

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

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Subcommittee A

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3:11 p.m.

[Deputy Chairman: Mr. Magnus]

Committee of Supply: Subcommittee A Executive Council

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd call subcommittee A of Committee of Supply to order.

The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and hon. members. I am pleased to participate in this round of hearings held by this subcommittee.

Mr. Chairman, today we'll be discussing areas for which I am responsible; namely, Executive Council, which includes my office and general administration for Executive Council and the Lieutenant Governor's office; northern development; the personnel administration office; the Public Affairs Bureau; and, as of late last year, the office of the chief information officer.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, Executive Council is ultimately responsible for co-ordinating our agenda. We'll continue to focus on three things: one, to take the lead in bringing in balanced budgets without tax increases and in paying down our provincial debt; two, to find more ways to streamline government to provide essential programs and services at a cost that we can afford in the long term; and thirdly, to reflect the will of the people we serve, in everything from the way we deal with budget surpluses to health care and education in Alberta. Our ultimate goal remains to give Albertans the best services possible and at the most value for their tax dollars. Executive Council is on track to meet its budget target of \$21.9 million this year, and that's down from \$23 million last year.

The first story I would like to talk about today is the Northern Alberta Development Council, and I'm sure that the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti will comment further. Northern development has two components: the Northern Alberta Development Council and the administration of a federal/provincial cost-shared program designed to strengthen the economic base of Alberta's north. The council is made up of eight public members and is chaired by my colleague Mr. Jacques, who of course is the MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti. As I indicated, the hon. member will provide more details on the council after my presentation. The second component of Northern Alberta Development Council's responsibility is the administration of the federal/provincial cost-sharing process, which is now through the application phase and will distribute funds to approve projects until 1997-1998, as planned.

The Northern Alberta Development Council's mission is to contribute to economic development in northern Alberta by leveraging our resources in partnership with the private sector and community-based organizations.

The council is changing its approach this year from sponsoring public meetings that address northern issues to holding working sessions and conferences with its partner groups to target opportunities and ways for development in northern Alberta. It's expected to meet its budget target of \$2.1 million this year, which is down from \$2.9 million last year.

The personnel administration office is responsible for the central human resource management of government's biggest asset, and that asset of course is our employees. It provides programs and services to help departments fulfill their business plans. Its workforce adjustment program is helping to reduce the size of our public sector by nearly 30 percent over four years. Many of those reductions were achieved by the voluntary options program, early retirement programs, job-sharing opportunities, and of course many of these employees are now gainfully employed in the

private sector. The workforce adjustment program offers support courses on job searching, interviewing, and résumé writing. As well, employees are eligible for a negotiated severance package providing for up to 43 weeks' salary for 13 full years of service.

The personnel administration office co-ordinates both the Premier's Forum, bringing together representatives from the broader public sector to help manage change, and the Premier's award of excellence to recognize the exceptional work being done by our employees. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our employees for a job well done. They're working hard, and they're still looking for savings each and every day.

PAO is on track to meet its budget target of \$7.2 million, down from \$7.5 million last year.

Communicating with Albertans has been a priority with our administration from day one. The Public Affairs Bureau helps us make government information more accessible to Albertans. The bureau is a governmentwide, full-service agency. It assigns staff to departments and agencies to help develop and implement communications programs; it co-ordinates the purchase of advertising, printing, and graphic design services on behalf of government departments; it operates the RITE system, the Queen's Printer bookstores, and the Alberta Communications Network; and it co-ordinates government communications during public emergencies.

The bureau is on track to meet its budget target of \$9.1 million this year, down from \$9.5 million last year, and it's forecasting \$1.5 million in revenues, mostly through its Queen's Printer bookstore operation.

The office of the chief information officer was created late last year to optimize the way our government uses existing and emerging information technology. It will provide information, guidance, and a framework for departments and agencies in their information technology plans. It will help share information strategies and resources among government and the private sector. Its budget for this year is \$500,000.

Colleagues, those are my initial comments. Now I would like to call on the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti to talk with you about northern development.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, it's a great pleasure to stand here today not only as the chair of the NADC but certainly as a Northerner from northern Alberta. When I look at the area of the north, there are a lot of things that our members in this Legislative Assembly aren't aware of, and whether they're on this side of the House or the other side of the House is incidental, because the north is so distinct and so different. Things like the western boundary of northern Alberta being 400 kilometres west of Calgary: Calgarians generally wouldn't think of that, and indeed I don't think a lot of northerners would necessarily think about it. But if we look at the border, the western border, it is 400 kilometres west of Calgary on a longitudinal basis. People think of Grande Prairie as being far north of Edmonton. It's twice as far west as it is north of Edmonton: 160 kilometres roughly to the north but over 330 to the west. People don't think of Fort McMurray being west of Medicine Hat - I'm not even sure my colleague from Medicine Hat is aware of that - things like Fort McMurray being an additional 160 kilometres farther north than even what Grande Prairie is and indeed a community like High Level, which is another 360 kilometres farther north than Grande Prairie.

In this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Chairman, we have 12 members whose constituencies either in whole or in part reside in that NADC area. They consist of West Yellowhead, Whitecourt-St. Anne, Barrhead-Westlock, Lac La Biche-St. Paul, Bonny-

ville, Fort McMurray, Athabasca-Wabasca, Lesser Slave Lake, Peace River, Dunvegan, Grande Prairie-Smoky, and my constituency, Grande Prairie-Wapiti. If we look at some of these vibrant communities and towns and even cities that exist in the northern part of Alberta and in the NADC area, we see places like Rainbow Lake, High Level, Fort Vermilion, Fort Chipewyan, Manning, Fort McMurray, Grimshaw, Peace River, Fairview, Spirit River, Falher, McLennan, High Prairie, Slave Lake, Lac La Biche, Athabasca, Grand Centre, Bonnyville, St. Paul, Elk Point, Grande Cache, Whitecourt, Fox Creek, Valleyview, Grande Prairie, Wembley, Beaverlodge, Sexsmith, to name but a few.

The other thing I should point out, Mr. Chairman, is that the geographic centre of the province of Alberta is located in the Swan Hills. What that really means is that if we look at Edmonton, for example, it is in the south half of the province, yet typically most people will think of Edmonton as being in northern Alberta. It is true that the area that is represented by the NADC encroaches in that south half, if we look at the actual boundary of it, but the larger part is in the northern part.

3:21

The Premier spoke of the council, and I did want to briefly just review the members of that council and also acknowledge the great contribution that they've provided to the north and to this province.

Elmer Anderson, who's from High Prairie. He is the chairman of the Peavine Métis settlement council. He's also a successful businessman in a sawmill, as an example.

Jim Carbery, who I think many members may be familiar with, who's from Fort McMurray. Jim is currently an alderman on the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo council, which of course he always refers to as the largest municipality in North America, if not the world. He has just recently retired after spending a number of years as native affairs adviser with Syncrude in Fort McMurray.

Louise Faulkner, who is from McLennan. She's the secretary-treasurer of the McLennan chamber of commerce. She and her husband run an electrical service and contracting business there.

Floyd McLennan, who is a retired RCMP member and who is the mayor of Grande Cache and has been for a number of years.

Irwin Packham, who is the owner and manager of a High Level department store. He has also served on the High Level town council for many years, also including mayor.

A fellow by the name of Don Wieben, who is from Fairview, who serves as the president and general manager of a very large family farm in that area.

Charles Wood from Saddle Lake. I'm sure that many members here may have encountered Mr. Wood or know of Mr. Wood. He is currently a councillor with the Saddle Lake First Nation band council. He also works as a consultant in native business management personnel development, and he's the past chief of the Saddle Lake Indian tribal council.

So you can see, Mr. Chairman, that when we talk about the NADC, we can talk about land and we can talk about the geographic areas, but we also have to talk about the eight people who serve on that council from throughout northern Alberta with diversified backgrounds and a tremendous amount of knowledge. It's also, I should point out, not one that is exclusive to any political party. Certainly, if we knew Mr. Carbery, for example, he's a well-known Liberal from Fort McMurray and a very valuable member of the NADC.

Mr. Chairman, when we talk about the NADC and we look at the area, we're talking about an area that is approximately 60

percent of the total land area of the province, and if we look at the forests, about 90 percent of the forests are located in that area. Companies like Al-Pac located near Athabasca, Weyerhaeuser near Grande Prairie, Daishowa near Peace River, and Alberta Newsprint near Fox Creek are some of the more major developments that we have seen, particularly over the last 10 years. Of course, Weyerhaeuser had been there prior, back into approximately the mid-70s. When we see 90 percent of the provincial forests located in that area, and we've seen the development that has occurred to date, we know that there is still room for tremendous more development.

If we look at the oil sands, 100 percent of the oil sands are located in that area, and in particular we're all familiar, of course, with both Suncor and Syncrude at Fort McMurray, and we're also aware of some of the initiatives that are being undertaken with regard to possible expansion. With regard to the so-called conventional or normal energy-type of activity, over 35 percent of our conventional reserves are located in that NADC area.

