

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 21, 1995**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 95/03/21

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: We'd call the committee to order.

head: Main Estimates 1995-96

Labour

THE CHAIRMAN: The Committee of Supply this evening has under further consideration the estimates of the Department of Labour. We'll ask the Acting Minister of Labour, the hon. Minister of Health, to make a few opening comments relative to the estimates.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to introduce the re-examination or continued examination of the estimates for the Department of Labour on behalf of my colleague, the Minister of Labour. We're certainly looking forward to the comments from both sides of the House on these estimates, and we'll be taking notes and responding appropriately.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. I thought that the hon. minister would want to supplement the Acting Minister of Labour's comments, and that's why I hesitated in arising as quickly as I might.

I'd like first to thank the minister for his replies to each and every one of the speakers who asked very appropriate and incisive questions at the first round of debate or questioning that we had with regards to the estimates. I would also like all the other ministers to take note that the hon. Minister of Labour actually took the time to read each one of the responses that were prepared. I'm not sure that the hon. minister prepared the responses himself. I think he probably had help from the Department of Labour. But he took the time – he's motioning that he did have input into the process – to actually add footnotes to explain and expound on the information that was typed. I think that shows a great concern and a lot of personal commitment to the portfolio, and perhaps the other ministers should take note of that. I think that's a fine example the Minister of Labour has put forward.

When I had a chance to look through the multitude of documentation with regards to the Labour estimates, I found there were some questions I still had with regards to certain areas. Some are as a follow-up of the initial questions that were asked . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Order, hon. members. We are getting to a sufficient level that we're beginning to drown out, even making it difficult for the Table to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, so if we could contain our voices.

Edmonton-Meadowlark to continue.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. I never thought my voice was that quiet that anyone could drown me out, but I guess that's possible in this Assembly.

I did have some questions that arose out of the estimates on March 1, and I'd like to just run through those quickly so we can then go on to the other questions I had that I wasn't able to ask in our first go-round on the estimates. With regards to the issue of the agreement on internal trade that comes into effect on July 1, 1995, there is, as the minister is aware, a labour mobility chapter that will require that certain areas within Labour are reconciled in terms of standards across the country. If we move one further step from that, there are certain international agreements we will become involved in that will require some standardization in terms of labour standards, in terms of occupational health and safety, perhaps with regards to occupational standards and qualifications. My question within this particular area is: are there any funds that are now allocated that I have not been able to ascertain within the estimates with regards to looking at these areas and ensuring that we do fall within the parameters as outlined within the agreements?

I know the issue of mobility within provinces is a sensitive issue. I'm sure the minister has received phone calls, as I have, from individuals, particularly in the construction industry, who find it hard to understand why some employers tend to prefer out-of-province employees as opposed to employing within Alberta first. As I indicated, that's a sensitive topic, but when we have unemployed construction workers within the province at this point in time, it's a question that I think needs to be asked, especially when, it's my understanding – and I have not myself gone to look at the situation – that in certain parts of northern Alberta there appear to be as many Saskatchewan licence plates on the parking lots of work sites as there are Alberta licence plates.

[Mr. Herard in the Chair]

I have a question with regards to the employment standards area. There was a comment made that the issuance of permits relating to schemes of employment was reduced significantly through modification of policies and procedures. I'm interested to know which permits and schemes of employment are being referred to here, whether those are things such as overtime permits. I would like some further clarification on that.

Within the competency-based classification and compensation area there was a statement made: now provides financial incentives for employees, particularly those who provide direct services to Alberta Labour clients to acquire the skills and competencies they require to help the department meet its business objectives. I'm interested in knowing whether the department is, then, providing for upgrading for these particular individuals. What kind of skills and competencies would these individuals require if the department is providing time off so that these employees can be in a position to obtain the financial incentives that the classification system provides for?

There was an area in terms of mediation. There's a couple of areas but one in particular that I'd like to address at this point in time because it ties into my concerns with a labour dispute that's currently ongoing within Alberta, and that is the projectionists. One of the items mentioned in terms of the privatization of the mediation services is that the preventive mediation program that was formerly offered by the department and which the department was very successful at in the past, it's my understanding, is no longer available within the department and that in fact it will be a contracted-out service that will be provided, it sounds like, on a fee-for-service basis within the private sector, not within the department itself. I think that given what the labour record is of

work stoppages within this province, that, perhaps – and if I may be bold as to go this far without having the, so to speak, insider's knowledge – the area that should have been looked at being retained within Alberta Labour, within the mediation services with regards to preventive mediation is an area that I would strongly urge the minister to reconsider.

Now, we look at what's happening with the projectionists' dispute at this point in time. I realize they are going to have additional hearings in front of the Labour Relations Board in the next few days, but the fact of the matter is that if mediation perhaps had a stronger role in this particular strike, if there had been preventive mediation, perhaps the dispute would not be at the situation it is right now. It's laudable that Alberta Labour is looking through the issue management area at assisting with regards to attempting to come to a resolution either now or at some later point in time with regards to this dispute. The fact of the matter is that in talking to the union a couple of days ago, it looks like the dispute is not coming to a speedy resolution, and Alberta Labour, through mediation services, could perhaps have a stronger role within that particular dispute.

8:10

There are areas that I have grave concerns about and our caucus does as a whole in terms of the workforce adjustment strategies as well as the lack of severance pay for health care workers as a whole. I know that Alberta Labour in conjunction with the Health department has been an active participant in the workforce adjustment strategy. My question to the minister is: when the strategies and the dollars were initially allocated, were the number of employees that are projected to be laid off the number that was considered in the allocation of that \$15 million for workforce adjustment, \$5 million for education purposes? If the number projected to be laid off was underestimated, is the minister in a position, in conjunction with the Minister of Health, to look at allocating more dollars in this particular area? As the Minister of Labour is well aware, in Calgary where the workforce adjustment office has just recently opened up, there's a two-month waiting period to get in and that's without the layoffs that are currently occurring within that particular area.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the chair of the Council on Professions and Occupations. I would like to point out to the current chair that this is not picking on the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek question because I've asked similar questions of the member who was in that position prior to the current member. In the reply, what I have written here is that Albertans are getting good value for the dollars we are paying her. Well, if that's the case, I would like to know exactly how we put a dollar value on the time she's spending with the committee and whether there's an accounting of these activities. I'd like to know whether the member is willing to table how many meetings have been attended by that member, what the results of those meetings are, and any benchmarks that this particular council has put forward with regard to the activities of this council as well as with regard to the activities of this particular chair.

Important initiatives mentioned within this document talk about the fact that one of the initiatives the chair is currently involved in is the Health Workforce Rebalancing Committee. It's my understanding that the chair of that particular committee is the Member for Medicine Hat, and I wonder, you know, what the interplay is when we have a chair of a committee and then a chair of a council who then report to a minister.

The other item that was noted here is that the chair plays an invaluable role in co-ordinating professional issues and advising

the minister on appropriate policy objectives. Again, I would have thought that would have been the role of the departmental staff, and my question then comes . . .

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, I don't have a hearing problem, but I really can't hear the member speaking, so please keep it down. Thank you.

MS LEIBOVICI: If this is what chairs of various councils are supposed to be doing, then perhaps we do not need the support staff that reports to the minister with regard to those issues.

In terms of the health workforce education project, I would like to thank the minister for his answer that indicates that it has five focus areas: supporting emerging disciplines, facilitating review, restructuring of clinical student placement programs, et cetera. My question is: does the minister have any breakdown with regard to how those dollars are expended currently or how those dollars will be expended within those particular five areas? This is with regards to the health workforce education project, where \$5 million is allocated.

I have a question also with regards to, again, mediation services. I wonder if the minister would be able to supply the fee schedule for those mediation services. I noticed in the minister's reply that the Calgary office will be closed, and my question is: if there are services required within the Calgary area, who, then, pays the traveling fees for those mediators?

