

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 27, 1995**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 95/03/27

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order.

We'll invite the minister to speak in a moment, as soon as we are just reminded of the rule that we'll again abide by: the custom of having only one person standing and speaking at one time.

head: **Main Estimates 1995-96**

Community Development

THE CHAIRMAN: With that admonition, we would invite the hon. Minister of Community Development to begin this evening's deliberations.

Hon. minister.

MR. MAR: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. At the outset I have to say that the Minister of Justice has suggested that there are too many people in the gallery, but that's my entire department now. I'm pleased to appear this second time before this committee to present the 1995-96 budget estimates for the Department of Community Development. As I addressed the general features and objectives of my budget and business plan on March 6, I will tonight limit my comments to answering the questions that were posed by hon. members at that time.

The Member for Edmonton-Avonmore asked several questions regarding libraries, dealing with multilingual books, privatization, the treatment of Community Development groups currently occupying space in government buildings that are to be sold, and the municipal recreation/tourism area operating grants to which I provided answers on March 6. I would refer him to my comments on pages 381 through 383 of *Hansard*.

The member also asked other questions which I'll answer now, but first let me assure him that despite his fears, I am not presiding over the gradual elimination of this ministry. The reductions he refers to have been clearly set out in the business plan and represent a continuation of the direction we set upon last year. I agree that the sheer magnitude of the Alberta seniors' benefit program tends to dwarf the remainder of my budget. However, net of that program, we will hit our spending and staffing targets as stated and are not accelerating our reductions to zero.

Regarding the contribution that the arts and culture make to the province of Alberta and continued government support, I agree with the member's comments on page 374. The arts generate a great deal of economic activity in Alberta. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts will continue to support the arts in our province. Funding for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts remains at \$16.1 million, and I am continuing to support the arts in that way.

The member sought clarification on how we would increase the economic return of sport, recreation, arts, culture, and heritage to Alberta communities and the province in general. Simply put, by implementing the community development approach, our objective is to help these communities build capacity, improve their self-reliance, and help them to develop in ways that are sustainable and economically viable. Alberta Community Development will be there with expertise, information, and training to facilitate communities developing their own ideas quickly and as fully as possible. The good things that happen to one community also

have a beneficial effect on the whole province. For example, if arts or recreation events attract a large audience, the spin-offs benefit the entire province. Similarly, if we make our marketing efforts more effective and more tourists travel to our cultural and historical facilities, then all the communities on the route and indeed the province will receive benefits from the increased spending and exposure.

Finally, the member asked about the effects of the reductions in our provincially operated museums and in particular the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. In both cases, Mr. Chairman, entrepreneurial revenue generation activities at these facilities will allow the historical resources regulated fund to augment the general revenue fund operating funding. The areas affected will include some seasonal wage expenditures and interpretive programming. I should note that at the Royal Tyrrell, as detailed in my business plan, the operation of the gift shop at the museum has been transferred to the Royal Tyrrell Museum Co-operating Society. The profits from its operation will be available for use at the facility through the historical resources regulated fund. This allows for delivery of comparable services and programs under a different funding structure.

The Member for Edmonton-Avonmore also asked questions regarding changes to the administrative portion of my budget affecting program 1. I would refer him to my opening comments on March 6 in which I fully explained those changes.

My learned friend my colleague the Member for Calgary-Egmont asked questions about the magnitude of the reductions in the urban parks operating grant as compared to the reductions to the municipal recreation/tourism area grant program and the implications of each for rural and urban centres. I think that the member was referring in fact to the reduction in urban parks development grants, which is a capital program. This program is being phased out over three years in a manner that will ensure that the construction which is under way in 1993-94 will be completed in a manner that does not compromise safety. As for the MRTA grants, these are operating grants paid to some 274 rural parks, which, consistent with my business plan, have been reduced by 50 percent from 1993-94 levels. As for urban parks operating grants, the budget for this program was transferred to Municipal Affairs in April of 1994 and became part of the unconditional municipal grant program, which was initiated that year.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked a number of questions. Her questions regarding the Seniors Advisory Council, admission fees, and elements 2.1.4, community services field offices, and 2.1.5, recreation and sport services, were addressed in my summary remarks.

Regarding the disposition of the Advisory Council on Women's Issues, I would note that even the federal Liberal government has reached the same conclusion that we have in Alberta; namely, that times have changed, women's groups have multiplied and grown in strength, and they can and want to speak for themselves to government without a publicly funded intermediary.

Regarding 2.2.2, municipal recreation/tourism area operating grants, I would refer the hon. member to my initial comments on March 6 and my reply to Calgary-Egmont. Regarding 2.1.2, administration of the western economic partnership agreement, I can state that all of the funds have been committed. A total of 48 proposals were supported by the agreement, and results to date indicate that the overall impact of the agreement will be viewed very positively. The reduction in 1995-96 reflects the orderly winding down of the program, which has two years remaining in

its mandate. The remaining work will focus on assessment and monitoring of the accomplishments of the program consistent with the federal/provincial agreement.

The member asked about my business plan objective to "facilitate initiatives which stimulate and support community activity." My earlier reply to her colleague for Edmonton-Avonmore provides part of the answer. There certainly are many examples of the support that the department field staff have provided to help local communities and community groups increase their self-reliance and initiative, notably in the area of leadership training. Staff have had a number of communities come together to create visions of their future and to define their common goals and aspirations. These types of exercises also enhance local collaboration and in this way strengthen the communities. Field services staff also provide support and training to local volunteers in governance skill development. Strong community leadership is essential to maintaining healthy, active communities.

Community development officers are in contact with communities and community organizations on an ongoing basis and respond to requests for assistance as they arise. A fee structure for services provided is not in place at this time, but in keeping with our goal of making communities more self-reliant, efforts are being made to train volunteer facilitators at the local level for future involvement.

Regarding involvement with the regional health authorities, field staff are playing a role in helping to structure and implement public participation processes such as information sessions and group discussions for business planning purposes. Field staff are also facilitating authority governance development with some regional boards. Getting input from the citizens affected is an important process, but regional health authority staff are often neither trained nor sufficient in numbers to carry out the process themselves.

8:10

Regarding seniors' issues and the benchmarks for the appeals process and the time spans between initiation and hearings, one of the reasons we have opted to use the Family and Social Services appeal system to hear Alberta seniors' benefit appeals is because of their efficiency and quick turnaround times. Currently, once an appeal has been reviewed by the department and the client has chosen to proceed to an appeal panel, a hearing is held within two weeks of receiving a notice of appeal, and a decision is usually available the next day. The first level of an Alberta seniors' benefit appeal will be an internal review within the Department of Community Development. I'm committed to achieving comparable turnaround times at this level of appeal.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked a question regarding my ministry's performance measure for the Alberta seniors' benefit program. The use of "appropriate" in this context refers to the provision of the benefits to which eligible seniors are entitled under this program. Our goal is to ensure, through proper program delivery, that eligible seniors receive appropriate support; i.e., 100 percent of their entitlement under the program.

With regard to extraordinary prescription costs, as part of the initiative to introduce a new Alberta seniors' benefit appeal process, we will be introducing special assistance for seniors who may be having severe financial problems. Drug costs, other health care costs, housing costs, and so on will be considered in assessing eligibility for this assistance. In addition to offering assistance from the fund mentioned above, I am exploring what else can be done to assist seniors with high health costs. I am particularly concerned that some seniors have high health costs

that they are not able to manage. As for other programs that impact seniors' lives, the Premier, the Minister of Health, the chair of the Seniors Advisory Council, and I have all publicly stated our commitment to monitoring the cumulative impact of changes to seniors' programs.

The member asked about the apparent changes to the gross budget of the Alberta seniors' benefit program. On an aggregate basis the current projected budget will require slightly less in 1995 than the amount that a straight-line projection of the 1994-95 estimates would indicate. A simple extrapolation of the annualized 1994-95 budget and what this means for seniors ignores the fact that the ASB program has not completed one year of operations, and as we gain seniors' comments, the program will evolve.

