

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 6, 1995**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 95/03/06

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call the committee to order.

Again, for the benefit of those in the gallery as well as those that are occasionally seated here in the Assembly, this is the committee stage of the Legislature. It's less formal, sometimes less formal than the Chair would like to admit, but less formal it is. People are able to go from one chair to another. We only ask that the committee have one person standing and speaking out loud at a time.

head: **Main Estimates 1995-96**

**Community Development**

THE CHAIRMAN: Before entertaining questions, comments, and amendments, we would invite the Minister of Community Development to begin this evening's debate by making comments relative to his department's estimates.

Hon. minister.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present the 1995-96 budget estimates for the Department of Community Development, which you will find on pages 63 through 75 of the 1995-96 Government Estimates book. The 1995-96 estimates for Community Development and the three-year business plan detailed in A Better Way II support this government's two primary agendas, fiscal balance and structural reform, and I am pleased to be a part of this process.

We prepared the ground in 1994. This year we can build a strong foundation for community development in the province of Alberta. The initiatives in my latest business plan and Budget '95 move us closer to the day when Alberta's communities will be self-reliant and sustainable. They will move us away from "big government knows best" attitudes towards a government that is smaller, responsible, and progressive, a government whose role is clearly defined and supportive, a government that does not dictate but instead works with communities to build on their capacities and abilities.

Community development is not just a phrase. It is a philosophy rooted in the belief that communities can and should take responsibility for their future, for the decisions that affect them, and for the commitments that sustain them. It is profoundly democratic as it enables local communities, organizations, and groups to direct their future. Their future will not rest in the hands of others.

Mr. Chairman, the 1995 Canada Winter Games in Grande Prairie and Jasper are an excellent example of that philosophy in action. From the initial decision to bid for the 1995 games through to the successful conclusion of the games last Saturday, the Canada Winter Games were a community-based, community-driven project. My department and other departments contributed money and other support, but it was very modest compared to the amount of money, material, services, and volunteer help contributed by the people of Grande Prairie and Jasper and indeed by all Albertans from all parts of the province. The leveraged return on our investment was tremendous in terms of economic activity generated in the host communities and the province and in terms

of the many legacies that the games leave behind: facilities, skills, experience, community pride and spirit, and a legacy of goodwill that reaches all across the country.

The community development approach is not limited to my department. My colleagues the ministers of Health, Family and Social Services, and Education have all adopted community development strategies through the regional health authorities, the community supports initiative, or parent school councils. These and other initiatives exemplify the desire of this government to limit its role and give control back to the people where it belongs.

I want to reiterate a comment that I made last year to this House. Community development is one of the best ways we have of meeting our fiscal goals and maintaining public programs and services at acceptable levels. I continue to believe that. Albertans exemplify the philosophy through their eagerness to take responsibility for their own affairs and to identify community needs and allocate community resources according to community priorities. The strategy is the essence of community development. It is a way of encouraging and supporting community initiative and self-reliance.

Mr. Chairman, last year we had some simple goals: get spending under control, reduce the cost of government, and get out of activities that were not among the core businesses of government. We made some very difficult choices. As a result, we are now different than we were at this time last year. We are spending less and doing things differently that focus on and clearly support our core businesses of people, prosperity, and preservation. The Department of Community Development is formally identified with preservation, but as A Better Way II points out, what a ministry does often fits under all the core businesses, and this is clearly the case with Community Development.

Our focus on people is demonstrated through our commitment to the dignity and financial security of Alberta seniors with lower incomes. It is demonstrated through our abiding concern for the rights of individuals to live a life free of bigotry, racism, and discrimination, a life in which all Albertans have equal opportunity and access to the social, economic, cultural, and recreational benefits of our communities without barriers based on negative gender, cultural, or racial stereotypes.

Our contribution to prosperity is demonstrated by our commitment to supporting tourism through the operation of major and in several cases world-class cultural and historical facilities and museums throughout Alberta. Indeed, Mr. Chairman, some of our facilities are not just world class; they are in fact the world's best. Our focus on prosperity is demonstrated in our commitment to the cultural industries that help sustain and create good, environmentally friendly, information-based jobs and employment in related sectors. We also support prosperity by facilitating development of the arts, libraries, recreation, and sport to help communities build an infrastructure of amenities that will make them superior places for Albertans to live and raise a family and that will also make them attractive to employers and employees who want to invest and live in communities that are modern, advanced, and progressive places with an environment that supports active minds and active bodies.

We support preservation through our efforts to protect Alberta's historical and archival artifacts, through our efforts to help communities develop the capacity to be self-sustaining and self-reliant, and by helping creative Albertans to tell Alberta's story to the world.

That is the foundation as we want to build it, Mr. Chairman. In order to build that foundation, we must continue to plan and

design new processes and approaches. We will continue to refocus our products and services and support the transition to a smaller, less costly government.

There is a human dimension to this government's and this ministry's structural and policy reforms. It is also reflected in my department's 1995-96 budget and in its three-year plan. The 1995-96 estimates indicate a net increase of 7.5 FTEs. This figure includes an increase of 19 FTEs for the Alberta seniors' benefit program and a decrease of 11.5 FTEs in the rest of the department. Another 67.5 FTEs will be eliminated in the remaining two years. We are very aware of the consequences of these reductions on the individuals involved. We have made and will continue to make every effort to be compassionate. Where possible, reductions will be made by attrition, redeployment, eliminating existing vacancies, and not renewing temporary positions. When we cannot find alternative placement for affected individuals, we will offer fair separation allowances.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I would like to touch briefly on some of the highlights from the financial portion of my estimates. My 1995 estimates are consistent with the objectives stated in my business plan. The changes to program, budget, and use of human resources are on track with the objectives set in 1994. There are no significant changes to my business plan, and the estimates confirm this fact.

I would like to now draw your attention to page 63 of the estimates book. The changes from last year's comparable 1994-95 estimates are virtually all accounted for by the additional appropriation needed to fund the Alberta seniors' benefit program for a full 12 months. This change was noted in the business plan. This program, which began in July of 1994, received funds to cover only nine months last year. A full year's operational funding requires approximately an additional \$45 million in my 1995-96 estimates. Subtract from that my scheduled program reduction of approximately \$3 million in other areas of my department, and you arrive at a net increase of \$42 million requested for 1995-96.

Turning to programs. I draw your attention to the fact that under program 1 on page 65 of the estimates book, there's no increase in either the operation of my office or that of my deputy minister. The changes to 1.0.3, finance and administration, reflect the decision of this government to transfer to my department and others responsibility and funding for accounts payable, payroll, and processing charges and insurance premium payments previously paid for by Alberta Treasury.

Regarding program 2, community services, on page 67 of the estimates book, the changes within subprogram 2.1, management and operations, are consistent with the business plan objectives, and the changes reflect no significant deviation from the objectives announced last year. The large reduction in 2.1.1, program support, reflects our continuing efforts to restructure and reduce administration. Of note under subprogram 2.2, financial assistance, is element 2.2.2, municipal recreation/tourism area operating grants, which this year will reach the level targeted in the 1994-95 business plan. This is the second half of a planned reduction of 50 percent from the 1993-94 funding level. I should note that we've consulted with the recipients of these grants to help them become more self-sufficient.

#### **8:10**

Hon. members will note that library operating grants, 2.2.4, are unchanged. I would note that 2.2.5, urban park development grants, that were previously paid from the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, have been moved to the general revenue fund and show up as a new element. This program is winding down

as detailed in the business plan and will terminate on March 31, 1997. When this funding ends, all work that was under way as of April 1, 1994, should be completed. All other changes in program 2 are consistent with spending targets and program objectives in the business plan.

With regard to program 3, cultural facilities and historical resources, detailed on page 69 of the estimates book, there are no significant deviations from the business plan affecting the budget request. I should note that we are exploring the possibility of changing the management of the Jubilee auditoria, which will very likely result in their becoming stand-alone facilities. These important cultural facilities will operate in a more businesslike manner and will be able to retain revenues to support operations.