I have a question also with regards to laboratory services, which will be privatized on March 31 of 1996. My question is: is their privatization being co-ordinated and integrated with the regional health authorities with regards to the laboratory restructuring that's going on within that particular sector?

Those are my comments or questions with regards to some of the information that the minister so kindly provided on the estimates on March 1, 1995. I would like to continue with some further questions that I have with regards to the estimates.

I noticed in a draft document – no, it's not a draft actually. It's the Alberta Labour regulatory review action plan. Within that particular document there's mention that the minimum wage is to be reviewed by the government on an annual basis, I believe, with public stakeholder review. I may not be reading this chart particularly right, and if I'm not, if the minister would advise me of that, either now or at some later point. My question is: have there been any dollars allocated for that review to occur? I have not been able to find it within the budget that was submitted by the minister.

There was a question that I had asked a while ago in terms of the multiskilling concept within Alberta Labour, and I talked about it a little earlier as well with regards to competencies. My question is whether there are any dollars that are going to be attributed for employees within Alberta Labour to be able to become multiskilled, as it were. There was a statement in the December 19, '93, response to my questions at that point in time that said that these additional competencies in terms of multiskilling and specifically with regards to the Safety Codes Act will be acquired through extensive training offered. My question is: where are the dollars for that?

The Alberta Fire Training School, I'd like to know if there is an intention to privatize this at some point in time. It's a question that I've had, and I don't think I've had a chance to ask the minister. Will the Alberta Fire Training School be DAO'd as some of the other areas within Alberta Labour have been?

Another question that I have with the Alberta Fire Training School is: what are the dollars that are being brought in at this point in time with regards to that school? When I look at public

accounts last year, I notice that there are revenues that have been brought in to the Department of Labour, but there's no real breakdown as to what those dollars are. If the minister would be so kind as to provide that.

8:20

I have so many questions, I'm deciding which ones I should ask first.

I notice that there's a new section within the cover page of Alberta Labour that talks about:

Funding is provided for research and education projects addressing the development of solutions to workplace health and safety problems, the health and well-being of Alberta workers and the establishment of occupational health and safety associations.

When we look at the estimates, what is noticeable is that there have been increased dollars put into the areas for Safety Codes Council support and delegated administrative organization support. There is an increase in dollars, actually, in that particular program, 3.1, program support, as well as in the assistant deputy minister's office. There's been a decrease when you look at the program and policy audits. My comment there is: if we are looking at the allocation of dollars to government being substantially less than what we are seeing right now with the provision of these dollars, what we're seeing is an increase as a result of privatization.

Thank you.

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

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it's fitting that the Minister of Health did a little pinch hitting there, because, after all, there's a lot of labour strife in the health sector. Indeed, considering the quality and the brevity of her contribution, maybe it's understood why there is so much strife in that sector.

Nevertheless, I'm ever mindful of the Minister of Labour's pleas to look positively upon the affairs of the government and not to indulge in pure negative criticism. I've decided to heed his words. I have no desire to see a grown man cry, so I've got a whole series of questions, actually, that I would like to pose to the Minister of Labour.

To begin with, I turn to the booklet called Building a Strong Foundation. It's always remarkable how well these things have been put together. This deals with the three-year business plan highlights. Under Achievements, Mr. Chairman, those are in fact the items that have been achieved, that the minister has been able to implement. It says:

A primary strategy utilized by the department in its restructuring is what we have defined as the "third option". The first two options - cutting resources and privatizing functions - have as their main focus reductions in resource requirements. The third option is primarily concerned with developing employment opportunities for the private sector.

Those, Mr. Chairman, are what we on this side have occasionally referred to as the dreaded DAOs.

It seems that the Minister of Labour is the primary pusher of DAOs, which could well stand for something like Day's Alternative Objectives or Day's Airy-fairy Objectives. But I do hope that the minister does a thorough study before he launches into establishing a DAO, because I think it is not always true that the private sector will be able to do things less expensively than the government can. If I'm not mistaken, there's the case of the petroleum council, where in fact a thorough study had been done. The verdict was - it is rumoured anyway - that the private sector

would require far more of an expense to look after that, and therefore it should remain with the government. So that's important.

There are several DAOs that have been established, but one I'm very pleased to see is the boilers and pressure vessels industry. That's the one that the minister has used as an example whenever he referred to the establishment of DAOs in Bill 41 and the now defunct Bill 57. Never, I think, has a small sector of any industry loomed so large in the Legislature debate. So finally we see that the boiler and pressure industry has been channeled into a DAO. I think that's great.

Further, Mr. Chairman, the establishment of the international qualifications assessment service I think is a good idea too. It makes eminent sense because it provides Albertans with a means of assessing their qualifications internationally as well.

Now, I note, though, that in the establishment of those services there is no reference to any consultation with the people concerned, and I wonder whether the minister could elaborate on that. I have one small example of this, and that is the miners. Last year a miners' organization invited me as well as our Labour critic, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, to sit in on some meetings with members of the department. The discussion ranged far and wide and dealt to a very large extent with certification in the mining industry. It was the clear intent of the department people to change it, whereas the miners were not in favour of that at all because they felt that essentially whoever was involved in the mining industry from top to bottom should pass a course or a little test that would indicate that they would have some idea as to what mining was all about, and apparently that was possibly going to be taken away from them.

Well, this meeting took place last July, and since that time the miners haven't heard anything. They haven't heard as to whether the department has implemented their changes. They haven't been invited back to any further meetings. All in all they're kind of in limbo. I was just talking today to one of the union executives, and they haven't heard a thing. So I would like the Minister of Labour to clue us in here as to what the situation is now regarding the certification of mining. Since the minister is paying very close attention, I'm sure that an answer will be forthcoming.

Then we go on, Mr. Chairman, to the actual facts and figures. I don't want to know a great deal, but there are some questions that I would like to pose. For instance, there is very little information on the capital investment of \$571,000, and I'd like to know what it's going to be spent on.

Then we get to vote 2, issues management, and there is a decrease of \$367,000 in the mediation services. I really would like to know why that was hit so hard. It kind of indicates to me that mediation services are not considered to be very important to the minister, or perhaps it simply wasn't utilized because the parties who might want to use them felt that mediation services didn't perform very well. So I'd like to know what's happening there. Also, mediation services are now charging a fee, I understand, for their services. That's perhaps another reason why they're not employed very much. Perhaps the minister could tell me how large a fee they charge.

Then I move to vote 3, work and safety client services. Really the outstanding feature of that particular vote is that a lot of money, in my view, is being spent on administrative support. So perhaps the minister could elaborate on that one. Also, it seems that a number of positions, part-time and full-time, are being created, and perhaps he could tell us how many.

8:30

Now, in terms of further establishment of DAOs, delegated administrative organizations, another question: how many more is the minister planning to establish? Also, what I'd like to know: will the audits of the DAOs that have been established be made public? That's rather important. There are some changes, I think, since Bill 57 has been withdrawn, and perhaps he could tell us how the fees for the DAOs are going to be arrived at.

Vote 4, labour relations. There has not been much of a change in the funding nor in the FTEs, as far as I can see, and I wonder why that is. Perhaps the minister could explain why he has not applied the knife to that particular section.

Vote 5, occupational health and safety. The loss of how many FTEs does the decrease of \$511,000 represent? Also, why has radiation health and safety been cut back almost by half? That's quite sizable, and I haven't heard anything about a corresponding move to the private side. Now, which parts of occupational health and safety will become DAOs? He's talked about that before, and it's not very clear from the budget here.

Vote 6, development of policy and legislation for professions and occupations. Again there hasn't really been a change in the funding for that one, but a user fee of \$100 is attached to the international qualifications assessment services. I would find that a pretty stiff fee, but, Mr. Chairman, I'm one of these lucky folks whose income increased when he joined this particular body. So I'm not used to hundred dollar amounts to throw around as if it meant very little.

