million, is the vast majority the call centre, or are there other things in that consumer awareness and advocacy?

Mrs. Klimchuk: I can tell you exactly what it is. It's also programs promoting, regulating, and enforcing fair market practices through consumer awareness activities, consumer-related legislation, monitoring the marketplace, investigating fraud and consumer complaints, which, as you know, is a pretty big deal these days, and supporting regulatory bodies that administer consumer legislation. The other part is services in the area of access and privacy legislation support, with program compliance and accountability and department legislative planning and supports for requests made under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. That's where that is as well, which is a really, really important part of Service Alberta.

Mr. Anderson: You mentioned an awareness program. What would be an example? Like, let's take fraud. What type of monies would be spent in investigating? I mean, police would generally investigate fraud, but obviously we're doing some investigations. What does that look like?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, working with the Solicitor General, I did an announcement for Fraud Prevention Month, which was March. We did an announcement in a mall, just providing consumers with examples of fraud. For example, when you go to a bank machine and you put your bank card in and if it's not flat, if someone has mounted a thing on there. So just giving people real-life examples. It's tipsheets. It's also getting into some of the malls and being out there, some of the trade shows, some of the things that we do. Also, we developed something with the Sol Gen called Changing Faces, and we've had an award for it because of just the information it provided to consumers.

That's one small example. It's about just trying to make consumers more aware of what's happening around them, whether it's Internet security and all of those things, where you're just trying to give people, as you said before, tools so that they can make better decisions.

Mr. Anderson: You know, it's funny that you say that. I was

watching the presidential elections, as I'm sure you were, and some of the candidates, especially in the primaries, made a distinct effort to stay away from conventional advertising and specifically used what they called the free media or, basically, the mainstream media to get their message across because they found that it was more effective to use the media in inventive ways to get a message out there kind of in a viral way as opposed to the conventional, you know, pamphlets and awareness programs for candidates that they were using. I wonder if there's any kind of discussion at your department – you know, a lot of these things, these tips that we give consumers, a lot of them might be more effectively disseminated through alternative free media as opposed to costly awareness programs. Is there any example where that has been used in your department?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. I guess, the first thing was the gift cards. You know, that was really . . .

Mr. Anderson: A very good example.

Mrs. Klimchuk: . . . a very good example of encouraging consumers to ask questions when they buy a gift card. Don't just take it. Look at the back. See what's actually on there. The other part of it is the security awareness and then BizPal.

Your comment about assisting consumers with tips, whether it's using social media or using the Internet. To me this is where – you know, we all hear about the scams, that car warranty scam, where I was getting calls on my cellphone. I'm sure we all were. It was fantastic because Service Alberta did our thing, and then AMVIC did theirs, and then this is where the media played a critical role in getting the word out, too. You're right about using the media. That happened with the Revenue Canada scam, too, when they were asking individuals for the number on the back of their credit card, that security number that we all have, which you never, ever give away. It was the role of working with the media as partners. That to me is an incredible, positive way to get the word out and try to think of innovative ways to get the word out, too. I agree with you, Rob. Yes.

Mr. Anderson: I want to say that that gift card legislation rollout was phenomenally done in that way. I mean, I don't know how much you would have had to spend to raise the same amount of awareness around an issue than what you did just through the media. Anyway, it was very well done.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, could I just ask you to suspend your questions for a couple of minutes? We're going to take a three- or four-minute break here, an adjournment. We'll be reconvening shortly.

[The committee adjourned from 8:19 p.m. to 8:24 p.m.]

The Acting Chair: Okay. The committee will come back to order now.

Mr. Anderson, you have the floor.

Mr. Anderson: Just talking about the licence plates, if we can move back to that. Did you say it's going to cost an extra \$15 million to institute the new licence plates with the new branding? Can you just review that for me?

Mrs. Klimchuk: It would be \$15 million over two years. It's about getting the plates made, which I talked about, you know, the new

technology that's out there now. Individuals would get them over a two-year period; that is, when their name came up, they'd go and get the new licence plate. That includes the work that we did before with respect to the consultation and all the good input we got. That whole process has been a very good process.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. On the new licence plates. I guess I just don't understand why it would cost \$15 million. I mean, you have to get the new licence plates anyway. You have to add an extra number to a licence plate, right? Where are all the costs coming in for the new ones? I mean, the logo is designed. Everything is good. Is it because we're forcing everybody to change their licence plates?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, that's part of it. It's the new technology. We're looking at flat plates, very different from what we have now. It is the new technology, and it's the cost of producing. I mean, 25 years ago was the last time we did this. I don't even know what it cost 25 years ago. But being respectful of making sure that we get, you know, the best plate and what's best for the law enforcement agencies across Alberta, so that's the reflective finish, all of those things that we don't have on our current plate.

