

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 11, 1996**

**Subcommittee C**

Date: 96/03/11

8:01 p.m.

[Chairman: Mr. Tannas]

### **Committee of Supply: Subcommittee C Public Works, Supply and Services**

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call the meeting to order. It's now 8 o'clock. I'll call the subcommittee of supply to order. We have tonight before us the estimates of Public Works, Supply and Services. We'll start off with the minister, and then we'll go to Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. So, hon. Mr. Minister, please begin.

MR. FISCHER: Could I ask one question before I begin? How are we going to do this? Do you want me to answer all the questions at the end, or do you want me to answer them as we get them, or do you want me not to answer them? How would you like to do that, Don? Is it up to me?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, hon. minister, the chair is only the servant of the subcommittee here. In the past in most of the subcommittees people speak for as long as they wish to, and then whenever the minister wishes to catch up with them, the minister may at his/her discretion do so. Normally we go back and forth between the two sides of the Legislature, but the minister may come in at any time there's a break.

MR. FISCHER: Okay. Thank you very much. I hope I don't bore you too much with my opening remarks, but I did want to give you a little bit of information that I think is very interesting, and I'm sure you'll find it that way as well.

Mr. Chairman, public works' mission is to minimize the cost of common services needed to support government program delivery. The department is the central agency responsible for providing capital infrastructure, accommodation, air transportation, information technology, and procurement services to support government program delivery. These services are provided through three major business units: property development, property management, and information technology and supplies. Our customers include departments, boards, and agencies of the Alberta government, regional health authorities, and Alberta Treasury Branches. Our stakeholders include suppliers, consultants, contractors, and professional associations.

I think you'll find that you'll be interested in the following highlights from the '96-97 estimates. For the first time the public works budget estimate is fully consolidated. This means that the government's general revenue fund and revolving fund budgets have been combined at the ministry level. These consolidated statements are intended to reflect only the value of goods and services that we purchase from the private sector. This includes purchases for our own use and for government departments and agencies. Any transactions undertaken between the two funds within my ministry are therefore excluded. If we didn't make these consolidation adjustments, the ministry total would be overstated.

Spending reductions achieved. In the '96-97 budget the general revenue fund operating expense is \$437.2 million. This represents a reduction of \$39.4 million, or 8.3 percent, when compared to our '95-96 estimates. Our '96-97 operating estimates include a non cash amortization provision of \$52 million, reflecting our annual consumption of capital assets. Capital investment is \$45.1 million, a reduction of \$9.8 million, or 17.9 percent, over '95-96.

The '96-97 staff complement is 1,346 full-time equivalents, a reduction of 99 full-time positions from '95-96. Since '92-93, Mr. Chairman, staffing has been reduced by a total of 1,156 FTEs, or 46.2 percent. In addition, the number of ADM-ships

has been reduced from five to three with staffing reductions equally disbursed across our management, program delivery, and administrative functions. Overall we are proud of our staff for the dedication and the commitment which makes these achievements possible. Facing the difficult challenges of change, we have worked together to create a smaller, efficient, and more cost-effective department.

The '96-97 highlights. A hundred and five million dollars will be allocated for regional health care facilities, including \$87 million for major capital projects and \$18 million for capital upgrading projects. Fifteen point four million dollars will be allocated for the renovation of seniors' lodges in compliance with established standards. In '96-97 the department will continue to undertake additional capital works on behalf of lodge foundations. This additional work will be undertaken in conjunction with provincially funded lodge upgrading projects.

Twenty-five million dollars will be allocated for four major water development projects in '96-97. Twenty-four point five million dollars will be allocated for projects on behalf of departments and agencies. This funding will be used to address consolidation and reduction, support accommodation requirements, and maintain government facilities.

Ninety-six point six million dollars will be allocated for the operation and maintenance of government space. Eighty-five point six million dollars will be allocated for leasing space for government departments and eligible boards and agencies.

Approximately \$25 million will be included for the operation of government-shared telecommunication network services. Also, PWSS will continue to proactively work with schools, hospitals, and other eligible organizations to find solutions which will meet their increasing telecommunication needs at the lowest possible costs.

Another \$25 million will be allocated for the operation of centralized data-processing facilities on behalf of government boards and agencies. These services are currently delivered through two data centres in Edmonton and one in Calgary, consisting of five mainframe computers, 13 UNIX and LAN-based servers. These 18 computers serve over 18,000 computer devices across this province. By the end of '95-96 central computing services for Alberta Health will be outsourced, resulting in a further decline of 26 FTEs in this operation. Since '92-93 this operation's revenues and expenditures have declined by about 45 percent as a result of outsourcing and cost-reduction initiatives.

Transfer of funding to departments. Consistent with the government's goal of making individual ministries more accountable and responsible for their costs, \$19.5 million in funding is being transferred to departments and eligible boards and agencies. Departments will assume funding responsibility for local telecommunications services, air transportation services, and replacement furnishings and minor tenant improvements. In each of these areas individual departments will now have the ability to directly influence the amount of services consumed for their program requirements.

Our local telecommunications services. Commencing in '96-97, departments will be accountable for their own local telephone services. Public works will continue to fund shared network telecommunications services, such as the provincially telephone, data communications, and mobile radio services. We are in the process of developing a model which would make departments accountable for their use of these shared services in future years.

Air transportation. Effective April 1, '96, departments will be charged for their use of the government-owned aircraft. Departments will also continue to pay for the use of chartered aircraft and scheduled air services as they have in the past.

Funding for replacement furniture acquisitions and minor tenant improvement projects will also be transferred to ministries. PWSS will assist departments and provide guidelines and standards for this minor project work to ensure that the building infrastructure and essential building systems are not compromised. We anticipate that the ability to authorize minor tenant improvement work will assist program departments in quickly addressing changing needs in their facilities as they modify their programs.

Government space. Downsizing throughout government requires that ongoing space audits be conducted to identify and eliminate underutilized pockets of space. Over the last few years in consultation with our client departments my staff have been aggressive in their efforts to consolidate departmental office and warehouse space and dispose of those surplus to government. From April 1, '93, to December '95 my department reduced government-leased space by approximately 95,000 rentable square metres. Over the next two years we expect to decrease leased space by an additional 44,000 rentable metres. Whenever we have lease commitments for space that is now surplus, we try to sublease that space.

Approximately 63,000 gross square metres of owned space has been disposed of or sold, and an additional 100,000 gross metres of space is presently approved for disposition. We are actively attempting to sell these properties at market value. Lease terminations and subleases also result in reduced operating expenditures, and any disposition of surplus owned space will also eliminate the associated operating and maintenance costs.

#### 8:10

Our business plan includes a number of initiatives intended to improve accountability in government. As part of this process we have been reviewing ways to improve accountability in the delivery of accommodation services provided by my department. As a result, we plan to pilot an alternative accountability model for accommodation services, including the evaluation of a charge-back process. We plan to pilot and evaluate the model using the office of the Auditor General and one or two departments.

Consistent with an agreement between the Alberta Tourism Partnership and Public Works, Supply and Services, PWSS is responsible for ATP's accommodation costs, including furnishings and telecommunications, until March of 1998. The annual estimated cost which public works is contributing to this initiative is \$750,000. We are anticipating that ATP will be self-sufficient at the conclusion of this agreement. Included in the agreement is a requirement for ATP to provide a draft operational plan for their visitor information centres. This is to be submitted to Public Works, Supply and Services and Economic Development and Tourism for review within a year.

Our health care facilities. As mentioned earlier, we have allocated a total budget of \$105 million to the health care facility construction program in '96-97: \$18 million for capital upgrading and \$87 million for major capital projects. These projects have been included in our budget based on priorities established by the Department of Health and PWSS and the regional health authorities. Capital upgrading initiatives are construction projects with funding valued at less than \$1 million which are required to address deficiencies and minor program changes at health care facilities. Our major capital projects are construction projects with total funding requirements of \$1 million or greater.