With regard to program 4, individual rights and citizenship services, detailed on page 71, again there are no significant changes to note beyond those detailed in the business plan to achieve the fiscal targets and restructured program objectives.

As I noted earlier, the increases to program 5, Alberta seniors' benefit, detailed on page 73, reflect 12 months' compared to nine months' worth of funding. In addition, provision has been made in the 1995 estimates for administration costs and an adjustment to cover the revised projected number of seniors who are eligible for support.

Mr. Chairman, in our continuing effort to respond appropriately to the needs of seniors, we will begin to set up a public appeals mechanism for the Alberta seniors' benefit in April. This appeals mechanism will have two responsibilities. First, it will address the questions of interpretation and eligibility under the Alberta seniors' benefit program regulations. Second, it will attempt to address the needs of seniors with unusual circumstances. Each senior's situation is different, and we need to be sensitive to this fact in applying the program regulations. We have set aside \$1 million for transitional assistance to seniors in these cases. As seniors have requested, the appeal process will be arm's length from government. They've told us that they want to be represented in this process. Seniors will be represented on the appeals board. In order to save costs, the new appeal process will use the Family and Social Services citizens' appeal boards, modified to include a representative of seniors.

A total of \$2.1 million will be spent on administering the Alberta seniors' benefit program, or 1.4 percent of the total program budget. The \$1.8 million noted in 5.0.1, program support, represents the direct costs associated with program delivery. The remaining funds are spent within program 1, departmental support services, for items such as information systems, audit and accounting services. The administrative cost of this program is low, approximately \$9.50 per eligible senior per year, and this includes mailing costs, which account for approximately \$5 of the total administration cost per capita. This expenditure reflects an appropriate concern for both efficiency and effectiveness.

Mr. Chairman, with the 1995-96 Community Development business plan and budget, I am staying the course towards a smaller, less costly government and a reformed public sector, upon which we embarked last year.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I would like to call upon my colleague Yvonne Fritz, who is responsible for the Alberta Multiculturalism Commission, to speak on matters regarding that agency.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Minister, we don't have anybody by that name, but we do have somebody from Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: That's me. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. MAR: Yes. My humblest apologies.

MRS. FRITZ: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to begin by thanking the minister for the support that he and his department, who are seated in the gallery, provided in assisting the Alberta Multiculturalism Commission to carry out its programs and services. The Citizenship and Heritage Secretariat, which provides program and administrative support to the commission, will again meet its targets for the budget as set out in the Department of Community Development's business plan. The staff of the secretariat provide a quality service in meeting the needs of Albertans and will continue to look for opportunities for delivering the commission's programs and services more effectively and efficiently.

This past year, Mr. Chairman, the commission released a new three-year strategic plan: Multiculturalism: The Next Step. The plan is based on the comments and suggestions that Albertans made to the commission during its public consultations in the winter of 1994 and built upon the success from its first three-year multiculturalism action plan. The minister pointed out in his opening comments that his ministry impacts on all three of this government's core businesses.

In the case of the commission and the secretariat, its new strategic plan is about people and prosperity. Our focus on people is obvious. It begins with our vision, which, as we've said before, is a vision of Alberta as a harmonious, culturally diverse province which includes all of its citizens in its economic, social, political, and cultural opportunities. Whether it be our goal of fighting racism and discrimination or our goal of working to improve the awareness and understanding of the valuable benefits of diversity or our goal of helping communities to become self-reliant, we are about people.

We work with young people in schools and in youth groups through our youth cultural ambassadors program. This program is designed and delivered by young people. It helps youth learn about diversity and gain skills to deal with any conflicts that may arise from diversity issues. Our cultural ambassadors assist individuals from all walks of life to develop skills they can use to communicate with others about the benefits of diversity. In the past year, our first 24 graduates of this program made 160 presentations to schools, service organizations, and various community groups. We are working with regional health authorities, community colleges, nonprofit volunteer organizations, elementary schools, junior and senior high schools, other government departments, municipalities, and Alberta's cultural and racial minority communities, all in an effort, Mr. Chairman, to bring skills, resources, and understanding to these groups, which allows them to function more effectively in an increasingly diverse society.

I'd like to take a moment, Mr. Chairman, to thank the minister for the focus and the commitment that he's shown to youth, especially through the standing policy committee. I notice that you do have it in your three-year business plan, Mr. Minister, and we're pleased to see that it's there. We'll continue to work along with you in regards to assisting our youth in society. So thank you.

As I said earlier, Mr. Chairman, we are also about prosperity. We recently held our fifth annual symposium attended by over a hundred senior executives from the public and private sectors. The focus of this symposium was diversity and good management, productivity and growth. Our eighth annual summer institute

drew over 60 participants from across the country. They came to Alberta to develop skills in helping their organizations benefit from diversity. We worked with the Alberta branches of the Royal Bank of Canada and assisted them with their Celebration of Diversity Month in April of this past year. We helped over 10,000 young people continue to learn a second or third language outside of the school system, giving Alberta a tremendous language resource for our international trade efforts. We provided the financial support to enable this government to establish a service which provides assessments of educational qualifications obtained outside the province. This service helps newcomers to more quickly integrate into educational or employment opportunities.

8:20

Our new plan, Mr. Chairman, released this year builds on the excellent groundwork that I've just described for you. We have spent the last three years developing partnerships and laying a foundation for greater community responsibility through education, training, and resource development. Our intent is to continue to provide the leadership, training, and resources for an even greater involvement of communities.

Mr. Chairman, multiculturalism policies and programs are an investment, an investment that I believe will provide Alberta with a huge social, which is people, and economic, which is prosperity, payoff.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for allowing me to share those comments with the Legislature.

MR. MAR: Mr. Chairman, my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View may wish to speak about his experience regarding the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation.

THE CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Minister. I have been a board member of the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation . . .

MR. DOERKSEN: How much do you get paid?

MR. HLADY: I get paid nothing for sitting on that board, hon. member. I've been sitting on that board . . .

DR. OBERG: Why not?

MR. HLADY: I do it because I love sport, recreation, parks, and wildlife. [interjection] I enjoy the parks of Alberta. I find them to be a very integral part of this province.

Anyhow, Mr. Chairman, being a member of this board I've found very rewarding in many ways. For the past two weeks we've been very involved. The board has been very involved up in Grande Prairie with the Canada Winter Games. The basic values that it brings to our society was very evident up in Grande Prairie. Not only did we have many athletes from across the province competing there, but the parents that went to enjoy the games and see their children experiencing a very special time and growth period in their lives, the coaches that have spent many years building these athletes so that they could compete and perform at this high national level, as well as the officials who have spent many, many hours volunteering to be able to bring good, equal, and quality performances to each of the individual 21 sports.

The other areas: recreation, parks, and wildlife. We've recently, in the past year, just combined Recreation, Parks and Wildlife with the old Alberta Sport Council to form the new foundation. It's been a challenging time for this new board to come together and determine how they're going to be sending grants out to the different agencies and making it happen and making sure that all of the areas are respected and judged well and making sure that everything is getting out to the individual concerns.

It's been very rewarding, everything from individuals such as Dr. Grant MacEwan, who has made donations to the foundation and through the foundation of a book and other works that he has created throughout his life and wants to share with Albertans in any way that we can through the foundation. It's been an exciting time. I've enjoyed the time there. There's lots more growth. As we see a development and furthering change of Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife in Alberta, we're seeing more involvement and giving back to the community of making its own decisions in each specific area.

I would, again, just like to say thank you for the time that I've had to work in this area and look forward to continuing this in the future.

**THE CHAIRMAN:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

**MR. ZWOZDESKY:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've been able to give some review to the documents presented by the hon. minister and his assistants and my colleagues on the side opposite. I guess I'd just make a couple of opening comments here that I think will sort out the direction that I'm trying to head in with the rest of my discussion this evening.