Mr. Anderson: What would be the advantages to law enforcement, just that they would see it better from a distance?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah, reflective when the lights go on it at night and seeing it from a distance in the day as well. You know, some of the preliminary testing that we've done in locations around Alberta, the police were very happy with what we were moving towards.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Just looking down under technology services, under enterprise services, you have costs going from \$25 million to \$35 million. Why the increase, and what exactly do enterprise services entail? Sorry. I'm on page 342, 3.2.2, enterprise services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: There we are. Okay. Got it. Thank you very much. Enterprise services, as I mentioned previously in another question, is the cross-government strategic approach to information and communications technology. That's the ICT infrastructure services to all government departments and some agencies, boards, and commissions. That number is \$35.73 million. It's the IMT strategy. It's the support of the corporate applications. It's the government of Alberta domain migration, which is what all government departments are now moving to so that we're all on the same page, the registry renewal initiative, which is the accountability framework, the ICT service co-ordination initiative, and the protection of information assets. That goes to the conversation about data centres. We need to look at how data is stored in terms of bringing it all together, that whole area.

Mr. Anderson: I guess my question is: is this \$10 million going to streamline? Is it going to save us money in operating in the long haul? Is it going to provide better customer service to Albertans? I mean, what are the advantages to what you're talking about here?

Mrs. Klimchuk: The ultimate goal is that it's – as we all know, when I left government in '92, in my previous life, the silo approach was alive and well. What's very exciting and great to me is that the silos are down. We have to do things better. We have to work better, differently. That's what the Premier has mandated to me, and I take that very seriously, and so does he. It's about looking at things as a whole and for the greater good and putting aside some of

the things that we all want and maybe just saying: okay, well, we're going to do it this way because we know it's going to be better. When I look at that whole strategy, that's the whole IMT strategy. And learning from each, too, because we all know there are individuals across government doing fantastic things in various departments and locations. Let's pool the resources and make sure what we do is better and more efficient.

8:30

The best example of that is the case management that I talked about previously, and when we know in government if someone needs support from government. If they're an AISH client, they start with AISH. Then when they turn 65, they go to the seniors' benefit program. There's a whole transition. It's about making sure that when someone touches into government, it's transitioned across government over the lifetime that they are in touch with us. That, to me, is a great approach that I think in the long run is going to be a great cost-saving measure for government. But I'm not going to be able to say in three months, you know. It takes a while to get these initiatives in place.

Mr. Anderson: But the goal is to save money by pooling, basically, by making you the portal at Service Alberta. Is there going to be some tracking of the cost savings to the other departments? I'm assuming the other departments will see their costs decrease.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Oh, yes. It's all reflected. If you look across the budgets, it's all reflected. The money that Service Alberta has to do their job: because of the approach we can take, we know we can do things more efficiently. It's that duplication of some of the things and some of the contracts that have gone on in the past that we need to change and look for alternative ways of looking at things. That's certainly what we want to do.

Mr. Anderson: Well, I've just been so impressed by the recognition that, you know, we have to do a better job of streamlining our government services. If you have the duplication from human resources to communications to God knows what else, there have got to be ways we can streamline it. If it's going to save us money in the long run in that regard and save us duplication, I very much support that.

Mrs. Klimchuk: I just want to add that I know, too, that I previously spoke about viewing what we're going through right now as an opportunity. Some would say that's a different way to look at it, but that's the way I look at it. It's an opportunity. Moving forward, when things get back on track, we know that we'll continue to do what we were doing and keep moving forward with that. That's the way I look at it to make sure that I'm learning from this experience with this, my second budget. It's always learning.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

The chair will now recognize Mr. MacDonald, please.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I think we'll get started, if you don't mind, please, on page 342 of the government estimates. The ministry's support services budget has decreased by roughly \$1.4 million if you go back to 2007-08. Is the budget reduction because the public service administration, or the PAO and corporate services, has been moved to the Treasury Board?

Mrs. Klimchuk: No. Corporate services within my department includes corporate finance, human resources, business planning, accommodation services, and communications. I think what we did when we were looking at it – I looked at this with my team – is look at the decrease. We knew that looking at a decrease, we were still able to continue to do what we were doing.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. I can appreciate that. Now, the Public Service Commissioner's office, the corporate human resources, all has been transferred to the Treasury Board.

Mrs. Klimchuk: That was effective with my last year's budget.

Mr. MacDonald: And the air and vehicle services: all that's gone. Your budget is still almost the same when you consider enterprise services has gone up significantly. Is that correct? Your budget is just sort of static?

Mrs. Klimchuk: We did take a \$7.5 million decrease in the overall budget, but based on some of the things that we've been able to achieve, there has been a decrease.

I would add that the planes went to Treasury Board, but the vehicles are still with Service Alberta.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. So that's the difference.

Mr. MacDonald: I appreciate that.

If we could go to element 2.2.1, consumer awareness and advocacy, in the past I note where, particularly for operating expenses, there was an overexpenditure of \$3.7 million in the last year that I have accurate information from, and I'm quoting from the 2007-08 annual report. Is that overexpenditure the reason why you increased the consumer awareness and advocacy budget to \$22.3 million?

Mrs. Klimchuk: I discussed this before. This is the RTDRS component.

Mr. MacDonald: But what I'm asking you is: there was an overexpenditure in this department for the last year there was publicly a report available, and that overexpenditure was \$3.7 million. Is that the reason why you're increasing this budget?