Indeed, even in the agricultural area over 20 percent of our land is located. People are surprised when they go east of a community like High Level to see the tremendous amount of farming activity that takes place in that area. It's an area that most people, particularly those from southern Alberta, simply are not familiar with and are really quite frankly dismayed when they see the amount of agricultural activity that's going on, particularly in that area. When the NADC was established, Mr. Chairman, which was back in 1972 under an Act, I believe the government of the day was recognizing some of the aspects that we've talked about but also recognized that there were some very unique constraints and very unique problems and indeed probably some very unique opportunities available to all Albertans within the northern part of this province.

Distance and access are probably some of the things that stand out, stand out in terms of our road transportation, in terms of airline connections, the remoteness of many of our communities. We look at an economy that is very, very largely based on resource extraction in particular, between the forest products sector and the energy sector, in terms of nonrenewable resources as well as the agricultural community. Also, typically the communities in northern Alberta tend to be very young, in fact some of the youngest communities as compared again to the median age that one would see in other towns and cities throughout Alberta. We also unfortunately see some towns and some areas and some communities that really have not been able to participate fully or to experience some of the benefits that have occurred in the north.

Mr. Chairman, the NADC has had a long history, as I indicated earlier, going back to 1972, of fulfilling that mandate of the Act. I do want to emphasize as we move into the '96-97 business plan year that the NADC has embarked on a different course of action. Historically the council has tried to be all things to all people in terms of so many of the issues and so many of the problems and so many of the opportunities that have been identified in the north. The council - and again I'm referring to the eight members and myself - spent some many days closeted together early last summer to really concentrate on where we felt the NADC should be putting its resources in the ensuing years and particularly over the next three years as we look at a sunset provision that will kick in on January 1, 1999. As a result of that process, the mission that we have concentrated on since that point of time and are developing in terms of our activities is to contribute to the economic development by leveraging our resources in partnership with the private sector and community-based organizations. I think it's fair - if we look at that, we would see that in turn it is

aligned with the government's commitment to the issue of prosperity and people.

If we look specifically at the three goals for this forthcoming year, Mr. Chairman, the first is "to promote emerging development opportunities in northern Alberta." We see council taking a lead role in this regard. There are many organizations that we can work with towards that goal.

Our second goal is "to strengthen northern Alberta's economic competitiveness." For example, a project that took up quite a bit of our time last fall and is an ongoing one concerns the whole issue of rail transportation, particularly as it relates to northwestern Alberta. As a result of that, we have identified some areas of opportunity that we will be working with other government agencies and the private sector to explore and see what we can do to act as a catalyst to resolve some of the issues.

Value-added agriculture is another area that we're focusing on. We've got a project under way, particularly in the northeast part of the province, right now.

3:31

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

As the members know, we'll be alternating speakers, as is the usual practice, and the Premier as the head of Executive Council may choose to answer your questions individually or as a group towards the end or anywhere that he wishes to answer.

With that in mind, I have my first questioner, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, please.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My first questions will come from Agenda '96, page 217, under the personnel administration office business plan. It states here under the core businesses that part of their responsibilities are to "support executive deployment by assisting in the selection and development of senior executives." This week in the House we've heard some discussion and different options in terms of exactly what the rules and responsibilities of the PAO are, and perhaps the Premier today could clearly identify what the responsibility is of this office in terms of assisting in the selection of senior executives. There must be a mandate or job descriptions or specific procedures that they follow, and I hope the Premier will be able to provide that to us.

MR. KLEIN: Well, certainly one of the functions, Mr. Chairman, of the personnel administration office is to assist Executive Council and other agencies of government to select those who are best suited to carry out specific duties. These are professional activities carried out by professionals, and in many cases of course we hire outside consultants who have tremendous expertise.

As to the science, the actual science that is used, I don't know because I am not a personnel consultant. I am not a headhunter. I just don't know the techniques that they use. I do know there are certain processes that are put in place and certain professional techniques that I guess are somewhat standard, but to ask me for a detailed breakdown, Mr. Chairman, of how these searches are carried out and the kind of expertise that is applied and how it is applied, I really can't answer.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, my apologies. I thought you were finished with your 20 minutes which you are allotted for each question or series of questions that you might have. Is that not correct?

MS CARLSON: No. Mr. Chairman, I was assuming the Premier was following the procedure that was followed in a committee this morning in which the minister would answer each question individually.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That would be the designated supply subcommittee. This will work the same way as Committee of Supply, which enables you, as I understand it, to ask a series of questions, up to 20 minutes. When you're finished with your 20 minutes – and I have a list from your side of five names to ask questions – as I say, the Premier may elect to answer you individually or may wait till all of your speakers are done at the end and then answer you. It's his choice. So you have about 18 minutes left.

MS CARLSON: Thank you very much.

My next question is in the same area. I'm wondering if the Premier could explain to us why there are different layoff procedures, which procedures initially come from this office and then go to all the different ministries, and they are carrying out the layoff procedures in different manners. Specifically I'll speak to economic development and social services and computer services. What we were told is to happen is that when someone takes a severance package with the government, they're told that if they are contracted out by the company that is now assuming the responsibilities that were previously assumed by the department, they cannot take the severance package, that the severance package is only available to them if they either find no employment or seek employment elsewhere, not with the company that's being contracted to carry out those services. In fact, what looks like is happening in these departments is that the ministers are able to bend the rules and allow some people who are being contracted out to maintain and retain their severance package. I'm hoping he can clarify that, because it really gives an unfair advantage to those people who take a package with the government and who then have to live on that severance pay and can't find immediate employment with the contractors.

We have in fact several examples of people who were told that they could take the severance package, immediately found a job with the contractor, and were able to keep the severance package. Yet specifically this morning the minister of economic development said that that would not be possible, that they would have to turn back in the severance money if they continued to be employed by the department, whether that be as a full-time equivalent or with the contracting company. That's a very deep concern to us. I'm hoping that before we leave today the Premier will address that and tell us that the policy is consistent from department to department and that it will be acted on in that manner and that it's a level playing field for everybody regardless of what kind of job they're going to or coming from afterwards.

My questions next go to northern development's business plan. In the vision you speak there about a "new strategic focus", and I'm wondering if the chair of this committee can tell us what was wrong with the old focus and what it was that they did to determine how and what should change about where they're going. You talk there about promoting "emerging economic development opportunities," and I'm wondering if you can name the ones that are under current consideration and if you can tell us how they are prioritized and who decides what they are and how you're promoting them and what role this council plays in this. Are we talking support, encouragement, dollars, computer services, networking? We don't know because it isn't laid out here, and I think that's something people would want to know.

You state here in the business plan that the council's administra-

tive costs were cut by 20 percent and that membership was reduced on the council. I'm wondering if you can tell us who was taken off the council and how you made that decision and whether those people volunteered or whether there was some other basis on which the reduction in membership was made.

Under goal 1 you talk about one of the objectives being identifying emerging opportunities through '96 to '99. What are you going to do with those once they're identified, and what criteria did you use to identify them? Nothing's outlined here, and we'd like to know that.

If you're going to be taking a leading role in marketing the development opportunities in the region through that same time period, then could you tell us again exactly what you mean by leading role? Does that mean new dollars in? Does that mean the council will take some specific role in this? What kind of equipment or staffing or support is involved in that? What can people that are in the north depend on you for? It's not clearly outlined, and I'm sure there are a number of people who would be very interested in that.

If we go to the performance measures of the personnel administration office, you listed some performance measures there on page 219 that talk about "client satisfaction with human resource policy frameworks." Now, I'm wondering who the clients are that are being identified here. Are they employees? Are they coworkers within the departments? Are they the general public? Are they Official Opposition members? Because we often have a need to request information. If you take a look at the percentage of clients who are satisfied - I'm wondering if you could give us a further breakdown there by group that you are identifying as clients - it says that your actual overall percentage of clients who are very satisfied is very high. That would be contrary to the information that we receive on an ongoing basis in our offices.

When you talk about the '96-97 plan for the integrated human resource management information systems, can you tell us: once you put the plan in place - and you're targeting that for the '96-97 year - how do you plan to monitor this, and who will be doing the evaluating of it on an ongoing basis? I think that's something that we would really like to know.

3:41

Under the core strategies you talk about, "researching best practices, sharing information on emerging trends and consulting with departments on applying leading edge expertise," could you tell us how much time this takes up in your department and what you're comparing this to? Do you use industry to compare in terms of leading-edge expertise, or do you use the federal or perhaps other provincial governments? That would be information that would be very good for us to know.

We go to the Public Affairs Bureau business plan. There are many strategies and initiatives that you talk about. I'm wondering if the Premier can speak to the criteria that were used to determine how these strategies should be put in place.

"Eliminate cataloguing of all government publications." Was some sort of a study done, or was there some recommendation that came forward from the department about this not being a necessary service? How was that determined? On that same line there's a number of things that have been eliminated. The provincial film library loan service: was it because nobody was using it, or were there some other criteria?