Some examples of major capital projects identified in '96-97 include the new Carewest Alzheimer's care centre in Calgary with a '96-97 budget of \$1 million. This project is a 40-bed care facility for Alzheimer's patients. The project involves cost sharing between the province and the Calgary regional health

authority, with the province's share to be \$3.8 million.

An \$18.9 million project to develop a children's health care centre in renovated space at the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre will consolidate most pediatric services for the region and will provide some services for northern Alberta. It will include a pediatric burn program and provide organ transplantation services. This multiphase project has a '96-97 budget of \$1.4 million and is scheduled to be complete in 1998.

Eight point three million dollars for the Slave Lake general hospital. In September of '95 we received approval to replace the existing 39 acute care bed facility with a new 25 acute care bed and 20 continuing care bed hospital. It is scheduled for completion in the fall of 1998. Also renovations and expansion of the Whitecourt hospital: we have on hand designs for this \$5.1 million project in '95-96. Construction is scheduled to commence in '96-97 and should be completed the following year.

Our water development projects. I am pleased to report that we are planning to proceed with the construction of the Pine Coulee project near Stavely. This project will help secure water supplies, improve water quality, and provide recreation and irrigation opportunities in the area. The budget for this project is \$13 million. Two million dollars have been allocated to help continue with the planning and design of the Little Bow River project near Champion.

Also in '96-97 my department will be assuming responsibilities for two major water upgrading and rehabilitation projects. Capital funding for major rehabilitation projects has been previously provided by Alberta environment through the Alberta heritage trust fund. However, capital funding from this fund was discontinued in 1995-96. My department was able to accommodate the two projects since '96-97 without any funding from Environmental Protection. One of these projects is the replacement of the spillway of the St. Mary dam near Spring Coulee. This 50-year-old dam is a vital part of the Waterton-St. Mary headworks system, which provides water to approximately 5,000 acres of agriculture land in four irrigation districts. The existing spillway is in poor condition, is undersized, and does not meet today's safety standards. The budget for this project is \$9 million.

The other project is the replacement of the East Arrowwood siphon, which is part of the Carseland-Bow River headworks system. This system primarily provides water to about 195,000 acres of agriculture land in the Bow River irrigation district in the Blackfoot reserve. The budget of \$1 million will allow us to continue design of the project, with construction scheduled to be completed in two years.

In summary, we have achieved significant savings in our spending profiles. This is due to our ongoing commitment to aggressively challenge what we do and how we do it. As a result of our innovation and streamlining, over 93 percent of our total spending is now directly dedicated to program delivery.

With these opening remarks, I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you very much for your patience.

**THE CHAIRMAN:** The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

**MRS. ABDURAHMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, hon. minister. With regards to the business plan, the first thing that struck me, Mr. Minister, is that the goals are identical to A Better Way II, 1995/96 – 1997/98. Am I to assume from that that the goals from the previous budget year, the business plan, were not achieved? If that is the case, what I'm looking for is: in what areas or how did you identify that they hadn't been achieved? I

could use the first goal, "a responsive, efficient, smaller organization." I look at the principles that were used in the previous business plan. Those principles are not identified in the new business plan; we've got a set of values. Basically what I'm looking for, Mr. Minister, is: how are you going to evaluate when you've met those goals? How far are you prepared to go in your department till you identify that you've got a responsive, efficient, smaller organization? What are the goals, in other words? What's the measurement that's going to be able to identify when that goal has been achieved and should be removed from your business plan? I could go through them all, but it's not my intent to do that.

MR. FISCHER: I think that you'll see, if I could help you a little bit.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, if you wish to respond to each of the questions, that's fine. Go ahead.

8:20

MR. FISCHER: Well, most of our performance measures that we have in place now are just a little bit further in the business plan.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Minister, I don't really want to get into debate, but I have to ask the question on how you're going to identify when you've actually achieved that goal: a responsive, efficient, smaller organization. Certainly we've seen substantial downsizing within the department, and we're seeing increased efficiencies. So what I'd like to know is: what am I going to look for in the next business plan in the next budget year to see if you've met those goals? It says, "an environmentally sensitive organization." Once again, I'd like to see: is that goal achieved, is it achievable, and how long is it going to take before you achieve it?

I think so we can assess that indeed you are meeting those targets, we have to have a better understanding of what it is that you have at the end of the day. I can use, for example – and I'd like to make reference to page 288 of Agenda '96. We look at the targets for leased space, and you have determined that the average operating cost per square metre of owned space in the PWSS space inventory is \$45. Now, how did you determine that? How did you arrive at that figure? I'm looking back at I believe last year's, and it appears as though it's the same number once again. So I'm wondering: what were the criteria that came to that end conclusion, hon. minister?

Moving to the area of information systems on page 334 of the department estimates, we're seeing a reduction in this area, and I was wondering what has transpired in the department.

MR. FISCHER: Could you give me that page number?

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: On page 334, operating expenses, program 2. We're looking at about a \$13,000 reduction in there. I'm wondering what's happened in that area of public works that we're seeing that decrease, because we have to acknowledge that we're in an information system, and I'm wondering, you know, how in 1996 we're able to achieve that.

The other question I have to ask: in all your technology, are the computer systems computer friendly for the turn of the century? In other words, are they going to be up and running on January 1 of the year 2000? In other words, are the programs millennium friendly? And if they're not all millennium friendly, where in this budget are we starting to plan to meet the needs for changing our information systems to allow for that to happen? So that's dealing

with the year 2000 and ensuring that our systems don't all shut down on January 1.

On 2.3.1, customer services, I'm wondering with regards to that area under telecommunications what the changes are with regards to the budget numbers there, Mr. Minister. And just before I turn over the floor to someone else, I'd also like to know on page 340 of the estimates, 4.11.47, the northeast community health centre, what those expenditures are for. Are they planning dollars? Or what are the estimates going to allow . . .

MR. FISCHER: Could you give me that number again, please?

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Page 340.

MR. FISCHER: Okay.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: It's line 4.11.47, the northeast community health centre in Edmonton. I'm wondering what those dollars are designated for, if it's planning or what they're actually going to cover.

On page 341, I have to tell you that I'm ignorant when it comes to knowing what 4.14.50 is. It's the amortization of capital assets. I understand you know what amortization is, but I need to have a better understanding how in public works that works. It clearly shows there's an increase there, but I have to understand how public works amortizes that, over what period, what it's for.

MR. FISCHER: I just need that number again.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Page 341. It's in the budget estimates.

MR. FISCHER: Okay.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Right down below China/Alberta Petroleum Training Centre.

THE CHAIRMAN: Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, are you expecting the minister to reply to each question?

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: No. I was trying to accommodate the minister finding the line, so it's a matter of courtesy.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Do you have a point of order, hon. minister?

MR. EVANS: Clarification, Mr. Chairman, as to the process. I'm not sure what *Beauchesne* reference would be appropriate, but if you'll bear with me for a moment.

As you've stated on other evenings when we've gone through this process, the process is the same as our previous estimates process, where the minister has an opportunity to make some original comments, then members have an opportunity to make their comments, and then the minister has an opportunity to make some comments on those references by hon. members. I'm just asking you, Mr. Chairman, for your advice on what appears to be changing a little bit in these estimates tonight. It seems to be becoming a dialogue back and forth between the minister and hon. members. I don't think that's consistent with the approach we've been taking up to now, and I don't think it's necessarily consistent with giving as many hon. members as wish the opportunity to make their comments on the estimates.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, okay. Thank you, hon. minister.

