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8:02 p.m.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Subcom.B: Executive Council

Subcommittee B – Executive Council

Tannas, Don, Chairman
 Laing, Mrs. Bonnie, Deputy Chairman
 Barrett, Pam
 Blakeman, Laurie
 Bonner, Bill
 Calahasen, Hon. Pearl
 Cao, Wayne C.N.

Doerksen, Victor P.
 Forsyth, Heather
 Fritz, Mrs. Yvonne
 Graham, Marlene
 Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC
 Havelock, Hon. Jon, QC
 Jonson, Hon. Halvar C.

Kryczka, Karen
 Leibovici, Karen
 McClellan, Hon. Shirley
 Melchin, Mr. Greg
 Olsen, Sue
 Tarchuk, Janis

THE CHAIRMAN: For the benefit of those in the galleries as well as other members this is an informal session to allow all members to quiz a minister, in this case our Premier, on the estimates. So there's give and take. People are allowed to sit in seats other than they're normally entitled to sit in and to ask more than one question or to get up on the same issue on more than one occasion.

Mr. Premier, ministers have been taking a few moments to give an overview of their estimates and then allowing hon. members to ask questions. I guess the question to you, sir, is: would you like to take two or three questioners at a time and then respond or would you like to respond each time? The call is yours, and you can change that call as we go along. So I will begin, then, with the hon. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, I'm sure that most of us in this Chamber this evening would rather be watching a very, very exciting hockey game, but the glamour of politics of course takes precedence.

Mr. Chairman, this evening we'll be discussing areas for which I'm responsible; namely, Executive Council, which includes my office and general administration for Executive Council and for the office of the Lieutenant Governor. It includes responsibility for northern development, the Public Affairs Bureau, and the office of the chief information officer.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, Executive Council is ultimately responsible for co-ordinating the government's agenda. We'll focus on ensuring that Albertans continue to benefit from growth, prosperity, and jobs, and from quality, responsive, and affordable public services. This year's estimated expenses for Executive Council are \$2.87 million, the same total as last year.

Turning now to northern development, Mr. Chairman. 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 program is in its final year. The council is made up of eight public members and is chaired by my colleague Mike Cardinal, the MLA for Athabasca-Wabasca. Mr. Cardinal will provide more detail on the council after my presentation. The 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.

Its estimated expenses this year are \$1.4 million, down from \$2.1 million last year.

With respect to the Public Affairs Bureau, this bureau helps us communicate with the people we serve. It is making the most of new communications technologies so that Albertans and their

public service can get the information they need as quickly and as conveniently as possible. 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 on behalf of all government departments; it operates the RITE telephone system, the Queen's Printer bookstores, and the Alberta Communications Network; and it co-ordinates government communications in public emergencies. The bureau's estimated expenses this year are \$8.7 million, down from just over \$9 million last year, and it is forecasting \$1.5 million in revenues, mostly through its Queen's Printer bookstore operation.

With respect to the office of the chief information officer, Mr. Chairman, this is currently in my office, but soon the CIO, or the chief information officer, will be designated an office of his own, because of the importance of emerging technologies. Indeed, the office of the chief information officer is responsible for working with all ministries, agencies, and other stakeholders, including the private sector, in the development and co-ordination of Alberta's information technology and information management activities. I might say that this extends to the so-called MASH or MUSH or HUM sector: hospitals, universities, schools, and municipalities. It includes developing common guidelines and standards for the government of Alberta's presence on the Internet, developing a comprehensive plan for the use and co-ordination of information technology resources within the government of Alberta, and perhaps most significantly the chief information officer is also responsible for developing a government strategy for ensuring that all ministries have plans in place to ensure that all government information systems are year 2000 compliant. In case you need some clarification on that, that's when all the computers go from the 1900 series to the 2000 series, and no one has quite figured out how it's all going to come together, but we're working on it. The CIO's budget for this year is \$500,000, the same as last year.

Mr. Chairman, those are my brief opening comments. I would now call on the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca to talk about the Northern Alberta Development Council.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Premier, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Do you want me to stand? I'm short enough as it is. I guess I should try to stand up every opportunity I get.

Mr. Chairman, it's my pleasure to make a few remarks about the Northern Alberta Development Council. The role of the council is to advance the socioeconomic development of northern Alberta, and of course our strategic focus is aligned with government's commitment to prosperity and people. But in order to understand the work of the Northern Alberta Development Council, I think it is very important for the Assembly to under-

stand a bit about northern Alberta, and I'll just be brief on that.