You talk about delegating "authority to departments to purchase audio visual services directly from private sector suppliers." How is that going to be co-ordinated, then, so that we know we're getting the best cost? When you negotiate individually, often there's overlap and duplication in that area. We'd like to be able

to assure the people of the province that they're getting the best dollar value there.

You talk about providing "specialized subscriptions to industry to keep them updated on changes in related legislation." So are you talking about *Hansard*? Are you talking about copies or précis of the Bills? Are you talking about any of the ongoing regulation that results from the legislation? If you could make that just a little clearer to us, it would certainly help.

You talk about providing "convenient on-line access to, and purchasing of, Alberta statutes, regulations." Who's your market there? If you could tell us that, we would appreciate that.

"Reduce costs and simplify how government advertising is developed and placed by selecting one agency of record to handle all media buying." Is that going to be an open tendering process? Are you prepared to table what the criteria are going to be there and how it's going to be established? Who would be open and available to that? Do you have an "Alberta first" policy in that regard?

You talk about developing "business plans for communication branches in departments." Again, will those be tabled? Will they be available for people to see? How are you going to establish criteria on what the effectiveness is and whether or not it's been needed and necessary to do this? We would like some information on that.

You're saying that one of the initiatives here is going to be a study where Albertans get information from government, and assess the potential of giving Albertans an optional, "one-window" point of access to general government information.

Again we'd like to know specifically what that means in terms of the paperwork people will get and how they're going to access that. Are you talking about more than one level? Because some people would like to access, I'm sure, through modem, some by telephone, some through the mail, so that looks like you're actually being less open than in the past. I'm sure the Premier will be able to explain that that isn't the case and that people are still going to be able to get general government information on an ongoing and open and regular basis.

You talk about developing "a model of preferred practices for government communications professionals." That's interesting. We would have thought there would have been a model in place now. Will you table that in the Legislature? Certainly we'd like to see that. Communications professionals: is that everywhere in the department, or is that specifically in the Premier's office? We'd also like you to comment on that.

There are a lot of the core businesses that look like they need to be explained here in terms of exactly what they're doing. Some of them are being privatized. So if the Premier can reflect on those, like the Queen's Printer bookstores and the regional information telephone inquiries, how that's going to be staffed in the future. Are you looking to privatizing that? We'd be interested in doing that.

When you talk about developing new products and increasing revenue in this department, we'd sure like to see a list of that. What kind of R and D costs are going into developing new products? The Premier doesn't like that question very much, but there's not much explained here, so we'd just like you to expand on it, if you can. As a Public Affairs Bureau we're wondering what the product is. So if you could identify that, that would certainly be wonderful.

I've got some questions now with regard to some of the answers the Premier gave last year when we were in designated supply committee. Those questions are applicable here still. I'm wondering if the Premier can either talk to these today or can provide us with additional information like he did last year.

We were provided with the Alberta Tracking Survey: Wave 4, For The Government Of Alberta Quantitative Report as a part of his reply last year. I found just a couple of inconsistencies. I'm hoping the Premier will be able to tell me how they occurred and what their intention was.

Under government priorities one of the questions was:

In your opinion, which one of the following items should be the highest priority for the provincial government over the next two years?

The protection of the environment was only at about 4 percent. The second question was: "What should the second highest priority be?" The environment came in at 14 percent. Yet when the question was asked,

Now thinking about how the government is adapting to change, do you think the provincial government should place more emphasis, less emphasis or about the same emphasis on each of the following . . . ?

then protecting the environment scored significantly higher. On Preferred Government Emphasis it was 52 percent, and on More Government Emphasis it was 80 percent. So there is a little inconsistency there in the questions, and I'm hoping that at some time in the future the Premier would be able to address those for us.

At this time, Mr. Chairman, that's the end of my questions.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: I didn't even have time to count the questions, never mind write them down. There were quite a few questions there. I'll attempt to get the answers, but I'm also going to provide the cost to the taxpayers of collecting this kind of information, because most of that I think can be found in the business plans. Some of that can be answered through the examination of other ministers during the course of the debate on estimates and the committee on estimates. If the hon. member really wants us to go through and get the answers to all those questions, I'm going to instruct those who will be charged with providing the answers to get the costs so we can also table the costs of collecting that information in this Legislature just to show the taxpayers what it costs to answer a whole bunch of questions that could be found if the Liberals were to use their research budgets.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Currie, please.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Premier, I have a few questions I'd like to ask, and I'm going to refer to the Executive Council Public Affairs Bureau business plan summary. It's identified on pages 206 and 207 of the government and lottery fund estimates.

Mr. Premier, first of all, I think the Public Affairs Bureau, as stated in the business plan, has a significant function to play. I just want to highlight some questions for you on the policy initiatives. I think the public would benefit from knowing some of the specific savings that are being targeted.

For example, can you explain why the system is being further reduced from six regional centres around Alberta to two centres, in Edmonton and Calgary? Similarly, I understand the Public Affairs Bureau is going to reduce the cost of long-distance toll charges within government. How are they planning to do that? The Public Affairs Bureau is also going to help the government make the most of the Internet and use new electronic technologies. Mr. Premier, I think that in the interest of good information in the

hands of Albertans, that's an important piece of information, and the cost associated with those initiatives will be important information to pass out.

3:51

The personnel administration office, which has been already referred to by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I would like to just talk briefly about the effect of changes on government employees. I know there are a number of initiatives that have been put on the table in the last little while as they go through the tremendous psychological and emotional restructuring at a personal level, not to mention just the dollar side of it. So I'd like some comments on the effect of government changes on employees.

Also, it's important that we do improve the image and profile of the Alberta public service. What initiatives will be taken in order to deal with that?

Mr. Premier, I think one of the other issues that must be addressed is the accountability side of it. Quite clearly, under the Treasurer one of the mandates of this government, on the fiscal side of it, is to show outcomes. How do we actually measure the personnel administration office's success?

So if you could make a note of some of those questions. If they come to me in writing, before the House, through *Hansard* or wherever you table them, if that's your wish, that's fine with me.

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Chairman, I hate to criticize one of our own members, but again the questions come faster than I can write them down. I don't know. If this was the process that was agreed to by Members of this Legislative Assembly, it doesn't give the person being questioned really enough time to offer answers. In some cases, with respect to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, some of those questions I could have answered had they been given to me one at a time; not completely, but I could give some peripheral answers. Right? Perhaps the details could have been filled in later. And it's the same with the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. If the questions come to me one at a time and I can stand up and give an answer as best I possibly can, then I'd be certainly glad to do so. I'm just serving warning right now that it would be very hard for me because I haven't had a chance to write them all down. I forget what the questions are. If the hon. members have them, then you can shoot them over and I'll try and get the answers. But, again, there's a lot of cost associated with this too.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Premier.

We have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's not my . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Actually, before you start, Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I'm sorry, but you've obviously heard the Premier's comments. Perhaps if you have an important question that you did feel you wanted an answer to, you could pause and he could answer that at the time.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, let me start by saying that I don't see it as my duty to slap the wrist of the Premier, but in this particular case I am going to do it. We have constituents that come to our constituency offices, and they ask us questions. They say: "You're my representative. When you go back to the House, will you ask the Premier this question?" Some do call him Ralph, but "Ask the Premier this question" or "Ask the minister this question" and so on and so forth. In fairness to the Premier and

to members of the front bench, we don't anticipate answers this afternoon to all these questions. On some of the questions that I'm going to ask, I know the Premier's going to have to go back and his staff are going to have to do a bit of research. But these are questions that I do ask on behalf of constituents that come to me, and they ask why a particular thing has happened.

For example, Mr. Chairman, my very first question deals with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, which is no longer part of this particular budget, which has of course been transferred. One of the questions that I've been asked – to take advantage of it when I have a chance to ask the Premier a question – is why. Why was it transferred away from the Premier's office, where it was perceived to have a certain element of clout that is no longer there, to another office? The person asking me wanted to be assured that it wasn't because it is now seen as of lesser importance in the eyes of government.

Secondly, I go to program 1. This is a question that the Premier may have a little more difficulty answering, and I can't find it in any research material that I may go through. Although I realize the final decision comes from the offices of the Prime Minister, can the Premier give us an indication as to when he expects an announcement is going to be made on the position of the new Lieutenant Governor? There is some anxiety on the part of some people within this House as to who that individual may be. Any clues would be appreciated, Mr. Chairman.

MR. KLEIN: I can answer that question right now.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Would the member want the answer now?

MR. WICKMAN: Well, as long as I don't get cut off.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Chairman, I think the Liberals would have a much better idea as to who the next Lieutenant Governor is going to be than I would. No, the Prime Minister has given me absolutely no indication, but I understand there are some murmurings amongst the Liberals as to who it might be.

MR. WICKMAN: I ask that question, of course, with a certain amount of jest in my voice, but I do gather that there is a great deal of anticipation whenever this type of significant event occurs.