In actual fact, the committee may make its own sort of regula-

tions as to whether they want to go back and forth on a question/answer, question/answer, question/answer or whether they want to go on the procedures that are 20 minutes, or up to 20 minutes, and then the minister may come in at any time. That's partly what I was asking the hon. member, who has the floor for 20 minutes. This is not counting on her time, by the way. That's why I questioned Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan whether she was waiting for a reply, and her answer was no. She was making sure that the minister was at the same place she was, and that's part of her time. If she wishes to do that, the chair sees no reason why not. At the end of 20 minutes she'll be called, and we'll go to someone else. If that's what you're thinking about, she isn't on an endless series of questions and answers; she's on a 20-minute period except for this point of clarification.

So, Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, in the 10 minutes and 46 seconds that remain of your time, we invite you to continue.

**8:30**

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I certainly was trying to accommodate the hon. minister being able to locate the reference point, and I believe we've done that in the Legislature many times out of courtesy. It's not my intention to take much longer.

On page 344 of the estimates the question is at 4.10.35. What is the capital investment for in the '96-97 estimates for Michener Centre, Red Deer? What's actually happening in Michener Centre?

With those questions and comments, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to take my seat, as you would say in the Legislature.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member. Just a word before I ask Lethbridge-West to begin his questions. If anyone wants to get on the list, please do so. It is a little more awkward here since you can't jump up and that kind of thing. Right now I have Lethbridge-West, followed by Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by St. Albert, and I don't have anybody else after that. I now do have a couple of people. Sure.

Lethbridge-West.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to begin by thanking the minister and his staff for their co-operation. Whenever I've had to come with an individual constituent concern, they've been able to handle it in a most appropriate and timely manner.

I'm looking at the estimate book itself, Mr. Minister, on page 344. I'm only going to be there for a minute because it's just a matter again of some congratulatory remarks on my part. As an urban member certainly I have to be well aware, in representing Lethbridge-West, that many of my constituents owe their standard of living either directly or indirectly to agriculture, and of course in my part of the country irrigation is a lifeblood. We would consider in that particular area, as far as agriculture and economic development are concerned, that just as arteries would take blood through a healthy, living organism such as perhaps ourselves, certainly the irrigation system that we have in the southwest and southern part of Alberta would have to be considered in the same general analogy.

So on that basis, then, noticing in the '96-97 estimates that we are dedicating \$9 million to that St. Mary headworks system, I think it's worthy of congratulations. I want to of course indicate along with that congratulatory note that this, however, is based on the fact that we have not only balanced the budget but that we will continue to balance budgets throughout this period of time that we're talking about. So this investment that we see in front of us

is already based on not just an assumption anymore of a balanced budget but in fact on the law of the province of Alberta.

I don't feel any guilt, then, in talking about where we are increasing expenditures, because of course this deals with the area of flexibility. I don't have to worry that colleagues of mine or, more importantly, constituents back home might think: "There's that Dunford. Yeah, he wants fiscal responsibility and he wants balanced budgets, but he also wants a lot of cash into his constituency." Well, that might be the particular case, but again with the flexibility we have, I think what we're able to do is to address real needs that we have in our respective areas and try to deal with them as appropriately as we can.

So with that note and background I would like to switch you, then, to page 340. I'm looking at program 4.11, which is health. I don't want to be unduly nervous or uncomfortable, but I am uncomfortable. I need to have some assurances from the minister this evening with regards to a critical area that we have in Lethbridge, particularly in Lethbridge-West, and that I believe does concern my colleague in Lethbridge-East. That is regarding St. Michael's hospital, and I don't see an itemized point showing St. Michael's in Lethbridge.

The reason I'm uncomfortable, Mr. Minister, is that we have gone through a fair amount of trauma for a fair number of years in the city of Lethbridge regarding hospital care, particularly as it applies to long-term care. We had a situation in our city in the late '50s and through the '60s when previous governments, as we do, cared for our seniors and put into place rather modern facilities based on the current technology and thinking that was available at the time. They built facilities that were quite appropriate for their day. However, we find ourselves in the '90s in a situation where what was built then is no longer acceptable now.

I don't want to make, you know, an allegation or anything that I can't substantiate, but my understanding is that we may have people in the city of Lethbridge in facilities, in buildings that perhaps otherwise might be condemned. As a representative for at least part of the city, a smaller part of the city populationwise, this is just not the sort of situation that I think we can be silent about. We have to raise this concern - and I'm raising this concern here this evening - that this government has to take a long and hard look at what is happening with long-term care facilities within the region of the Chinook health region but particularly within the city of Lethbridge. I'm quite comfortable in making the statement that with the restructuring we've done in that particular region, we have long-term care facilities now in some of the rural areas that may be quite appropriate, but the city of Lethbridge has to be addressed.

We have a facility that we generally refer to as the auxiliary hospital. I don't know how long this facility has been around, but it is a painful place to have to visit. Certainly it's a tough, tough decision for constituents I represent to be told by a regional health authority that now that their parents need long-term care, they're going to have to go into the auxiliary hospital. In fact, we have had - I can't call them parents now, I guess - children of these seniors who, upon being asked to assist in making a decision, have actually refused to have their people remain in the city of Lethbridge in the auxiliary facility and have, unhappily, agreed that their dear parents would have to be shipped out to a rural area. They're not happy about it. They phone me. I'm not happy about it. But it's a situation that, you know, they feel they have to deal with.

**8:40**

Southland care centre is another facility we have. Toured it

again just recently on a Saturday morning. I understand how staff, you know, their hearts and their minds and their hands and their abilities go out to the people they are there to care for. So they have to make light of some situations, but, Mr. Minister, when you have holes in the wall and you have cut-out cats laying up against those holes to try to make some humour out of what is otherwise a desperate situation, you know, I think this clearly is showing us that something has to be done in this area. Of course, what I am attempting to do tonight is try to get us focused as clearly as possible that we have a situation in the city of Lethbridge that needs to be dealt with. I don't see it in these numbers.

Now, how they're trying to deal with it, which I believe is a very logical and a rational way, is that we're trying to demolish an old building that was called the St. Michael's hospital and now is called a health care centre. The original plan agreed to by the regional health authority and then by this government was that they would demolish that hospital and rebuild it as a 104-bed facility. Now, since that time, of course, there's been a recognition, at least publicly, of the things that I've been talking about in terms of the auxiliary hospital and the Southland care centre.

In my understanding, there is an agreement down there now that the rebuilding of St. Michael's, one, not only should proceed, but two, should proceed now as a 200-bed facility so that they can at last deal with the auxiliary, i.e., demolish it once we can get the people moved out of it, and that the Southland centre then be considered for – at least we'll move the patients we currently have in that facility out of there into St. Michael's. Then the St. Michael's hospital board, who has the operating authority over the Southland centre, will have to make a decision: do they demolish the building or find some other way to deal with it?

So it's a critical situation down there for us. You know, I need you to deal with that in the estimates as we go through this budget. Either it's here or it isn't. If it is here, then you have to direct me to what is, in fact, being looked at in terms of '96-97. I made a commitment to people that were picketing on the street this summer when they were opposed to the demolition of St. Michael's that as long as I was their MLA, there would always be a St. Michael's in the city of Lethbridge. I based that statement and that promise to these people that – and it was a sincere promise, because I tried to make them understand that St. Michael's with its people and its programs was the important thing. It wasn't just the bricks and mortar that happened to be sitting at that 13th Street site. It was no longer suitable for the way we want to try to deal with our seniors and our elderly people in the '90s.

One analogy I used would be that if you were in the dairy farming business and then switched over to perhaps a feed lot, there might be cause to remove, you know, a dairy barn from your operation to replace it with a more meaningful type of operation. Not being a farmer or rancher and recognizing the great astuteness in agriculture of my colleague from Lethbridge-East, I don't know how well the analogy works, but they seemed to understand, although they didn't necessarily agree. They seemed to understand, of course, what I was trying to get at. When they were using the fact that in Europe buildings were made and did last for 1,000 years, well, the argument I was using: that's why we call it the old world, and that's why we call our country over here the new world. I didn't get very far with that one.