The thing that bothers me a little bit about this budget, straight off the bat, that I would call to the minister's attention is that the entire budget for the Department of Community Development, not including capital investments, is slated at \$197 million. In actual fact, about \$148 million of that is tied to the seniors' benefits program; in other words, 70 percent of Community Development as we see it here is not what we have sort of become accustomed to knowing as the department. That leaves us with, I guess, about \$50 million only in terms of this estimate, and it's a downgrading or a cutback of sorts. So I again look at this budget and see evidence that would substantiate what I feared would happen a year ago, and that is that we see, I think, the dismantling of this department. Again it fails to connect with me as to why it is that this particular collection of very important departments is suffering yet further hits and perhaps ultimate annihilation. I see that backed up by the budget, and I see it also in the choice of words throughout the business plan that sort of gives life to the budget.

We see evidence of a lot of downloading and parceling out and searching for private-sector partners, words like "self-reliance" and "reinventing government" and so on. Every time I see some of these things, I ask myself: why doesn't the government just tell us that they're trying to get out of this business, that they're trying to get out of the Community Development area totally? I think we have seen consistently what I will call polite attacks on these areas of the humanities, the arts, the cultural side of the agenda. Here I see some further evidence of that again. By that, I mean we've seen a consistent downsizing of these departments both in terms of the value or the importance government places on it and, at the same time, also the dollars that sort of back up some of these things.

Now, I've made the arguments before in this House, Mr. Chairman, that the arts and areas related to culture, to the humanities, libraries, all the things that comprise this area are

very, very important and very critical to the quality of life that we have in this province. I'm just afraid again that things have been pushed so far to the back burners now that they really are in danger of falling off the stove. If that's the case, I would just ask the minister and colleagues opposite to come clean and just say, "This is what we're planning to do: we're planning to get out of this business entirely," and then let's review it from there. I'm sure there are some members on the front bench that would like to see that happen, but I will hang in and try and support the minister if he tries to support keeping them alive, which is what he is charged to do as a minister in this instance. He is charged to defend the faith of the department.

I see other evidence of some of our organizations being ousted or transferred from operations such as the McLeod Building over to the J. Percy Page Centre. I know that we've seen some musings about this in the paper, and I assume that the department is going to carry through with this. Organizations like the Alberta Band Association, the Alberta Choral Federation, Theatre Alberta, the Alberta Dance Alliance: these are organizations along with several others who have enjoyed the benefit of governmental support with so-called free rent at the McLeod Building. I understand that some of them or all of them likely will at some point be asked to move because they're selling this wonderful piece of Alberta architecture: the old McLeod Building, that is. Some of these organizations will find their way over to the newly renovated facilities at the J. Percy Page Centre, but not all of them. I wonder if the minister, in his careful deliberations and thoughts, would tell us and guarantee these people that they will find space, that they will somehow be accommodated once they are displaced.

It seems to me that in the vernacular here it says that government is looking for these organizations to become more self-reliant, to go out and seek new partnerships. I would make the argument that there are already precious few dollars available through the private sector for support of the arts. There is already quite an active lobby campaign that is under way and has been under way for years to try and secure those precious dollars from private-sector donors to support the arts, and this might put even further strains on that competition. So I would hope that the minister will take this under serious advisement. These are organizations that have a couple of paid staff people, but by and large they are volunteer boards of directors that make these groups tick, groups like the Alberta Registered Music Teachers; the Royal Canadian College of Organists; ARIA, the Alberta Recording Industry Association; AMPIA, the motion picture people; and so on. I have a serious concern that their concerns may not be fully met by some of the government initiatives here.

### **8:30**

I think it's all fine and good to put down into words what it is that the government plans to do by way of streamlining and getting out of business here and getting out of business there, but some of these things are just not businesses alone. Yes, there are a lot of small businesses that make the arts work. Yes, that's very true, cultural industries in particular. But by and large the arts and culture sector have always needed some form of assistance. Before governments were invented, they probably were able to receive those funds and supports from some benefactors in the communities. To some extent we still see that happening, such as with the Edmonton Concert Hall Foundation and some generous donations there, but the arts/cultural sector will always need some form of support, be it programs, be it other services, be it outright cash, financial-type support. So I would strongly urge the minister to look into that area.

Similarly, the Word Works building: I don't know where that's reflected in the budget or if it is or not directly. Groups housed over there such as the Book Publishers Association, the Writers Guild, the Young Alberta Book Society, and several others: what will happen to them when that building gets sold? Will they still have a place that they can go that they can afford, or are we going to be placing further hardships on them through this kind of streamlined budgeting?

The other area I wanted to just talk about briefly is to do with the general budget here. I do see some things that are good, and I want to congratulate the minister on having brought forward some good initiatives, but I also find a lot of things that are questionable, Mr. Chairman. I'm not yet satisfied, for example, with this entire area of municipal recreation/tourism area operating grants. I know that we're looking at a reduction here of about 33 percent, and I realize that this is probably part of a larger picture plan. However, if memory serves correctly, I believe that what we did as a province a few years ago is that we embarked on a rather ambitious program through our budgets to create these special parks. In the cities they were the urban parks and in the rural areas they were under the MRTA, I think. Now, it seems that when these parks are up and running, they need some guarantee of operational funding, and I see us backing away from that. To me, it could be that we are backing away from protecting our investment, because we spent millions of dollars on those parks. So I would hope that there is some plan to back up the guaranteed management of those parks at the municipal level in particular. If not, perhaps the minister could alleviate any concerns that people in the public have to the contrary.

The other area that caught my attention with regard to the budget is line 1 on page 64 of government estimates. It's the departmental support services area. I see some increases here, and I didn't quite catch whether or not the minister had explained it in his opening comments on the budget. I see here an increase of 2.8 percent in departmental support services, and I would assume that a large part of that probably has to do with the increase in our Alberta seniors' benefit portfolio, but I also understood that the Alberta seniors' benefit has its own pool and its own dollars for administration and that it's probably isolated. Perhaps the hon. minister could just clear that point up for me.

A little further on in line 1.0.3 on page 65 I see another increase in finance and administration of about \$100,000. I know that the minister said something about his own office not reflecting any increased costs – neither does his deputy minister's department office show any anticipated increased costs – but there is an increase on the finance and administration side. That may be something to do with insurance and accounts payable – is that what you alluded to? – in which case I'll check *Hansard* for that answer to be clear.

There appears to be some cutbacks here too, Mr. Chairman, that might bear some further explanation by the minister, in particular the Provincial Museum funding to the Royal Tyrrell. I don't know quite what the minister had in mind here. Similarly, at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump I see some cutbacks. My understanding, given also what the minister has just said, is that these, of course, are world-class facilities and they will require proper maintenance, proper staffing, and the injection of funds from time to time. This is a cutback that's happening here that I hope would not detract from what we already know to be world-class facilities. Perhaps just some brief explanation would help us understand what it is that's being cut back there.

Then we see that in the business plan last year the FTEs, the full-time equivalents, were, I think, expected to be 558 for '94-95. However, they're now forecast for something like 605. There

seems to be a significant increase there, and I don't know where those FTEs are being deployed. Perhaps that could be cleared up. It appears to be a discrepancy between the two business plans, and that may be just a reversal in thinking, or perhaps it's an oversight. I don't know what it is, but I'm sure the minister will be quick to try and clear that up.

Then I move to the area that concerns me a great deal with regard to the musings that were about a few months ago. Those musings included the proposed amalgamation of some of the minister's department: the Human Rights Commission and the Alberta Multiculturalism Commission, along with the Advisory Council on Women's Issues and the Seniors Advisory Council. If I recall correctly, the minister had said that he was going to be amalgamating these or at least proposing that that might be done.

I would again urge the minister and the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross to please, please take a third look. I know you've had a second look, but please take a third look at this, and don't go through with it, to be blunt. I would strongly urge you to try and keep these commissions and councils separate. They were set up for specific purposes. My sense is, and I think the general populous of Alberta would tell you that they have done, if not an admirable job, an excellent job fulfilling their mandates. There's tremendous expertise there. I don't think they're outlandishly expensive, and they do have a specific territory that they try and serve. I have a fear that by lumping them all under one, we will possibly see this idea occur of trying to help everybody and in the process not helping anybody. I would really counsel you to look at that seriously and delay it for a while longer if nothing else. Please.