I have a few questions. The workforce rebalancing committee: what has the cost been up to now? From all the DAOs that are now in existence, what will be the projected revenues over the next three years? The minister should have an idea in his three-year plan.

That brings me to a conclusion here, Mr. Chairman. I have been deliberately low key in my approach. I want you to notice that. I've actually said some positive things here. What I have is mostly questions. I think generally the minister certainly has been able to decrease the funding for his department and shrink the amount of money that he is going to be using, and as long as the services aren't suffering, everything is good.

So on that note, I will end. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to just make a few general comments on Labour, and I want to approach it a bit differently than the Member for West Yellowhead. I guess I want to philosophize a bit on some of my thoughts as to where labour is headed at this particular time in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, I tend to look at what's happening here in Alberta, without any question, as creating a new Alberta, a restructured Alberta, an Alberta that we're going to end up with that is going to have no similarities to what was here eight or 10 years ago. Some parts of it will be good. Some parts of it will be better. But in the process we should all recognize that some people are hurt, and some people are hurt very severely, particularly those that find themselves being jobless in this restructuring process, and that's the category that I guess is the most difficult for any of us to deal with, particularly when one is out there seeking employment and the employment opportunities aren't there. I realize that's not the direct responsibility of the Minister of Labour, but it is the responsibility of government to

a degree, and as the minister is part of the government, he does have a degree of responsibility in that area.

There are some, too, within the labour force, Mr. Chairman, that have been very, very secure despite what's happened. The employees in the city of Edmonton, for example – I believe Calgary to a similar degree, maybe not quite as much – have been very, very fortunate in that they have remained relatively untouched compared to what's happened within the provincial government, compared to what's going to happen in the federal government, and compared to what's happened in the private sector. Then there are those that are caught in the middle, the ones that aren't jobless, the ones that don't have a further degree of security, not total security. The member to my right has corrected me that in the city of Calgary the employees have not been as fortunate as the city of Edmonton. Am I correct?

AN HON. MEMBER: That's true.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, the ones that I want to talk about a bit tonight are those that are caught in the middle, the middle between the jobless and those that feel relatively secure that have the benefit of collective agreements that do give them a measure of protection in terms of fringe benefits and such. It's a whole shifting. We see a lot of professional-type jobs being gone within the health care system, within the educational system, within a lot of the corporations. Yet when we stack up the numbers, we tend to stack up the numbers as having a greater level of employment than we had, let's say, two or three years ago. But those are the ones that I'm referring to. Those are the ones that are by and large in a lot of instances part-time employees, some working maybe six or eight hours a week, some working 12 hours a week with virtually no possibility of fringe benefits, no possibility of sharing within those plans that many full-time, permanent, protected workers tend to have. We see it happening so often that those particular workers can be gone so quickly.

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but I've been trying to make a link with the people in the middle that you're talking about and the actual estimates that we have before us. In four minutes I have not heard a reference to the estimates. I wonder if you could perhaps link it to the estimates, please.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, to link it directly to the estimates line by line, I don't really believe is always necessary. What I'm trying to do is link it to the responsibilities of the minister who is overseeing this department, and that is the Minister of Labour. As part of the budget process it gives us the opportunity to not only talk about what's actually there in the estimates in terms of line-by-line budgeting, but it gives us the opportunity to talk in generalities in terms of what's good about that department or the shortcomings of that particular department. I'm talking about the shortcomings of the department at this time, and it's how those shortcomings affect those workers that are caught in the middle that I'm referring to.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: For a number of years now, Mr. Chairman, we have advocated the need for stronger labour legislation that recognizes the change, that recognizes the increasing number of

workers that are caught in the middle that don't get the fringe benefits, that don't get the level of security that many other workers enjoy. That's where the Minister of Labour, I believe, has a responsibility to strengthen that legislation to give those employees that protection that I believe they deserve.

8:40

Mr. Chairman, it's not a light problem. It's a very, very serious problem. If you move about at all and enter into a lot of the retail trades and talk to sales clerks and such, they'll tell you that time after time after time. Even those that are protected to some degree by a union, by an association are kind of left out on their own. I guess one of the classic examples – and I'm not really sure exactly how the minister can attempt to resolve the difficulty that's occurring – is the strike by the projectionists with the Famous Players chain who have been out for a period of time, who have been asked to take a rollback of 65 percent. That is a very, very hefty rollback. There again we talk in terms of workers that are part-time by the nature of their particular occupation. Nevertheless, I'm not sure if the minister or his department has taken any opportunity to somehow attempt to resolve this matter, to bring the two sides together, so those employees can be back on the job instead of having to walk the picket lines.

When we look at the budget specifically, the one area that concerns me is the reductions we see in the area of safety on the job site. Mr. Chairman, we've talked about this in the past, and of course with budget restraints we see areas that are cut back. That's an area that is very, very important. It's an area where in the long run we can see a great deal of cost in other areas as a result of industrial accidents that occur that need not occur if sufficient safety measures were put into place.

One other point, Mr. Chairman, that I want to kind of conclude my remarks on, if I'm allowed to get into this area. I feel that I should be able to get into this area because the minister is also responsible for the Workers' Compensation Board, and if I'm not allowed to make a few comments . . .

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the estimates that I have before me do not contain anything with respect to the Workers' Compensation Board, so therefore I would agree that perhaps you should contain your comments to the estimates, please.

MR. WICKMAN: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. I have to question your call on that one. It is in the budget on page 245: 7.0.1, workers' compensation, an expenditure \$2,750,000. I believe by that being in the budget it allows me the opportunity to make a few comments on it. I'll keep the comments relatively short because I see there's a lineup here to speak.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: We see more and more the Workers' Compensation Board becoming totally independent of the government, totally independent of the minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Board, more and more an arm's-length relationship. We also see at the same time the Workers' Compensation Board assuming more and more independence, more and more jurisdiction, and we see them thrive to their particular goals. They have been successful in many areas. I do have to give the new, I guess it's called, president and CEO of the board a great deal of credit for achieving some of the objectives he has sought to achieve.

Some of it has been very, very positive. Some of it, too, Mr. Chairman, has been done at the expense, I believe, of injured workers. There still has to be a lot of changes, and the Act that has come forward in this session doesn't begin to come close to addressing those concerns. There still has to be a lot of changes within the Workers' Compensation Board to ensure that the injured worker has fair process, quick process or reasonably fast process to the settlement of disputes. We know that the present procedures sometime allow for appeals to go on for months and months and months, and meanwhile those injured workers are left out in limbo.

We're going to have a further opportunity to speak in more detail in terms of the Workers' Compensation Act when we deal with the piece of legislation that is presently before the House, but the one question that I'd like to have the minister answer – and I want to acknowledge that the minister is extremely efficient. This particular minister is extremely efficient and effective in responding to inquiries that are made by members of this caucus, and I think he sets an example that other members on the front bench there should abide and pay that same type of acknowledgment when we do raise questions, whether it be through the other process on the Order Paper or inquiries that are made during the budget process.

My question is specifically on the Workers' Compensation Board. Two, three years ago, whatever, we saw the Workers' Compensation Board undertake a massive restructuring of their computer systems at a cost of – and I could be wrong – if I remember correctly, \$70 million. It was a very, very substantial amount of money. There were problems with it. I don't know if that system was shut down, replaced by another system. Exactly what happened? I'd just like an analysis from the minister as to what the outcome of that particular modernization of the computer programming was and how it turned out, the net results in terms of losses and whether the whole thing is back onstream.

On that note, I'm going to conclude to allow other members of our caucus to speak on the Labour and workers' compensation portfolio.