The resolution, I guess, of the very hot, volatile, and animated discussions I was having with those people as they marched on 13th Street on that Friday and Saturday was the fact that there would be a St. Michael's in Lethbridge. I'll do whatever I have to do to make sure that promise is kept by this government. So

we need you to address that tonight or whenever it is appropriate, and I look forward to your comments.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.

Minister, you're invited to just let us know whenever you want to jump in, whenever you're ready. If you're not ready now, we'll go to . . .

MR. FISCHER: I think I would like to address it. I can do it fairly shortly. My memory isn't good enough, and I lose pages when everybody keeps pointing to some numbers. Concerning St. Michael's hospital, we have started the system that we set up a couple of years ago now on evaluating which hospitals should be built. They have to go through criteria and a system and guidelines before we get approval. Keep in mind that in order to get that, there's been a lot of background work that goes into putting that forward to our people, both public works and Health. There's a lot of work that goes into that. The St. Michael's group didn't get in on the first round of that, and I have a list of possible ones that have not been reviewed yet. They're proposed. St. Michael's is on that list. Consequently, we don't have money in the budget to start construction because it still hasn't been approved.

We approve these projects as we go along during the year, and when they're ready and when we're ready to approve it – and I can't just say for sure on that one how much background work has been done on it yet – then we do have not an emergency bit of funding but funding for capital projects that come on before the beginning of next year. We don't have a lot of the money, but it's for consulting and planning programs. So I just leave you with that, knowing that we are going to address a number of other ones as well sometime during this year.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Chairman, and good evening, Mr. Minister. My questions are basically in just two areas. Firstly, program 2, information technology and supply, and secondly, program 4, construction projects. You won't be surprised where my initial focus is.

I wanted to ask you some questions relative to implementation of freedom of information in the province. In that respect I refer you to page 284 of the Agenda '96 booklet. If you look at the bottom goal, it says:

effective and efficient administration of assigned government initiatives fostering open, accountable and accessible government.

Relative to that goal I expect you're anxious to find out what degree of satisfaction Albertans who want to utilize the Act are experiencing. So I guess my first question is: why have you not addressed that in your performance measures on page 288 of the Agenda booklet and page 350 of the estimates booklet? Why isn't there a performance measure right at the top of the list, or for that matter anywhere on the list, attempting to assess the value of the Act for those Albertans who choose to make a section 6 application? If you're not going to treat that as a key performance measure, how on earth are you ever going to determine whether you've met your goal which I alluded to at the outset at the bottom of page 284?

Moving on, minister, the first public hearing that was held dealing with section 87(4) of the FOIP Act, fee waiver request. What's the budget? What does it cost Alberta taxpayers through preparation by people in your department, attendants, for that almost full-day hearing in front of the Information Commissioner?

Can you break out that cost for me, please? I'm referring to the first public hearing held dealing with a fee waiver request. My recollection is that there were a considerable number of people from your department, and I'd like to know what the cost was.

**8:50**

In terms of lawyers from the Department of Justice who, in effect, come in to provide assistance on behalf of the government, how is that costed, Mr. Minister? Where is that cost picked up, and what was it with the first public hearing? I'd like you to tell me the total number of formal requests made under the FOIP Act to date for personal information. I'd like to find out what the total number of requests for nonpersonal information has been to date.

Mr. Minister, since Ms Kessler and the people responsible for training FOIP co-ordinators and government managers generally have put an enormous emphasis on informal satisfaction of requests – in other words, trying to meet requests for information outside the formal processes of the Act – do you have statistics on the number of these requests made and the percentage to which there's been a response made?

I'd like you to tell me, Mr. Minister, the average fee charged for FOIP requests that have been made under the Act. I'd like to know the number of applications deemed abandoned after a fee estimate is given to the requester. You know what I'm talking about there, that once the fee request goes out, there's a period, and then the application is deemed to have lapsed if there's no follow-up. So I'd like you to tell me how many of those there have been to date.

I'd like to know the number of fee waivers sought under section 87 of the Act to date, the number of fee waivers granted, and if I haven't already asked, the average fee that has been charged to date.

I'd like to know, Mr. Minister, under section 31 of the FOIP Act, what criteria your department has provided to department managers and FOIP co-ordinators in terms of when the discretion under the section 31 public interest override thing has been used or what the test is that you are providing as part of your training package to FOIP co-ordinators.

Just changing direction slightly, what's the budget for the revamped committee that deals with destruction of government documents? I think it has a new title, but it's still under your ministry, Mr. Minister. What's the budget for that? How many times has that committee met in the last budget year?

I'd like to know what the budget is for meetings of FOIP co-ordinators. Perhaps you could tell me the number of meetings that have taken place to which FOIP co-ordinators have been invited to attend since, let's make it July 1, 1995. Mr. Minister, lots of conflicting information, some of it made by your colleagues, in terms of what the cost is of freedom of information to the government of Alberta, so I'd like you to give me the most current estimate of the cost, firstly of materials and secondly of labour, for the implementation and operation of the new Act. In the last budget year that would be the start-up cost up to October 1, and then if you can break out the actual operational cost from October 1, 1995, on.

Mr. Minister, an issue that's come up and has been raised, I think, a couple of years running now, the whole issue of Crown copyright. Do I assume that you are the minister responsible for that issue? I assume that's the case because of your responsibility with information management.

**9:00**

There are two approaches that have been taken, as we look

across Canada, to this Crown copyright case. You have some jurisdictions being very aggressive in terms of trying to sell information that Alberta taxpayers have paid for and which is basic, because it's laws and regulations and statutory instruments. You have some other provinces that take the view the public has a right to access that information, and if there's any third party that wants to come along and be able to provide people with access to statutes, regulations, statutory instruments, your job as the minister would be to expedite that. So would you tell me or share with us what your position is on that Crown copyright issue and what plans you have in the next 12 months to address that issue, which road you're going down and how you're going about it?

Just going back to the FOIP Act again, I'd like to know what your budget is for an adjudicator under section 71 of the Act. We've run into I think three cases now where the current Information Commissioner is unable to deal with requests for information and where an adjudicator is going to have to be appointed. So since it looks like this may be something we're going to see a lot of, will you tell us what your budget is for the cost for an adjudicator? I notice there that in division 2 of the Act, taxpayers are responsible for paying the expenses of the judge pursuant to "section 57(3) of the Judges Act (Canada)." Then the adjudicator, of course, has the power to retain the services of any other person. So this may be a significant cost item to Alberta taxpayers, and I think we'd want to know just precisely what the budget is for that, Mr. Minister, if you would, please.

Now, just changing direction and going over to program 4 and the facilities part, there are some items that I want to ask. This would be, firstly, element 4.12.7, if you can particularize the work destined for Court of Queen's Bench in Calgary. I know what the plan had been last year, and you might update me and tell me if there have been any changes in terms of what's been undertaken there. Under the other item, the court facilities, 4.12.42, could you give me a breakdown on what court facilities we're speaking of there and what stage that construction work is at?

The other question, Mr. Minister, I put to your colleague the Minister of Health in another subcommittee, and that had to do with the cost of the holding facilities for prisoners in hospital premises in the city of Calgary. I have some information that I'm trying to confirm that the provincial government contemplates building basically a new two-storey facility to house offenders or accused people while they're receiving either psychiatric assessment or psychiatric treatment. I'd like to know if in fact that's accurate and, if so, if you can point out where that is.

I notice, Mr. Minister, that in terms of health, you've got a number of substantial items for the three anchor hospitals in the city of Calgary, but I'd like some particulars in terms of what's being done in terms of prisoner-holding facilities, what the cost is to Alberta taxpayers. You might also indicate, then, what's going to happen to the existing facility, which would seem to me to have no other use. I'm interested in knowing what the thrown-away costs would be.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: A point of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan is calling a point of order.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Yes. I believe that one of our hon. members on the government side is in the public gallery.