Do the same thing, too, please, with regard to the proposed agency number 2. We've already seen the amalgamation of the Alberta Sport Council and the Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. Now to take them and amalgamate them further with the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the Historical Resources Foundation, I think once again creates an unclear, vague, hodgepodge of some groups that really should be autonomous from each other. Again, I would suggest that these groups do a very good job serving the constituents that they are appointed to serve. By moving them into a forced amalgamation, any of these seven organizations I've talked about, I really think we are diluting their effectiveness rather totally and creating one or two superstructures in their wake. How those superstructures could serve the mandates in a clear, concise way is beyond me. I just don't think it could be done.

#### 8:40

I think the savings on that merger bear some discussion from a budgetary point of view, but I would argue that the savings are negligible compared to the benefits that we feel from having these as separate, fully funded organizations. I would suggest that it's been told to me by enough people now over the last several months that a move of this sort might be perceived as trying to accomplish a political agenda, and I know that the minister would not allow that to happen. That would be wrong, and I caution him not to fall into that bit of difficulty.

The business plan is something that I've spent a great deal of time with, and I don't think I'm going to get to everything here today, so perhaps we'll come back to this. I do have some concerns starting right on page 6, Mr. Minister, where you talk about the actions, anticipated outcomes, and critical paths of the different actions and strategies that you have. You say here on page 6 that you're anticipating "increased economic returns of sport, recreation, arts, cultural and heritage . . . to communities

and the province." When you're withdrawing support, when you're potentially diluting the effectiveness of some of our infrastructure in these areas, I fail to see how that's going to redound to the economic benefit of a community. To me, on the surface it just doesn't flow.

I realize of course that this is all put into point form notes and that there are explanations that substantiate these moves, and I look forward to getting that information. I don't see that sort of backed up, in other words, in the corresponding budget, those economic spin-offs, those economic returns. It's not just to communities, Mr. Chairman. It says here: "to communities and the province." I don't know if the minister means the province as government or if he means the province as the people, perhaps a little of both.

Similarly, this review of the Libraries Act. The minister will recall the questions that he answered today during question period in this regard. I see here that there are attempts at streamlining the processes and reducing legislation and that legislative changes are expected in 1996. It says here that there's going to be a move "from direct service delivery to partnerships with other agencies and communities." As I see that phrase – and it appears in different words a little later on, but the meaning is the same – I wonder if this is some form of privatization that is imminent. Is that what this means? It begs an answer of very serious consequences, and I would hope that the minister is able to comment on that.

I see the same thing a line lower, Mr. Chairman, with regard to talking and multilingual books, where they're talking about "services delivery through partnerships with other agencies and communities." I'd appreciate an update on that. I know that it's expected soon, in 1995. I hope that the minister is not thinking about privatizing libraries. I see that there are some pilot projects here that are of a good nature, and I want to compliment the minister on the electronic Alberta library network, bringing that on stream.

On that positive note, I'll conclude my comments for this evening and come back another time. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. The questions that I have are with respect to page 67 in the estimates, reference 2.2.2. It looks like the government is reducing the rural grant program by 50 percent when at the same time it's totally eliminating the urban parks operating grant. Are city residents being unfairly treated by this government with respect to that?

Other questions, again with urban parks development grants. How is the government going to assist cities with completion of their projects from a safety point of view and in terms of legal liability with respect to funding these urban parks projects? Will cities receive funds under the program in '95-96?

Those are all my questions, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity once again to ask the minister a few questions and make a few comments about the budget of Community Development. I have a few general remarks about the budget, and then I'll address my attention to the seniors' issues.

In a general sense, Mr. Minister, in program 2, community services, I wonder if you'd give me a little bit of information about 2.1.2, administration of western economic partnership

agreement. Where is that at? Is that running out and so on? Another one on that same program is the one that the Member for Calgary-Egmont just referred to, 2.2.2. I note that has been reduced. Perhaps you can answer my questions about that as well. It seems curious to me that while we are on the one hand attempting to build and enhance our tourism industry, the government's support would be reducing it, maybe because the industry is now on its own. I'd like some information about it.

Mr. Chairman, I'd also like to have you give me some criteria, Mr. Minister, for the field work for 2.1.4, community services field offices, and 2.1.5, recreation and sport services. I have asked this question before, and I'm having difficulty in understanding the kind of criteria that you expect of your field workers to work in community development. I believe it's a very highly specialized field of practice, and I would just like a bit more information about how many are in that staff complement, what it is they are expected to do for you, and how successful they are. Perhaps some information about how I would acquire your services if I were working in a community agency, a municipal agency. How would I be expected to pay for them? Would you provide them free? What are the criteria for getting them and also the criteria for those who provide them?

[Mr. Herard in the Chair]

If I can turn to page 7 of the plan, again item 6, winding down the urban parks development grant; I've mentioned that already. Item 7 in goal 1, Mr. Minister: "facilitate initiatives which stimulate and support community activity." That's where I really need some examples of not only what those are but how they are encountered. Are you the initiator from the department, or are you simply responding? In item 8, on page 7 as well, it tells me that you're going to "provide facilitation support to the new regional health authorities, and similar bodies." Well, I thought they had their own staffs to do that, so I'd be curious to see what it is you're providing for them. Once again, would they contract with the department? Would they pay the department? Would they provide revenue to the department, or do you provide that service free of charge? Item 9 is the same kinds of questions. I don't really understand, and I wish you'd flesh out 7, 8, and 9 for me.

Items 11 and 12. I must once again express my dismay. The advisory council in item 11 I think has done excellent work and provided you with some very good recommendations. In item 12 you're saying that community organizations will be empowered to speak directly to government. Will there be a secretariat to provide for this? How do you anticipate doing it?

#### 8:50

Still in the business plan, on page 16, related to revenues by source, admission fees. These are going to go up slightly. Now, I understand that the fees for the two auditoria are now removed from that. Can you tell me, then, if we're seeing an increase in fees for the other facilities, or is this a total decrease? That's not explained or broken down, Mr. Minister, and I would appreciate that.

On page 18 of the business plan, here is a measure: proportion of eligible seniors receiving the Alberta seniors' benefit.

A desired outcome . . . is the provision of supplementary income support to all eligible low-income seniors. The fifth key measure will determine whether or not the Ministry has successfully achieved its goals of reaching and providing appropriate support to all eligible seniors.

I want to know, I need to know, Mr. Minister, how you plan to do that and how you would define appropriate. Those are two things that I think seniors have a right to have answers to as well.

Mr. Chairman, the Human Rights Commission: another member will speak to that.

Now, if I can address myself to the Alberta seniors' benefit and those other programs that relate to seniors in our province which are not covered but I believe contribute to seniors' well-being in Alberta. Mr. Chairman, as I understand it, approximately 250,000 persons in Alberta were 65 years of age or older as of last fall. There should be a projection of 258,000 seniors in 1995, so we are looking at an increase. The Alberta seniors' benefit gross expenditure for last year of \$113.5 million covers only a nine-month period, while the gross expenditure in current estimates is \$148 million over 12 months. If you look at that, we see a reduction on a monthly basis, Mr. Minister, of \$250,000 a month. Now, when I asked a question a few days ago regarding this, you explained that there were some other factors. I would like to see those numbers that you have projected that give you some confidence in reducing that amount per senior while the number of seniors has increased, because I have a little difficulty putting those two together.

Mr. Chairman, the examination of the Alberta seniors' benefit on a monthly per capita basis shows that for seniors in 1994-95, if we simply divide by the number of seniors in the province, it comes out to \$50.68 per senior per month. In this year that we're now entering, they are reduced to \$48.22 a month, and I'm not sure what the basis is for that decision. This represents in total a further 5 percent cut to seniors on a per capita basis, and that we add to the already rather difficult cut of 17 percent which has been documented for seniors to date. Perhaps the minister could comment on that.