Mrs. Klimchuk: No.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Now, also with procurement and administration services, further on, element 3.1.1. there is an allocation of \$53 million in the 2007-08 report. The authorized budget was \$49 million, and the actual was \$57 million. Again, there was an overexpenditure of over \$7 million. What measures have you taken to control those costs if that budget item is going to be \$53.6 million?

Mrs. Klimchuk: What you're seeing there are some chargebacks that go back to the other government departments: one-time projects, new print vendors, preparing training materials for TILMA. It's the chargebacks that we do with some of the other departments.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Regarding the Utilities Consumer Advocate I certainly get a lot of complaints about deregulation. Energy consumers, whether it's for natural gas or electricity, feel

ripped off by the current choice program, as you call it, where I have the choice to buy or close the door, as Mr. Mason indicated. I'm taking his advice on that one. It's sound.

There was \$6.2 million allocated here in this year's estimates. I notice that in the past the budget was similar or even greater, and there was an unexpended amount of 1 and a half million dollars. Consumers who are frustrated are going to Mr. Kang's office, Mr. Mason's office, Ms Woo-Paw's office, our constituency office in Edmonton-Gold Bar and not visiting the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. That indicates to me, from the traffic that we get, that energy consumers have no confidence in this office.

Mrs. Klimchuk: I would just clarify that what you're seeing there is the increased demand for services and the amount of investigations that are going on by the good folks at the UCA, and there are investigations going on, as I stated previously. That's why when they come – I often get a lot of requests from MLAs about situations, and we are more than happy to investigate those and try to assist and see what really happened in those situations.

Yes, there's a reason for that increase. Part of it is, I think too, that we want consumers to ask questions. We want them to be able to not shut the door all the time but maybe ask some questions about what they're getting into. What's reflected is that there's a greater demand on the investigators and providing the information out to consumers.

8:40

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. In this fiscal year if there is a great demand, then is Service Alberta going to consider giving consumers the option, on the anniversary date of the signing of the long-term energy contract, whether it's a three- or five-year contract, of backing out or just leaving the contract without fear of any \$700 or \$800 penalty from the energy company?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Okay. I talked previously about the 10-day clause and how, you know, people can get out of a contract in that regard, but that's something that I'd be happy to look into.

Mr. MacDonald: I appreciate that because I think with the volatility of the energy prices so many consumers are now trapped at \$10 and \$11 a gigajoule over sometimes three and four years. Even in the fiscal plan it looks like the projection for natural gas is going to be between \$5 and \$6, and it's not fair, particularly to people that are on fixed incomes, retired people.

Mrs. Klimchuk: So you're saying three-, five-, and 10-year anniversaries?

Mr. MacDonald: No. I would be happy with three and five or two. If there could be an option for consumers to exit without penalty on the anniversary of the signing of the contract

Mrs. Klimchuk: Okay. Leave that with me.

Mr. MacDonald: On the anniversary of the signing of the contract. Also, you note here on page 342 as well – there's a little star beside the Utilities Consumer Advocate – that the 2009-10 expense of \$6.2 million for that office is going to be recovered from the utilities industry, and it will be recovered from the natural gas consumers and the electricity consumers. Could you give me a breakdown in percentage as to what percentage will be recovered from natural gas bills and what percentage will be recovered from electricity bills?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Gotcha. That's an excellent question because it is funded by the industry. We have the same budgetary process for that as for all of us. Eighty per cent goes from the electricity balancing pool and 20 per cent from natural gas companies. That's how the UCA is funded.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Thank you. Whenever you say that this is funded by industry, is this not hidden on each individual utility bill?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. It's on the consumers' bills. Right.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Thank you for that.

Now, in the annual report from last year Service Alberta for 2007-08 has included in all the program elements achievement bonuses for management and opted-out employees amounting to \$3.8 million. I'm pleased that in this fiscal year the Premier has made the commitment that there is to be no bonuses paid. Now, given that the Public Service Commissioner has moved on, and we're still dealing under your ministry with the Utilities Consumer Advocate, will there be any bonuses paid out in the fiscal year 2009-10 to anyone in the Utilities Consumer Advocate office?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Bonuses? No. There's no budget for bonuses in the UCA.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. I appreciate that. Last night it was unclear as to what was going to happen in another department.

Now, on page 348 under Other Revenue there's a \$46 million item for other miscellaneous revenue. Could you please provide us with a breakdown of what that other miscellaneous revenue is, please?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Sure. That's what we talked about before, the whole concept of shared services. So that would be \$19.1 million for procurement and administration, \$14.5 million for technology operations and infrastructure, \$9 million for vehicle amortization, and \$2.3 million for financial and employee services. That's how it's broken down.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. I appreciate that.

I had a look at the fiscal plan, and there were some revenue increases in other departments: Tourism, Parks and Recreation; Culture and Community Spirit. There are no across-the-board fee increases in Service Alberta this year. Is that correct?

Mrs. Klimchuk: In this budget? No.