The budget has been developed based on a number of seniors receiving cash benefits and those receiving full or partial subsidy for health care premiums. In order to expedite our commitment to Alberta seniors, we allowed those turning 65 in 1994 to estimate their income for the year. In addition, we deliberately assumed that each one would be receiving the maximum amount of old age security on the understanding that their estimates would be reviewed against federal taxation data and that adjustments would be made when the differences were found. We recently reviewed all applications against information received from Revenue Canada for the 1993 income tax year, and we have adjusted the level of benefits to reflect the actual amount of OAS received by each senior. The result has been that some payments have gone up and some have gone down. Seniors are being informed of these adjustments with the March payment. We have not required seniors to pay back any extra benefits they received, but we have stopped making overpayments. The result is that the gross expenditure for the Alberta seniors' benefit program will be reduced by \$320,000 a month.

The member asked about the cost of running the 1-800 seniors' information line and the manner in which it is staffed. The estimated cost of providing this important service to Alberta seniors for 1995-96 is approximately \$205,000. As for staffing, well, we did draw upon resources from across the department and indeed the government during the start-up period. The need for such steps has abated. As of April 1, 1994, staff for the information line were hired through a tendered employment contract.

The member asked about revisions to the Alberta seniors' benefit application form. The Alberta seniors' benefit application form is currently being revised. A new guide to the program will accompany the application form. The income definition used will continue to be that used to determine eligibility for federal benefits.

The Member for Lethbridge-West made comments on each of my programs. I addressed several of his questions on March 6. Regarding his unanswered question about the change to element 2.1.6, library services, the reduction represents one FTE position resulting from the termination of the multilingual and talking book services, which have devolved to public libraries and library systems. The transformation of these services was detailed in the department's 1994 three-year business plan issued last year.

With regard to the Peigan Nation's Keep Our Circle Strong project, the Department of Community Development continues to be fully supportive. Departmental staff have assisted in the development of funding submissions for the project to the federal department of Indian and northern affairs to the western economic diversification office and to the new Department of Canadian Heritage.

Regarding the stacking effect or cumulative impact of program changes affecting seniors' programs, as I noted earlier, this government is committed to monitoring the cumulative impact of

changes to seniors' programs. This is an obligation we take seriously. We are listening to seniors, and we've made changes based on their feedback. For example, we recently made some important modifications to the Alberta seniors' benefit program. We've raised the income threshold for one-senior couples to reflect the federal guaranteed income supplement. As a result, a number of one-senior couples previously paying full health care premiums will now be subsidized.

Seniors living in long-term care can now choose to have their total income split 50-50 or to use their individual incomes as the basis for the calculation of benefits. This approach allows these seniors to maximize the benefits coming to them. I am committed to continuous improvement of the Alberta seniors' benefit program in response to seniors' feedback.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo wanted to know what the average wait time was for resolution of a complaint before the Alberta Human Rights Commission. Currently the average wait for conciliation and investigation of complaints is nine months. The implementation of our 18-month plan to reduce the backlog is well under way, and we should see continued decreases in the average wait throughout the next year. The member wanted to know the final cost of the human rights review. This was the first review of its kind done for the Human Rights Commission and the Individual's Rights Protection Act since its enactment in 1973. The actual total expenditure for the review was approximately \$102,000, which was below its \$120,000 budget.

The member asked a number of questions regarding the recommendations of the human rights review committee which can best summed by his question: when will the minister respond to Equal in Dignity and Rights? The recommendations are being reviewed by the standing policy committee on community services and will be responded to. I might add that several of the administrative recommendations have already been addressed and implemented.

Regarding my business plan and Albertans' access to government information through libraries, a partnership is evolving between Alberta Community Development and the Public Affairs Bureau related to the depository library program. The program now provides materials to selected public libraries and library system resource centres free of charge for access by the public. Plans are to make the process more effective, to extend the partnership, to promote the program, and to look at ways of delivering the service through electronic means when the public library network is fully implemented.

Finally, with regard to the plans for the Alberta Board of Censors, in September 1994 a substantial agreement was reached on a proposal to establish a western film and video classification board which was to include British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Documents pertaining to this agreement are currently under consideration by respective provincial ministers who will determine what action is to be taken regarding the September proposal. We have strong co-operation at the ministerial level among Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, and officials from each province are currently negotiating the specifics of film and video classification. These negotiations include the expansion of the existing service to include video classification and the standardization of existing nomenclature and symbols to harmonize with the video labeling system to be introduced by the video industry on the 1st of May, 1995.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my remarks at this time, and I would be pleased to entertain any further questions.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, and thank you for those answers, Mr. Minister. I have a few more questions for you tonight, and I know many of my colleagues do as well.

Mr. Minister, first looking at program 2, the community services program, and the budget for that, I want to go back to 2.2.2, the municipal recreation/tourism area operating grants, and 2.2.3, the community rec development grants. Now, I note from your comments that there are some 270, 280 rural parks that receive benefit under 2.2.2., and you say that there's a 50 percent reduction overall in your three-year business plan. I'm wondering if you could let the Assembly know: on what basis are you assessing the priority of how the remaining funds will be applied? Are we looking at simply maintenance dollars now? Are we looking at facility upgrades? Are we looking at the development of perhaps some new areas? If we're not looking at the development of some new areas - my understanding is that there were some development proposals and tourism proposals that were before your ministry, and I'm wondering what's happened to them, if they're not going to be funded out of this particular line item of your budget.

8:20

The 90 percent reduction in this budget year over last budget year for community recreation development grants does concern me greatly, and I've had this brought to my attention by some constituents. They're not at all sure that the decisions being made currently within your department reflect the priorities as they are expressed in your business plan. I'm just wondering if you'd give us some more details as to how the remaining dollars will be allocated so that those concerns can be put to rest.

Now, you also mentioned in your introductory remarks some comments related to the operations at the Royal Tyrrell Museum and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and the Reynolds-Alberta Museum, I believe, in Wetaskiwin. I'm wondering if you could inform us as to any change in the number of visitors after the admission policy was changed by your department. I'd also like to know in particular: has there been an increase or decrease in the number of tourism visits, school classes visiting, and what has the pattern of access to the provincial museums been on the free Tuesdays?

While we're looking at the museums under vote 3, I note that the line item attached to the Royal Tyrrell Museum has gone down by 16 percent, whereas the line item attached to the Reynolds-Alberta Museum has gone up 13 percent. These are some pretty wide variances, and I'm wondering if you could explain to the Assembly on what basis you have made the decisions that you can take 16 percent out of the operating budget of one museum and add 13 percent to the support that another one gets. Has it got something to do with the cost of the collection? Has it got something to do with the relative newness of the facility? I'm just curious as to that kind of wide variation.

In vote 4, individual rights and citizenship services, the Human Rights Commission budget has taken pretty close to a 4 percent hit this year, Mr. Minister, and this flies directly in the face of the review which you mentioned in your earlier remarks. There were many recommendations attached to that review. Several of them would cost money if they were to be implemented. Albertans have made it very, very clear that they support their Human Rights Commission. They've made it very clear that they support strong enforcement of the Individual's Rights Protection Act. They want quick resolution of the complaints that they bring before this commission, and I think that you owe a much more forthright and complete explanation as to (a) why the recommen-

dations of the review were not fully implemented, (b) why this commission has been allowed to suffer yet another budget cut, and (c) what its future is vis-à-vis the amalgamation with other commissions within your department.

Moving along to the seniors' benefit program in vote 5, program support of course dropping by 47 percent is a little shocking. You've made some explanation of that, but overall we hear continually from Alberta seniors their concerns that their support has been cut to the point where they find it hard, in many cases, to continue to live with dignity, cut to the point where legions are setting up food banks for seniors, cut to the point where seniors are complaining that unless they move in with their adult children, for example, they won't be able to maintain any kind of quality of life, that unless they sell their family home and move into some other kind of living accommodation, they won't be able to maintain any sort of dignity. I don't think this is the way that Alberta seniors deserve to be treated, and I don't think this is the way that the folks that voted in the last election expected seniors would be treated after the Premier's commitment and until a consensus was reached on the kind of support that they received from government.

Mr. Minister, we were talking about the Human Rights Commission and its future in a general sense. I understand that there are some proposals coming from your department, that several of the commissions currently under your jurisdiction will be amalgamated into perhaps just two agencies. The first agency would contain a Human Rights Commission of some form along with an Alberta Multicultural Commission combined with the Seniors Advisory Council and the Advisory Council on Women's Issues. The second agency would combine three other existing committees or agencies: the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, and the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation.