The ASB came into effect on the 1st of July. It was announced in the budget of that year, 1994, and it began on the 1st of July. The original intent was to eliminate five programs and replace them with one income-tested program, as we understand. These were consolidated under the guise of restructuring and the provision of a one-window access point. Supposedly, this was going to be much easier for seniors to manage. The true intent, I submit, Mr. Chairman, was to cut approximately \$100 million out of the benefits to Alberta seniors.

My recollection tells me that as soon as we saw the budget, seniors flooded the budget hot line. The budget telephone hot line soon became the seniors' telephone hot line. There was nothing more contentious than the loss of extended health benefits. Under the ASB as originally proposed, seniors would lose the direct subsidy towards dentures, dental work, and prescription eyeglasses and receive a paltry, I considered it, cash sum each month in lieu of, if they were eligible under the income test. Seniors were understandably outraged and very angry.

Each of the province's 248,000 seniors received an original ASB discussion paper promoting the plan, which would have seen the disappearance of the EHB, the extended health benefits program, and the introduction of a payment of the pharmacy dispensing fee for Blue Cross drug prescriptions. The government then held roundtables around the province to appear to listen and to care and in an attempt to explain the changes, which had been poorly explained in the literature. In fact, it had been somewhat distorted, and I think the minister moved quite quickly to change that and redefine the information. The seniors' rage, then, was building throughout the province. In any event, Mr. Chairman, the government beat a quick retreat and dropped the notion of

paying for pharmacists' dispensing fees, dropped the idea of eliminating the extended health benefits, said that Health would continue to provide dental and optic subsidy, and then we saw the transfer of \$7,500,000 from the ASB to Health. I'm grateful for that, Minister, that it was not chopped.

The EHB program was to be restructured. Eventually it was slashed from \$29 million to \$17 million, to take effect January 1 of '95, so our delight was short-lived. But the major problem was that the 248,000 pieces of literature originally mailed out were now wrong. The thresholds were changed marginally, the EHB was retained, the monthly cash disbursement was lowered, the Blue Cross prescription dispensing fee was dropped, and the co-payment on drugs was increased from 20 percent to 30 percent, a 50 percent increase in the cost of drugs as the result of consultation. Pretty soon new literature and application forms went out, very unclear forms by the way. Changes to Blue Cross proposed in the first paper were not even mentioned in the final one. The method of calculating income thresholds was ambiguous whether thresholds were before or after alleged deductions of old age pension and GIS, with the result that tens of thousands of people, Mr. Chairman, phoned the hot line.

Further adding to calls and administration costs was the dropping of the Alberta assured income program. Many seniors had not received their application packages, and they were very concerned about that. Application forms asked for an OAS number starting with an eight, but the federal government had done away with the eight prefix years ago. All of this contributed to a tremendous amount of worry and anxiety and fear, Mr. Minister, is the word I use, fear.

I have some considerable number of questions that I need to ask the minister, Mr. Chairman. Why was the Seniors Advisory Council, which reported to the Minister of Community Development, moved to Health when this government claims to advocate a co-ordinated one-window approach for seniors' programs? In fact, that was originally part of the ASB. Why was it moved out of there? If the ASB is to be a one-window program, why is a significant part of it someplace else?

#### 9:00

Given that the ASB was introduced just eight months ago and that seniors have faced cuts to programs of 17 percent already, why is the ASB being cut an additional 5 percent on a per capita basis? It seems to me, Mr. Minister, that Alberta seniors have suffered enough. They are telling me that, and I'm sure they're telling all members that. They are having difficulty understanding how they're going to be able to manage to stay in their own home or even in subsidized housing.

The extraordinary prescription costs, Mr. Minister: what provisions or relief has the government made for seniors who face these? I know there's an upper limit, but what about the high prescription costs if you're on several which fall under the \$25 cap, especially since these seniors faced a 50 percent increase in the cost of the copayment already? What form of appeal do we have if seniors are facing an increasing difficulty as a result of it?

Back to my question about your measurements, Mr. Minister.

The fifth key measure will determine whether or not the Ministry has successfully achieved its goals of reaching and providing appropriate support to all eligible seniors.

What is appropriate support, and how do you determine that?

Now, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Minister, I'm pleased to hear that an appeals process is going to be put in place utilizing the social services appeals methodology that's already there, adding, I

suppose, one senior to each board or perhaps a different proportion if it is a senior's appeal. I'd like more information about that.

What about the other seniors' programs, Mr. Minister, that don't fall into ASB that significantly impact a senior's capacity to lead a decent quality of life? What about the appeals to extended health benefits? What about the appeals regarding housing, regarding the proliferation of boarding houses without standards for seniors, regarding drugs, regarding home care where it is not judged by a doctor to be medically necessary but is in fact medically necessary if the senior is shipped out of hospital on an early discharge? Perhaps it's only housekeeping.

I described to the Minister of Health last week a case that had come to me where housekeeping is not considered a medical service. It doesn't appear on the surface to add to the treatment or to be considered treatment. The individual cannot be discharged from hospital unless they have somebody to provide perhaps shopping, perhaps some cleaning, laundry services, and so on. It is not under Alberta health insurance, and it is not considered necessary to the medical well-being. I don't know what those seniors are doing. They're the ones that express a great deal of fear.

Mr. Chairman, just in respect to the appeals process. What benchmarks do you have for performance with respect to appeals? Will you put in a maximum permissible time span between initiation and time of the hearing? A lot of seniors who are in difficulty are elderly and frail, and the appeals process in itself provides a great deal of anxiety. If they have the courage to go to it, I think we should commend them but not drag it out longer than we possibly can avoid.

The 1-800 telephone line: can you give us some idea of the cost? How many positions have been created as a result of the phone line developing into a permanent feature? Are these positions permanent? How are they filled? Were they advertised? Was there an open competition? I know we had to second people from other parts of the department, the museum for instance, to man that line. Not to put down the museum staff, but I can't imagine people trained to serve in the museum being trained to answer a seniors' line. Well, they could be, but I'd like to know what kind of training program, what kind of permanence you have, and how it was advertised? There are a lot of people, Mr. Minister, who have been in the social service field who are now unemployed as a result of cuts, and I think they would be naturals. Does this also mean that you've reduced the museum staff by that number, and if they were there and weren't needed in the museum, why did we keep them on anyway? So I'm curious about that situation, Mr. Minister.

The application forms. In your reworking of these, does this expenditure include that? Will it include simple things like print large enough for seniors to read, a clear outlining of the threshold levels? Which deductions apply for each threshold, ASB or AHCIP subsidy? Mr. Minister, we understand that there are two separate calculations, one for AHCIP and one for the ASB. Do you have any intention to standardize or make uniform the calculation so that seniors are no longer confused by the fact that one set of threshold is made before deductions and one set is after deductions; that is, the ASB cash benefit? That, too, provides a lot of confusion in their minds. Likewise, the use of taxable income rather than gross income for ASB calculations. Any thought of moving to using taxable income?

Mr. Chairman, I have many questions. I hope to have another chance.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. How come my bulb is shorter than everybody else's bulb? Is it to match my height? Actually, I have the shortest bulb in the House.

MR. BRUSEKER: I wouldn't think you'd want to bring attention to that.

MR. DUNFORD: Now that I have the attention of the ministers of Energy and Health, Mr. Chairman, I want to make some comments.

I have some questions regarding programs 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, as a matter of fact. I wanted to indicate through the Chair to the minister that we are always delighted to have the estimates of Community Development, because as our minister he's one of us. He's part of that rookie class of '93, and he needs all the love and care and attention that he can get. So I always encourage his department officials to look after him, but I get a little nervous when I see that the looking after starts to cost us more. I realize that the minister in his opening remarks had indicated some reasons for the finance and administration costs to actually be increasing, but I would appreciate it if he would perhaps go over those again for me when he has an opportunity.