Mr. MacDonald: No. Okay. Now, regarding page 347, the revenue from land titles and other fees and licences is going down slightly. Is that because of the cooling of the local economy?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah, most definitely. Of course, it's always the estimate versus the actual. It does reflect the cooling down of the economy, especially with land titles. The other thing, too, is that, you know, from talking with some of the registry agents across Alberta, we know that motor vehicle licences – people aren't purchasing cars as readily as they were last year. So that's what you're seeing. You're actually seeing that now. Going forward, we're anticipating that still to decline.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. If we could go back – I apologize. I forgot a question that I have regarding the \$6.2 million that is to be provided to operate the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Right. Okay.

Mr. MacDonald: Is it your ministry that indicates the percentage that natural gas consumers pay, 20 per cent, and that electricity consumers pay, or is it the Department of Energy?

Mrs. Klimchuk: It's predetermined, and it's working with the Department of Energy as well.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Thank you.

I have some questions about the business plan that you have. Now, the percentage of Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act requests to be completed by the government public bodies within 60 days or less: last year, 2007-08, in the annual report the target is 95 per cent. Now the target for the next three years in the business plan is 90 per cent plus. Why do you think you're not going to be able to maintain the 95 per cent actual that was achieved in 2007-08? Are the New Democrats planning on putting in a lot of flight requests that are going to be rejected, denied, or delayed?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, I would say that the target of 90 per cent plus certainly gives the flexibility to continue that it be maintained at 95 per cent.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Also, with performance measure 4(b), the percentage of Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act requests handled without complaint to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, again, are you hedging your bets here with the 90 per cent plus for the next three years whenever you compare it to what it used to be?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, I think the target of 90 per cent plus, again, means that the sky is the limit. Maybe we'll be at 97 per cent.

8:50

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Well, it's interesting to look at, you know, past years in your recent annual report. It looks like there's a significant downward trend in the administration of the access to information laws.

Mrs. Klimchuk: I certainly meet on a regular basis with Frank Work, the Privacy Commissioner. You know the good work he does. I am confident that he will continue to do the work, and Service Alberta will continue to ensure that Albertans have access to information.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Now, for the fees that are collected through the access to information process, do you have a breakdown of how many fees were collected?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Bear with me just for one second.

Mr. MacDonald: Sure.

Mrs. Klimchuk: I have mentioned, too, in the House that the FOIP requests – we look at the requests. We want to be fair and reasonable. We want to make sure that we encourage individuals to use legislation responsibly, and we want to make sure that they partially cover the cost of the service. The majority of FOIP applicants pay minimal or no fees. A \$25 initial fee is charged for general information requests, and additional charges may be applied depending on photocopying and all of those extra things. What I have found is that fees can be waived if the individual cannot afford to pay, of

course, and individuals asking for their own information pay only copying charges and only if the charges exceed \$10.

The cost of administering the FOIP program in government was about \$6.2 million, and for the same period \$72,900 in fees was collected, and \$6,400 was waived.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. I appreciate that.

Now, the performance measures that are in the business plan. I find them to be in a different format than what's in the annual report. Will these same performance measures appear in the annual report that is to come out in September or October? If these are the performance measures, am I to expect others in the annual report that will not be included in this business plan?

Mrs. Klimchuk: No. I think that what you're seeing here – I know that there's a new format that we're using with Treasury Board. Part of it for the year in question will be the same, but with the performance measures, when we're looking across government, you want to be able to actually measure the right information or the true information. Sometimes you may not be getting at the right information.

The Acting Chair: Mr. MacDonald, that concludes the 20 minutes allocated.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Can I get back on the list, please?

The Acting Chair: Yes, if there's enough brevity here. I have the following speaking order: Ms Calahasen, followed by Mr. Kang again, followed by Ms Woo-Paw, followed by Mr. Mason, followed by Mr. Sandhu.

Ms Calahasen, I'll just advise you to be brief, as brief as possible.

Ms Calahasen: How much time do I have?

The Acting Chair: You have 20 minutes.

Ms Calahasen: Okay. I get to speak, right?

The Acting Chair: In order that everybody could be heard, we'll try to expedite things.

Ms Calahasen: Madam Minister, first of all, I want to say at the outset that your ministry has probably been one of the most helpful that I've ever worked with. I want to say thank you for the help that you have provided to my constituents as well as to various people within my own family. Your team has been excellent. I want to say that at the outset because I think sometimes we forget to say thank you to those who work hard. So please pass that on for all the people that have worked very hard.

Mrs. Klimchuk: I appreciate that. Thank you.

Ms Calahasen: I have a few questions. My first question has to do with the Auditor General's recommendations from the October 2008 audit regarding the security of the government's computer systems. Can you tell me or at least give me an idea as to how you're addressing those recommendations and how far you've gotten with those recommendations? Do you want me just to give you all of my questions, and then you can answer them?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, I'll start with the first, the Auditor General.

Ms Calahasen: Okay.

Mrs. Klimchuk: The question was about the security part, or what was it again?