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Prior to recognizing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, I would like to point out that under 7.0.1 there are no current expenditures in this year with respect to the Workers' Compensation Board. I did allow the discourse to continue, but there are no dollars to be voted under that area, so I think we should try and still stick to the estimates where we have some current dollar amounts. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Debate Continued

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My questions to the hon. minister relate to the business plan as set out in the supplementary document to the budget, A Better Way II. I'd like to first focus on page 20 of the précis of the business plan, Performance Measures and Results, specifically the performance measures by category. Again, I would just note to the minister that the notion of excellence which seems to dominate – Service Excellence, Program & Process Excellence – those have to be quantifiable and definable. I think every individual involved in government or any activity perceives their efforts to be excellent in that they work to full capacity. The issue is to compare outcomes to some set of benchmarks. In that sense, the performance measures by category here – although I accept the fact that

it's a summary, one does expect to see specific performance measures and some benchmarks by which to assess performance through time. It's disappointing to see, then, in this plan no such outcomes. I mean, staff excellence, when it talks about human resource development, is certainly a commendable objective, but how you would define it and what the criteria are, it has to be a little more explicit than that.

I want to then turn to the business plan and talk about – and I know some of my colleagues have spoken about the DAOs. This has been a subject of extensive debate but not repetitious, I might add, over an array of issues related to DAOs. I note on page 8 of the business plan, item 6:

The continued development of DAOs where appropriate, i.e., industry funded and operated administrative and management bodies accountable to the Minister.

Well, my question there to the minister is: what specifically does "where appropriate" mean? What are the criteria? Are the criteria that this is a less costly and more efficient way of delivering it? If that is so, then one would like to see the specific performance measures that tell you it is cheaper to do it this way.

8:50

I would note, I guess it was a year ago October, there was a private member's Bill brought in by myself, Bill 205. It was information on privatization by our caucus, which dealt with the whole issue of assessing initiatives for privatization, contracting out, or the development of DAOs, and it set out very specific criteria that you would want to assess. This initiative was aimed not at forestalling privatization or contracting out or the emergence deals but just to have those occur where it was sensible to do so. I think, Mr. Chairman, that was much of the debate about Bill 57. Again, that is relevant to what I'm talking about here because we are talking about DAOs, and that certainly was the essence of Bill 57. So again I would hope that the minister would give us the criteria that underlie the term "appropriate" because it is a kind of an amorphous word. "Appropriate" is whatever you would like it to be, but we would hope that there would be a little more specificity to that term.

I want to then discuss the point that lies directly under it: the boilers' technical council. Again, from talking to some individuals in this industry, they've brought forward concerns.

MR. DAY: Do you have their names?

DR. PERCY: Hon. member, we don't mention third-party names.

The issues that were brought up dealt with intellectual property. The concern was that once you move from a government entity to provide at arm's length management to a DAO of the sort some of the intellectual property – the patents, the technologies, the little tricks of the trade that are embodied in the technology of pressure vessels for export markets – it's very difficult then with an industry-based certification process to ensure the preservation of intellectual property. They have argued that in fact part of the reason that Alberta has been so successful in exporting pressure vessels has been the technology embodied and that one of the unforeseen costs then of moving to a DAO in this area might be the fact that we lose part of that advantage. So my question to the minister is: with regard to that particular set of issues, how is intellectual property protected in these private types of entities? It's a lot more slippery because there is the potential for individual gain. Not that I'm casting stones, but I mean there is the potential that people associate it with that, which they don't when it's government employees doing the inspection.

They have argued that part of the reason that Alberta was also successful was not only the technological innovations and our resource base that in a sense led us to innovate in these areas but also the fact that the certification process itself was highly respected. Certified in Alberta, approved in Alberta meant something because of the extremely high standards that were embodied in the workers in that branch. So my question to the minister is: when this DAO is set up, how are those specific issues addressed? How do they relate then, how are they keyed to the export performance of this industry? It is a high value-added industry. That's one set of questions.

The second set of questions relates to the implementation of DAOs and the statement again on page 8, where it says, "to ensure a smooth transition without the need for massive fee increases in connection with the implementation of DAOs." Well, this is an issue that I have brought up in other forums in this House, debating the issue of dedicated revenue and this whole notion of a flypaper effect with regards to money, that in any entity where the revenues accrue and stick there is no incentive to be cost efficient. I think Bovar and Swan Hills is a classic example of what happens when you have a guaranteed rate of return. Now, in the case of DAOs, they don't have a guaranteed rate of return, but they do live off the fees that they charge, and they do live off the revenues they generate by casting their net broadly.

So the issue for the minister is: what are the mechanisms that you can put in place to ensure that our worst case scenarios – the DAOs just exist to implement new regulations so that they can charge new fees so that they can maintain their administrative superstructure – don't come to the fore? On one hand, I mean, I think it is an issue of ministerial discipline, that the minister just fires people if the boards become too big or they don't appear to be delivering the goods. But that can be done if it's within government as well. I note in here it says that they're accountable to the minister. So my specific question is: how do you ensure that you have the least-cost way of providing those particular regulatory services? Some would argue that it can be done efficiently within government as opposed to these DAOs. The minister may in fact have even greater powers in ensuring compliance by directives within government than the minister would have with one of these DAOs. So the issue is: how do you get the right incentives in there to enforce regulations, do so in the least-cost manner?

The next set of issues, of course, is what happens to any extra revenues that are generated in these DAOs? Are they invested within? Where do they accrue within the system? To what extent, then, are our concerns about the implementation or application of the Financial Administration Act being dealt with? On one hand, I mean, that requires that the Auditor General assesses, goes through the books. In my understanding, at least from the way that Bill 57 was set up, that was not the case. So my question here to the minister is: what are the audit mechanisms? This is part of the issue, then, related to compliance and incentives for least-cost provision of services by these DAOs. I don't think it's sufficient just to relabel government in the sense of shifting it out over there but losing some of your ability to ensure it's least cost in terms of providing services to individuals.

My other questions relate to page 10 of the business plan – this is something that concerns me, Mr. Minister – where it says, "Privatization or elimination of services where appropriate, i.e. there are no public policy issues involved." I think that whenever one privatizes a service, there's clearly public policy issues involved as to what is the least-cost way of preserving that. How

do we address whatever mandate has been given the department in ensuring certain regulations are applied and applied fairly? All of those are public policy issues, and all deal with both the issue of fairness but also the issue of efficiency. So when I see in a business plan a point such as that, it's worrisome. Although one can be in favour of privatization, there are some things that ought to be privatized and some things that ought not to be. It then talks about a particular department:

The Occupational Health and Safety laboratory is being prepared to move to the private sector. Many options are currently being investigated for future service delivery.

All of those strike me as public policy issues. How is public safety ensured? How are tax dollars efficiently used? If tax dollars are not being used and these services now are going to be provided on a user-pay basis, how do we ensure, then, that the Occupational Health and Safety laboratory is competitive and cost efficient? Who are their competitors out in the private sector that impose a discipline on the market? It notes that to facilitate this initiative, the laboratory has begun to charge fees for services. But, again, privatization works and provides a least cost alternative when you have competition in the market. In this particular section here, it's not at all clear what the other sources or mechanisms of competition in the market are to ensure low-cost resource use.

9:00

I have concerns as well related to page 7, item (4), "A continued client focus through the use of client surveys and consultations," and "Client feedback is solicited on an ongoing informal basis." You make, you know, the sensible recommendation that it's going to be more formal. My question to the minister is: are those results in summary form available? Are they tabled in the estimates? Do these survey results end up being part of the performance measures that are set out on page 20? That would seem to be sensible, that in fact the expectations of clients are met, that you can assess turnaround in terms of delivery of services. So my question then is: what is the role played by client surveys and consultations, and to what extent do they end up being part of the performance measures that are set out in the business plan?