Under program 2, community services, specifically in the area of 2.1.6, I'd like to ask why the budget has been reduced by some \$32,000. Mr. Chairman, I am a big fan of libraries. We have worked hard in our particular region not only to continue the excellent health of the Lethbridge Public Library, but certainly we have worked extremely hard for the Chinook Arch regional library system, and I'd like to be able to retain the confidence that these programs are going to be able to extend on into the foreseeable future.

#### 9:10

Before I leave program 2, Mr. Chairman, again to the minister, I notice in the urban park development grants that, you know, once again we're showing a decrease. As the chairman of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act, I am of course familiar with what we are doing in the sense of closing down the capital projects division. I just want to again be on the record.

That whole urban park development situation has been one of I think tremendous resource to particular communities, but I feel like somehow this government has reneged. We all are aware in our daily lives that quite often the cheapest cost of anything is the purchase price. If I can turn that analogy around, perhaps the cheapest cost of the whole urban parks was the actual construction of that urban park. I believe that we have to examine our role in this. I believe there were commitments made at the time the urban parks were constructed that the government of Alberta would be there in terms of the dollars that would be required to operate these urban parks, and I just want to be sure that the government of Alberta is in fact meeting its commitments that were made at the time.

In program 3, I don't have any comments on the items that are listed there, but I keep looking for one. Under cultural facilities and historical resources I would just want to advise you, Mr. Chairman and the minister and other members of the House, that one of my last official acts as a real person was to be involved with the Peigan nation in something that was called Keep Our Circle Strong. I'm hoping that those folks, with the assistance of both the provincial government and the federal government, will find a way in which to bring that project along so that someday I might be able to stand here in the House and look at program 3,



cultural facilities and historical resources, and perhaps find a 3.0.10 that would be the Keep Our Circle Strong cultural centre. I'm really supportive of what they're trying to do, and I hope that they will find a way and I hope that this ministry can find a way to help that along.

The only comment I want to make on program 4, individual rights and citizenship services, is in the area of 4.0.3. I notice that the Human Rights Commission's budget is continuing to decrease, and actually I'm encouraged by that because that would be a signal to me that their wish to get involved in initiating investigations perhaps means that that has not been acceptable and that we don't have to budget money for that activity. They made it a recommendation from their report. I posed it in the times that I've had an opportunity to meet directly with them, and of course I want to be on record tonight as opposing that kind of a situation. The Human Rights Commission is there to respond to the needs of individuals that arrive in some difficulty, but it's the responsibility of the individual to come forward. It is not the responsibility of members of the staff of the Human Rights Commissions to start making work projects for themselves.

In the area of the Alberta seniors' benefit the only thing I would like to say is that I'm in contact . . . [interjection] Sorry, Mr. Chairman, I was momentarily distracted. It seems like members in the House still want to comment on my bulb.

In the seniors benefit area I make it a practice to go over to the seniors' centre on a fairly frequent basis for coffee. I like to think that I'm in fairly good contact with the Lethbridge Senior Citizens Organization, which, Mr. Chairman, you might find interesting in the fact that they have over 4,000 paid members. It must be one of the largest volunteer groups in the province. We're in continual contact, and quite frankly many of them were relieved to hear the Premier give an indication that there would be some investigation into the situation that seniors have found themselves in with the restructuring, with downsizing, and with reductions to budgets. I think there quite justifiably is a need to examine just the stacking effect that may have taken place on the seniors and their particular programs.

Now, I wouldn't want to be misunderstood. In that examination I frankly don't have any problem with the programs that have been reduced or in fact eliminated. If we find that there is a stacking problem on seniors, when we go back in to revise or to correct, I would make the suggestion at this point that we just simply look at the threshold level. I'm a strong believer in dollars being votes and that seniors ought to have, if they are to have more flexibility, dollars in their jeans with which they can then vote what services, what programs, or whatever it is they wish to spend that on.

Mr. Chairman, with that – and I hope I haven't been too disruptive with some of my side issues – I hope that the minister will be able to respond to those concerns.

**THE ACTING CHAIRMAN:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**MR. DICKSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are a number of matters I want to raise with respect to the estimates for Community Development. I wanted to start by focusing on the Alberta Human Rights Commission, and I'd preface my specific questions with this observation. I'd start by incorporating by reference the comments I made on March 10, 1994. I'm disappointed I have to refer the minister back to page 559 because it's an indication of how little has changed in terms of the concerns that I and other members raised one year ago.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, one of the things I found interesting – I along with a lot of other Albertans waited with great interest to hear the unveiling of the 1995-1996 budget, and I was of course keen, as was everybody else, to look at A Better Way II and to look at the three-year plan. What I found fascinating was that if one looks at the entire three-year plan for this particular department, the only reference – the only reference – to the Alberta Human Rights Commission is on page 3, when it's listed along with five other agencies.

You know, as one looks through the vision and the mission and the goals and the objectives and the actions and the strategies, nowhere – nowhere – do we find in here the plan for the Alberta Human Rights Commission. Now, in March of 1994, when I addressed this, we understood that there was a review under way, so one might have expected and understood at that time why the minister wasn't there with a plan, wasn't there to tell us what he was going to do. But there's been an intervening act. The intervening act is the fact that finally we received the report entitled *Equal in Dignity and Rights: A Review of Human Rights in Alberta* by the Alberta Human Rights Review Panel.

Now, there's a cover letter in the report, which is part of the bound volume, addressed to the Hon. Gary G. Mar, QC, Minister of Community Development, dated June 1994. Albertans, as well as this Member for Calgary-Buffalo, have been waiting and waiting and waiting for a response from the minister, not a throwaway comment here about the government not having money for an additional program there or some beefed up resources over here. There's been a deafening silence, Mr. Chairman, from the minister with respect to this report. So I would start by asking the minister to please tell us and tell Albertans: what was the final cost of the review? The projection at one point had been between \$190,000 and \$240,000. What's the final tally for the report?

**9:20**

I'd like an update from the minister in terms of what the average wait is now for a complaint to be investigated. Members will remember that it was just last year, in the fall, I believe, or spring and summer of 1994, when the commission was sending out a letter to complainants saying: we can't even look at your complaint for perhaps six months or more. So I'd like an update from the minister in terms of what's happened there.

Now, with respect to the report, what I find so curious, Mr. Chairman, is that this report was prepared not by the opposition, not by a group of human rights advocates, not by one of those special interest groups that the government is always so alert to identify and so quick to avoid. No, this was a report submitted by a group of Albertans selected, appointed by this minister and his government. I just want to spend a moment and identify the people on that review panel: Jim Casey from Edmonton; Jean Forest; Del Iannucci; Roy Louis; Jack O'Neill, the former chief commissioner; Ron Scrimshaw; Ross Watson; Amal Umar.

You know, these people came up with a number of specific recommendations, and Albertans are waiting for a response from the government. This is long past the time when the government might reasonably be expected to come back and give a specific response to each of the recommendations. So I'm going to take a moment right now, Mr. Chairman, and put the questions to the minister and ask him for a detailed and a specific response to each of these questions.

Firstly, I want to ask the minister whether he is now prepared to respond to the recommendation that the Alberta Human Rights Commission be made independent of a single minister, that it

report to this body, this House, through the agency of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices.

I want to know what the response of the minister is to the specific recommendations with respect to a representative committee from the aboriginal community, and I am distressed . . .

#### **Chairman's Ruling Relevance**

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, hon. member. I've been trying for some time to relate your comments to the estimates that we have before us. I would really appreciate it if you could tie those in with each and every one of those questions with respect to whether or not they in fact relate to the estimates we have before us.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I'm happy to tie them in, and I'll preface every question I ask by referring to element 4. I want to make sure the minister knows exactly which vote and which element I'm referring to. I just make the observation, Mr. Chairman, that I've always felt that it's the program that drives the budget, not the other way around, and I think my constituents and many Albertans feel the same way.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, moving on, there had been a specific recommendation in terms of the aboriginal community having a representative committee to have input into the workings of the Human Rights Commission. Now, I don't know what the cost is, and I'm surprised that we haven't had a response from the government on this one. In fact, I daresay that the Premier has shown a singular kind of commitment and, I think, outstanding leadership in terms of addressing the concerns of aboriginal Albertans. So I'm mystified that those recommendations on page 13 relating to aboriginal people and the Human Rights Commission have never been responded to in any public fashion at all.