Ms Calahasen: Actually, the security of the government's computer systems.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. When I talked previously about the new strategic priority, about the information technology security systems, that's the chief security officer. That's the recognition, you know, of the growing need to safeguard the information held by government as well as the technology of other systems and the infrastructure. So accepting the Auditor General's recommendation – we were well under way with a number of the recommendations. It's the integrity of Albertans' information and the security, which we take very, very seriously. The fact that we do have a chief security officer resident within Service Alberta is huge.

As I mentioned before, in the cross-ministry meetings we have with all the departments, we are able to share and work together and make sure that if there's a problem, we can deal with them sooner rather than later.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you.

The other question I have has to do with performance measures. I know that some of the opposition were talking about the performance measures. If you will look at the performance measures that you have on page 246 – I know that he made reference to it – on the percentage of Albertans satisfied with access to government of Alberta services and information, the last actual was 65 per cent, and you have a target of 80 per cent. Did we find out why it was only 65 per cent? I'm sure that the last target would have been about 80 per cent as well.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Part of that number reflects the period when the turnaround time with land titles was 26 days, and that's very valid. That's why a performance measure like that, when we can actually dig down and think, "This is why?" – that's what that's about. Now it's two and a half days.

Ms Calahasen: Isn't that amazing.

How about 1(e), then? It says: "Percentage of Albertans who are satisfied with the timeliness of Government of Alberta services and information." The last actual we were at 63 per cent, and the target is now 80 per cent. What was the reason why it would have only been 63 per cent? The same thing?

Mrs. Klimchuk: It's about the same thing. Don't forget that a lot of this information is a year back. When I was going through my binder and reading it, I kind of thought: well, what are we really measuring there? Then I realized that you're always a year behind because of the way, you know, that we do stuff. That was a huge issue for Albertans. That was one of those issues that people were incensed about.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you.

The other question, of course, again is on performance measures, page 249. Being an old teacher, you know, performance measures are important. In performance measure 4(a) – and I know that was referenced as well – you have 95 per cent, and the target is 90 per cent plus. I know that you gave an explanation of that. When you look at that, I would think that you would go 95 per cent plus – right? – instead of the 90 per cent. It looks like it's a decrease in

expectations rather than looking at an increase in expectations. I guess my recommendation would be that maybe we should look at that kind of performance measure to be reflective of what kind of achievements you have made in your department.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. That's fair.

I just want to add, going back to land titles for a minute, that one of the first pieces of legislation that we did last year was the queuing system. That was carried forward by the hon. member. The queuing system has proven to be an excellent way of making it that much better and more efficient.

Ms Calahasen: On page 250, goal 5, you have client-focused shared services to ministries across government. Can you tell me to what extent we are relative to the shared services? It's always been a challenge. My understanding is that under your tutelage now we have an increased service possibility in terms of shared services.

9:00

Mrs. Klimchuk: Right. Certainly, when we developed this plan over this last year, the whole concept of shared services, you know, having one service, one department kind of shepherding and coordinating all of it, is really important. Whether it's about procurement, whether it's about our IMAGIS system, it's about making sure that departments know the resources they have at their fingertips and that we work together. That's been really important to me. Shared services means, too, that when the individual goes to a particular department, it's all there, whether on the Internet or on the website.

Ms Calahasen: Under strategy 5.1 you have: "Develop a plan." It's talking about standardized procurement processes. Can you tell me if there's any kind of idea or a vision to be able to incorporate maybe some of the aboriginal peoples and how they can also become part of the procurement process?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. That's a very good question, hon. member. The procurement process, whether it's, you know, procuring with the RFP models that we have, is something where now we've got this great model that all government departments are looking towards us for when we go on those things. I guess procurement means getting the information out. If there are aboriginal businesses or groups that want to be at the table, that's what's really great about this. It's out in the open, and people can see, and they're posted on the Service Alberta website when we do go through the RFPs. It's really important to me that it's out there and that it's a very clear process.

The other thing, too, that our department does, which I think is very neat, is that we do exit interviews. Oftentimes people will apply for something, and they may think they've got the best solution. Well, they might only have part of it. That's where the exit interviews are really important, to empower them to know what they have to do to come back.

Ms Calahasen: That's excellent. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Mr. Kang, please.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay. Going back to the annual report 2007-2008, we've got it here that the Utilities Consumer Advocate responded to almost 33,000 telephone inquiries. That was an increase of about 115 per cent compared to the number of calls received last year. There were only, you know, almost 3,700, you can say, disputes mediated by UCA between consumers and the utility providers. What about the rest of the telephone inquiries?

What were they about? Is any record being kept on this? That's a big, big spread here, with only resolution on 3,600 of them. What happened to the rest of the calls?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, just to give an overall figure, since it was created, the UCA has helped almost 12,000 Albertans in mediating disputes with utility companies, so that's one positive. You're right: the UCA handles particular questions with respect to the contracts, the bills, whether they're bills from, you know, Telus or whatever.

The other part of what is in that is the call centre and all the things that people phone about. Whether it's about a bad contract, home renovators – we get a lot of calls on how to spot a bad home renovator – how to look for a moving company, if you're going to home inspectors, sometimes referrals to other departments, too, there are so many issues out there that people call us about. So that's really critical in that role. You're right. It's not just that. It's all the others in the kettle, what's out there and whatever the consumer issue of the day might be. Maybe six months ago it was something different. Now it's submetering. Back then maybe it was going to a payday loan company or landlords and tenants. It kind of changes depending on what's top of mind.