Program 2 the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie covered very, very well. Basically, my concern – and I think it's a concern shared by many people in northern Alberta – is a perception that possibly a certain degree of favouritism over the years has been shown to southern Alberta versus northern Alberta. There is always a fear that northern Alberta is being shortchanged or that it doesn't have, let's say, the same political clout in terms of representation in the government's inner circle as southern Alberta may have. I guess it's not so much a question as a concern. There are many, many people who are concerned that northern Alberta is not shortchanged in the overall workings of priorities.

Mr. Chairman, in personnel administration, program 3, this is where I have a number of more detailed type questions. Whenever we see a headline in the paper, even with the last budget that we just dealt with very, very recently, 3,000 and some positions to be eliminated, there is a certain panic that goes throughout the province, particularly in the city of Edmonton, where a vast number of provincial employees hold down their positions. In terms of the numbers, the numbers that are floated around as to how many positions have been eliminated since the reduction or the downsizing has occurred in recent years, there's one thing that we see on paper. But, in actuality, how many people have

actually been laid off in the sense that their positions have been terminated, so that they've suddenly found themselves out of employment or have found themselves out on the street? How many have been done by more creative methods, such as the natural attrition that does take place, where positions simply are not filled when they become vacant for more natural type reasons?

Mr. Chairman, it is understandable that this is more of a concern in Edmonton than it would be in other parts of the province. In the latest go-around, even at the 3,000 – the same night the budget came down, I had several phone calls from operators of small businesses who expressed a concern on the impact it would have on their businesses. They wanted to know: is this for real? Are another 3,016 people or whatever going to lose their jobs? How is this going to affect the economy of Edmonton in terms of a lesser demand for housing? And so on and so forth. So if there could be some specific stats on numbers of persons that are actually affected.

Another question was put to me by people that come to the constituency office, people who may be in other departments that may not necessarily be in the same need of downsizing as some departments are, but there are provincial employees who have worked for the government for a period of time that have some apprehension as to how long their positions may last. Some feel they want to get out while the going is good, yet there is a certain fear that if they initiate, if they take it upon themselves to initiate a severance package and if they're turned down for that severance package, it could come back to haunt them somewhere down the road in that it could signal an indication or a perception that they no longer like their job, that they want out. It may not necessarily be that they don't want their job. It may be that they no longer have that security they feel they once had, and they want to get into something that may be a bit more stable. So if the Premier could maybe outline in written form further down the road the exact procedure that is followed in terms of employees who want to very discreetly know what their opportunities are, what the consequences may be if they choose to exercise an option that may or may not be there in terms of accepting or initiating a severance package.

My last set of questions deals with the area of Public Affairs, and the previous member asked a small number of questions on that. We show within the program for Public Affairs a total expenditure of \$9,104,000. Of course, under revenue that's offset by revenues of \$9,104,000, which I assume are a matter of internal billings, where various departments . . .

4:01

MR. KLEIN: I'm sorry. Just for clarification, I didn't hear that figure.

MR. WICKMAN: In the expenditures for program 4, Public Affairs is \$9,104,000, and then in revenues for the same department it shows revenues again of \$9,104,000. In other words, the revenues were offsetting the expenditure, which would lead me to the assumption that the \$9,104,000 is internal billings that are done from various government departments to Public Affairs. Now, when we have that type of situation, of course it becomes a little looser in terms of budget watchdogging, similar to some cities that may have a system of central supply and services, where departments put their request in and that one department then sort of co-ordinates those requests for public affairs activities. I'd like the Premier to sort of outline as to what type of watchdog mechanism is in place to ensure that there isn't an overabundance of requests for the services of Public Affairs, which then of course increases the Public Affairs budget. Then from their point of

view the rationale is that we're just concurring with the requests that are made by various departments, if the Premier follows my line of thinking.

On that note I'm going to conclude my questions, because I know a number of members on this side of the House have questions. I'm satisfied to have my questions responded to in written form further down the road, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Chair recognizes the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question is to the Premier. I'll refer specifically in the estimates to the particular items. The first question relates to the office of the Premier/general administration, and it relates to the number of ministers in cabinet. So it would be program 1 – this would be page 194 – and that's the heading I'm using to slip the question in, basically on the size of cabinet. What decisions, what criteria are used to determine the size of cabinet? One could envisage, for example, science and technology being collapsed into economic development or the Northern Development Council being collapsed into economic development or a further downsizing of the size of government, because over the last two and a half years the size of cabinet has grown. So, you know, other than political decisions, what criteria have been used in terms of effectiveness in delivery of services? Does it make more sense to have more ministers? Does it make co-ordination easier? Does it make it more complex? I guess I'm looking for a rational decision as to the size of cabinet as opposed to a political decision.

Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure whether or not the McDougall Centre falls under Executive Council and provisions for the office of Executive Council. If it does, then my questions would relate. I would assume it would again come in under program 1, office of the Premier/general office administration. My question there would be the issue of access. It is my understanding that opposition parties have no access to McDougall Centre; it's purely a, quote, government centre. On the other hand, it would make sense to co-ordinate, since the opposition is part of government, though a different aspect of government. It would make some sense to have at least some office there, because Albertans who didn't elect the government of the day do look to the opposition to be their voice. That's part of the role of the opposition, and having them accessible to Albertans in the southern office does make some sense. So my question to the Premier is, you know, the criteria for excluding the opposition from at least access or use of some of the facilities, when under the parliamentary system part of the role of the opposition is to provide a voice for those people who feel that they're not being heard directly by government.

I'll go directly, then, to personnel administration. I note – and this would be on page 197 – that recruitment advertising actually is forecast to go up from '95-96 to '96-97. I suspect that relates both to inflation in terms of advertising costs and perhaps anticipated greater turnover in the middle or senior management ranks. I was just wondering if that could be explained.

The second issue deals with staffing, development and health. I guess that would 3.0.3, which would be on page 197. My question there really is: has the province assessed the competitiveness of the salary schedule in Alberta compared to other provinces for comparable positions? Because although we have a clear advantage in terms of cost of living and no sales tax and the like, I think from what I can see that at least the scale here makes it difficult for the province perhaps to be as competitive as you would like it to be in terms of attracting senior civil servants. At

some point I think the government or the Legislature has to assess, then, that this is a competitive market and people vote with their feet. It's a highly competitive labour market, and we have to offer competitive salaries and packages to attract the best people.

I realize that a study has been undertaken, for example, with regards to MLA remuneration, but that's been put on the side for obvious political reasons. But with regard to the civil service and the senior levels of the civil service – that's where the people are perhaps most mobile – what is our competitiveness in terms of the real salary being offered? Is there any review being undertaken, then, under personnel administration to ensure that we are competitive, that we can offer the best packages, and that we can get good people in? The people we have are extraordinarily good, but many of them are nearing retirement age, and there's an issue, really, of getting the best that we can. So the question is: is such a study contemplated or being considered, or has a study been undertaken that shows where we stand in terms of our competitiveness in attracting professionals to the civil service?

Just as an aside, I would say that when you look at the budget or you look at the effectiveness of the Department of Energy, it's because you have really key professionals in there. Many of them are working for considerably less than they could get elsewhere because they're dedicated to public service in the province of Alberta. As that sort of generation departs, it may be more difficult to replace them, so I think it's a relevant issue.

With regards to the Public Affairs budget – this would be program 4 on page 198 – in terms of communications services, of the \$4,517,000 that's listed there as a gross expense under 4.0.2, is there a breakdown available on anticipated Premier's fireside chats and other types of mass communications in the coming year? Do we anticipate another January or February fireside chat, possibly just prior to an election? Is there a breakdown there in terms of that type of allocation, or is the Premier considering perhaps a lower cost route via the CBC?

In terms of publication services, I do note that if you look at that, it appears that is a moneymaker in terms of bringing in more than the gross expense. I would be curious to see if, in light of that, there are efforts being considered for a more broad-based marketing approach. Some of these I think clearly are related to information about specific government services that firms or agencies are required to buy, but I would be curious as to why in fact we actually run a net profit there of \$288,000. In response to that, is Public Affairs undertaking to sort of work in that market niche?

Finally, with regard to the office of the chief information officer – that would be on page 199 – there is an allocation there of \$500,000. I guess my question is: does that \$500,000 include start-up costs as well? Do we anticipate that this in subsequent years would be higher, or how much of that \$500,000 is sort of one-shot expenditures related to the emergence of this important office?

With those questions, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat.

4:11

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, please.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I have five questions for the Premier. One may involve some further research. In terms of the goal to promote northern development, which seems to me to be a contradiction in the budget if you look at Agenda '96 on pages 214 and 216 – on page 214 under "Vision," the third statement that's asterisked there is:

assist northern people to increase their skill levels to take advantage of opportunities, and on page 216, under "Goal #3," the third box:

create a fund to assist students from remote communities to access technical and post secondary education. 1996 through 1999.

So there are those two statements. If you go then and turn to page 154 under advanced education, there's a statement there in the second bulleted paragraph. They're going to "replace the Alberta Educational Opportunity Equalization Grants with loans" in the 1997-1998 year, and those are for students who move to centres to access education. So on the one hand, the goal seems to make things easier; on the second hand, they're asking them to take out a loan. I'd ask: is that a contradiction?