There were a series of recommendations in terms of adding a full-time mediator and intake person and support staff in each of the Human Rights Commission offices as well as upgrading the hardware and telephone systems. I'm asking the minister to specifically respond to that and how that's going to impact element 4.0.1.

Now, Mr. Chairman, the recommendation of the Equal in Dignity and Rights report was for a standing board of inquiry instead of the boards of inquiry set up on an ad hoc basis. This would have been an important cost saving, and it might even have the impact of reducing element 4.0.3 in future years. So I want to ask the minister what his response is about having a standing tribunal instead of the additional cost and delay involved with setting up separate boards of inquiry.

There were specific recommendations in terms of making the commission offices physically accessible to Albertans with physical disabilities and making it more accessible to walk-in traffic. There may be a cost component to that, so I'd like to have the minister respond. What does he plan on doing about that recommendation? If there's a cost feature, please inform us.

Mr. Chairman, an enormous concern with respect to the selection of the chief commissioner and commissioners. Once again, this is vote 4.0.3. The point is that we have a number of vacancies on the commission, and we still have this ongoing and vexing problem where Albertans don't understand what the criteria are. Why is it that we have some outstanding people with

extensive and impressive backgrounds in human rights that apply and are screened out, do not become commissioners? We have other people who become converts to a strong advocacy position whose term is not continued. I'd like to know what the minister's response is to the recommendation on page 15 of the Equal in Dignity report in terms of an all-party legislative committee selecting the chief commissioner and other commissioners.

With respect to education the minister may recall that a year ago I'd asked about that report that had been done by the Alberta Human Rights Commission and the Department of Education that undertook a survey of Alberta youth in grades 8 and 11 and recommended that it be done again three years later. Well, the third anniversary was a year ago; still no response from the minister on that important issue.

In continuing on with vote 4.0.3, there's a question in terms of existing grounds of discrimination and whether we will see the definition of age being deleted so it's broader than currently exists. In terms of disability there are a number of specific recommendations, and I'd like the minister to respond to the recommendations at page 16 that relate to disability, to the recommendation with respect to the removal of section 9 from the Individual's Rights Protection Act. Marital status: I'd like his response in terms of the recommendation that "marital status apply to all areas, not just to employment." I'm interested in his response to the recommendation on gender and sexual harassment as well as on race and religious belief.

There was a recommendation to expand the legislation insofar as it deals with expression to notices, and I'd like a response from the minister to that specific recommendation. This government still does not have an employment equity practice, a practice that's been adopted and has been effective with the city of Calgary. I'd like to ask the minister to respond to the recommendation on page 18 of the report. I'd like his specific response to recommendations dealing with criminal record, family status, political belief, sexual orientation, source of income, systemic discrimination, workplace abuse and harassments, and then, finally, to the list of other recommended changes to the Act which appear at page 20.

#### **9:30**

Mr. Chairman, I'm distressed to report that this may be the only forum where we have this minister on behalf of this government telling Albertans what we got for our \$200,000. So we will look forward to the response of the minister on each of those points.

Mr. Chairman, a couple of other points I wanted to raise. In terms of seniors, I think it's somewhat ironic that the government talks and couches the budget presentation in terms of people, prosperity, and preservation. When I look at the seniors in Calgary-Buffalo, some 13 percent, almost 14 percent of the downtown Calgary population are seniors. In East Village, Victoria Park, Eau Claire, and in Chinatown we've got a large number of seniors living alone, well over 4,000 seniors. If you look at a recent study - and I'd commend this to the hon. minister - the Calgary health needs assessment that's being conducted for the Calgary regional health authority, a report that I'm confident the Minister of Health is conversant with and would be happy to share with this minister. It is, I think, of a great deal of concern: the concentration of low-income seniors who have a great deal of problems with the recent initiatives we've seen over the last year.

There's confusion over the Alberta seniors' plan application. There's confusion, as my colleague pointed out a moment ago, between the Alberta seniors' benefit application and calculation and the different calculation for the Alberta health care insurance plan. I hear a great number of complaints from seniors in

downtown Calgary with respect to prescription costs. The reality is that the \$25 cap still means that many, many seniors require multiple prescriptions, many of which are below the cap, and it's an ongoing concern. Presumably, this is one of the things that the government is reacting to by talking about a renewed consultation with seniors. I just indicate again that this continues to be a source of a large volume of calls and complaints to my office. I'm looking for some action from the government and less consultation. The government has had almost a year of feedback on these initiatives, and I think that we should be able to move beyond that now.

There were some other items I wanted to raise, Mr. Chairman. In the three-year plan for the department at page 7, goal 1, action 4, there is a wonderful sounding plan to ensure that Alberta maintains the kind of leadership role Albertans are accustomed to in terms of the national information highway. I guess I'd ask the minister to consult with his cabinet colleagues, because at the same time that the minister is ready to take Albertans leaping across another canyon in terms of information management and information network, we still have what I suggest is an embarrassing situation in this province where Albertans can't get access to statutory instruments, to regulations, to ministerial orders, to orders in council, to normal regulations and statutes. What's happening is that the government seems to be flirting with the notion that they're going to sell that information. Another user fee, Mr. Chairman. I'd like this minister, who is boldly prepared to embrace an electronic Alberta library network, to realize that maybe we start by informing Albertans on the kinds of core elements of law and regulation in this province. The minister could demonstrate, I think, terrific leadership by following up on a suggestion that's been made by a number of entrepreneurs who want on-line electronic access to statutes, regulations, and *Hansard*. I've made the recommendation before to the Premier, a year ago when we did estimates on the Executive Council office - still received no response. I'm anxious to see us move forward on that.

Goal 3 on page 9 of the plan for the department: national regional film classification system. I understand the objective. Censor boards have bedeviled governments in Alberta and other jurisdictions for certainly longer than I can remember. What can the minister tell us in terms of what other provinces feel? Do they share the standards of this government in terms of tolerance and film classification? I mean, I understand the goal and the plan, but I want to know what work has been done to make this minister think and for us to believe that this is imminent, that this measure of co-operation exists or is close to happening? Having said that, I want to be clear on the record: I support a film classification system. If it can be done in conjunction with other provinces and the costs shared, that makes excellent sense, because the market is indeed not a provincial market, but it's at least a regional if not a national one. Does this contemplate not only films shown in commercial theatres but video movies as well? So I'd be interested in his indication in that respect.

I guess I'd like to conclude by drawing the minister's attention to the concern that I hear a lot about in downtown Calgary from arts groups and from libraries. You know, the Calgary Public Library is a leader in this country. It's not only got one of the best records in terms of circulation, but most significantly I think and of particular interest to this government, it's one of the most cost-effective. So I'm interested in whether they're going to be heard in library planning.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

9:40

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am happy to say, Mr. Chairman, that my experience at going to estimates last year has been repeated again this year. I've listened very carefully to many people on both sides of the House, and while I may not always agree with them I always find the comments that are made to be sometimes persuasive and sometimes not persuasive but always meritorious of being considered.

To start with, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore, it appears to me, has a very, very strong understanding of the importance of community development. He did talk about issues respecting quality of life, and I'd like to address that just briefly. There's no doubt in my mind that the Department of Community Development can be characterized as being a department that contributes strongly to the quality of life in the province of Alberta. Sometimes that is something that is difficult to quantify. It's easy to qualify because we all understand the importance of recreational opportunities. We understand the importance of fair treatment of people. We understand the importance of the arts and culture. We understand the importance of clean environments and parks. Accordingly, I would just make this observation. It's often brought home about the importance of quality of life if you simply ask someone: why do you live where you live? People will frequently answer by saying, "I live where I live because the quality of life is good." Many of the things that are housed within this department contribute strongly to quality of life.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore asked questions about the tenants that are currently within the Word Works and McLeod buildings. He asked whether or not we would guarantee a place for all of those tenants in other facilities. The answer to that question, Mr. Chairman, is no. We have offered 15 provincial arts organizations space at the Percy Page Centre, and seven of those organizations will be moving next weekend. The choral association that he referred to has relocated to private space, and seven others have also opted to find their own office space. When he mentioned groups like the Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association and the recording arts industry, they find that being located downtown makes a good deal more sense to them. Accordingly, that's what they wish to do. Many of the tenants in the McLeod Building in particular are groups that have a focus on activities in the city of Edmonton, and I would expect the city of Edmonton to be of some assistance to them.