MR. WOLOSZYN: My apologies.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member. Yes, we're supposed to walk between those pillars, hon. member.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: It was the Whip; I couldn't resist it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, you didn't resist it. So okay.  
Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I think those were the key bits of information I wanted, and obviously I'd ask whether that information is going to be available before I'm required to vote on these estimates.

So thanks for your patience and attention, sir, and I look forward to the responses.

MR. FISCHER: Okay. Thank you. I've got a pretty big list. Anyway . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry. You're finished now, Calgary-Buffalo?

MR. DICKSON: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Mr. Minister, do you wish to respond at this time?

MR. FISCHER: I would like to just quickly respond then. Certainly there are a lot of things that I don't have the numbers for here, and some of them, on some of the committees that haven't spent any money yet, I think were quite premature.

You asked about the cost of records and storing and disposing of records and that. Between the leasing facilities and the operation of it, it's about \$1.9 million. I think the leasing facilities are close to a million dollars themselves.

One of the things you mentioned was about the courthouses and that. I believe that I should get you a little detail in writing about that, although with the Court of Queen's Bench and our facilities in Calgary, we are doing quite an elaborate study on that right now. We've put together a committee of some of the judicial people as well as some of our people and some of Justice's folks, and we're trying to come up with something that's going to be satisfactory to everyone.

It is interesting about copyright. I probably shouldn't be addressing it, but we do in the Act mention that they do have to ask people what they are using that information for and who they're going to contact with it. I know that that isn't a very strong regulation in there, because after they get it, how can you stop them? But I know that that has been a bit of a problem in other jurisdictions as well. Possibly that would have to be addressed a little bit later on.

The cost of our freedom of information – and I did go over that today in fact. Altogether since we have begun, since October 1, we have spent about \$5.3 million. That would include the commissioner's office at \$450,000, I believe it is, and for each one of the departments I believe it's close to \$2 million. We have quite a bit. As central co-ordinating agency – it's in the budget here for \$900,000. That includes training and getting ready for the next stage with the MASH sector and all of the things that we do with that. So as near as we can estimate – and it's a rough estimate – that's about what it is now.

I think that I'll just stop there.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Minister. The minister has the opportunity to speak again to the estimates on the night they're presented to the whole committee and are formally voted on. Many ministers have indicated that if they miss any questions, they'll report back in writing.

Anything further, Mr. Minister?

MR. FISCHER: Not right now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Just a reminder, then, that we'll go Whitecourt-St. Anne, St. Albert, Little Bow, Lethbridge-East, Calgary-Cross, and then Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.  
Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the minister: I want to thank you and the people of Whitecourt want to thank you for the general hospital renovations in Whitecourt. I noted at the outset you said that it was in the budget this year and will be completed next year, and we all thank you for that.

My question is on page 342, 4.15.61, Pleasant View Lodge at Mayerthorpe, a budget of \$930,000. Is that the total budget for the renovations, or is that just part of it for this year? The other question. They asked me some time ago: when you do those renovations, would you consider paving the parking lot? I note that every other lodge in Edmonton and every place else gets their parking lot paved, and they're wondering why they're second-class citizens. So would you get that to me? I don't need it tonight.

The question I want to ask is that on page 349 you show \$85.6 million for "leasing space for government." Now, I'm sure that's a reduction from before but how big a reduction, because of the downsizing of government?

The next question. You mentioned you sublease some of your available space. When there's such a vacancy rate in Edmonton, who do you sublease to and how successful are you in subleasing? Is there quite a bit of vacant space that is not subleased because of the vacancy rate, or are we subleasing it at a reduced rate?

So those are the questions I wished to raise, and I would ask that you would get back to me sometime other than tonight.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: All right. Thank you, Whitecourt-St. Anne.  
The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Also, we do look forward to our lodges in the Sturgeon Foundation being upgraded: four lodges over the next I believe three years and one this year. Could I get the criteria for how the lodges are upgraded? Is there an assessment book? I'd like to see what it is for my own information and see how it's done. I'm not questioning the priorities at all. I just want to be more informed on this myself so I can go through it and also maybe even for the foundation to know what this information is for upcoming years. It would be important to know.

I'd like to know how the costs on the upgrading of the foundations are done. For the Chateau Sturgeon in Legal it's \$100,000 from the province. How much does the foundation have to kick in also? What are they responsible for? What is the province responsible for? Is there a formula for all the lodges across the province? Is there one formula for it, or is it flexible? Are there variations to it depending on where it is or some other criteria? Is my question clear?

MR. FISCHER: Uh huh.

MR. BRACKO: Okay. These cover most of the lodges, but there will be upgrading in the future. Will this program continue, or will it be looked at after these programs for lodges that need to be upgraded are over in the next three or four years? What I'm asking: is there a long-range plan for the lodges?

Also, I asked this in Municipal Affairs, but I'm asking it also in public works, about the planning for the aging population in the seniors' lodges. At one time the average age was 65; now it's 85-plus. At one time the lodge used to be the party centre of a community. Now with the walkers and wheelchairs it's very crowded in the hallways. Are adjustments being made for the hallways with the different type of traffic, the different devices needed to assist the seniors in this area? Are we looking at, again, plans if the population even gets older in the lodges such as oxygen intake and so on that is needed?

9:10

DR. WEST: Socialism is dead. We're moving on.

MR. BRACKO: I know. You're the only socialist left, Steve. I appreciate that.

DR. WEST: I can't believe you're still asking questions like that.

MR. BRACKO: Well, you have to plan for the future to save money. We didn't get \$32 billion in debt because of smart thinking. You think you would have . . . [interjection] Yeah, exactly. Fifty-year mortgages, Steve.

Anyway, moving on. The contractors and the tendering of these upgrades, how is that done? Is there some criteria set out to make sure that the company bidding is legitimate, that they can complete the job, that not halfway through they are unable to complete it? What safeguards are there to eliminate waste in this area? It's also important because there's a very short time frame for the repairs to occur, otherwise it drags out and can have a negative health impact on the seniors, just so I would know what's happening there.

Also, are there any holdbacks from companies? Has any money been held back from companies that have done work that hasn't been up to standard? If there are, I'd like to know that information.

Moving on again to rural Alberta, we talked about in agriculture estimates that we had a strong rural infrastructure to keep the cities prosperous, growing, and so on. In the rural areas if one business or two goes under, it can affect a town tremendously, and this has happened to some of the companies I've been in.

There are public buildings, whether they've been old ALCB stores that haven't sold and have no chance of selling for a few years because of the economy of the area or courthouses or provincial buildings, that are not full. [interjection] Well, unless it went in the last week. Some of these are empty or have very limited use, and the community may wish to utilize these. I know some programs – further ed, other groups, even municipal governments may need a new town hall – that would like to have access to these at a reasonable rate for their community. We want to see that they're used efficiently, wisely. I know some communities have been, I think almost a year now, wanting the courthouses that haven't been used and were used once a month prior to that. They would like to get the information without having to wait another six months or a year. Could we speed up the process, maybe light a fire under the Justice minister's department, if that's the hold up, so they know where they can go in the future, not wait another year or two?

So those I guess are the main questions I'm asking at this time.

MR. FISCHER: Okay. I'll try and quickly just answer those. The criteria for the lodge upgrading. We look after all of the major repairs, I guess, to keep a building in excellent shape, whether it's the heating or the lighting or the roof or that type of thing. Right now we're not taking apart the inside and renovating, making one room out of two and that type of in-house thing. There is a fairly good guideline that distinguishes between what the lodge would pay for and what it wouldn't.

As far as our long-range plans with the lodges and that, we have said that we would like to see those lodges built, the need in future, by the private sector, and I think we're just starting to move into that right now. Contractors and low bids: sometimes that gives you a problem. Yes, we do have a holdback, and yes, we do try to evaluate contractors. If they bid too low, we try to prequalify them as much as possible, but we are obligated to take the low bid if they can show they can do that building. Certainly that isn't something that's just cut-and-dry, because if you get someone that doesn't do a good job, you have to do something about it. Then we certainly put them on a list so that they are not allowed to bid later on.