Mr. Minister, could you please explain, other than just in very crass terms, how this might save money, what the logic is? It seems to me that particularly with the first agency, the one that combines the Human Rights Commission and the Multiculturalism Commission amongst others, there are some decidedly different purposes here, that there are different elements of society being addressed, that the work of these commissions and committees is not entirely overlapping or overlapping at all in some cases. So I'd like to know how it is exactly that you believe that consistent with your own department's business plan you could amalgamate these groups and they would still be able to provide the service that they were set up to provide. Or is it that you were trying to somehow inform Albertans that the work of these commissions and these organizations has been done and that they don't need to exist? I note that you alluded to that in your comments about the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. I believe that there are many people, men and women, in this province who would disagree with that assessment.

So I would like you to in some detail, please, explain why it is that these commissions can be safely amalgamated and how it is that their work will not be compromised and how it is that the people who depend on groups like the Human Rights Commission will not be done a disservice by being forced together in some other kind of administrative framework. I would suggest that it would be wholly inappropriate to do that kind of force fitting if it was simply to save a few dollars at the expense of the quality of life and the dignity of the Albertans who have come to rely on these commissions.

Mr. Chairman, the minister mentioned that Community Development field officers were involved in the regional health

authority public consultations. I have firsthand experience of that, and in several health regions I went to the public meetings and met with several of the field staff. I must say to you, Mr. Minister, that your staff did just an excellent job. They were competent people working under very difficult circumstances, and I think they comported themselves very well, and they are to be congratulated for being the meat in the sandwich, as it were. They were dealing often with hostile communities in emotionally charged environments. That's the good news.

The not-so-good news is that I had many people express to me their concerns that one agency of government was acting somehow as a shill for another agency of government, that we had Alberta Health forcing huge and dramatic changes in how health services are to be provided throughout the province, and when people asked tough questions, they were told by the unelected, appointed regional health authority board members that it wasn't their doing; it was the Minister of Health or the Premier or somebody else. When they asked facilitators for more information, they were told: "Hey, listen. I work for a different department in government; (a) I don't have that information and (b) you can't exactly expect me to tell you what I think's wrong with what another department's doing."

So while they did as good a job as they could, that has to be qualified with: under the circumstances. I think they were put into a very awkward position. I would like to know: were they put in that position on some kind of a client relationship? In other words, was one government department charging the other government department for their involvement? Was there a cost? Did the regional health authorities have to buy that facilitation service? If so, how much? Where is that in your budget? Will we expect to see this more in the future? I think that as we try to fairly evaluate the changes in health care, we need to know the full array of costs, and certainly if you are now incurring costs in your department as a result of the restructuring in health care, if those are unrecovered costs, I'd like to know that and I'd like to know how much.

A couple of questions about women's issues. In vote 4 I note that when we look at women's issues and compare that to seniors' issues, it's very difficult to determine how much money is being spent where. There's about \$1.26 million being spent between the advisory council, the Seniors' Secretariat, and the Women's Secretariat, and I would like to know how exactly that \$1.26 million is divided. It would be helpful in the future as well, Mr. Minister, if that could be provided in the budget document itself so we wouldn't have to request you to do extra duty and inform us through debates on estimates.

8:30

Now, the women's advisory council in June of last year produced what I believe to be an excellent report on the economic situation of women who are over 55 years of age. I'd like to know why the government, which you're a member of, has not responded to these recommendations specifically and when that will happen. Mr. Chairman, those recommendations cover a wide variety of issues: job training for women; sexual harassment policies; apprenticeship programs for women, particularly trade-related apprenticeship programs; the need for educational assistance, in particular for single mothers; recommendations about the economic literacy or lack thereof of women and senior women; and the need for a made-in-Alberta policy. The recommendation specifically, I believe, is that there be a government of Alberta policy formulated on women's economic conditions, and it should be done forthwith. I'd be curious to know when that will take place.

Mr. Minister, as the minister responsible for women's issues I'd like your comment on the abysmal lack of a meaningful presence of women on the new Economic Council. As you know, there were 15 members appointed to this council, only five of whom are women. The 15-member board of management of this council is comprised entirely of men. I would have expected that as the minister responsible for these issues, you would not be silent on this particular point, and in fact as minister I might have expected you to have been at the table arguing that there needs to be more gender balance in this very critical area. So your comments would be appreciated in that regard as well.

The issue of violence against women and children is one that I know concerns members on both sides of the House. We know that the cycle of unemployment amongst women, job insecurity with women, poverty, gambling, and other addictions with women help perpetuate that circle of violence. They help perpetuate it in generational terms. Where specifically in your budget are actions to reduce these concerns of women, particularly the violence that women and children are often the subject of? And please, Mr. Minister, not just in general terms, that it's in the secretariat or the advisory council, but what specific things are taking place? Can you give us details – some dollar amounts, some programs, some initiatives – so that we can feel that the government is paying at least a little attention to this most vexing area?

Mr. Minister, a question that I would like a specific response to as well is: what is it that you're doing to reduce the number of women who are in prison simply because they haven't been able to pay a fine? Alberta, I believe, has the distinction of being the second highest in terms of the rate of female inmates admitted for fine default. I believe that about 39 percent, almost 40 percent of all women incarcerated are in jail simply because they were unable to pay a fine. Of course, we know that many women cannot participate easily in the fine options program because often they can't make child care arrangements, and if you can't make child care arrangements, you can't go and do the volunteer work to work off your fine. What happens is the women end up being incarcerated, and then unfortunately what happens is the children become wards of the province, and that whole cycle seems to just keep on going and going and going. So it requires your immediate attention, and I'd like to know what it is that you're doing about it.

Mr. Minister, a couple of questions to do with seniors. The \$228,000, of the Seniors Advisory Council, to Health: I'm just wondering how this is consistent with the government's claim that they would like to see a co-ordinated single-window approach for all seniors' programs in Alberta. The two actions seem to run counter to one another.

You mentioned in your earlier comments that you do have some concern about how extraordinary prescription costs will be borne, how they will be paid for. I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, whether or not you are currently involved in some way, along with the Minister of Health, in the negotiations going on with the pharmacists of this province. As you know, the agreement is due to be renegotiated in April; that's just a few days away. I understand from talking with people in pharmacies and with Blue Cross and with others that there's a major concern particularly around seniors who have chronic medical conditions and require long-term medication being told by some pharmacists that even though the doctor has given them a prescription for, let's say, six or 12 months' worth of medication, the pharmacists will only administer monthly or quarterly allotments of that medication. Some seniors have told me they suspect that's so the pharmacists can maintain

the dispensing fee. Now, while I don't have any firsthand knowledge of pharmacists who are denying giving out drugs just to maintain that dispensing fee, I would like to know what involvement your department has, along with the Minister of Health, in dealing with seniors on this particular issue, helping make sure that the costs can be provided when they need them and can be provided at a cost that is affordable to them and convenient to them.

My last question, Mr. Minister, has got to do with the uniform calculation of the thresholds for seniors. We understand that there are currently two separate calculations, one for the AHCIP subsidy and the other for the Alberta seniors' benefit cash subsidy, or payment. Is it your intention to standardize or make uniform these two calculations so that seniors are no longer confused? Many who have come to my constituency office have been confused by the fact that one set of thresholds takes place before deductions – that's for the health care insurance premium subsidy – and the other set of thresholds is after deductions, that being for the Alberta senior benefit cash program. I don't think it would be difficult to harmonize the two. You've talked about how you're always sensitive to reviewing areas of concern for seniors, and this seems to be a relatively easy one to deal with, along with, of course, your stated commitment that the thresholds will be rigorously examined and re-examined to make sure that they're not disadvantaging a large group of seniors who would otherwise rely on the kinds of programs that the government should be making available to them.

Mr. Minister, with those comments, I would appreciate a timely response to these questions, and I look forward to the questions coming from my colleagues.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, appreciate the opportunity to speak to the estimates of the Department of Community Development. I guess I would like to preface my remarks to the minister with a question that I have posed at previous estimate debates, and that's to ask the minister when he's going to present a business plan. If you look again at the literature on business plans, what we have before the Legislature is, I think, at best called "a business activity plan." It lacks a very important ingredient, and that's the attachment of dollars to activities. So my question to the minister is: when will he? Is this an interim step along the way to the presentation of a proper business plan to the Legislature and one that, one would hope, would eventually reconcile the dollars that are found in the estimates books with the kinds of activities that are outlined in A Better Way II? So that's my first question: can we look forward to a business plan from the department in the future?