I note that on page 6 the business plan also says: "The continuation of results-based budgeting with an increased refinement of performance measures." Well, that sounds really good, Mr. Minister, but again, if one flips to page 20, it says:

The department has an extensive list of performance measures in the following categories:

- Service Excellence
- Program and Process Excellence
- Staff Excellence
- Financial and Administrative Excellence

It would be extremely useful for the business plan here to define precisely what they are, to suggest the explicit links between the client focus through client surveys and consultations, and be far more specific with regards to item 2.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will sit down.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I noticed earlier that the Member for Lesser Slave Lake was hoping this would be a brief analysis or brief assessment of this department's estimates, perhaps noting that a number of my colleagues were outside of the Chamber on the phone or preparing for their talk. I want to assure her that there's a lot of good material to

cover and we're anxious to take full advantage of the opportunity we're given this evening.

Mr. Chairman, I want to start off by thanking the Minister of Labour. I was delighted, consistent with other of my colleagues who have spoken already, to see this morning on my desk a memorandum from the hon. minister responding to questions I had last asked in estimates on the Department of Labour. While one might quibble with certain aspects, I guess, of the answer I received, I very much appreciated the fact that I'd received a prompt response. I can say that if all of his colleagues on the front bench opposite – and I think to some extent this minister has set the standard – took that as the model to follow, my colleagues would be in a much better position to vote, and vote in a knowledgeable and an enthusiastic way, when the vote comes on the estimates. So not to belabour it, I think this kind of a positive development deserves some praise. Although we like to and may be quick to criticize members opposite, I think they certainly deserve some positive feedback when they respond in that kind of an expeditious fashion.

Mr. Chairman, I wanted to caution you right now, because I've been listening carefully and I've noticed that from time to time you've intervened when you had a concern that members were straying, in your view, from the estimates. I have to express some frustration, because I don't know how many times we've gone through this notion that when the government presents the budget package, that includes the three-year plans as well as the financial estimates. I take it that in a very responsible way the government is saying, "We're prepared to talk about the plans," as well as "We're prepared to talk about the specific dollar allocations."

I just want to caution you, Mr. Chairman, that I'm going to talk some about the estimates, but I'm also going to talk significantly about the three-year plan, because that's presented and represented by the hon. Treasurer as part of the budget package. In fact, on budget night it seemed to me that we heard an awful lot about those three-year plans. So I'm going to take it that I'm at liberty to deal with that, and if you have a contrary view, then I'm happy to . . .

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, now that you've made that clarification, I don't have a problem with debate on the estimates and the business plans, but at the time that I made the caution, neither of those two things were the object of the discussion. So I would still ask hon. members to stick to the topic.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks for that clarification, Mr. Chairman.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: It also puts me in mind of another thought I had as I listened to that exchange between yourself and my colleague for Edmonton-Rutherford. It had to do with the Workers' Compensation Board portion of the budget. As I understood the exchange, you had said, Mr. Chairman, that we're not dealing with it, that there's no expenditure this year, and even though there may be an item, there's not a specific expenditure. I'm glad you put it as clearly as you did, because this points out the real danger with the Provincial Treasurer's net budgeting concept. To me there are few things more foreign to parliamentary accountability than the notion that if there isn't a net expenditure in a given year, then we have no basis to be able to raise questions and challenge in that area.

So I just want to say, Mr. Chairman, that I think Albertans expect we can come to this place and we can ask questions about every element of what's carried on by the Workers' Compensation Board. Regardless of whether in fact there's a net item in the budget, if it's a government program, a government service, then I think it's fair game for us to raise that and to explore it.

Now, Mr. Chairman, moving on. I just wanted to get that off my chest while I was in mind of it. It's always difficult, when we have a lot of able colleagues who cover the ground well, to make sure that I'm mining new territory. I think I've found a safe way of doing that, and I want to focus specifically on some of the interests of importance in Calgary.

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

Mr. Chairman, I note that in the labour relations office in Calgary – and I'm looking at page 5 of the three-year plan for the Department of Labour – it looks like the Calgary manager is going, and there's a \$66,000 saving. I guess the question is: I'm not clear whether that office is now going to be managed from Edmonton or whether we lose that element of local direction. Consistent with what I repeatedly hear from the government, that we're trying to move the decisions down to the service delivery area, Calgary is I think a large and a pretty important cog in the operation of this department. I'd like a response from the minister in terms of how that managerial function is being picked up and where that's shared elsewhere in the department.

9:10

Another specific concern I've got: when I look at the estimates, the thing that I don't find there is an identification of the costs attributable to the implementation of freedom of information. I notice that there are certainly some items that, if I were guessing, I might assume would encompass that. I'm looking at information services, vote 2.0.2. Some show on there, \$971,000, but what I want from the hon. minister is for him to break out the portion of his budget which he attributes to the implementation of freedom of information. I'd like to know how many people in his department will be tasked with the chief responsibility of freedom of information implementation. This would include who's preparing the directories, or the Labour department portion of the freedom of information directory, how many people are going to be involved in that department in terms of processing requests for information and then presumably doing whatever other sort of administrative functions are subsumed in that whole chore. So I'd like the amount; I'd like to know how many employees are going to be involved with that. If there are outside contractors, if there's a consultant outside of the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services, I'd like to know how many consultants and what we're paying them and what the term of their contract is.

Mr. Chairman, I have a concern with respect to the DAOs, and I want to share with the hon. minister a concern that I'm hearing, certainly from a good many of my constituents. People who live in downtown apartment buildings have a vested interest in elevator and fixed conveyance inspections and so on.

MR. DAY: How many called?

MR. DICKSON: I beg your pardon?

THE CHAIRMAN: Order. Hon. Minister of Labour rising to ask a question under *Beauchesne*.

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

MR. DAY: Would the member entertain a brief question?

MR. DICKSON: Of course I will, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DAY: He said he's hearing from constituents who live in these buildings about the elevator conveyance regulations. I just was curious. How many have actually called him? How many has he actually spoken to on that?

MR. DICKSON: The actual number I'd be happy to advise him once I've checked with my constituency office.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: What I do is I produce a regular newsletter, and I talk to building managers. I also should tell you that I met recently with the Calgary Apartment Association, which represents, I'd guess, most of the large residential building landlords downtown. [interjection] That was one of the items that came up for discussion. I don't recall whether it was in response to a newsletter I'd sent out or it had come unprompted or unsolicited. I think it's fair to say that clearly there is a level of concern that when we move to a model with the industry policing itself or individual sectors policing themselves, we don't lose sight of the fact that, in terms of public safety issues, people expect the government to assume a responsibility. They have an expectation that government will discharge that public responsibility, and to be candid, I share that concern.

At page 9 of the three-year plan is one of the things that I find most curious. If one looks at the bottom of page 9, we have this very ambitious review. The review is of regulations and bylaws and procedures. Now, the minister says in his three-year plan that this is a collaborative effort; it's a joint initiative. It encompasses not only the parties we might expect, in terms of Alberta Health, Alberta Labour, and the Health Workforce Rebalancing Committee, but also the standing policy committee on natural resources and sustainable development.

Now, the issue becomes – and it's one that's been raised before in this Legislature. If I've raised it once, I've raised it a dozen times. We have a standing committee. We have a standing committee chaired by the Member for Calgary-Shaw, the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. The purpose of the committee is to review statutory instruments, and that means ministerial orders and regulations. At some point at some time I expect somebody on the government side is going to explain to me why we don't use the vehicle that exists and why the government hasn't yet got it through their collective, corporate noggin that doing these things in secret, doing these things as some kind of a committee of government backbenchers, where there's no *Hansard*, where there's no access, where you're invited to come to make your submission but you're asked to leave when the government members are going to have their discussion, is not openness, that's not the way you build public accountability.