You were talking about the public buildings. We have in some cases – and I'll use the liquor store in Provost where the education people, Lakeland College together with the two schools down there, are making use of that building with their training programs and some of their school programs. We do use those buildings for that sometimes. Mostly we're saying that if it's surplus, we try to sell it at market value. We don't want to get into a business where we're leasing it or giving it to volunteer organizations right now, but we have let some go in and use it right now.

The court facilities. Just at the end of the year – they had to have a year before they were allowed. We didn't want to do anything until they were sure that that's the direction they were going to go. You could also allow any government agency a first buy on it or the municipal government the first opportunity to buy.

That's it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The next members are the hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Lethbridge-East, Calgary-Cross, Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I would like to reiterate a couple of the comments that the Member for Lethbridge-West made at the start of the proceedings tonight, and that's to thank your staff as well. Your ministerial staff has been most helpful in all the dealings we've had with them over my four years anyways. The deputy minister and assistant deputy ministers have always been quick to respond and assist constituents in our riding. They've sincerely appreciated it, and so have I. So my hat is off to all of you.

As far as the departmental staff I would like you or your staff to pass on the very sincere thanks from our constituents as well for about a 17-year relationship. Since about 1978 or '79 many of our constituents have been working with various ministers, various department personnel working on some water management projects, and quite happily this year some of those projects are going to finally proceed with the original intent. I know from my own involvement a number of years ago with some of your department staff, you've got some very dedicated people who've been able to keep people aware of the issues of the day and provide them with the necessary assistance in coming to what they felt was a proper decision, although it did take substantially longer than what they'd originally anticipated, and for that we're very thankful.



It is also important to recognize some of the water management projects that you've identified through the Public Works, Supply and Services planning and implementation portion of program 4. I think it's also important, Mr. Minister, to make sure that everyone is aware that not all these water management projects are for irrigation, that if it wasn't for the proper control of our water resources, there wouldn't be adequate domestic, municipal, and recreational opportunities in this province. Although I myself don't irrigate, I sometimes wonder how many people take water for granted when they turn on their taps in the morning to brush their teeth or when they flush the toilet or when they jump in for a shower just because they're a little bit hot. I would like them to remember that it just doesn't happen to come out of the tap because you turn the faucet on.

I can remember December 28, 1978, when it was 43 below in our own house and we turned on the tap and the water quit running. The well had gone dry. I don't think anyone at that time in that area ever suspected that wells went dry, but they did for various reasons, whether it was a natural occurrence in the aquifer, whether it was . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Frozen.

9:20

MR. McFARLAND: . . . because of seismic activities. One of my colleagues is saying it froze up. Yeah, it may well have frozen up. But these things do occur, and when they do, Mr. Minister, other things have to take their place. Sometimes it's hauling water in the back of the truck for 17 years, which some of us have a very acute awareness of. For others it's the benefit of getting on a rural water program. Two gallons a minute may not seem like a huge amount, but it makes the difference between having a viable small business or farm operation or not having one at all.

I would imagine there are many constituents that any one of us around this table represent who might have two and three washrooms in a house, and when you consider the number of appliances that are subject and prone to leaks, it doesn't take very much to lose two gallons an hour through drips, through leaky faucets. Now, if you can imagine, some of the rural water programs around are providing two gallons a minute for the entire operation. That isn't a whole lot of water to subsist on, but believe me it is a very worthwhile godsend, if you will.

What I have in mind, Mr. Minister, if you could answer, is a question in relation to 4.8.9. The second one is on 4.8.42.

MR. FISCHER: What page are you on?

MR. McFARLAND: I'm sorry, Mr. Minister. Page 344. I'll start with the latter one first, because as you announced earlier on, this is one of the projects that will be proceeding. I know that the government received a favourable decision from the joint federal/provincial review panel on the Pine Coulee project, but I would like to know: what is the current status of the project? I think everyone is aware that it's been announced and that it has been approved, but I would like to know where it currently stands.

The second question that I have in relation to that same project, Mr. Minister, is this: is your department prepared to start construction on this project this year so that the residents in the Willow Creek basin can expect to look towards a reliable water supply, that many of us otherwise take for granted? That's 4.8.42.

Just above that at 4.8.9, the Little Bow River project, the

question that I have is on the status of the EIA with respect to that particular project, an update on the environmental impact assessment. The last question that I have: under that same project for the Little Bow, when do you anticipate a hearing, and is that going to be another joint federal/provincial hearing?

I believe that's it, Mr. Minister, other than one final thank you, and that's one that I know applies across the province. A very worthwhile project that I see happening in many communities is the upgrading of some of the older senior citizens' lodges, which for many of us, if we look around, probably were built in the late 1950s. Many of the interior structural components such as the electrical and the wiring I know are nearing the end of their life expectancy, but many of the changes, the code requirements that I think you'll be undertaking on some of these projects will be most worth while. In the lodges I'm familiar with in our constituency, it seemed in the past that they used to be occupied by single seniors who'd lost a spouse, but it seems more and more today that there's a very wide acceptance, with a great deal of anticipation that elderly couples can move into these lodges. Rather than having one single little bed in a tiny room, I've seen some renovations take place that allow a senior couple, who otherwise may not have been able to live alone comfortably, to move into very friendly surroundings, have the necessities of life, yet maintain quite a bit of independence. I congratulate you for that.

The last bouquet in respect to the renovations – and again it may be just one of the seniors' lodges that I'm familiar with. They've also undertaken, although they hadn't been restricted in the past, developing some of these facilities for handicapped seniors. They're actually expanding because they're finding a greater and greater appreciation and use of those same facilities. So I would like to thank your staff again and the department as a whole for the work they've done in the area of accommodating some of these not totally confined but smaller facilities so that one of the spouses who might be in a wheelchair can be with their partner in the same facility. I think that's something you should be complimented on.

So with those few comments, Mr. Minister, I thank you. If you don't respond tonight on those program issues that I brought up, I would appreciate it if you could give me a written response.

Just for your information, from our neck of the woods, Mr. Minister, we have not yet had one request under freedom of information. These things that we can see and feel and touch and the things that will help people have a better quality of life, down where we're at anyway where we are subject to the ravages of Mother Nature – that is, taking care of water in a responsible way – far, far exceed the requests we have for any kind of information under freedom of information. So if you ever have to pare back a little bit, I'll give you one suggestion where you can.

Thank you, Mr. Minister.

MR. FISCHER: If I could, Mr. Chairman . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister, go ahead.

MR. FISCHER: Just on the lodge program. I should have mentioned it when the Member for St. Albert was speaking. We do have an engineering team that has done an evaluation. It was done before it got moved over to us from transportation. They have analyzed all the lodges, and they put down the needs on a priority list, and we're doing them as fast as we can. We've got a \$12.4 million budget this year, and we're hopefully doing them fast enough to keep up with that. Some of the rest of them: I could save a little time if we put it down in writing to you and let some of the other members speak.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Again, Lethbridge-East and Calgary-Cross, then Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. Undeclared on one side and Edmonton-Centre and Bonnyville on the other. So we'll ask for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. WHITE: Mayfield centre is the big centre.

AN HON. MEMBER: You're pretty small though.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's right. He came in at the same time you waved your hand, hon. member, so Edmonton-Mayfield.

Lethbridge-East right now, yes.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, thank you for coming this evening. Just a few questions. What I'll do is just start at the beginning of this and work through the budget document with my questions as we go through. One of the questions that came up follows out of one of the discussions that you've already had with one of the other members about leasing and subleasing some of the property. I would assume that subleases then generate a revenue, yet even in the department summary on page 334 there's no dedicated revenue coming into public works. Where do those dollars from a sublease go if they don't come into your department?

9:30

MR. FISCHER: They are in there. There's \$1.4 million.