I guess the second question is one, too, that I would ask for the minister's opinion, maybe, more than anything else, and that is: is a business model the most appropriate model for a department such as Community Development? One would think, as you look at the Community Development department, that instead of being filled with the language of the marketplace, such a department and their activities might be filled with the language of community, the language of culture, the language of caring. I think that even if you're going to follow the business model, you have some obligation to follow it through rather consistently.

Even those gurus of business in government, Gaebler and Osborne, make somewhat the same point, and I quote from page 67, where Gaebler and Osborne say:

Institutions and professionals offer "service"; communities offer "care." Care is different from service. Care is the human warmth of a genuine companion; care is the support of loved ones as a family copes with tragedy; care is the gentle hand of a helper when one is bedridden.

They make the important distinction between business and making sure that the kind of language that's being used is appropriate for the enterprise that's being undertaken. Again, I see the material that we have before us and the business activity plan as being somewhat short of that kind of caring language that one would expect.

8:40

I also noticed in the business activity plan that action, anticipated outcomes, and then a critical path are listed as the major concerns. I think there's abundant room in such a plan for the unanticipated outcomes, because I assume that in many of these cases what hasn't been anticipated is going to be as important as what the minister and his staff have anticipated will happen.

I'd also like to stay with page 6 and 7, looking at the Actions and Strategies, and wonder, for instance, on page 7 under action 6, "Winding down Urban Parks Development Grant," why the anticipated outcome might not be linked to urban parks rather than "smaller, less costly government." Should there not be a very tight, strong link between the action and the anticipated outcomes? I think for all of these you could say smaller and less costly government. That's been really one of the prime movers of the whole exercise. For instance, in action 10 on page 7, "Develop a Youth Leadership Strategy," again you would expect the anticipated outcomes might talk something about youth and youth leadership, rather than co-ordination and governance or a management activity. The same is true on the top of page 8, where action 14 is.

Continue and improve the work of identifying, evaluating, planning, interpreting and providing technical advice and assistance to community-based heritage resource preservation projects.

Again, the anticipated outcome is what we saw before: "decreased demands upon government for funding and assistance." So again we have actions that don't seem to be logically linked in many cases to the anticipated outcomes.

Also, if you read the literature on performance indicators and, again, Gaebler and Osborne, if you are going to use that model – and I question whether the model is appropriate in the first place. If that's the belief system you're going to buy into, the management system you're going to buy into, then Gaebler and Osborne have 10 pages, pages 359 to 369, where they outline the characteristics of a performance measurement system. If you apply the kinds of criteria that are listed there against what the department has in their business activity plan, the plan certainly seems to fall short. Again, my question is: where are the dollars for these actions? Why can we not look at a proposed action and trace the number of dollars that activity is going to cost us and then find a specific measure that will tell us how far along the road we are in terms of achieving that measurement and why is that material not here? There's been a lot of work put into the document, a lot of information gathered, yet I think that it fails us in being true to the kind of model that it purports to follow.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

I noticed in a news release from the department on February 21 of this year that the very last thing that the minister says is that "measures have been developed to ensure the department's

services are responsive to community needs." So at least in this document, some time before the business activity plan and the estimates were made available to us, the minister was promising that there were performance measures that we could use, and I defy you on many of these activities to tell us what the performance measure is, let alone how successful or how far down the road the department is in meeting those objectives.

I'd like to turn and look at some of the specifics then, if I might. The human resources in the department. Again the news release and the estimates confirm and the business activity plan indicates that employee numbers will be further reduced this fiscal year. It talks about 32 full-time equivalents. "A further reduction of 67.5 FTEs will be accomplished by 1997/98. The department will also restructure its management" so as to flatten the management model. My question is: what's happening to these people? This is the Department of Community Development. This is the department that you would think would be first and up front in caring for the individuals that have served it in the past. What accommodation, what help are those individuals being given in relocating or in using the kinds of skills, the kind of expertise that they have exercised in the department? I'd like to know what's happened to those people.

The appeals fund indicates that "\$1 million has been allocated to address seniors who fall through gaps" and that the regulations will be developed and be available in April to allow seniors to know how those appeal funds can be accessed. My question is: why \$1 million? Where did that number come from? What was it based on? How did the department decide that a million, not \$2 million or a million five, was the number that was going to be required?

The municipal recreation/tourism operating assistance grants were cut by a further 25 percent. It says, "Nearly 274 community facilities are being assisted to become self-sufficient." My question is: what kind of consultation went on with those communities, the 274 of them? How were they involved in that decision-making that is going to be extremely important in their budgeting and in their working with communities? What say did they have before that decision was announced? How, again, was 25 percent agreed upon as the appropriate number?

There's quite a bit of attention to libraries. The minister has assured the Assembly on a number of occasions that libraries are valued. There's an indication that access to library materials is going to be improved through an electronic library network and that there's a pilot project under way. My question would be: how does the work that's being done in that area of electronic accessing of library materials relate to the Internet? Does the Internet already do exactly what this pilot project says it's going to explore? Any of the commercial services that are now available, CompuServe and many of the others but in particular Internet: how does this project differ?

I'd ask the minister if there's some report, if there's some indication of the state of the province's libraries in terms of their collections. The increase in the cost of books over the last number of years I know has severely affected university libraries and college libraries across the province, and those institutions are finding their collections of serials and journals being dramatically reduced. My question is: what of the public library system? What's happening to those collections? Can we be assured that the investment that Albertans have made in those collections and in those libraries in the past is being protected and that those collections will remain current and up to date?

The heritage facilities. The news release about those facilities which describes what is in the estimates is sort of an intriguing announcement. It says:

Community involvement in the department's heritage facilities will be reviewed and expanded. Increased individual and community participation in advisory committees, voluntarism, and special events will result in decreased demands on government.

It sounds like the minister is mandating voluntarism. I would hope that's not the case, that we don't have a government that's telling its citizens: "Now you will volunteer." It seems to me that if that's true, that's rather an iffy basis on which to base the care and the development of heritage facilities across the province.

I've already mentioned the performance measures, the promise that those measures were in place, the promise that the services which the department offered would be measured, and that the public, the citizens, could look at their measures to judge the success of the department.

Just one final comment. If you look at the plan, the activity plan, whatever you want to call this, even though it doesn't have performance measures, it does have an interesting mix of both quantitative and qualitative measures where you find them. I would hope that in any future document that's prepared, that practice would continue, that the department wouldn't, as some others seem to be doing, retreat into numbers and hope that numbers alone are going to do the job in terms of determining performance.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

8:50

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, my comments will be brief tonight. I recognize that the Minister of Community Development has much friendly fire to contend with from time to time as well as some concerns from other Members of the Legislative Assembly. I would like to endorse the minister's comment about the contribution that the arts groups make to the province of Alberta. I recognize that there are many mouths gaping to be fed from an ever shrinking resource pool, but I am pleased that he sees fit to endorse the arts and the desirability of arts funding as a worthwhile expenditure of government dollars. I know that there are those in the Legislative Assembly who would take away, strip away, all funding to arts groups, whether out of some misguided belief that you can control morality by restricting funding through the arts or by some misguided belief that they do not contribute anything to the province. I'm happy for the minister's stand in that regard. I know that it took some courage on his part to do that.

I would, however, ask the minister to provide for us – and I do not differentiate or distinguish from this minister to the others when I ask – a breakdown of the full-time equivalent employment by the program. I have urged the government members and those ministers who are members of Executive Council to adopt that as a normal part of the budget presentation in the future. I know that the computer resources and the ability to track those numbers are simple. The minister's full-time equivalents, relatively speaking, are few, and he should be able to break them down by the program for us this year and incorporate that as a permanent function in his reporting in future years.