It leads me to a second question. It's probably more philosophical, but I think Albertans deserve some sort of answer. That's the trend of the government to finance education, particularly postsecondary education, on the backs of students if this budget includes another \$60 million for the student loans program. So here we have a government that's saying: debt is bad, public debt is terrible, but private debt is good; go into debt deeper, if you're a student, to get your education. It seems to me that's inconsistent, and as I've talked to students across the province, they have the same difficulty.

If you go and look again at debt - I have been visiting the postsecondary institutions across the province talking to students, and the attitude of many of those students and their families is that debt is bad, that going into debt is not a good thing to do if you can possibly avoid it, and they feel they're being forced more and more with the rise in tuition fees to access the loans program. It's especially hard on students who are in low-income families, because there's good evidence that those families in particular are against going into debt, that debt affects those, and that the vision of high debt affects those families more than students from middle socioeconomic or high socioeconomic families where handling debt is seen to be more easily done. I think the notion that the system somehow or other should be financed on student loans is one that I would like to hear the Premier comment on. That's my first question, the seeming contradiction: we want more people from the north to get educated, yet to get that education they're going to have to take out loans. I just don't think that promotes the northern interests.

In terms of that northern area and particularly Athabasca University, which is a university that is in the southern part of the northern area of the province, that university is taking a \$10 million hit over and above the 21 percent that all other post-secondary institutions in the province are taking. How does that promote northern interests? How does that help those people up there gain an education? When that institution is getting . . . [interjection] Pardon me?

MRS. McCLELLAN: We're just trying to figure out the correlation, Don.

DR. MASSEY: Well, if the object, Madam Minister, in the Premier's budget is to promote northern Alberta by upgrading people's skills, then when you take and cut the budget of one of those institutions that provide those skills, you're affecting what happens to students. Do you want a picture?

The third one. Again my question is: how does it promote the skill development in the north? If you again look at the advanced education budget, the skill developments program is going to be eliminated by April 1997.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please. We're not looking

at the advanced education budget. We are on Executive Council at this point, hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: With all respect, Mr. Chairman, the Executive Council budget has as its goal: identify and increase northern skills to take advantage of economic opportunities. Where do you think that happens?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It's marginal.

DR. MASSEY: What do you mean, marginal? Give me a break.

So I'd like to know how the elimination of the skills development program promotes increasing skills in that northern context, particularly when, as the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti pointed out, this is a young population in that area, and it's the young population, those adults 19 to 24 years old, who have the highest unemployment rates. Again, I don't think eliminating that program helps promote skill levels in that population.

On page 214, the vision statement, again, says that they're going to increase the skill levels of Northerners. I'd like to know: how is that going to be measured? What is the base, and how is that base determined? There is a performance measure that says that 38.6 percent of adults have participated in programs and courses in Alberta. Is that the measure that's going to be used in the northern part of the province to show that this objective on page 214 of the Executive Council budget has been met?

I guess my last question has to do with the personnel administration office, on monitoring. I'd ask: is there a measure or will we see a measure that will monitor the morale of the public service, and will that measure be made public?

With that, I conclude. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, please.

MR. JACQUES: Mr. Chairman, if you like, I could comment on one of the issues that was brought up by the previous member, but it's at your discretion how you wish to handle this.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Go ahead and comment.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you. I appreciate the hon. member's observation and question with regard to this issue of assisting "northern people to increase their skill levels to take advantage of their opportunities," which is the specific referenced item he read from page 214. I should point out that within the Northern Alberta Development Council there is a fair amount of activity where particularly the council members themselves as well as some of the staff members deal with the bursary program that the Northern Alberta Development Council has itself.

There are really two programs in that regard, one of which was implemented not that many years ago, which was what we call a bursary partnership program, which is intended to leverage particularly funds from the private sector or other groups. We do have some brochures on that. Also, of course, the standard program that we offer is targeted obviously to not only trying to get people educated but, more importantly or equally importantly, getting them to return to the north to share their skills in the northern part of the country.

I just wanted to note that as an obligation as a bursary recipient, for example, they would sign an agreement that would commit the person to come live and work in northern Alberta, that they would take up residence in northern Alberta within six months after their graduation, and that they would maintain contact with the

program, and advise of any changes in employment status. Effectively, if all the terms and conditions are met, then any obligation by that individual ceases. It is worked through the Students Finance Board, and there's somewhere in the order of about \$475,000, as I recall, on a per annum basis that is allocated for this particular program.

4:21

We also have targeted very specifically – and I'm not sure whether it's in that document that the member was referring to. Yes, it is: on page 216. In terms of the performance measures, there are two things that we really want to key in on. One is the fact that “our target is that 75% of the students assisted will return to work in the north,” and also that we can target and achieve \$150,000 in the annual leverage funds by 1998-99, which is that partnership program.

I will sit down at this point, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre, please.

MR. HENRY: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've been listening to some of the debate, and I had a couple of issues that I would like to raise with the Premier, in particular with the personnel administration office business plan. One of the concerns that's been raised with me in a general sense is that as we tighten our budgets and as we have less and less money in terms of staffing, then one of the things that tends to go by the wayside or can be threatened is ongoing professional development and the upgrading of our professional and management staff.

Identified as a core business in the business plan for the PAO is supporting executive development “by assisting in the selection and development of senior executives.” I'm wondering if the PAO has done any tracking perhaps on a per employee basis to look at how departments are managing with their budgets to ensure that there is professional development for professional and senior staff on an ongoing basis so that we don't end up falling behind the times and have to do catch-up five years down the road. So, again, the question is: is the PAO doing anything to monitor that? I'm not going to expect the Premier to have an answer today, but if he can get back to me, I'd like to know if there is tracking of the per capita – if I can put it that way – or per employee expenditure on professional development over the last five years by department. Are we doing any of that? Is the PAO monitoring that from department to department? Again, I don't expect the Premier to have those kinds of numbers at his fingertips right now.

The other issue I would like to raise with the Premier is again one of the core businesses identified in the PAO: the development of policies and strategies to provide consulting on many issues including occupational health and safety. Again, for the Premier's benefit, I raised this with the Minister of Labour just last week, and I was wondering if we should start looking and if the government is planning on starting to look at other kinds of indicators in terms of monitoring the workplace other than just the numbers of days lost through work disruptions, strikes, et cetera, and numbers of days lost during injury.

Are we going to, again, look at trying to develop indices that would indicate levels of stress on employees in the workplace, and are we going to start monitoring that on an ongoing basis? If we are – and I would advocate that we do that – then we have to establish some sort of benchmarks that say that when we get these kinds of increases, perhaps in numbers of sick days, an unusual percentage of sick days or numbers of employees on long-term

disability, what do we kick in to look at? What are the causes of that, what are our responses as government going to be, and how are we going to deal with that or respond to that?

I'm not specifically going to raise any issues with regard to the Northern Alberta Development Council because I think a number of issues have been raised and spoken to.

As well, with regard to the PAO and the selection of senior executives in departments, I would appreciate it if the Premier could release the standard procedure for selection of senior public servants in terms of hiring, quote, headhunting firms and in terms of when a recommendation is made or a shortlist is made, where it goes to from that and specifically what the involvement is from individuals in the Executive Council office. Other than in the PAO, are other members ever involved in screening shortlists or in picking the final candidate or in working with the particular minister in regard to a recommendation to cabinet or in fact just as the individual?

With regard to the Public Affairs business plan, I did want to point out to the Premier that with regard to what Public Affairs is doing on the Internet and the government home page, hats off to them. I think that's a good, positive development, and I daresay there have been a couple of instances where I have perhaps made phone calls to ministers' offices and have been able to get the information faster from the government home page on the Internet. I think that's a good development. I generally think the information that's being provided by various departments – and the Minister of Education will know that I've looked at what he's said in his department – is useful information for Albertans, not just in terms of the news releases and whatnot, but also some of the background material I think is really interesting and useful. I've talked with several people through the Edmonton Freenet as well as the commercial provider that I'm hooked up through who have accessed the government's home page, and I think it works effectively. Enough said on that.

I'm interested in the initiative by the department to streamline and consolidate a toll-free RITE line system in terms of reducing the costs. I'm wondering: is there a master plan for the RITE line system, and if so, could that be released? Or is this just sort of looking every year at where it is we can economize or where it is we can streamline things, or is there a long-term plan in place, and what is that plan?

The Public Affairs Bureau: I'm interested in the key performance measurements and the model in looking at public customer satisfaction. I'm wondering why this is specifically just related to the RITE line and the Queen's Printer Bookstore? The reason I ask is that as we know, the communications officials in each department are seconded from the Public Affairs Bureau. Perhaps some sort of way of serving public or media satisfaction with the service that they deliver in terms of the timeliness of the response might be in order in terms of an indicator. Again, I believe that they are publics. I think a significant part of the Public Affairs Bureau is provision of services through Public Affairs sections of each department, and why is it we're not measuring that?