Mr. Kang: Okay. That's 32,000 calls. That's lots of calls. Is there any performance measure done on how well the office of the UCA, the Utilities Consumer Advocate, is performing? Is there any performance measure done on them?

Mrs. Klimchuk: With respect to how the UCA works with the board, the board that works with the Utilities Consumer Advocate, most certainly it's a very active board. It reports to the deputy minister and to me on a regular basis in terms of some of the interventions they're making. It's very important to me to make sure that they continue to work hard on behalf of Albertans and use their money wisely as well.

With respect to the annual report and the calls, I mean, I can get you more detailed information on that breakdown. I don't have that in front of me. Is that something you would like?

Mr. Kang: Yeah. Sure. Where do you report, you know, the performance measures you've done on UCA? Where do you report that? Is it in reports anywhere, or does it just stay with the minister?

Mrs. Klimchuk: It's through the minister and my department, but ultimately it's the consumer. If the consumer views the Utilities Consumer Advocate as not advocating on their behalf, whether it's on an intervention or that kind of thing, that's where the power lays. We are hiring an advocate. We are in the final interviews going forward. I think that once we get that person in place and with the scope and the mandate and the direction that I think we need to go for consumers, ultimately it's about how they can get the information and what's required to protect their interests.

Mr. Kang: I was looking for the information in the business plan, and it's not in there.

Mrs. Klimchuk: I can get that for you.

Mr. Kang: It used to be in the business plans, you know. Why was this information taken out of the business plan if it used to be in there?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, it certainly is in the business plan. It wasn't taken out. With respect to specific performance measures, that's certainly something I can get back to you on. No problem.

Mr. Kang: Okay. Going back to page 342 of the estimates, for 2009-10 the Utilities Consumer Advocate's estimate is \$6.2 million. The 2008-09 forecast is \$6.9 million, so this estimate is going down. What do you think? Why is the budget for the UCA going down?

Mrs. Klimchuk: I think what's more important, if you look at the 2007-2008 actual, is that that's a more valid comparison in terms of what funds were made available last year and how the funds were used. In terms of being efficient and being effective, it was about making the funds available, but I based it upon what they actually used in the 2007-08 year.

Mr. Kang: So why was there a big jump here, then? I think you talked about that before, but from the 2007-08 actual in 2008-09 it was \$6.9 million.

Mrs. Klimchuk: It's the increased demand. Part of it is that we had the Bill 46 debate. The Utilities Consumer Advocate board was created as a result of that debate. That was two years ago this December. The reason why you're seeing an increase is because of the increased demand and consumers asking better questions.

Mr. Kang: So just because of Bill 46, you know, this budget almost doubled?

Mrs. Klimchuk: It didn't double.

Mr. Kang: Oh, no. Sorry. You know, from \$5 million almost up 1 and a half million, close to \$2 million.

9:10

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, again, it goes back, as I said, to increased awareness and to the advocates, whether it's individuals advocating on behalf of the Consumers' Association of Canada and all of the individuals out there and the Utilities Consumer Advocate board advocating on behalf of consumers. Moving forward, it has an important role to play with respect to whether it's electricity or in the natural gas area. It has a very important role to play, and that's something that I value and that I want to encourage.

Mr. Kang: My understanding was, you know, that with the recession coming, there will be more complaints to the UCA. That's why I think we should be budgeting more to service the consumer better. That's why I was bringing that point up.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Okay.

Mr. Kang: This is regarding condos. You probably got a letter on that, too. I think everybody got a letter on the condominium act. I think it's under your department. Are you planning a review of this act in 2009-2010? There are issues with the act, with condominium planning.

Mrs. Klimchuk: The condominium act. I know that with respect to the act and on a regular basis there's a team in Service Alberta that is tracking some of the concerns and issues that are out there. We all know that there are issues with respect to – what's it called? – the amount of money that condos have to keep.

Mr. Kang: The reserve fund.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, hon. member. The reserve fund. We know that there are issues out there, and we are tracking it by

some of the letters that we're getting about issues of condos out there. I would like to ask you if there's any particular area that we need to look at. I'd be more than happy to look at your suggestions. We need to constantly update and to make sure that the legislation and regulations are moving with what's happening with condos.

Mr. Kang: So all our suggestions will be put in the legislation?

Mrs. Klimchuk: All of your suggestions? Oh, I'm not saying that.

Mr. Kang: Well, you know, that's what you just finished saying. Every time we bring any good amendment or something, it just gets voted down. I mean, we can do your work if you want to work with us.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, as you say, I look forward to all of your input. I mean, it's about people from all over Alberta contacting you in your area or contacting me and making sure that the legislation grows with us.

Mr. Kang: All the input we've been giving, you know, has been coming from the constituents. I mean, when we take it there, all of a sudden their input is no good anymore. That's where I was coming from.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Okay. Well, point taken. Thank you.