I also want to return to one of my favourite themes, Mr. Chairman, and that is the theme that we are asking Albertans in this province to take an amazing amount of cutbacks in stride. We are asking them frankly to tighten their belts until their belt buckle rubs against their backbone. We are asking them to make do. We are asking them to improvise. We are asking them to

help one another, to carry one another through the tough times. It would be inflammatory and not productive for me tonight to remind Albertans why we do have these tough times in Alberta and why we are obliged to spend what we spend on debt management.

Against that theme, I want to urge the minister to look again at his departmental support services. I want the minister to look at the fact that his own minister's office has not decreased, not \$100, not \$10, not a dollar, not one single penny in this fiscal budget. I'm sure the minister can do better than that. I want him to look at his deputy minister's office, Mr. Chairman. It has not shrunk: not \$100, not \$50, not \$10, not even a dollar, not one single penny, and I know that the deputy minister of this department can do better than that. I would like the minister to look at his finance and administration department. Not only has that not gone down \$100, it has increased by many thousands this year, and I think that they can do better than that.

Finally and frankly and with respect to those members and those employees of this minister seated behind me, there have been several public relations disasters that this department has brought to the people of Alberta in connection with the marketing and sale of the seniors' benefits. The programs relating to the seniors' benefits did not take into account that many seniors have relaxed in terms of the sophistication with which they pursue paperwork. They have relaxed in accounting and financial matters, and some of the public relations in conveying to seniors some of the cuts that they would endure last year and this year and in future years, I suggest to members of this Assembly, with respect, inflicted a certain element of additional pain and suffering that was not necessary. When I look at the communications budget of this department, it's no different than every other ministry on the front row of the government, Mr. Chairman. There's lots of money for communications, very little money and less money for children and for hospitals and schools. I want to say as a general theme to this minister that in that area, the area of communications, he can do better. I know that he will want to do better, and I know that his department and those department officials will want to do better than that.

I want to also indicate to the minister that there are a number of his grants that are distributed on an application basis or on a per capita basis or on a funding formula that is not determined in this Legislative Assembly and is not based on a per capita funding. I come from a constituency, Fort McMurray, Alberta, where the people there might be said to come from Missouri because they want to see it. This is not my view as their elected member, but there is a generally held view that the community of Fort McMurray contributes much more in taxes and benefits to the province than they get back in those discretionary grants that come back and that there is not fair and proportionate funding for community grants and the like that come back to Fort McMurray. So I would like to give this minister an opportunity to put that argument to rest once and for all. I would like this minister, if he is able, to arm me with the ammunition necessary to go back to the community of Fort McMurray and prove that Fort McMurray on a per capita basis or on a number of grants issued over the total number of grants or on any other realistic formula that he can devise, allow me the ammunition to go back to Fort McMurray and show that we do not get prejudiced in those discretionary grants in our community. If the minister, in doing that research and that homework, is not able to show that, is not able to establish that, is not able to provide the documentation necessary to convince the residents of Fort McMurray that that is so, then implicit in that, the minister, because of his stature in this

Legislative Assembly and in the community of Alberta as an honourable man, I know will move with lightning speed to suggest suggestions, strategies, and methodologies whereby the good residents of Fort McMurray can begin to get their fair and representative share of those discretionary grants.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, I want to say to the minister in charge of this department that if he thinks seniors in the province of Alberta are now happy, he should join me again and spend some time in Fort McMurray, and I will introduce him to reasonably placed and moderately speaking seniors who are not happy, who intuitively know that their percentage of cuts that they've been asked to bear is greater than the percentage of cuts that many Albertans have been asked to bear.

In my closing comments I want to remind this minister of a caricature cartoon that appeared in one of the major dailies last year. There were an elderly man and an elderly woman sitting in front of a run-down house, rocking away. The windows were knocked out of this house, some of the windows were boarded up, and there were no shades on the bulbs. The man looked at the woman and said: "See, Martha. I told you if we lived in Alberta long enough, we'd hit the definition of wealthy." The comment was again a reminder to the minister that his concept of what constitutes an adequate and decent income for seniors is in fact a dollar figure that is much below that money that many in Alberta are asked to live on.

9:00

I want to urge the minister that if he can find savings in those departments that I have suggested, he would do well in the spirit of fairness in this province to turn that money over to assisting seniors. Do not ever lose track, Mr. Minister, of the fact that seniors in this province in many quarters are hurting, and we should never get into a position in this Legislative Assembly where we gloat about the cuts and we gloat about the savings and we gloat about this and the next thing, when we must appreciate that it is being done on the backs and at the sacrifice of seniors in this province. So if you are able to take any of my constructive criticisms to heart and save any money, Mr. Minister, I would urge you to not forget that the seniors, although they may have become less vocal in recent months, are still not happy.

That, Mr. Chairman, concludes my comments this evening, and I'll pass over my spot in the speaking order, because I know there are many other members that are ready, anxious, and willing to speak on these important issues.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Chairman, I like the opportunity that speaking to estimates gives me, because it allows me to put some philosophical questions to ministers. We have those in our caucus who are better at single line review and asking questions about the dollars and cents, but I want to get to the philosophy that the minister has on a number of key issues.

I want to start by reminding the minister about something that happened in this Assembly not very long ago.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Chairman, is this a philosophical debate, or is this estimates?

MR. DECORE: Well, I'm delighted that the minister of agriculture has now got my attention as well. This is a good forum.

I want to know, Mr. Minister, because you've allocated some almost \$4 million towards multiculturalism and the Multiculturalism Commission, what your philosophy is about multiculturalism. Is it different than Premier Lougheed had when

he put forward legislation in this Assembly, the Multiculturalism Act? Is it the same kind of philosophy that Lougheed and Horst Schmid had and the government of that day? Or is it the philosophy of Premier Getty when in January he stood at a meeting and said that multiculturalism was being rammed down the throats of Albertans? I guess he forgot that the Conservative government under Lougheed had passed legislation on multiculturalism.

I think it's worthy of note, Mr. Minister of Agriculture, that when I stood in this Assembly and asked the then Premier questions on this issue, I got a note – it wasn't signed – from a member of the government backbench, I assume, telling me that the days of multiculturalism were coming to an end, that this was a good thing, that the new Alberta didn't need this kind of philosophy.

So if you're going to spend \$3.9 million or any money, Mr. Minister, on multiculturalism, what does it mean to you? I want to know what the goals and objectives are for the minister with respect to multiculturalism, and I want to know what the goals and objectives are for your commission.

It used to be that a commission was picked in part by the minister responsible for culture. It used to be that the majority of the commission or the council that served and gave advice to the minister was elected by ethnic groups. I had the privilege of serving as the first elected president to the then minister of culture, Mr. Schmid. I thought it worked well. But since those days, the commission has been co-opted, has been politicized, and quite frankly I don't see much use for a commission. So I want you to tell us, Mr. Minister, why we have this commission and what sort of things you expect this commission to do.

I'd like to know what the minister has in mind for multiculturalism insofar as the new foreign affairs policy of Canada is concerned. That foreign affairs policy talks about what they refer to as privileged access that Multiculturalism Canada allows Canadians with the world. Is there some way that we're going to take advantage of that? Is there some objective that you have that you've discussed with the ministry of industry and development?

I want to know whether some thinking is going on.

DR. WEST: Total integration.

MR. DECORE: Well, I'm glad you woke up too, minister of transportation, and I'm delighted to hear that you're talking about total integration, because that's what I expected you to say. I kind of expected you to say that the best thing for Alberta would be total integration, that everybody should look like you and talk like you and act like you and be like you. Now, keep dreaming, minister; keep dreaming. It ain't going to happen.

You see, we can now see – maybe it was the minister that sent me that note during the Getty era. Could be. Could be. He's nodding his head no, so I accept that. I accept that from the minister.

I believe that this tension does exist in the government caucus. I believe this tension, hon. members, exists, that the minister of transportation is putting the pressure on the minister responsible for culture and saying: I want total integration; that's the best way to do it. I think there are other hon. members on the government side that are doing the same thing. So let's flush it out. We know where the minister of transportation stands. Where do you stand, Mr. Minister of Culture? Tell us where your government stands. Are you going to dump this philosophy that Lougheed gave us, or are you going to make something of it? Are you going to give us some new directions on the area of multiculturalism?

DR. WEST: Well, now we know your stand too. You're against integration.