DR. NICOL: Okay. I would have assumed that it would have been under management of properties as opposed to the developed planning and implementation section. I would have put it under the management of properties part, program 3.

MR. FISCHER: If I could just stop you for a minute. The accounting process – I would have put a lot of things in a different place too.

DR. NICOL: Right. Okay. Well, that explains it.

MR. FISCHER: The accounting process – and I've been just dying to say that all night – comes from Treasury under the guidance of the Auditor General. So when things are where they are, that's the reason.

[Mr. McFarland in the Chair]

DR. NICOL: That's the clarification I wanted, because I was looking for it under program 3. Thank you.

Mr. Minister, if we can look then on page 338 under your operation expenses, program 4, there's a section in there under Agriculture, Food and Rural Development for the Tree Nursery and Horticultural Centre in Edmonton. There's an expectation there of expenditures for both operating expense and planning, and then back in the capital investment part there's also capital investment going on. If we look in the agriculture business plan, this is one of the facilities that is to be privatized. I was wondering why you're planning all these investments to come about in the next two or three years if it's all in the process of being divested out to private operation.

The other question that came up in my mind as I was going through that page and the subsequent page – I guess it's a matter

of terminology again. I would ask the minister if he could explain a little bit what "accommodation projects" are. They show up underneath each of the subsequent ministry subsections, and I just need to have a feel for what that kind of project might be, because they seem to generate a number of dollars of expenditure for each one of them.

The other question, then, is on the same section, 4.10, Family and Social Services, page 339. There's quite a planning expenditure for the Michener Centre in Red Deer, yet when we look at all the long-term planning that's going on both for mental health and the children's services, which deals a little bit with that same aspect of mental health, those plans are all still being done. Why are we planning for construction of a building that we don't know what the direction is going to be on the use over the next year because those plans aren't adequately in place yet?

We get into section 4.11, the Department of Health, and again I'm going to follow up a little bit on the St. Mike's project in Lethbridge. You know, I think this was a real surprise to the people in Lethbridge when there were no dollars for the continuation of the St. Mike's project. The people in St. Mike's as well as the regional health authority were really, I guess, planning as though this was an expenditure that was going to be in the budget. When I spoke with you earlier and also with the Minister of Health, everybody seemed to be surprised that it wasn't there. So the question that comes up: what is it in the planning process that has delayed this particular project? You know, you indicated in your response to the Member for Lethbridge-West earlier that some part of the planning process wasn't quite complete, so you didn't have all the information that you could use to make the decision. I think the people who are planning both at the regional authority level and within St. Mike's administration would like to know what it is they have yet to do in this planning process, because in discussions with them, they are quite confident that they're now waiting on you, that there's no more input from their end in order to move this project along. So it would be very good if they could find out what it is that has to be done yet.

Mr. Minister, you don't have to respond to me on that. If you could just forward that information directly to them so that they can get this up to date and get this project moving along. You know, in the Chinook regional health authority area, this is a real critical project, because right now we're caught in a position, as the Member for Lethbridge-West has pointed out. There's a real imbalance between the lodge facilities looking at where the people are as opposed to where the facilities are and the quality of the facilities from the city of Lethbridge to the surrounding communities. There are a number of people that are really anxiously awaiting word on the progress of that St. Mike's project. The Member for Lethbridge-West covered a lot of the other issues, so I'll just ask you to clarify that and let them know, and then they can get on with it.

Section 4.14. You have \$2.7 million in there for operating expenses for planning and implementation of construction for government buildings. It appears to be construction and planning for new buildings, yet in most areas we're looking at downsizing. We're looking at excess capacity within the space that's managed by your ministry. Why are we still going ahead with all these plans, and how does that fit consistent with the needs for space downsizing? That's 4.14.57 on page 341.

A final couple of questions, Mr. Minister. Under science and research, I notice both in the operating expense planning and implementation, section 4.17.10, there's \$1.03 million for planning and implementation at the Alberta Research Council. Yet when we look through the business plan for the minister of science and research, there's no discussion of upgrades or changes

at the facility there. So what we've got are dollars going here when the minister under her portfolio has not indicated any plans of an upgrade at the facility. We need to get a little bit of explanation. [interjection] Section 4.17.10 on page 342, program 4, right at the bottom of page 342. There's a million dollars going out to the Alberta Research Council for planning and implementation of projects.

The other one is on the next page, page 343, the provincial grazing reserves, 4.3.32. There's about \$50,000 going in there for planning development on grazing reserves, and it's my understanding that the minister of agriculture intends to contract out the management of these on a cost-recovery basis. So why is it that the government is still putting dollars in there if this is now going to be on a cost-recovery basis from the management agencies that are operating the facility there?

Thank you, Mr. Minister. That's the limit of the questions today, just to the point and out there so that you can address them as needed.

MR. FISCHER: The grazing one: there is money there for the grazing program they have. Environment sometimes needs to buy some land for different environment projects or some of it was tax recovery land in the past. Sometimes if there was a needed use for that land, we budgeted \$50,000 for that, and that's consistent with last year. We didn't use it, but we budget for it anyway.

I can't remember which number you said. It was the downsizing anyway or the renovations for \$4 million or something like that.

DR. NICOL: It's \$2.7 million, 4.14.57.

MR. FISCHER: As we're downsizing our government, we have to take people out of other places and put them in, and you have to renovate. Certainly we've recognized some need for the St. Michael's building down there. When you ask what's missing, I will have to go into that – we do work with Health an awful lot on that part of it – and find out exactly what it is. During our restructuring of our health regions, in relationship to the criteria, there were some things in there like a payback that kind of stuck out ahead and allowed some of the other projects to go ahead first, the number of beds in the region, and they had to meet those types of criteria. I'm not sure which one they didn't meet.

9:40

The accommodation projects. That is administration and accommodation when we go to do planning or construction of a project.

The Michener Centre. I believe we budgeted for that. They do not have their governance board totally in place yet, but the need is there, so the budget is there if it's needed.

DR. NICOL: Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Next on the list is Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Actually, many of my questions have been answered. So I'll be brief with the two questions that I have remaining.

One question relates to what I'd heard earlier through discussion at this table in regards to St. Mike's in Lethbridge, from both MLAs from that area. Mr. Minister, I'm looking on page 340, the planning and implementation of construction projects, the Peter Lougheed Centre at 4.11.13. The reason that does raise

concern is that I understand the Peter Lougheed Centre has planning issues that are currently before the development appeal board and that those have been set aside I think for – I don't know – four to eight weeks or whatever. Not knowing the outcome of the appeal board, what I am concerned about is whether or not these funds are then set aside if the appeal board makes a decision that the planning project in some way should not proceed. I'm only asking that question based on what I've heard earlier, because it sounds like large systems like health and this system were very unaware of the steps in the process, that this would be at our table here, of not understanding what exactly happened and what the planning barriers were. So I would really appreciate the minister writing to me – you don't need to comment on that this evening – what that effect would be on the Peter Lougheed Centre in regards to planning and in regards to the decision the development appeal board may make.

The second question I had was on page 354. It's just a brief question. I heard earlier at the supply subcommittee on Health a question from an MLA in regards to how smart cards are incorporated within their budget in the area of technology, and we know that in the area of education the reallocation of surplus funds is going to be into technology in schools. I'm still learning – so I hope you appreciate that – how budgets relate to one another through the ministries. When I was just glancing through your budget in the area of technology, I had noticed on page 354 that there was a significant decrease in that area. It's \$34 million to approximately \$25 million or so. My thoughts were along the line that actually you would have an increase in that area, that as our government becomes more automated, costs and revenues in this area in your ministry might actually have increased. As I said, I'd appreciate that in writing, or you could comment on that this evening.

MR. FISCHER: Sure. I can comment on that one right now. That was mostly due to the outsourcing, as I'd mentioned earlier on. Some of that is going to the departments now. It will come out of their budgets, so our budget went down.