Mr. Chairman, I think we've got a standing committee. The purpose of that committee was set out in the Zander committee report of this Legislature back in 1974, '76, or whenever it was, which said that we've got to get a handle on regulations in this province. The Zander committee did set out a number of recommendations, and to the credit of the government of the day they dealt with many of them, but the one that no Conservative Party or government has had the courage to implement, perhaps

the most important, was to start referring the statutory instruments to the standing committee.

It's interesting to me, too, because I've heard members in this House stand up and say: "Well, there's too much detail. We can't go through all the regulation." Well, if the standing policy committee on natural resources and sustainable development is seen as the appropriate body to review this morass of regulations in this department, then how can any government member say that we can't refer other regulations to a committee of MLAs? It's illogical. It makes no sense.

In the same sense that this minister is showing some leadership in terms of his speedy and comprehensive response to questions asked in estimates, I'm going to encourage him to take the next step and show the same kind of leadership by making a commitment before we vote on these estimates that the subordinate legislation under the 38 pieces of legislation and the 137 regulations be committed to the committee. It's safe, Mr. Minister. It's chaired by your own colleague from Calgary-Shaw. You have a government majority on the committee, so I daresay that you might benefit and you might be pleasantly surprised to find that the regulations may be dealt with much more expeditiously than this tortuous process you have at the moment.

The other concern I wanted just to mention to the minister is something that I've raised with him before, and it has to do with whistle-blower protection. I think I'd like the government at some point to include – and this minister, because he's proven himself to be progressive. I'd like him to address, because it's not in his three-year plan, the fact that often the people who know best how to make government more efficient, the people who know best in many cases how we can shave some costs and cut some corners without hurting the quality of the service in fact are government employees. I'd like to see a more concerted effort. We've seen in the last year some initiatives by government to try and encourage employees to come forward with those kinds of initiatives, but I still think we could see some greater leadership from the hon. minister for the reasons I mentioned before.

Then I guess the last thing I wanted to touch on is privatization of mediation services. I want to ask this minister – and this is partly a question for the Minister of Justice. I'm counting on a high degree of collaboration between Justice and Labour on this. Our neighbouring province of Saskatchewan has once again really gone way out ahead of this province, and in terms of mediation they've come up with a very, very impressive mediation program that's been underwritten by the Saskatchewan provincial government. At the same time that this Minister of Labour is talking about privatization of the mediation program in the Labour department, I think there must be some opportunity to learn from what Saskatchewan has done so effectively. I'd be interested in hearing from the Minister of Labour whether he's seen the Saskatchewan mediation project – I'm hopeful the Minister of Justice for this province has – and if he'd respond, the Minister of Labour that is, by telling me what additional things he is prepared to do or recommends that we do in this province to ensure increased utilization of mediation services. I'd like him to tell us what steps he's taken to ensure that the privatization of mediation services will not result in a diminution of the utility of that important service.

That I think basically deals with the questions I have, Mr. Chairman. Thanks very much.

9:20

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few items that I'd like to bring up to the minister now that we have the opportunity to discuss the Department of Labour budgets. I understand the minister has responsibility for the Public Service Employee Relations Board, which has been amalgamated with the Labour Relations Board. What I was interested in is: with the government downsizing over the last couple of years, including the current fiscal year, I would be interested in getting from the minister how much specifically has been paid out in severance payments and various packages as a specific result of the downsizing. Included in that, as a separate figure – and I'd like to have this department by department; I'm sure it's available – I'd like to know how much of that was employees terminated, how much of that was employees taking early retirement packages and voluntary severance packages as of two years ago.

The next request is assuming the board keeps the information, and I hope they would. I'd like to have a breakdown by age grouping in terms of employees laid off, again, by department. By that I mean those perhaps 20 to 40, 40 to 50, 50 to 60, and 60 to 65 particularly. That issue, specifically in two departments, has been raised in my constituency, and I've had particular instances where people have questioned how that has been done. As well, if the minister can provide us with an accurate picture of not just union employees but non-union employees and their severance packages, et cetera, in addition to that.

I'd like to talk to the minister about the Professions and Occupations Bureau and his plan for creating a delegated administrative authority for that. What I would like to know is: specifically where else on this continent does that particular model exist? I'd like to know what plans he has for public consultation. The point I want to make here with the minister is: the ministry says in various statements that it wishes to, that it will, that it commits to consultation with stakeholders with regard to professions and occupations. I'd specifically like to know who those stakeholders are, my point being, if I could take one example, that psychologists, who are a self-governing profession, or the physicians – the psychologists are not the only stakeholders, are only one stakeholder with regard to that particular profession.

What we seem to be missing in all of the revamping of the Professions and Occupations Bureau is that the reason it was created was not exclusively for the profession but also for the public as a whole. The public has a vested interest in having a strong, professional body that has standards in place, that has standards for certification, standards for ethical behaviour and disciplinary procedures. So not only do the members of that profession have a stake in that but also the public as a whole. I'd like to ask the minister specifically what his plans are for beyond the basic stakeholders, as I believe he's talking about in his publications. How does he plan to have a much broader consultation? Will he lay that out? Will he have public meetings that will talk about the various professions and how they will be affected by the, I'm going to say, privatization, the creation of the delegated administrative authority?

I'm jumping a bit, but I see the clock is moving. The minister has talked about the fact that the department has delegated regulation of propane installations. The regulation of propane installations has been transferred to the city of Edmonton, and that's resulted in a cost saving to the department. I find that interesting. What I would ask the minister is: has that been pursued on a provincewide basis or with other municipalities? If I recall, in the ministry publication that was lumped in with some other items in terms of savings. I'd like to know specifically what

the savings were for that propane installation. I apologize if it is in here, but I do recall it being lumped in with some other figures.

I'd also like to know how that cost is now being covered in terms of the regulation of propane installation. Certainly, Mr. Chairman, we see more and more use of propane in the city of Edmonton, and many see that as a positive move, but we have to have regulation and monitoring, specifically of those regulations, and I want to know who's paying the cost for that. Is the city of Edmonton now bearing the cost, or are the installers or the users of propane paying that cost? Is there equitable treatment around the province; i.e., if we're regulating in other cities or other jurisdictions in Alberta, is the provincial government covering that cost or is the industry covering that cost? So I would like that particular information as well.

Mr. Chairman, the last issue I'd like to raise with the minister is the foreign qualifications review assessment centre. This centre goes back several years to, I believe, 1988, just prior to the '89 election, when the government of the day made a commitment to look at the situation of foreign professionals and foreign qualifications in our province. I don't think anybody can argue with the proposition – perhaps the Member for Lethbridge-West might argue with this – that when we have people who move to this country, either by choice as immigrants or as refugees, and they have skills that have been developed in their home country and we don't properly use those skills, we lose not only morally but we also lose very significantly economically. If we have somebody who has been trained as an educator or somebody who is a physician or – I'm thinking of a particular individual – somebody who is a pharmacist in an African country, perhaps their qualifications may not allow them to immediately begin pharmaceutical work here, but we have to have a way of being able to assess those qualifications to determine: if that person wants to be a pharmacist here, do we need to have four or five years' training, or perhaps with their training in their home country do they only have to do two or three years, thus saving the Canadian and Alberta taxpayers significant amounts of dollars?

After the ministry set up a task force in 1988, it muddled along – and I want to say "muddled along" – for several years until finally the previous Minister of Labour came out with the report and then took about a year after that to finally announce that there was going to be a foreign qualifications assessment review centre. But one of the limitations of the plan is that it now has to be self-financing, not from the report but from what the former Minister of Labour took out of the report. I would put it to the minister that in some instances that's appropriate, but to expect that somebody who has come from another country who needs to have their qualifications assessed, probably because they're underemployed or unemployed, to assume that they have the money to have those qualifications assessed I think is a mistake.