With those particular comments – I do have a couple of other issues I'd like to come back to with Public Affairs, but I'll do that at a later point.

Thank you.

4:31

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for West Yellowhead, please.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you. I just have a few comments and questions that I would like to direct to the Premier

and/or the chairman of the Northern Alberta Development Council. First of all, I know you have a great deal of clout with the powers that be. I didn't receive an invitation for this particular meeting until I arrived at work this morning, and I also found an invitation to another subcommittee meeting, I think that a creation of the House leader, which I received this morning and had duly missed. That bothers me because I hate missing these meetings. I like the opportunity to ask questions. [interjection] Well, I haven't been here that long, you see, and when I get a chance to query ministers and the Premier, of all people, then I would like to be there and do that on behalf of my constituents. That's just one item, Mr. Chairman. I know you pay the greatest amount of attention to my remarks and will surely look after an improvement in this area.

Now, as far as this council is concerned, the Northern Alberta Development Council, I want to focus on that, Mr. Chairman, because that is actually dearest to my heart, believe it or not. First, I would like to compliment the chairman for sending various invitations my way to attend events and seminars and so on and so forth, which I was unable to attend. Nevertheless, I was very pleased that he kept me in the loop, as the currently fashionable expression is.

The other thing that I wanted to commend the Premier and the chairman for is that the NADC has contributed handsomely to the community of Grande Cache, which is the only part of my riding that is within the boundaries of the NADC. They have provided financial support for the new business centre, which is almost finished, and I hope it's going to be opened up in May. Needless to say, I hope to be there, and it would be nice if the Premier could be there too because they always enjoy seeing him there.

Grande Cache is one of those young communities that the chairman referred to. It is particularly thriving now since the federal government has come to the rescue and salvaged the Correctional Centre, so that's good co-operation between the governments, Mr. Minister.

Now, I come to my first question actually. I don't know what the criteria are for falling within the territories served by the Northern Alberta Development Council. In other words, what makes you fall within that territory? I have difficulty discovering that. I've been thinking that if it is distance, if it is gas prices, or what have you, then I would suggest that perhaps Jasper ought to fall into the terms as well. That was one question I had, so I've asked that one.

Actually, the amounts that are given on page 196 of the budget don't tell me much. They deal with northern development. We see the Northern Alberta Development Council and the northern Alberta agreement. I'm not sure what the difference is between those two, so perhaps I could get an answer to that one. There's not much in the way of details. Now, I realize that most of the money is going to be spent on projects as they arise, but there is \$45,000, if I'm not mistaken, of dedicated revenue, and I'd just like to know what it's going to go to; probably just to the office. So that's another question I had.

Then the major strategies. It says here, "Identify emerging northern economic development opportunities," and so on. I wonder: there's no mention of tourism, and I think it's probably understood that that's part of it. Perhaps either the Premier or the chairman could clue me in on that one. I would also submit, though, that in addition to economically based projects there's a need for aid in the areas of social conditions and education. It seems to me that if you focus only on the economic side of certain projects, you kind of lose track of the other conditions that need to be shaped in order to make them foster.

I was just in High Level a couple of weeks ago, and I was told

that there is, for instance, one mental health therapist in that whole northern area and that that person had just resigned because he was terribly stressed out. Also, in the way of speech therapy, I think they had to come from Manning or even further south to deal with the problems there. So the whole thing hangs together, and I think the point was made by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods that education, skills development, is still at the core of all that stuff. Mr. Premier, I don't find this emphasized to the tune where I would like to see it emphasized, and perhaps you could elaborate on that.

Goal number one of the business plan. I always have fun with those goals because they seem to be eloquent in their lack of meaning, if I can call it that. Here we find that the strategy is to

Hold two annual multi-sectoral outlook conferences.

Organize working sessions with key northern organizations and the private sector.

That is almost outstanding in its noncommitment, you know. It doesn't really tell us much, so perhaps we could hear a bit more on that.

Finally, the area of performance measures, which is certainly one of the things that this government truly and dearly loves. There are performance criteria for everything, and I think that's just absolutely great. I have a question on one of them here that I don't quite understand. For instance, the target here: "Our target is a 100% approval rating." That means surveying all those involved. I'm thinking that is almost heading for disaster. If you set your target as 100 percent, then you're bound not to make it. Now, of course, it's great to have a target, but then the question is: what is failure, 99 percent? You know, I can never understand that. Then, of course, you have only a more modest target of 75 percent of students assisted by bursaries "return to work in the north." Perhaps it is modest enough; I don't know. What I don't understand is that if these students are given a bursary because they should return, then how come we don't see a 100 percent target here? I have some difficulty with that one.

I would also like to know – and here is a question again – how many students are getting those bursaries and how many of them are native. I recognize that those people, perhaps more than anyone else, need that kind of financial incentive. There's another question I wrote down: why not target an increase in numbers of bursary students? It seems to me that if you can get more students educated and skilled, that provides an enormously important basis for your ultimate economic development.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion I would like to submit that in my view the NADC is doing very good work, but I think it could be made even more productive if there's more attention paid to the social and education conditions. That means, of course, a close liaison with the departments of education, advanced education, and social services. That's all I have to say.

Oh, by the way, before you stand up, Mr. Premier. Mr. Chairman, one more point here. It's all part of the targets that I referred to earlier, the strategies. I mentioned tourism, and I want to relate one item here that's really important. Mr. Premier, it's specifically related to you, and that pertains to the paving of Highway 40 north, which, as you know, is almost done. Every time I'm in Grande Cache, I do pay you the ultimate compliment that you've stuck to your promise. Mind you, I follow that by saying that it's the only one. Nevertheless . . .

Thank you very much.

4:41

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

I'd recognize the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you. I'm so glad the hon. member finally mentioned Highway 40, because I was going to. That's why I was about to get on my feet. It relates quite significantly to a lot of the things the hon. member alluded to such as tourism, certainly economic development, and just basically much easier transportation between the areas of Hinton and Grande Prairie.

Relative to the other specific issues raised, I will defer to the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Mr. Chairman, if I could, I'd like to respond to some of the issues that were raised by the Member for West Yellowhead. First of all, I would like to acknowledge his reference to invitations, et cetera. Certainly I would hope that the Member for Fort McMurray would also acknowledge it, because certainly it has been our practice and our intent in the past and certainly in the future to ensure that all MLAs, regardless of whether they're opposition or government, do indeed receive all the relevant information regarding their constituency, of which either all or part is in the NADC.

Excuse me if I hesitate a little bit; I was making some rough notes and trying to keep track of your questions as you were going through. One of the questions you asked was: how does the NADC determine its geographical area? I wish I had a very specific answer I could give you, but I don't, other than the fact that when I asked the same question, I found that they were established back in 1972. They appear to have followed essentially some municipal boundaries, but if you try to track those municipal boundaries, they don't seem to necessarily make a lot of sense in terms of why one was in and one was not. As a result of that, it's one of those items that we have put on a sidebar list, I guess, basically saying: it's something that we should look at in terms of, yes, what is the area of the Northern Alberta Development Council? More importantly, what are the criteria that should be used and therefore what is the logic that can be used in the future, particularly as it pertains to this whole issue, on the economic development scene?

In terms of the spending profile, I believe you had some questions with regard to, more specifically, where the dollars were being spent as opposed to simply the totals that were being shown on the budget in terms of being voted on. I don't have that exact page, but I could send to you a breakdown of those expenditures. Rather than going through them at this point, it may be easier if I just send them to you. You'll have a better idea rather than going through it here.

Your question or comment with regard to the emphasis on some of the social issues is one that we as a council debated quite vigorously and I can say thoroughly last June and into July when we sat down and really said: what should our role be in terms of this total mandate that we have under the Act? As you alluded to and as you pointed out, under the Act it is a very broad mandate. It certainly does involve social issues, economic issues, et cetera.

Historically the council has been dealing generally on a reactive basis with what I would almost call a potpourri of issues that would arise. In other words, something would pop up, and the council would assess it in some way and deal with it in some way. It could have been anything from simply referring it to a government department to deal with on a further basis to actually issues that were accumulating over time that seemed to have some common denominators and on which we felt we could probably do something. I use the community policing issue in terms of many of our northern communities, and I think the fact that some years ago when the NADC did initiate a bringing together of so many of the players on that, it did indeed result in some positive steps being taken within individual communities.

So, yes, the track record is all over the place. Yes, it is in economics; yes, it is in terms of some of the social issues. However, as with all agencies I think it's fair that we have to stop and pause every once in a while and look at ourselves, particularly with our declining resources. Certainly the NADC has had its share of funding withdrawals and will continue to do so.