The hon. member also asked whether or not we are backing away from our support to municipal, recreation, and tourism areas. Originally the budget for each of those MRTAs was \$20,000 per annum. What our plan calls for is a reduction over the two-year period, so it will be \$10,000 per annum. I should point out that there are over 270 such sites throughout the province. Many of these facilities have done a very good job of assisting with the tourism promotion in the area. I believe that the fact is that some of these MRTAs are going to have some difficulty in dealing with a reduction in their budget of \$10,000, but the majority of the 270-some MRTAs will be in good condition.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore also asked about why element 1.0.3, finance and administration, was showing an increase. He was correct that the increase I explained in my original comments was related to the distribution of central agency costs across government for administration and payroll, accounts payable, and risk management. Originally those costs were picked up by Treasury, and now they are being picked up by each department.

He also asked about the reduction of \$346,000 in GRF funding to the Royal Tyrrell Museum and what effect it would have on its function as a major tourism destination for the province and a substantial contributor to the regional economy. There's no doubt that if you ask anybody in Drumheller about the importance of the Royal Tyrrell Museum, they will tell you that it is absolutely a vital hub in the economic development and the tourism development in that area. This is one of the facilities that I would not only classify as being a world-class facility but in fact a world's best type of facility. There is the decrease of \$346,000 in GRF funding. The reduced funding should be more than offset by new, self-generated revenues through facilities that are located at the museum itself. Certainly the Royal Tyrrell Museum being as important as it is, we would want to make every effort to continue its premier status as an outstanding facility.

Edmonton-Avonmore also asked why there was an increase in the ministry's FTEs. There was an addition of 19 FTEs, which were required to operate the Alberta seniors' benefit program, and there was a decrease of 11.5 FTEs in other areas, resulting in a net increase of 7.5 FTEs.

The Member for Edmonton-Avonmore asked about the difference between administration costs of \$1.8 million and \$2.1 million for the seniors' benefit program. I can advise the member that \$1.8 million was the amount for direct program administration and \$0.3 million was the indirect administration. So the ongoing costs on an annual basis will be \$2.1 million.

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

The member asked if we were thinking of privatizing library services. The answer to that categorically and unequivocally is no. Certainly the importance of the libraries that we have in the province of Alberta has been made very, very clear to me. I am an enormous supporter of libraries. I believe that in an age of information these facilities, our libraries, are really a great source of pride. As the Member for Calgary-Buffalo alluded to, the Calgary Public Library should be a great source of pride to all Albertans. Our regional library systems are also an outstanding example and are really a model for libraries throughout the rest of the country. We certainly are looking at partnering up with community groups wherever we can, such as having local libraries house the talking and multilingual book program, but there's no intention in any way, shape, or form to privatize libraries.

I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore who asked about urban park development grants. Certainly these urban parks have been a major contributor to quality of life in the province of Alberta. One need only ask people who live in the cities that have these parks how important those parks are to them.

I think it was this member who asked: which cities would receive grants under the program in 1995-96? Seven cities and Strathcona county will receive funds from the 1995-96 budget. The seven cities are St. Albert, Fort McMurray, Camrose, Fort Saskatchewan, Spruce Grove, Airdrie, and Wetaskiwin. The cities of Calgary, Edmonton, and Leduc will not be receiving any funding.

Going on to the questions that were asked by the Member for Calgary-Egmont. He asked how the government is going to assist cities with the completion of their projects from a safety point of view and in terms of legal liability. The staff of Alberta Community Development have met with city representatives to ensure that the contractual obligations that are in place will result in the completion of phases of development for the safety and benefit of

community residents. Each city has been told how much they will be receiving in each year for the remainder of the program in order to complete their parks.

I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont also asked another question, but I don't recall what it was off the top of my head. I'll certainly make every effort to review *Hansard* and provide written answers in order to complete a full answering of the questions which were asked this evening.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is someone that I must say I often listen to closely, and although I may not always agree with this person, I have a great deal of respect for her. She did ask about what the main functions of community services field offices were. There are 10 community development field service offices across the province, and they are staffed by community development officers who make every effort to increase the level of leadership and self-reliance and local problem solving in communities throughout the province.

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She also asked about the impact of reductions to element 2.1.5, recreation and sport services. The reductions to that element will have a minimal impact on the customer groups. The experience has been – and I believe that my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View will confirm this – that with greater efficiencies in the partnerships that we've established with other agencies, many of these services are being delivered at a lower cost. I'm certainly prepared to talk about the many partnerships that are currently in place and some new partnerships, but perhaps I can do that by way of providing a written answer.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar made a statement to the effect that homemaking or other assistance or snow shoveling was somehow not available. There is in fact a program that I've been advised about by the Minister of Health. There is a \$5 an hour fee to a maximum of \$300 a month available for these services and also a waiver of that fee for persons who are unable to pay it. The funds received from this stay with the jurisdiction to be used to enhance home support programs in that jurisdiction.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar also asked about the changes in revenues for the cultural facilities and historical resources division that reflect the admission fee increases at provincial museums and heritage facilities. The change in revenues reflects in part our anticipation of more visitors at many of our facilities. In addition, we now intend to introduce a \$1 admission fee at some of our smaller facilities which previously did not charge at all for admission.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked a question about the Seniors Advisory Council and its move from the Department of Community Development to the Department of Health. Certainly in speaking with seniors throughout this province, perhaps the predominant concern that seniors spoke about was with respect to the area of health and would health care be available and what kind of programs would be available. Accordingly, many of the issues that were dealt with by the Seniors Advisory Council related to health issues. The Seniors Advisory Council will be able to discuss their concerns with seniors and provide advice directly to the Minister of Health in regard to health issues.

Mr. Chairman, there are some questions that were asked by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West. I had an opportunity to speak with the Member for Lethbridge-West the other day, who was kind enough to bring himself to my constituency and speak about the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. I will repeat for the members here in committee what I said the other day about the Member for Lethbridge-West, and that was this: whenever I

found my own point of view to be at variance with that of the Member for Lethbridge-West, the very fact that there would be a variance is always cause for me to relook at my own position, because I believe that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West takes a great deal of care in drawing his views and conclusions.

He did ask about the funding for the establishment of the Chinook Arch regional library system in this year's budget. The second part of \$300,000 for the establishment of this, the last of Alberta's original library systems' headquarters, is included in line 2.2.4, and it certainly gave me a great deal of pleasure to meet with my colleague in Lethbridge for the opening of that facility last year.

The hon. member also asked about the Human Rights Commission and how can the Human Rights Commission deal with a backlog when its budget is being reduced again. Its budget was reduced in part to reflect the fact that there is not a consultation process going on in the current year. Certainly the commission has done a good job of streamlining its procedures to achieve an increased efficiency. I am happy to advise the hon. member, as well as the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, that five staff members have been seconded from other parts of my department in order to deal with the backlog of cases that existed, and that backlog has been reduced.

Mr. Chairman, there are many other questions that were asked by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and all other members. However, in the interests of time I would reiterate that I am prepared to provide written answers upon my review of *Hansard* and answer those questions that I believe are relevant to the discussions regarding my estimates.

Accordingly, at this time, Mr. Chairman, I would ask that we adjourn debate.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Community Development has moved that we adjourn debate at this time. All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I move the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

MR. HERARD: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Community Development, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 9:59 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