9:30

The point there as well, Mr. Chairman, is that I'd like to know what the minister specifically has done, profession by profession, trade by trade, with regard to mandatory acceptance of the assessment centre's decisions. Right now one of the problems we have is that the individual who comes from another country – the Eastern Bloc, Africa, the Far East – with certain qualifications can go to that foreign qualifications assessment review centre and say, "I was a teacher" or "I was an agricultural researcher" or "I was an agricultural meat inspector in my country," and pay the \$100, and they get a piece of paper saying: this is what we think that qualification may be worth, but that's not binding on any of our other institutions.

I think that if we look at the model, for example, in Quebec, the academic institutions and the professions have been heavily involved and have made a commitment that when the assessment is done in their equivalence centre, that will be binding. I would like to know from the minister what sort of progress we've made. I know that there are problems with regard to turf and numbers, especially in this economy, with regard to individuals in particular professions not wanting their profession to grow in terms of numbers or whatever, but I think we have a responsibility, if we're going to bring people into this country, to maximize their economic potential in this country and their personal potential in our province by ensuring that we recognize what qualifications they have, that they are indeed assessed, and that that assessment is binding.

Again, in summary, why would an individual who's making \$6 an hour, who's trying to support a family, which is often the case, who's been a professional in their home country, take the very significant sum of \$100, significant for them, pay it to the centre to get a piece of paper that may not be binding? It may be moral suasion in terms of a future employer, but it's not binding. We can make that binding if we sit down with the various trades and professions in this province and give them some time lines and say, "We want you to develop equivalencies." So when a carpenter comes from Poland or when an electrician comes from the former Ukraine, they can come here with their qualifications and find out how much more training they need to make Canadian standards, and it's not just simply by moral suasion. I think we have a long way to go on that one.

Every week, Mr. Minister, I run into people in my constituency and around the province who have come from other countries whose qualifications have not been accepted. They are either underemployed or, what is more sad, they're involved in school, redoing some of the work that they had done in their previous country because nobody has been able to adequately assess where they're at. I know the Minister of Health has done some work in terms of physicians, and I want to leave that whole issue aside, and perhaps I can pursue it with the Minister of Health at another time.

I would like some specific information about the assessment centre. Specifically, how many individuals have used the centre since it has opened? I'd like to know a breakdown by types of backgrounds in terms of careers, whether it be trades, professions, and other.

One of the issues I would like to raise with the minister, that has been raised with me, is specifically in terms of child care. There are many new Canadians, and both parents have to work to put a roof over their heads, or often there's only one parent. So we're having growing numbers of children from new Canadian families in our day care system, both here in Edmonton and Calgary, I know in Medicine Hat and in Red Deer as well.

One of the things that I was involved in was a demonstration project for a multicultural day care that actually employed child care workers who had been trained in other countries. At one time there were 14 different languages spoken in that one centre. We were quite proud of the kinds of work that centre did and what it was able to provide in terms of training for other centres around this whole province. I just want to put a plug in, if I can, for the Franciscan sisters who backed that project and who worked very, very hard for about five years to make that project work and to make it a demonstration. The work started there is now working in most day cares in Edmonton and Calgary and in other parts of Alberta and indeed across Canada.

Having said that, my question is: how far has the minister got with regard to equivalencies and qualifications concerning child care workers? He may want to get back to me later in terms of

this particular centre. Some members may want to laugh, but we have people who have taught at the university level, in terms of early childhood, not being able to get anything beyond the basic qualification in terms of the 50-hour course that's required to work in a day care. There's something wrong with that. We're wasting talent, and we're doing a disservice to those people.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my place and perhaps join the debate later.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. I'll just, in the time that we have left on these particular estimates, go through a quick rundown on some questions that I did not get a chance to ask as yet.

One of the areas that we're looking at in terms of fee increases is with regards to the DAOs and also, in particular, with regards to the safety code councils. One of the questions that I have with regards to the fee increases is that there is a desire by the Department of Labour to ensure that there is not a massive fee increase. The only question that comes to mind, though, is: at what point do the fees become so onerous to the user that they are not supportable? I think the goal of the department is obviously to provide services on a cost recovery basis. This may not be possible in all cases, and I wonder at what point the department will look at a cutoff with regards to the particular fees.

In the business plan for the Department of Labour there's talk about the mine safety regulations consultation and recommendations to be completed by March 31, 1995. I know that there have been some concerns by the unions which represent miners within this province with regard to these regulations, and I'm wondering if the consultation process has been completed.

There are a couple of perhaps wording inconsistencies in terms of the establishment of the professions and occupations DAO. On one hand, it looks as if there's going to be a consultation process that began January of 1995. Part of this consultation, I would hope, would be to see if it's at all feasible, number one, to have professions and occupations as a DAO. On the other hand, when you look further through the particular business plan, what it indicates is that it will become a DAO is one of the issues. Another question that I have with regards to the benchmarking of the success of the Department of Labour in certain areas is the benchmarks that are put forward with regard to the number of DAOs and privatization initiatives that are brought to completion. My question about those particular areas is: is it considered a failure if in fact there are certain areas that are not appropriate to privatize and the department does not make its benchmarks as a result of that? I would hope that the answer to that is no and that each area will be looked at and considered.

9:40

I know that one of the concerns with the privatization of mediation services is with regards to the assurance that once the lists are developed and mediators are put onto that list that there's no favouritism in terms of selection of individuals who are to be mediators.

There's mention in here of a three-year business plan for occupational health and safety and that it has been developed. It would be useful to have a copy of that particular business plan so we can look at that in conjunction with the estimates that are in front of us.

I talked earlier about the harmonization of labour legislation that's required and whether there are any dollars that are put aside with regards to the estimates in that particular area. I think that

when you look at the implications of NAFTA – and again these are issues that are identified by the Department of Labour itself under Current Environmental Issues, page 12. There are items in here such as "pressures for the harmonization of labour legislation," "economic restructuring in the public and private sectors," "harmonization of standards." These are issues that ring bells of warning in my mind in terms of how we are going to be approaching these issues and again whether there's the expertise. This I do not know, but it's a question I put forward within the Department of Labour itself to deal with these particular issues. If there is not the expertise, again whether there are the dollars provided to ensure that the expertise is obtained. One of the questions that may well come into play – it was put forward by the Fraser Institute – was looking at the fact that there are some states that have no minimum wage and that this is something that the province of Alberta might want to look at. That is why I say that there are some warning bells that go off in my mind in terms of when we talk about harmonization of labour legislation.

There's also mentioned on page 12 "the need for a coordinated approach to workforce adjustment strategies particularly but not exclusively in the health care sector." In my remarks on the Labour estimates on March 1 that was a point that I was trying to put forward. The response was to put it in the area of the health care sector only. I think that with the massive restructuring that we're seeing within the province in all areas, this is definitely an issue that the Labour department needs to look at. Again I do not see any dollars within the estimates in front of us that show me that this is an area of concern and an area that will be addressed appropriately.

There are questions that I have with regard to the goals and strategies of the department. Page 13 talks about promoting "high standards in the workplace," yet talks about moving from intervention to facilitation and partnership. Again we get back to the example of the fox in the henhouse. It's not always appropriate to just promote; sometimes there needs to be intervention in terms of ensuring that certain standards are maintained.

There is an issue that I brought to the minister's attention with regards to the safety codes area, in particular the certification of individuals who had worked for the department and have now moved onwards outside of the department and with regards to the certification of an individual who had spent about 20 years within the department. I can use his name, as he's given me permission, Mr. Yurchi. I know that the minister is aware of this; I have spoken with him about it. I'm wondering if I can find out a little bit more as this gentleman is concerned as his livelihood is at stake.

There are a number of other issues that I have with regards to the action plans and how they in fact tie into the estimates. It looks as if there are some areas within the action plan that have in actual fact been addressed, such as the area of the Labour Relations Board, and that there are administrative savings that are to be realized from the amalgamation. Yet when I look at vote 4.0.1, the Labour Relations Board, I see in actual fact that the expenditures have gone up from the forecast. On one hand, the action plan says there will be savings realized, yet in actual fact we have not seen those savings as yet. So the question is: why is that occurring?