In terms of looking at the total mandate – and this is where the debate in council really focused – they said: where do we really want to kind of concentrate our efforts, though maybe not to the exclusiveness of all those things we talked about? If we are going to be more proactive as opposed to reactive and if we are faced with reducing budgets, reducing manpower, how can we be the most effective? It was the area of economic development that at the end of the day – and there was more than one day involved – kind of clearly emerged where we felt that we could play an effective role because of our track record, to some extent because of our independence as well, and because we are I think viewed not necessarily as an arm of government. I think we're viewed more as a resource centre with some good people who have some good knowledge and who can work with all different groups of people and community organizations.

In turn that then leads into, such as you used for an example, the strategy goal number one, where we talked about the nice phraseology of identifying emerging opportunities. I agree with you that they are nice words, but what do they really mean? When we got into that strategy area and we talked about the multisectoral outlook conferences, those were two things that we felt were, if you like, to some extent an initial step that would assist us in perhaps identifying even subsets of goals; in other words, to really try to get ultimately down to the nuts and bolts.

Now, what we have done, for example. In Fort McMurray on April 17 and 18 we will be together with the municipality of Wood Buffalo, and we're simply kind of there to help them. We're not the leader in this thing, but we are certainly a cosponsor in this planned activity. It's going to be a trade show and a conference which is really going to concentrate on resource development in the northeast sector of Alberta. We anticipate about 125 people from industry, from aboriginal communities, and certainly local businesspeople. The purpose of this is really to encourage and to help that municipality to deal with in an orderly fashion all of the issues that they are faced with so that they can maximize on their behalf ultimately the social and economic benefits to not only that community of Fort McMurray but certainly the whole of northeastern Alberta. So it's going to focus very much on the linkages between business on the one hand, the aboriginal communities on the other hand, and the local business community. We see those as really the three kind of key items that ultimately have to be in sync and ultimately have to be in unison in order to really take the strengths from each for the benefit of all.

4:51

So there is an initiative that is under way, that we're working particularly with the mayor to focus on. We've extended invitations, for example, to the federal minister of energy to come and address the conference. This is obviously not politically motivated but rather very specific in terms of the community and getting as many resource people there not only from the federal government level but particularly the provincial government level as well as obviously the resource people within the communities themselves. It's a small step. We will be assessing it, obviously, to see how it works out and whether or not we should really make a significant change in another activity that we're looking at for probably the fall of 1996, which probably would focus on the

northwestern part of the province.

It was interesting with your observation on the target of 100 percent. Again, it was another debatable subject. We have found – and I don't know whether there were references made in there or not – that our last survey indicated about a 90 percent approval rating. Now, when I say approval rating in the sense of what we did, they may not necessarily have liked the ultimate answer. But in terms of the NADC's ability to deal with the issue, to come to some end point, closure, however you want to call it, including the people that they had the deal with, we felt that, you know, 90 percent is good. I mean, I agree with you. It's interesting, because you can get into the philosophical argument of whether you should always set a hundred percent or never set a hundred percent.

I come from a background in an industry, for example, that had a high incidence of accidents, the forest product sector. Our company over time became the leading company in Alberta, British Columbia, if not western Canada, and we would accept nothing less than a hundred percent in terms of our objectives. If we had said that we were going to accept 95 percent, then we were willing to compromise that 5 percent failure is A-okay. I guess that same philosophy finds itself in this. Again, it was a debatable issue. We don't think we're setting ourselves up to fail, however. We want to keep that hundred percent as our goal, and we will work diligently to achieve it.

With regard to the return rate, I agree with you, but unless you physically force somebody to live there, you're not going to get a hundred percent. Yes, there are terms and conditions, but some people simply say: "Well, that's tough. We're not going to follow those terms and conditions. Thank you very much, but we'll pay the money back. We'll do some other things, but we are not going to go back up there." It's a problem. So, yes, I'd like to see it at a hundred percent, but where we are at this point in time, we felt that 75 percent was probably a fairly ambitious target.

With regard to the issue of how many are aboriginal, I don't have those exact numbers with me. Indeed I'm not sure, quite frankly, whether we even track them on that basis. This gets into a delicate area, obviously. I think it is fair to say that in terms of the bursary program, both the regular program and the partnership program, we're very much targeting particularly the aboriginal communities. There's no question that that's probably where our greatest need is in terms of any group of people within northern Alberta. In that regard we've planned a spring conference to bring together a lot of people who deal with this whole issue of not only the northern bursary program but indeed the whole issue of student financing. It's going to be targeting specifically student counselors and economic development officers in remote communities, aboriginal community organizations, agency representatives that have training mandates, and also high school counselors.

Now, one of the reasons that we're bringing these together is not only because there have been changes within our bursary program in recent years, but certainly the area of advanced education under the Students Finance Board and certainly the federal rules are changing the whole game plan with regard to student financing. You may say, "Well, that's not really economic development; that's kind of back to the issue that you were talking about." But we obviously believe very strongly that education and skill development are an integral part of economic development. It's not something that's by itself. It is an integral part of it, and it requires attention and time and effort in order to make it part of the overall effective process.

You did make, I think, a comment or a question with regard to tourism: is it included in there or is it excluded? We did not

define specifics as to what we said in terms of that development area. We said: let the marketplace determine it. Yes, we know that tourism is probably going to be high in a lot of communities and a lot of areas, and we know that it has a lot of potential. We also know that in some areas forest product development is underutilized. Certainly in some areas involving agriculture there are things that can or should be done. So we've really used the broad kind of generic application in saying, "All right, on a proactive basis." Yes, in certain areas they'll concentrate on certain things, perhaps like the one we're doing in Fort McMurray, but as I indicated earlier, most likely out of that will fall some subsets of some very specific things, and it might be, for example, a tourism initiative involving a certain thing in a certain region or a certain community.

So I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I have the Member for Edmonton-Roper, please. [interjections] Order please. That is our 20 minutes. The Premier actually started those comments, and then Mr. Jacques finished the vast majority of the remainder of our time. I believe there's nothing left actually.

So the Member for Edmonton-Roper, please.

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Allow me, first of all, to start off by saying that I'm pleased to be on subcommittee A for the reason that I'll be able to scrutinize some of the budget estimates. With respect to the rest of the budget estimates I suspect I won't have that opportunity, and I want to ensure that the Premier hears my displeasure at that. The fact that at previous sessions of this Legislature we were able to look at each individual government department and scrutinize the budget estimates on a one-by-one basis I think for the most part was a tremendous education for the MLA, the representative of each constituency, to go back to their constituents and identify and answer questions, to be able to respond correctly and accurately. I think we're doing our constituents a disservice with this procedure. I would hope to think that now that we're here now, it's fine. We're going to proceed, but in future sessions of the Legislature I would think this is wrong, and I would hope that we discontinue this practice.

Mr. Chairman, allow me, then, to preface my comments on the Executive Council budget estimates by firstly saying with respect to the NADC that I am a northerner, born and raised. I've worked in the north most of my life. I've seen what the Northern Alberta Development Council has done, the work that each member does. The amount of time that is spent traveling and meeting with people is enormous. I commend them on a job that is well done.

5:01

There are certain things within these budget estimates that I think could be expanded upon. I'm wondering why – I'm perhaps maybe disappointed in a sense – the chairman of the NADC didn't expand upon the budget estimate of \$2,130,000 or the net expense of \$2,085,000. Since it is a reduction of about a million and a half dollars from the 1994-95 actual budget year, I looked for specifics, and I didn't get any specifics. The chairman didn't give us those. We talked about where northern Alberta is geographically in the province in relation to other parts of this province, but I want to know how \$2,085,000 is about to be spent there.

There are expenses, I suspect, to members. I'm hoping that the chairman would be able to give us a breakdown of how much his expenses are with relation to travel. If the members receive certain sums of money, how much do they get? Give us more

specifics with respect to the make-up of the appointments and how often they're appointed. I would have thought that the chairman, in making his remarks, would have come up with these specifics and said: "This is where we're spending the money. This is who's doing it. This is who's going out there and meeting with people." That's what I want to hear.

I suspect that this motion that was brought in by the chairman of the NADC – it would have been the last spring session, I would imagine. It was a motion that would see a sharing of resource revenues with municipalities that would be affected by different developments in those areas. Now, correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Chairman, that this was directly brought about by the NADC and a motion by the chairman of the NADC in the Legislature here. It was passed in the Legislature that we would actually see a procedure put in place, or even a study of a procedure, to share those resource revenues. Now, it's been about a year since I've seen that motion pass through this House, and there has been nothing that has come back to this Legislature that says that the thoughts or the ideas brought forward by the NADC were actually acted upon in a very positive way, that they were enacted in legislation in fact. So I'm wondering where that sits today, and why is it that we haven't heard a year after the passing of that motion in this Legislature?

I know from my own community where I was born and raised there were a tremendous amount of people, particularly town council and many members working with transportation and many members working with different government agencies, that knew full well and had firsthand experience with respect to some of the problems that were created from the development of our resources. The money that the resource revenues were creating was coming and accruing directly to the province and little was coming back with respect to the damages created to those municipalities. For example, roads. Many times trucking and logging trucks would travel and pound the roads. Each municipality had a certain budget that was allocated to them for transportation, and they saw a great deal of their budget going to repair the problems created by the logging trucks going through their main roads.