MR. DECORE: Yeah, I've always been against integration. It's nice to see you leaving to deliver another calf, minister of transportation. Nice to see you going off to deliver another calf. Nice to see the minister of agriculture putting up his head again and also thinking about multiculturalism: what it should involve, what it should be, and whether it should be dumped. I'd like to hear from the minister someday on that issue.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: There is a format for that, and that isn't the estimates.

MR. DECORE: Well, minister, if you look at *Beauchesne*, you'll see that there's pretty wide latitude. When a minister comes to this Assembly and says to the taxpayers of Alberta, "I want \$3.9 million to deal with multiculturalism," I'm entitled to ask questions about what he thinks this is going to do, how it's going to improve Alberta, and how it's going to improve your life.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: That's why you're 17 percent in the polls. That's exactly why.

MR. DECORE: I guess you believe in integration too, Mr. Minister. That's nice to see. That's nice to see.

I also want to ask the minister about the Individual's Rights Protection Act. I suspect that the minister of agriculture takes a different position on the issue of gay rights than the minister responsible for culture. [interjection] Oh, he's laughing at this. I think I'm correct, Mr. Minister. Tell me if I'm wrong, when you stand up and reply, that you, too, would like to amend the Individual's Rights Protection Act to ensure that there is discrimination against no Albertan. I'd like you to confirm that, when you stand up, and tell us what you're going to be doing with the Individual's Rights Protection Act. What sort of goals and objectives have you got for that organization or that initiative or that philosophy?

9:10

I'd also like the minister to tell us a little bit more about the area of culture in terms of funding, because there is great fear amongst a number of cultural groups, music groups. I mean the groups that my learned friend from Fort McMurray was talking about when he talked about the fact that this minister appears to have an attitude towards culture that is good, that the minister sees it as an enrichment of the lives of Albertans. I need to know something about where you think that whole issue should go. Is it something that government should get out of completely? Should we have the Citadel and the symphonies of Calgary and Edmonton? Should we get rid of funding and assistance to those organizations completely and let them be on their own? Or do we owe something additional to those organizations to make them stronger? I take particular delight in turning the radio on from time to time and hearing Bernardi or Uri Meyer from Edmonton being part of the record scene of Canada. I want to know where the minister stands on that issue.

Mr. Minister, there is great fear that this intended amalgamation of a number of agencies, commissions, and so on is going to completely render them useless; that is, render the philosophy, render that area completely useless. I want some assurance from you that sports and recreation and the Historical Resources Foundation and the Seniors Advisory Council aren't going to be

put into some maze of a bureaucracy that finds that there's no real purpose for their existence.

Now, I think the minister is a caring person, and I've liked the sorts of things that he's said in this Assembly. I just want assurance and reassurance on these issues so that I can go to my constituents and say that at least I know there's somebody on the other side who believes in rights for all Albertans, who believes that there is something more important than a culture that's devoid of music and symphony and dance and performing arts and so on, that there's something important about multiculturalism in our country. I want the minister to stand up and say that to us.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The previous speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, stood up and said that he was going to speak from a philosophical basis, so I too would like to ask the minister tonight to respond to some of the issues that I'm going to bring forward as chairman of the Multiculturalism Commission. Although it has been a short time, I think about 18 months, the issue that I believe I have seen is that diversity is a fact. It's a fact in Alberta, in Canada, and around the world, and I believe that our ability to effectively manage diversity at home adds to what we talk about here in the Legislature, and that is the Alberta advantage.

Now, as the member said, the government of Alberta has long appreciated the multicultural heritage of our citizens, and I believe that we continue to do so, and I would like the minister to comment on that. Albertans have made contributions, Mr. Chairman, and those contributions, as I said, do come from people with diverse backgrounds, and they have made to the development of the province. I think that is a bit of what you're alluding to.

Also, the government recognizes that the diversity of our citizens strengthens the province and that they're committed to programs that ensure their cultural diversity has a positive impact on Alberta's people, on the economy, and on its future. Such recognition helps us get the most out of our employees and provide, I believe, better services to customers and clients. Also, Mr. Chairman, over the past three years funding has shifted from preservation of cultural traditions and artistic endeavours to managing diversity.

MR. DECORE: A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, on a point of order, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. DECORE: Mr. Chairman, I would ask if the hon. member would permit a question.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry would like to ask a question. Would you accept it?

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't think so. I've just listened to the member for the past 15 or 20 minutes.

Debate Continued

MRS. FRITZ: I'm responding to what he had to say, mainly because in the first night of estimates I very much talked to the

issue of multiculturalism, the next step, the direction that it was taking the province of Alberta, and why under the hands of this minister there has been a change in direction. That change is worth while and good. The recent review of our multiculturalism action plan has indicated the direction and that that direction is supported by Albertans. So I am going to ask that the minister in his comments does reflect on that.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I start off by acknowledging and thanking the minister for responding to those questions that I'd put to him on the first go-around. But his responses then beg some other questions, and this relates of course to the Alberta Human Rights Commission. I took the minister to say that for the typical time now from the time a complaint is registered until the time it's disposed of, we're talking about an average of nine months. He referenced the backlog that exists and talked about the plan that's in place now to be able to compress the time to process these complaints. I guess what I'd like is an indication from the minister: what's the goal? What's the objective in terms of how long it should take from the time a complaint is filed by an aggrieved Albertan until there's a disposition? What's the target?

The minister has said in the House – and this is consistent with what he said publicly – that the Equal in Dignity report and his government's response to it is contingent on some review by a Conservative standing policy committee, not an all-party committee but a party of the Conservative caucus. Given the time that has elapsed since the report Equal in Dignity was published in I think July of 1994, I'd ask the minister to be more precise in terms of when the standing policy committee of his caucus is going to deal with this. I'm looking for a particular date. My understanding, and the minister can correct me if I'm wrong, is that the Conservative standing policy committee had received an oral presentation from the authors of the Equal in Dignity report some time in December. My understanding is that those people appeared in front of the standing policy committee, responded to questions, presented the report, and answered the questions raised by your colleagues, Mr. Minister. So I'm having some considerable difficulty understanding why we are here months later, and the government in some form of paralysis is waiting for a group of MLAs to decide what the response should be.

Mr. Minister, through the chair, you've responded to some of the requests for additional resources to be able to make the commission work more effectively. I'm curious in terms of why you felt you were at liberty to respond to those recommendations when the other recommendations that seemed to have the broadest possible kind of public support – namely a stronger commission, an independent commission, a commission arm's length from government – we hear no response on. I think the government owes it to Albertans, and certainly Albertans that are keen in seeing an implementation of the recommendations from the Equal in Dignity report, to know what the time line is. So I ask you to confirm whether there has already been a presentation to the Conservative standing policy committee in December, when the committee will next deal with this, and then when you're going to make a decision.

9:20

Now that, I think, also touches on the issue of a further report. Not only do we have the 1,700-odd Albertans that made submis-

sions reflected in the Equal in Dignity report, but there was the Fractured Voices report done by Dennis Anderson, former minister of consumer and corporate affairs, former minister in a number of capacities in this Legislature prior to the 1993 election. Mr. Anderson was commissioned to do a report for the Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta branch, on the Human Rights Commission, and I take it, Mr. Minister, that you've received a copy of the report. I understand that the authors of the report will also be making a submission to a standing policy committee of the Conservative caucus. Is your position and your government's position on the Equal in Dignity report contingent upon hearing the representation from the Canadian Mental Health Association on the Fractured Voices report?

Mr. Minister, I'd like you to respond to the recommendation in the Fractured Voices report that, number one, the most important thing is to have an independent commission, a commission independent of government, a commission reporting to the all-party Legislative Offices Committee, and then to the specific recommendation that the investigative arm of the Human Rights Commission be merged in an office of a citizens' advocate along with the services currently provided by the office of the Ombudsman, the mental health advocate, the Farmers' Advocate, and a number of other complaint advocates. I'd like the minister's response to those recommendations.