I'd like to point out that within the '97-98 budget it looks as if there are dollars – and I'm not sure if this is the government's contingency fund for possible salary increases. I do not know if this is apparent in every budget document. I have not looked at each one of them. It seems to presuppose either a bargaining

position or a certain percentage of dollars that will be allocated to staff. I'm wondering if the minister can explain the particular figure of a million dollars due to that possible salary increase.

I am sure that the minister will look at all the issues we have put forward, especially those with regards to the very sensitive areas of workforce adjustment, severance packages, and layoffs.

I do have one other comment with regards to the performance measures by category. I'm having trouble understanding what these performance measures are based on. Under Corporate Plan it talks about assisting economic development and that they achieved high standards. Well, how did they do it? With what did they do it? Where are the dollar figures that back that up? There's a whole range of questions that go with these two pages, 20 and 21, with regards to performance measures and results. If the department is going to be providing this kind of information, my suggestion is that there need to be the estimates that go along with that as well as an outline of what the measures are so we can in fact see if the dollars are appropriately spent.

Labour is a very important area within government. It is an area that's extremely sensitive, as it deals with the issues of working people in Alberta. I think it's an area that has room for growth in terms of issues such as issue management, safety service, workplace health and safety, and employment and work standards. I'd like to thank the minister for his attention.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The questions have been fast and furious, so there's no way I'll be able to address them all tonight, but I will commit to respond at a later date to each one that I don't get to tonight.

The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark asked the questions on internal trade and how many dollars are being allocated for our department in terms of the implications there. Basically, that has to be done with existing funds. We don't have the joy or the pleasure of allocating specific dollars to that.

I'd like to also give her the assurance that on the severance pay issue, I met again today with the Premier, Heather Smith, and the Minister of Health on that very issue. Obviously, we do not negotiate that. The government is not and has not in any way, shape, or form given a commitment to the dollars, but the Minister of Health will again be meeting with the regional health authorities, the Council of Chairs, to impress upon them the importance of talking in each region about that very important issue.

I'd like to say that the chair of the Professions and Occupations Bureau – you're asking how many meetings. All I can tell you is that the number of meetings that chairman has to go through is virtually endless. I could show you the correspondence file from a variety of the professions and occupations that have concerns and want them addressed. I frankly don't know how she finds the time to do all the meeting that she has to do. I know it was an honest question, and I'm just giving you an honest answer on that.

There were questions, Mr. Chairman, on the Alberta Fire Training School in terms of revenue: \$650,000 this year and \$885,000 forecast for the next year. Is it being fully privatized? Not at this time, because there is a commitment for that Fire Training School, as the member is aware, to be training the volunteer components of fire fighting around the province, and those smaller municipalities and districts and counties can't actually afford to do that training. It's difficult to find a private carrier who will be willing to take that loss, as it were, and so that service is being provided. It is a great school, hon. member,

and there is a lot of private action happening in terms of once the needs of the province are met and the volunteer fire departments, other countries have their people there taking spaces and taking the program, and they pay quite handsomely for that. We're quite pleased about that.

9:50

There's a question about the mediation services' cost of travel, for instance. You know, the exciting thing about what we're doing in mediation services is making the possibility available for mediators all around the province, in every jurisdiction, meeting certain requirements and meeting the list of criteria to be on the mediation list. Then you don't have to have somebody traveling from Calgary to another point because in fact there will be mediators to choose from in Calgary, Lethbridge, Red Deer, in these different sectors, trained, qualified, and having to meet the various standards that will be laid out for them.

The Member for West Yellowhead talked about the DAOs. I can assure him that no DAO can be set up without extensive consultation. The boiler consultation which the Member for West Yellowhead was asking about: that consultation itself which he already commented on – he did say that he appreciates the DAO that's been established for boiler and pressure vessels – took about two years. So no DAO can be set out without very extensive consultation. The fees are set on a cost recovery basis. There is an annual report that's required, including an audited financial statement to be tabled right here in the House for all of us to view and ask questions on, and there is no revenue flow to the government on those.

In terms of their capital expenditures, he had questions there. That would cover electronic data processing equipment and systems development and some expenditures related to the Fire Training School and radiation testing equipment.

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was talking about performance measures of excellence. Those are actually detailed in the results-based budget for each team and are clearly defined in the Treasurer's department measuring up. So if you'll check those, I think you'll find abundant answers there. He asked about "where appropriate." What we're talking about is where the users of the service are asking for it and have a consensus that they want that and are prepared to pay for that and to administer it. That's the only time it's appropriate, where it's the users themselves who want that to happen and are willing to pay.

The good question on intellectual property. Confidentiality is still a requirement in the delegation of agreement, and the ownership of information still is retained by the minister, so that's a careful protection that has to be maintained there.

He had concerns about the OHS laboratory. The only reason that is being privatized is because we would be competing against others in the private sector. As a matter of fact, when the OHS lab was set up, there were no alternatives, and now there are. That's why we're moving out of that particular area.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo talked about concerns about the Calgary office, the LRB, and the manager not being there and what that might mean. Well, the manager actually left there in '93-94, and that office has been functioning very well since then.

Related to elevators, there is no self-policing as related to elevator inspection, and the department audits the inspections that are done, so it's very carefully monitored. He had comments on the Health Workforce Rebalancing Committee. The meetings there have been right across the province, so the consultation has been wide and extensive.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre talked about the profs and occs DAO and about what other models we've looked at. There is no other model. This is one of a kind, and that's why the discussion paper has been so widely circulated. If we're going to move in that direction, we want to make sure we've got it right and we've got full acceptance on the people who would be involved and the stakeholders involved with that. So it's going to be a painstaking process that we're going to work with and monitor very carefully. If we go ahead with it, then it will be the paradigm itself, and we want to make sure that we get it right.

The question about delegation of the propane regulations to the city of Edmonton: that was actually requested by the city of Edmonton, and that's why that proceeded.

Two members, the Member for West Yellowhead and the Member for Edmonton-Centre, talked about the international qualifications assessment service. I'm glad the member appreciates it. It is a good service, also a unique one, and there has been an uptake on it. I don't know how we could say that the assessment is mandatory. We do the assessment. It has been used, and it's very valuable for those employees because then they can, in applying for jobs, et cetera, say that their qualifications have been assessed and deemed equivalent in whatever areas. So you can't demand that they be accepted anymore than you could demand a degree-granting program might be acceptable to an employer. What we are doing, I can assure you, is actually working with employers through professions and through academic institutions to familiarize them with the international qualifications assessment process so that they do indeed see it as something that's viable. There were some other questions on that too that I'll respond in writing to.

There was a question about projected costs for implementing freedom of information provisions. We do not hire people to do that. We have to do that ourselves. That is a question of our own public servants taking on that as an extra task, and they're doing it very well. Actually, the director of information services will also co-ordinate the freedom of information requests. So we do not have extra funds. We are restructuring the way we do business and allocate tasks to accommodate that from within.

Those are the questions I could address just briefly before our closing hour, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the questions, and I also appreciate the appreciation for getting the responses to you. Obviously, I will follow through with that on questions unaddressed tonight. That's my commitment.

As the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has already mentioned the possibility of calling the question on the Labour estimates tonight, I will take the liberty at this time to move that and to call the question on the estimates for the Department of Labour.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expenditure	\$37,736,000
Capital Investment	\$571,000

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I move these votes be reported when the committee rises and reports.

[Motion carried]

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

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1996, for the department and purposes indicated: Department of Labour, \$37,736,000 in operating expenditure; \$571,000 in capital investment.

10:00

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report and the request for leave to sit again?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:01 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