Mr. Kang: Thank you.

Mr. Sandhu: Come to this side.

Mr. Kang: Well, I could have come to that side a long time ago if I wanted to.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, do you have anything further?

Mr. Kang: Okay. We were talking about high-ratio mortgages here, you know, at land titles. Do you think that buyers should be informed of high-ratio mortgages, you know, through the file on the property. I think it's going to be a big problem in the future, too, with home prices coming down, and lots of consumers are going to get burned with high-ratio mortgages. Peter knows about this.

Mrs. Klimchuk: You know, that's a very good point. As time goes on with the prices of houses, we know that in Calgary and Edmonton it's kind of a different situation. I think what we're going through right now – back in the '80s we went through the interest rates being 22 and 23 per cent – is a little bit different. The interest rates are lower, but that does not mean that we should not be wary of this issue and make sure that individuals – you know, if you have a property, you've got the right amount of mortgage on it and if you resell it. So I agree that it's something that we should watch as well.

Mr. Kang: Yeah. I don't think there's any difference. You know, back in the 1980s the mortgages were small, but the interest rates were high. But now the mortgages are big, and even with one or two persons, you know, it's going to make a big difference.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. That's a good point.

Mr. Kang: On page 29 of the annual report, the percentage of government employees that use the GOA domain, there was a 75 per cent target, and it reached only 61 per cent: in 2006-07 it was 47 per

cent; in 2007-08, you know, it reached only 61 per cent. What is being done?

Mrs. Klimchuk: The target, I think, when we began this process about the GOA domain shared services IMT strategy, was, you know, in its infancy. Right now we are almost at 80 per cent, so that would not be reflected in an annual report from last year. We are almost at 80 per cent in terms of those government domain shared services.

Mr. Kang: Okay. Thank you.

You addressed issues of, you know, a benefit plan. I was looking at the benefit plan on page 47.

Mr. MacDonald: That has moved over to Treasury Board this year.

Mr. Kang: Okay. I think my partner, my copilot, answered that question for me.

I'm going back to page 243 of the ministry business plan. It goes on to say, "There are opportunities to provide a range of corporate services to public sector organizations outside of the provincial government who also serve Albertans." Can the ministry clarify which public-sector organizations the ministry plans to partner with?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Part of this about other corporate services is school boards, is working with the health services, mainly, I think, the school boards and the municipalities and the other services.

Mr. Kang: Okay. Is there any detailed information on the partnership?

Mrs. Klimchuk: I guess one such partnership is if you would look at the example of the SuperNet and the municipalities that have access to the SuperNet. That's a good example. The SuperNet in the museums is through Culture. The other thing as well is the standing offers through procurement that Service Alberta does.

Mr. Kang: Are there any costs involved in these partnerships? You know, what is the estimated cost, if there's any, and who is paying for the cost?

Mrs. Klimchuk: I think that when you look at when I developed this business plan – you know, this section is Significant Opportunities and Challenges. When I look at something, we're trying to look ahead and think a few years down the road of other opportunities and challenges. I think that as time goes on, you're going to be seeing some more items that come out. At this point in time there's no money attached to this. What we're doing: let's have a conversation, and let's make sure that we link with some of the individuals and groups out there and assist them, and they can assist us, too.

9:20

Mr. Kang: The next question was on aircraft, but I think it's not under Service Alberta anymore.

Mrs. Klimchuk: No.

Mr. Kang: That was a hot potato. I think you got rid of it.

What is the budget for the executive fleet this year, you know, for cars?

Mrs. Klimchuk: It's approximately \$17 million for the overall fleet. I know you've asked some excellent questions about hybrid cars.

We're up to 50 now, again making sure that we're having the right kind of vehicles doing the right kind of service within the city. We know that hybrid vehicles can do a lot of excellent work in the cities, where they're not in the middle of farmland in southern or northern Alberta. We're very aware and very respectful of where we need to have the right kind of vehicles doing the right kind of work.

Mr. Kang: Thanks for taking our advice. Finally, you took one.

Mrs. Klimchuk: There. See? I took your advice.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, you have less than a minute left on your 20 minutes.

Mr. Kang: Already? Okay.

On the Service Alberta employees here, the employees are the same, you know. Although a lot of the burden has shifted to the Treasury Board and other departments, the employee number is the same. Why?

Mrs. Klimchuk: It's comparably adjusted across, so we've adjusted it with other departments. Our FTEs we're able to keep the same because of working with some of the others. Because of the cross-ministry work that we're doing, other departments are supporting us.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, that concludes the time allocated to your questions and responses.

I will now recognize Ms Woo-Paw, but before doing so, I just want to observe that we have approximately eight minutes left. Pursuant to the standing orders it's provided that we should deliberate for three hours. The chair recognizes that in consideration of the fact that the chair has derogated from that three hours by the period of the adjournment, I'm going to add another four minutes onto the time available so that Ms Woo-Paw and Mr. Mason can both get their questions on the record, please.

Ms Woo-Paw, be as brief as you can.