Further, with respect to the Human Rights Commission I wanted to ask the minister to provide particulars. Last week we had the undertaking by the Premier, your Premier, that he would make available public opinion polls that had been done by your government and paid for by tax dollars. I'm interested particularly in a survey that I understand was commissioned by the government of Alberta which asked among other things whether the Alberta Human Rights Commission should be independent of government. My understanding is that in the survey that the government received and paid for and commissioned, we had well over 70 percent of respondents who said, "Yes, the Human Rights Commission should be independent of government." So in keeping with the undertaking given by the Premier last week, Mr. Minister, will you provide us with particulars of that particular survey? I understand this isn't the only one. I understand there has been at least one other and possibly two other surveys done polling Albertans on whether they think the Alberta Human Rights Commission should be independent and also in terms of determining whether sexual orientation should be included in the Individual's Rights Protection Act. I'd like those particulars now. As I say, I don't have the exact date, but it was a date last week when the Premier had undertaken that that information would be available.

The other question, just moving on from the Alberta Human Rights Commission. I'm interested in the plans, Mr. Minister, in terms of library services in the province. I noted the other day in my constituency of Calgary-Buffalo that the Alberta Vocational College, AVC, as a result of a \$500,000 cut in provincial government funding is going to close its library. As I understand it, the response of the government and the hon. minister of advanced education is that we don't have a library here, so these people can walk over to the Calgary Public Library, the Castell library, and access information there. Now, from our discussions with people in the library service, there is a finite capacity on the part of the Calgary Public Library to be able to deal with requests for information, particularly having regard to the fact that AVC's student population has a very high concentration of new Canadians, people who don't speak English as a first language. It seems

that one may safely assume that this is going to put perhaps a considerable burden on the Calgary Public Library. So I'm interested in knowing from the minister what if anything he and his department are prepared to do to address what may likely be a very considerable additional demand load for service on the part of the Calgary Public Library. I'd certainly be interested in your concern in that respect.

Going back to the Alberta Human Rights Commission. It's been of interest to me, Mr. Minister – and I tell you this now – that people have contacted your office and they've asked why Mr. Jack O'Neill, the former chief commissioner, was not kept on as chief commissioner of the Human Rights Commission. The response as reported to me from your office, from your executive assistant, was that Mr. O'Neill failed in his Equal in Dignity report to accurately reflect the concerns expressed by Albertans when they made presentations to the Premier's task force. I'm astonished at two things. I'm astonished firstly that someone in your office would make that kind of claim, that kind of assertion, when Mr. O'Neill had himself been installed by your government without the benefit of an open competition. One would have thought they felt Mr. O'Neill at least shared the government's perspective and views.

The second thing is that to anybody who attended any of those hearings in the spring and summer of 1994, it was apparent that the overwhelming call was for an independent commission, was for a stronger Human Rights Commission, was for the inclusion of sexual orientation in the IRPA. So I'd like an explanation from you, Mr. Minister, in terms of why that kind of information would be provided to Albertans that have called your office. I can tell you – and I think you'll appreciate this yourself – that I have no reason to think that this would be on your instruction, but you're the minister and you have responsibility for what communications come from your office. I'd encourage you to look into that, because I think it's most unfair to Mr. O'Neill, the former chief commissioner.

I think those are my principal questions. You have indicated, I think, that five people have been seconded from your office to the Alberta Human Rights Commission to try and address the significant backlog that exists there. You've told us that you don't want to increase resources to the Human Rights Commission. You've indicated you don't want to see more tax dollars spent by the Human Rights Commission. I guess my question would be: do we take it from that that the people currently seconded to the commission to try and address the backlog are only there temporarily and that at some point in the future those people are going to be pulled back into the Department of Community Development? When that happens, what do you say as the backlog continues to build again? The incidence of complaints to the Human Rights Commission has for the most part been steadily increasing. There's no indication that those complaints are about to drop off. I see that there's been a cutback in terms of resources for the Canadian Human Rights Commission, so that may put even more pressure on the commission that you're responsible for.

I'm interested in responses to those questions, Mr. Minister. Thank you.

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

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to thank the minister for his answers to some of the questions that I

asked the other evening. I appreciate that, and I'll be giving the answers some further study.

9:30

Mr. Minister, I was, however, a little puzzled at your comments about my questions regarding the women's advisory council. If I understood you correctly, your statement was that women's groups wanted to be on their own, didn't any longer want or presumably need the support that your department has given them in the past. With respect, Mr. Minister, I disagree. I think it's very important for this government to continue that advisory council. I think they have done excellent work in the past, and I only wish that the various departments of the government would have availed themselves of the recommendations of that particular council. I'd be grateful if the minister could share with me and other members any correspondence he has that reinforces his comments that women's groups want to be isolated from government and presumably from government funds, because that's not been my information.

Mr. Chairman, on page 18 of the three-year plans there is a measurement for the department and for the Alberta seniors' benefit program that I don't believe I had a chance to question the minister on before. This is one that says:

A desired outcome of the Alberta Seniors Benefit Program 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 wonder if the minister would comment on that. If I understood you correctly, Mr. Minister, there is an additional fund for extra support to go to those who are judged to be suffering greatly from the circumstances in which they find themselves, but I'm not sure I understand how that extra support would be determined; that is, how do I get to it? I assume through the ASB or through an appeal process which has yet to be established.

Mr. Chairman, I mean this with respect, but the minister's title is: responsible for seniors. I'm a little troubled by that, because I think there's an assumption there on the part of seniors and seniors' organizations that this particular department is responsible for all seniors' programs, and we know that's not the case. I like to think this minister serves as an advocate to other ministries where there are programs that might affect seniors – positively, negatively, neutral, whatever – but I still don't have that comfort zone that I would like about it, and I don't think seniors do. I don't think seniors' organizations do.

The Seniors Advisory Council I think do excellent work too, Mr. Minister. I'm impressed with their report and their recommendations, and I would hope that they would be taken into consideration, but what I need to have some reassurance about is many of these recommendations that don't affect your department or your budget. What responsibility does this minister responsible for seniors have to ensure that those recommendations are addressed and dealt with by Health, by social services, by Municipal Affairs, whatever? I don't understand that link. I think that's a missing link, in a sense, because seniors need some reassurance that there is a place.

Now, I feel somewhat better by the current answers that I've received from this minister and the Minister of Health on the appeals process, that an appeals process will in fact be formed; that it will deal with appeals in the widest sense; that it won't just deal, as I originally thought, with appeals to the ASB; that it will be a place where I as a senior can go and make my case if I feel

my rent in the lodge is exorbitant and I will get some satisfaction. So I want to see the appeals process.

Within that, Mr. Chairman, I want to have some understanding that the thresholds will in fact be re-examined. Now, in this measure 5 that I read to you, I think that's contained in that measurement. Will in fact the thresholds be examined? Are they still contemporary? Are they still satisfactory? What is the Alberta Council on Aging, the Seniors Advisory Council saying about those? Is it time we had a look at them to determine if they in fact are at the right level? I'm unsure about where this department is vis-à-vis those thresholds.

Mr. Chairman, I've mentioned housing, and housing isn't in this department, but I'm assuming that this minister has a connection to housing. In housing and the deregulation of lodge rents we find that there's a statement that says: no seniors should be left with less than \$265 a month. I'd like you as the minister responsible for seniors to explain to me how that's monitored, because I keep hearing from seniors who don't have anything like \$265 left a month. The lodge charges the \$700 allowed, but then they add on laundry and they add on and they add on and they add on a few other things, and pretty soon there's really very little left for the senior. Now, is that a requirement or is that a guideline? I think the minister of transportation is conversant with this as well. I'd like to know where that number came from, how it is applied, and how it is monitored. Now, if a lodge, for instance, does not adhere to that, then is there a penalty? If I'm a senior in that lodge, to whom do I go? I mean, I can go to the foundation, but they'll just say: "These are the rules. This is what the rent and the extras are going to cost. You don't need to have your laundry done. You can take it to your family or whatever." But that number is out there, Mr. Minister, and seniors want to know: "I don't have \$265 left. How come?" Why is it there if it has no particular significance or meaning to the senior?

Mr. Chairman, I have some other rather more direct questions. I'm glad to hear the application forms are going to be reviewed. I think that's a very good move, and I look forward to that. I think there were some concerns about the complexity of them in the first place.