So I thought at the time this motion was being debated that it was a wonderful motion, that it was a good idea, and that we should move on it. I have had numerous conversations with different municipalities across the province wondering where this ended up. Why have we not heard anything further from the mover of the motion, who is the chairman of the NADC?

Mr. Chairman, the chairman of the NADC also added that with respect to the different goals – there were three goals in the business plan summary; he actually only got to two and was cut off by time limits, and I understand that. With respect to two, "to strengthen northern Alberta's economic competitiveness," he talks about the NADC studying rail transportation, particularly in northwestern Alberta. I'm wondering what was the outcome of this study. What was determined would be the best thing? I mean, do we need this rail transportation in northwestern Alberta or not? I would imagine that going through to Fort McMurray it is required, especially with the added activity that's anticipated in Fort McMurray. It's okay to study all this stuff, but what are we actually doing about it?

With respect to the comment made by the chairman, as well, about the value added in agriculture: tremendous words, words that everybody likes to hear in this province and I think throughout Canada. Any time we can add value to our sectors of revenue, such as agriculture, we'd be doing this province and the people in it a service.

He talks about a project in northeastern Alberta now, made mention of it. I'm wondering what that project is. I'm wonder-

ing how much money, if any, the NADC dumped into it. Are there any additional projects of this kind or of a similar type that are being contemplated? Give us some more specifics with respect to how that \$2 million is being spent, Mr. Chairman. I think we need to know that.

The goals that are in the business plan summary again are great words: "To promote emerging development opportunities in northern Alberta." We talked about strengthening "northern Alberta's economic competitiveness" and also to "identify and increase northern skill levels to take advantage of economic opportunities." What's so different from last year's goals, Mr. Chairman? I'm wondering if those have changed from the previous year or not.

With regard to performance measures and particularly with respect to the Northern Alberta Development Council's comment here about a "100% satisfaction rating in our annual survey of clients and project partners," I'll say to you, Mr. Chairman, that anybody receiving any money from the NADC is going to be a hundred percent satisfied. So you're going to meet that objective guaranteed.

Another performance measure recorded in this summary is that we will track the number of students who receive bursary assistance and fulfil northern employment obligations. Our target is that 75% of students assisted will return to work in the north.

Now, I know that the Member for West-Yellowhead alluded to it, and we asked the chairman of the NADC to give us some specifics with regard to how many students were native. I want to know how many students there were altogether that received bursaries. I want to know how much money was going to this bursary program, and I want to know how much of the budget it actually consumed, the budget of course being almost \$2,100,000. It's a wonderful idea. To ensure that these students end up going back up to the north and working within the north is a wonderful target and a wonderful goal, but give us some more specifics, Mr. Chairman.

Those are the comments that I have right now, Mr. Chairman. I thank you for the opportunity.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This has been an interesting exercise. Notwithstanding the protestations of the Liberals relative to the format, I thought that the questions were good, very good, much better than question period. I'll tell you that for sure. [interjections] Well, first of all, they were good, but they're also expensive questions. When the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie asks to list all of the products from the Queen's Printer bookstore – I mean, that's a huge amount of paperwork. She asks about the performance measures of the Public Affairs Bureau. Who are the clients? Could she have a breakdown? You know, what process are they using relative to each of those clients? That is a good question, but it's a very expensive question too. We'll try and get you the best answers that we possibly can.

5:11

MR. GERMAIN: You should have that info; you're spending the money.

MR. KLEIN: The info is there. I'm suggesting that if you want that information, it's available to you. Use your own research budgets.

MR. CHADI: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Roper, please, on a point of order.

MR. CHADI: The Premier, Mr. Chairman, mentioned that the Liberal Party . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Citation, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHADI: There doesn't have to be a citation here. [interjections] Standing Order 23(i). The Premier suggested that the opposition members . . . [interjections]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please.

MR. CHADI: Yeah, sit down, Halvar.

AN HON. MEMBER: Sit down, Sine.

MR. CHADI: Well, I'm not sitting down either. I'm arguing my point of order.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, it is a quarter after 5. We can do this for another 10 or 15 minutes or we can try and get this sorted out. The Member for Edmonton-Roper has the floor on a point of order, and I'm waiting for the citation.

MR. CHADI: Standing Order 23(i). Mr. Chairman, the Premier suggested in his comments that any member of the opposition should use their budget to get information, use those resources within the budget to get the information required. I would think that this here is the forum to get the information and the answers. That's what this is all about. It's the budget estimates within Executive Council. That's what we're here for today, and that's why I hope to think that any question that is asked in this House today under the budget estimates of Executive Council ought to be answered by the Premier. The Premier could very well get back to us in writing. That's not a problem to any member here. Nobody's asking for that answer immediately.

MR. KLEIN: No. Mr. Chairman, I understand that. It's the kind of information that is being asked for. Presumably the cost of collecting that information is going to come out of the budget of Executive Council. I'm saying the information is there. It is available, and the Liberal Party has a research budget, a huge research budget. They've used it many, many times, believe me. Perhaps they can use it for this particular purpose.

Mr. Chairman, I'll quickly try to answer as many questions as I possibly can. As I wrote them down, the next speaker was the Member for Calgary-Currie. She alluded to the RITE system and the reduction from six regional centres to two regional centres. I guess the basic answer I can give is that it's evolving technology. We simply don't need all those centres because of the new technology that is now available.

Someone's been taking them down, and I'll try and get as many answered as I possibly can. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Now, this is one question I can answer. You asked about the size of cabinet and whether there's any thought being given right now to a further reduction. The answer is no, not at this particular time, but we're in a process of ongoing assessment of Executive Council. I will remind the hon. member that we did reduce our cabinet from 26 to 17 two and a half years ago, so I take issue with his remark that nothing has been done in two and

a half years.

He also alluded to McDougall Centre, and other people have alluded to McDougall Centre within the Liberal Party. Mr. Chairman, again I would remind you that this is Government House. I know the member said: well, we're really not part of the government. No, you're not part of the government; you're the opposition. This is not opposition house; this is Government House. Funds have been provided for the opposition Liberals to have office space in the city of Calgary.

One very, very good point made by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was this whole issue of senior employees and paying them salaries that are competitive with those salaries being paid equivalent senior employees in other jurisdictions. It's a real problem for us. Yes, there's a major review going on right now. Because of the commitment of a 5 percent reduction and zero, zero, there is no opportunity nor would it be fair to other employees to adjust those salaries at this particular time. So it's a tough one for us to deal with. If you have any solutions – one comment that you made, and I just made note of it here, was that perhaps this can be looked at by the Legislature. I don't know if there's a mechanism to assess the salaries of senior and other exempt employees by the Legislature. Perhaps there is, and I think that that would be worth while looking into.

One question that was asked that I was going to answer immediately, that was posed by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, was on the Premier's council: why was that transferred? Basically, it was thought that it could just be best operated under the Department of Education. The Premier's time is very, very limited, and I wanted to make sure that if there was going to be a minister responsible and the administrative resources available, perhaps it should be in a department that could more readily and more ably look after it.

The Lieutenant Governor. Well, I answered that. As I suggested, maybe the hon. Member for Redwater can answer that question. The question was, hon member: do you have any idea who the next Lieutenant Governor is going to be?

MR. N. TAYLOR: I don't think it's over on that side. That's about all I know.

5:21

MR. KLEIN: The two questions the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods raised on employee morale and satisfaction surveys, and so on: yes, some of that is going on, and I'll try and get you as much information as I possibly can on that.

A lot of the questions posed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre involved professional development for management, occupational health and safety, again going back to the procedures for the selection of senior public servants. I think I answered that in my first reply to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I appreciate your comments – oh, he's not here – on Internet. The rest: I just don't have all the questions, so I can't provide all the answers, but we'll attempt to get the answers to you.

So with that, thank you all so very, very much for a very entertaining afternoon.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, first of all, I'd like to move to adjourn debate on these particular estimates. I realize that the motion might be one of rising and reporting, but there is a procedural motion that I would like to introduce following adjournment of the debate.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you. There is no debate on the motion to adjourn. All those in favour? We are adjourned.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to move that the committee rise and report progress.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman. That vote was also supposed to be just the members of the committee. I'm pretty sure people were voting that are not members of the committee.

MR. DAY: On the point of order, Mr. Chairman. The vote was

taken, and appropriate time was given for division. There was no division. You can only do a recorded vote in subcommittee upon request. There was no request for that. The member opposite is assuming that some members voted wrongly, and that is an improper assumption in this House. The vote stands.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: On the point of order, Mr. Chairman. The Government House Leader told us in the other subcommittee that we're not entitled to a division. He comes into this Chamber and says we're entitled to a division. I wish he'd make up his mind how these committees are going to work.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please. I will mention that only three members, as I heard it, said no, and the rest said yes. I'd assume the rest of them are in the House, because I can see them here. So the vote is good, and there is no point of order.

[The committee adjourned at 5:25 p.m.]