Ms Woo-Paw: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Most of my questions have been answered. I just have a few simple questions, I think. On page 248 of the business plan, item 3(a), performance measures, the number of organizations that use Alberta SuperNet, you're increasing it to 145 from 128. I would like to know whether that includes some of the public libraries in our province that may not have SuperNet at the current time.

Mrs. Klimchuk: The answer is yes.

Ms Woo-Paw: I'm happy.

Mrs. Klimchuk: I've been working very hard in this area. I believe that libraries are an underutilized treasure across Alberta. We know that the SuperNet has been a great tool there with respect to video conferencing, with respect to support to nonprofit groups and new immigrants and that whole thing. There's a huge opportunity to make sure that the SuperNet is everywhere. It's about the broadband width as well. We know that some of those services take up a higher broadband width. I'm totally supportive of that, and I have been working quite closely with Minister Danyluk.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you.

My second question is from the estimates on page 345, statutory expenses. Could you please briefly explain the rationale for the substantial increases for the valuation adjustments and other

provisions from a 2007-08 actual of \$608,000 to an additional \$300,000, \$400,000?

Mrs. Klimchuk: It's mainly to do with the statutory expense. That is a number of different areas. One of the areas is the valuation adjustments and provisions. That's kind of common in all departments. That's tracking employees who have not yet taken their vacation days and those kinds of things. That's what that's part of. As in the private sector you have to have an accounting for that within the budget.

Ms Woo-Paw: Okay. My last question is on – I hope I didn't miss it earlier – page 343, the \$56 million increase under capital investment, enterprise services. Could you explain what that \$56 million increase is for?

Mrs. Klimchuk: That is all about the IMT strategy. The \$92.5 million is about the IMT strategy that is moving through all government departments now, all 23.

Ms Woo-Paw: So the increase on page 342 under enterprise services is also for IMT?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah, that's the operating system.

Ms Woo-Paw: Okay. So they're both for the IMT.

Last question. On page 247 I was looking at some of the strategies. This is a general question. I think it may be applicable to a few of your strategies on pages 246 and 247. Given the changing demographics and your interest in providing best-service delivery models to benefit citizens, improving access, enhancing awareness of consumer protection initiatives, those interests and objectives, I'd like to know whether your ministry is considering providing culturally appropriate strategies such as what the Ministry of Employment and Immigration is doing in terms of developing multilingual materials.

Mrs. Klimchuk: That's a fantastic question. Certainly, with you and I and the volunteer background that we have and the perspective that we bring to government, one of the things that we know within the registry offices is that offering information in many languages, which is really important, is about respect and what's out there. I think one of the major culturally appropriate initiatives I see is the SuperNet and its role to play in libraries and museums. To me it's such an incredible way for people to be able to access information, to be able to network from the group that they came from. That's an excellent suggestion. That's something that's a little bit harder for Service Alberta to track, but I will take that suggestion for sure.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Mr. Mason, you have six minutes.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your accommodation and flexibility in this. I wanted to identify for the minister that, in fact, the performance measures for the utilities advocate were eliminated as at last budget. There were two performance measures. My question is why we can't come up with some effective performance measures for that office. You're in the middle of hiring for that position, and it would seem to me that we should be able to track the performance.

9:30

Now, I'll just take as an example the casework in my constituency

office. I ask the staff to break down the different cases that come forward into things that can be pursued and things that are frivolous and then to track the success and give me monthly figures on how many cases are resolved plus the length of time that it takes to resolve them as well as an outcome and a satisfaction level. So I can track what's going on. I find it hard to believe that the department, with all its resources, cannot have some similar performance measures that realistically and accurately gauge the number of cases that this office undertakes and how many it resolves. For example, for how many people has the Utilities Consumer Advocate actually been able to get a reduction on a bill or get somebody out of a contract or that sort of thing? So that's my excellent suggestion for tonight that you might want to follow up on.

I do think that if we're going to continue with this office, we do need to know whether or not it's doing anybody any good. Like my hon. colleague across the way I have my doubts.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Certainly, we can probably get you some more information about some of the specifics of what they're asking the applicant about. I think the fact that moving forward and hiring the advocate – I've had excellent work from the Utility Consumer Advocate, from the current board that's in place. They have provided me with a strategic vision moving forward, scope, all of those things that I need. I agree with you: we have to make sure that

they continue protecting Albertans and advocating on behalf of Albertans. If we don't have something to say, yea or no, then we need to have something in place, so I'm certainly on your side.

I think that because we didn't have someone in place, it has been a void, and I'll be the first to say that. But moving forward, I believe that the new focus of the UCA board, one of the new things, is the information and consumer awareness, just the whole area of what you can do in that. We've had, you know, information and kits and all that distributed. But moving forward, I agree. This is something we need to make sure is there.

I will endeavour to get you some of the particulars about some of the investigations that have gone on because as you say, when you can track it, it's good.

Mr. Mason: That would be great. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, members. That concludes the business for this evening. I would remind committee members that we're scheduled to meet next Wednesday, April 22, to consider the estimates of the Department of Justice. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(2)(a) the meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:33 p.m.]