I want to ask the minister about the calculation of the thresholds and the uniformity. I understand there are two separate calculations, one for the health care insurance subsidy and one for the ASB cash benefit. I want to know if we have any intention of standardizing or making those calculations uniform so that seniors are no longer confused by that. Many seniors have asked me – and I suspect they've asked the minister – about the use of taxable income rather than gross income in the ASB calculations, and I don't think the minister has commented about that relative to the estimates. Those seniors who incur business costs, those are reflected in their taxable income but not in their gross income. Perhaps the minister would clear that up for me.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, property taxes, I assume, in a number of municipalities will be going up, and this year the seniors will not any longer have access to the deduction. I suspect that many of them will not have thought about that and perhaps have not set the money aside. I'm not sure how the ministry plans to deal with that, and my question of course is: will property taxes be included as deductions for ASB purposes? When property taxes come due, I think we're going to see a rash of seniors who suddenly realize they don't have the funds in the bank to pay for them.

9:40

Mr. Chairman, a couple of other questions. I was concerned – and I asked the minister before – about the reduction in the total

amount vis-à-vis the numbers of seniors that are coming onstream. Perhaps the minister can tell us: do we know or have we got a good fix on whether or not there are seniors in our province that are eligible for ASB that have not accessed it? [interjection] No? You're assuring me no. We've got everybody, every single one of them. Well, I'm grateful for that. That's very reassuring. So you have some outreach program that captures those people that might not think of themselves as being logical applicants.

Mr. Chairman, finally, I was disturbed, and I asked the minister a question about today's information about the veterans' food bank. This is the kind of indicator, Mr. Minister, that I think tells me that all is not right with seniors in the province, that perhaps the thresholds are not what they ought to be, that a modest increase or an adjustment may be absolutely essential at this point in time. I don't know how the minister is judging from the kinds of concerns that are expressed whether or not they need to be adjusted, but the idea of the veterans in our province experiencing such difficulty, even with the kind of pensions that they have access to and supports that they have access to, that a legion in Calgary would have to set up a food bank somehow really has shaken me. I'm disturbed by that, Mr. Minister, and I hope that the minister himself will have a look at that, will inquire as to what the experience was of those veterans that this particular legion has sought to assist and aid.

So, Mr. Minister, perhaps if you could have a look and maybe give me some answers to those few questions, I'd appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. PHAM: I am pleased to join in the debate today on the '95-96 budget of the Community Development department. Before going into the questions I have, I would like to congratulate the minister and his department on a job well done in 1993-94. This last year marked many historic events in the department. Two examples are the introduction of the seniors' benefit program and the review of the Human Rights Commission. These were very sensitive issues, but with his hard work and dedication this minister has successfully dealt with these issues head on.

Looking at the '95-96 budget, I am glad to see that his department continues to show strong support for the Citizenship and Heritage Secretariat and the Human Rights Commission. As we go through this period of fiscal restraint, it is very easy for us to eliminate these programs because they may not seem to directly benefit us. On top of that, some extreme cases being brought to the Alberta Human Rights Commission over the last few years have made some people upset and question the benefit of having such a commission. While I'm not always in agreement with the Human Rights Commission, I believe that the need for such an organization is real. Having it is just like having insulin. For many of us we will be thankful that we will never have to use it, but it is good to know it is there to safeguard the fragile balance of our society.

I would at this point focus the minister's attention on the Citizenship and Heritage Secretariat program, reference number 4.0.2 on page 71. If I'm correct, the Alberta Multiculturalism Commission is under this item. I would like to ask the minister two questions. Question number one: can the Alberta Multiculturalism Commission continue to carry out its mandate as outlined in its new action plan *Multiculturalism: The Next Step*? The second question is: what kind of activities does the Alberta Multiculturalism Commission support?

Mr. Minister, your job is not an easy one, but it's very important because many of the people that your department looks

after are those who can least fend for themselves. On behalf of those people I would like to thank you for your dedication and leadership, and I look forward to continuing to work with you for the good of these people and all Albertans.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. BENIUK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to say a few words on 3.0.1 to 3.0.8, dealing with archives and museums. I must say that I do believe museums and archives bring in tourists. I was quite impressed that when I took a visitor from Ukraine to Drumheller to the Tyrrell museum at the weekend, I had to park at the farthest end of the overflow parking provisions. Obviously a lot of people had come to Drumheller to see the museum and I'm sure were spending a great deal of money while there, whether it was for food or gas or other things. So museums do bring in tourism.

I note that the minister is cutting back on that particular museum by 16 percent from the previous year. When I was there, there were bodies so crowded in that building that it was very difficult to move around. So it is a very popular facility, and I'm sort of surprised that he's cutting back financing on it, operating funds.

I am pleased that the funding for the Ukrainian cultural village continues, although it is being cut back by 6 percent, which is unfortunate.

I note that Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump is getting \$278,000. When I was in the area, I was told by some of the residents in that area that there were other sites that were actually better to show what this site is supposed to show, buffalo being driven over a bank. I gather that this was chosen because of its proximity to an urban centre like Fort Macleod and once again for tourism. I see nothing wrong with it. I think it generates tourism and it is great. I do, you know, appreciate the fact that funds are going in.

My first question to the minister would be: do you have any analysis being carried out on how you can improve the marketing of the various museums and archives that you have throughout the province so that if you have to somehow invest some capital funds, it would generate a greater number of people entering and taking a look at what the museums have to offer?

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

I note that you have, as I indicated, put in \$278,000 for the Buffalo Jump, whereas you have \$4,728,000 thrown into one category, which is archives and other historic sites. So I'd like to know: is it that all these other sites and archives are so small that it would be a very long page; in other words, there'd be much less than the \$278,000? Or is there some other reason? I'd like to know what these sites and what these archives are and how much money would be going into the various ones. It would be interesting to know where they are, what the tourist impact is of these. I stress that I'm quite impressed with the fact that tourists go to where these sites are. They spend money. It helps the economy. I do think it helps, you know, to generate jobs and so forth. So if the minister will be so kind as to explain where these sites are for the \$4,728,000, I will be very, very pleased.

I believe the Reynolds-Alberta Museum is – correct me if I'm wrong – a private museum. It's not, the minister is saying. Okay. What is the significance that so much money is going to that particular museum? Is there . . .

MR. MAR: It's big.

9:50

MR. BENIUK: It's big, the minister says. Can I assume that a lot of people are visiting that particular museum also?

That leads me to another question. What proportion of the funds are you providing in the way of operating funds? What percentage of the total revenue that's required to operate these museums comes from user fees of people paying to go into these facilities as compared to what you and your department are providing? Once again, I'd like to fall back on the previous question when you're looking at this: what could you do to create an even greater number of people visiting these sites? The Drumheller one is a classic example. You know, the number of people going there is phenomenal. I mean, if it's that way every weekend, you've got a very major attraction on your hands. I note that there are some capital investments taking place – not very much, but there are some – and I see nothing wrong with that. I think it's a good investment to generate further tourist dollars.

With that I would conclude my comments, and I would just add one thing. The library operating grants, which others have referred to: I was wondering if the minister could somehow break that down. Is it in the urban areas? Is it rural? Where is the money going? Is the money going to Edmonton, Calgary, or is it going into the outlying areas? Is there anything in the way of a computer hookup so that books or magazines can be taken from one centre to another, in the rural areas especially, where the libraries may not have enough funds to have magazines, books, et cetera, that one would find in a larger urban area? It would be interesting to know exactly what analysis has been done in the way of a hookup to maximize the books and magazines that the libraries have. Also, how are you breaking down the funding? What are the criteria for providing these funds? If you would be so kind as to do that.

With that, I will yield the floor to another member.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. MAR: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I've listened very closely to questions from a number of members on both sides of the House, and I thank them for their insightful questions. I must say that I'm often impressed by the quality of questions, but never before this evening have I been so impressed by the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, who asked some very insightful things on the subject of philosophy. I'm sure that that can be the subject matter of an intelligent discourse between the two of us at some time.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll simply conclude by saying that I'll undertake to review *Hansard* and provide answers to the questions that have been asked by the members this evening.

With that, I'll call for the question.

Agreed to:

Operating Expenditure	\$197,687,000
Capital Investment	\$353,000

MR. MAR: Mr. Chairman, I ask that the vote be reported.

[Motion carried]

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

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

MR. TANNAS: 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. The Department of Community Development: \$197,687,000, operating expenditure, and \$353,000, capital investment.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Do you agree with the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, if any? Carried.

[At 9:57 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]