MRS. FRITZ: So it's actually, then, an interrelationship between the ministries, as I was talking about earlier. So other ministries will pick up that cost, and then it goes through that way.

MR. FISCHER: We have taken \$19.6 million out. With that one, I believe it's \$11 million, or somewhere in there, that is transferred to other departments for their telecommunications needs and their information technology needs. So that money will be there for them, yes.

MRS. FRITZ: Okay. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Our next speaker is Edmonton-Mayfield, followed by Lethbridge-West.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I'll try and breeze through it rather quickly. I draw your attention to a statement, the last statement on page 349, "consistent with the government's goal of making individual ministries more accountable and responsible for their costs," and then it goes through a number of areas that have been moved out of your budget into theirs. In fact, I believe you still do manage the purchase and acquisition of these services, but it's a flow-through cost as an accounting exercise and a management function.

My questions are these. If you take that same philosophy, which I believe to be very efficient in that it does exactly that, puts the onus on the department to budget within their own budget the priorities of their department – I cite program 3 on page 337, the management of properties – why, then, would you not do a similar sort of thing in this whole program, manage the properties that flow through the costs to an individual department's budget so as to make them accountable for their budgets? And add, of course, your management fee, as you would acting as a property manager, and not take the rents that you spoke of before, the \$1.4 million in rents that you're renting to the outside, but treat them exactly in the same manner as revenue to the department and expense to the department and a service charge on top of that.

Taking that philosophy further, why would you not act as a service centre so that virtually the entire department's billings, interdepartmental billings, would show up in your budget such that you would have virtually no call on the general revenue? Because all of your calls would be coming on individual departments, and they would in fact manage those funds to invite your department to come in and build a building or renovate a structure, and then they would pay you the capital cost or the operating cost of whatever the budget items were and your fee for managing to cover your overhead, such that you would not have any charges to the general revenue.

I suggest that perhaps it would do at least two things, the first of which would make the departments be in total care and custody of their capital works and their operating expenditures, and it would be self-managing, at least in part, to your budget, such that the scrutiny of your budget would happen internally as opposed to a meeting such as this, save and except some of the general overhead costs, which would be your ministers and your ADMs. That would be a little discussion paper perhaps or something, if your department has those on hand, which I'm sure they do, because they've dealt with this in other years. I'm sure they've dealt with the same sort of management philosophy and certainly examined it before.

The second area of questioning is in program 4, and it relates to something you said earlier in your dissertation, off the top, something to the effect that the water from the Waterton-St. Mary headworks project services some 5,000 acres. The simple math in the last two years' budgets, the forecast for '95-96 and that which is estimated in '96-97, is almost \$10 million, servicing 5,000 acres, services of \$2,000 per acre. For the government to recover that through productivity, employment, and however else one wants to apply it, it seems to me to lose a little bit of its appeal – shall we say? – to a government's expenditures. Unless of course this does have something to do with or a great deal to do with mitigating some of the flooding in the Milk River and the St. Mary River. Then I can see that it perhaps does have some relevance. I'd like a little explanation as to how those numbers work out.

9:50

Moving on to page 353, perhaps you can explain the investment income at the top, right on the top of the page. I expect the difficulty in forecasting from an actual of \$1.5 million to comparable net estimates of '95-96 being half a million dollars and then \$5 million as the forecast for last year and then a million – I mean, it's up and down and all over the place. I suspect that is because of some projects that do not proceed. Calgary-Cross has alluded to some of the projects running into municipal constraints and other things. I suspect those go into short-term notes and that sort of thing. I hope that's the case, because if it's not, certainly the department is not managing the funds particularly well if they

can't forecast income any better than it's been placed in the budget documents.

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

The last question – and this is to aid, to refresh my memory of how it works and for some of my constituents that ask periodically how this revolving fund in fact works, a simple paragraph or two explanation, particularly with emphasis on the current value of the fund. Is there in fact a holding fund, or is it paper transactions managed by the Treasury?

That's the extent of the questions, and I'll return it to the Chairman. Thank you kindly, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Mr. Minister, do you wish to respond at this time?

MR. FISCHER: Just for a minute. The 5,000 acres: I think it was 500,000 acres that you were doing. Flood control is one thing. Security of water supply: I don't think you should ever underestimate that, because if you go to some of those areas down there, they just don't have the underground water that we have in some of these other places. You've just got to go down and visit those folks for a little while, and you'll soon find out that's the most precious resource that they're afraid of losing.

The other thing – and it was alluded to earlier on – is recreation. Every time we have a reservoir, all of a sudden you've got cabins going around lakes and you've got recreation all over the place. I'm not sure in my mind that some of those folks shouldn't at some point, and depending where it is, pay some of their taxes towards that too. It's not all contributed to farming and irrigation. So you have to think of it that way.

You mentioned that the whole program 3 is the property management and so on. Think of it this way. We own 2,500 buildings, and we lease something like 300 more buildings. We co-ordinate all the government areas, and without that co-ordination, I'm afraid that your cost would be huge. [interjection] Well, it's certainly something to think about. The other thing is that volume comes in here as well, and you can get discounts with that. Anyway, we will get back to you in writing with some of that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The next questioner is Lethbridge-West.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I appreciate getting a second opportunity this evening. I wanted to move, though, to page 350 of the estimate booklet, which is your key performance measures. Just dwelling on that page for a particular moment, are these four the only key performance measures that your department would have?

MR. FISCHER: Are you finished?

MR. DUNFORD: No, but I'm not sure how to continue. Like, we're looking at a summary of your business plan. I mean, if I were to look in the actual business plan, would there be more key performance measures, or is it just these four?

MR. FISCHER: We are developing measures as we go along, but these are the ones that have already been measured.

MR. DUNFORD: Have already been measured?

MR. FISCHER: Have already been, yes. We've already gone through it, and if you look on both those pages there, there are charts that show what level of satisfaction it is. We've got square footage; we measure that up. We use a benchmark of the private sector wherever it's possible to. There are quite a number of them in there.

MR. DUNFORD: All right. Well, I guess the only thing that I'm a little concerned about, you know, is if this is the extent of it: customer satisfaction with project delivery services and then later on customer satisfaction with procurement services. I understand, of course, that we need to be continually out there working with our customers in the sense that we're meeting their particular needs, but when we get to something like a key performance measure as an indication, then, of the type of service that's being provided, I get quite nervous and uncomfortable. These are qualitative in nature, and while I'm not opposed to those, I think it's more meaningful to our corporate culture that we're trying to develop within the departments if we find some way to have quantitative measurements.

As members around the table will be aware, I'm a member of the productivity plus committee, and certainly we are an evaluator of a department's performance as time goes along, and really there has to be good quantitative material in order for these sorts of judgments to be made. So I think there might be an opportunity to address those at some particular point in time in terms of whether you might not want to harden up key performance measures.

Now, earlier in the discussion this evening I did talk about the irrigation systems, but I should have, on behalf of constituents, been a little more specific in a couple of particular areas. We're all recognizing, of course, that the spillway to the St. Mary dam

is in poor condition and does not have adequate capacity. In light of the magnitude of the flood in the Oldman River basin this past summer and some of the concerns that we're having even as we sit here tonight – we're of course pleased to see that you're going to be proceeding with this replacement, but I do need to ask and have answered: when could we expect the construction to be completed?

Also, in terms of the East Arrowwood syphon replacement, there are many communities along this system as well as the Bow River irrigation district which depend, of course, on the system for the supply of their water. Could the minister tell me when the replacement for this old, wooden syphon would be completed?

**10:00**

Now, Mr. Minister and Mr. Chairman, I don't happen to wear a watch. I don't like politicians that look at their watches while I'm talking to them, so I deliberately don't wear one so that I can never be accused of the same thing, but sensing my colleagues around the table, I would move that we adjourn the debate.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has moved that we adjourn debate. All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBER: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

[The committee adjourned at 10:01 p.m.]