I want to talk about some of the region's strengths. Ten percent of the population, approximately 250,000 people, and 60 percent of the land base is in with the northern Alberta area, 90 percent of the forests, 100 percent of the oil sands, 35 percent of conventional reserves, and 20 percent of the agricultural land base. So it is a very, very large area geographically with a lot of resources.

Of course, we do have some constraints because of that, Mr. Chairman, and some of the constraints are distance and access. We do also have a young population compared to the rest of Alberta. The downside again is that education levels are lower than the provincial average. Our economy is based on resources which are still growing, and there's still a lot of work to be done in that area. The other is that we have many small, remote, isolated native communities across the north, where we still have a lot of work to do to upgrade the skills development of the people in the communities themselves.

As the Premier indicated earlier, the Northern Alberta Development Council is made up of members from all walks of life from northern Alberta, and there are about eight members on the board presently. There is a small support staff of 12 people situated in the town of Peace River, again in northwest Alberta. While the department does not have a role in the delivery of programs, our job is to facilitate development in the region along with the other ministries and the government, of course.

8:12

The Northern Alberta Development Council itself has three main goals, and the Premier earlier mentioned one of those in his opening speech. The first one and the most important one, no doubt, is "to promote emerging economic development opportunities in northern Alberta." The council will take a lead role in highlighting the opportunities that the north holds.

I also mentioned earlier that the area is sparsely populated. Our second goal is "to strengthen northern Alberta's economic competitiveness," and we are working on a number of major initiatives in that area. One, as an example, is the rail transportation system in northwestern Alberta. The other, of course, is value-added agriculture and access for aboriginal communities into businesses, industries that are coming up across northern Alberta. Along with that is the major issue of the road network in northern Alberta.

The third and last and again very important part of our involvement is to identify and increase northern skills development of people in northern Alberta. This is where I think we have a lot of work to do, along with other departments and the private industry, to make sure that as the economy grows in northern Alberta, the people living out there and in the surrounding areas have access to these jobs. Of course, that means a lot of training opportunities.

The other area that's very important because of the financial situations of a lot of our people in the north is the need for bursary and financial support for postsecondary education and apprenticeship programs.

The Northern Alberta Development Council itself has changed somewhat in the last few years. What happened in the past was that the council held public meetings where presentations were made by various community groups proposing changes in how the north could be developed. What we are doing now is we have replaced this with public meetings and working sessions and conferences to make sure that what we have done research on now is planned and implemented in the near future.

So, Mr. Chairman, that is what I have to present tonight. Thank you very much.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's with great pleasure, I guess, that I address Executive Council tonight. This is a new portfolio for me, so it's a learning experience, and it has been a learning experience as I've gone through some of the last three and a half years of *Hansards* to look at where we've progressed with regards to the estimates on Executive Council.

One of the first things that struck me in looking at the estimates was that it doesn't appear to have some details within the budget, despite many requests from the opposition party to have the estimates detailed with specifics with regards to the office of the Premier, general administration, the Northern Alberta Development Council, the Public Affairs Bureau, and now we have a new office, the office of the chief information officer. Again, I will put that request in, that we do have a breakdown of various items within this particular budget. It is hard to look at how the dollars are being spent and to question whether the dollars are being spent effectively if in fact the information is not there.

Just to provide a brief outline as to what we would like to see in the office of the Premier: how many positions there are, what kinds of positions there are, what the salary ranges are of the positions within the Premier's office and to look at what some of the expenses are, some of the expenses with regards to communications, with regards to transportation costs, supplies, and services. Again, if you look through the '93 *Hansards* on, that has been a standard request, and quite frankly I'm surprised that we don't see it here given the openness that the hon. Premier indicates that he and his government have. It sort of begs the question in my mind, at least, whether there's something to hide within this particular budget. If there isn't, then why am I standing here once again asking for information that should have been in this particular budget.

Also, I would like to point out what to me makes it even more surprising. Within the Executive Council we have the Public Affairs Bureau. Now, the Public Affairs Bureau is a bureau that's dedicated to communications, dedicated to providing information to Albertans, and dedicated to supporting, if I can use their own words, "the government in its ongoing dialogue." But once again, when we look at the Budget '97 update and the government and lottery fund estimates, somehow when it comes to the Public Affairs Bureau, there seems to be some hesitation and some secrecy.

The other thing that I found rather surprising – and if I may, to the hon. Treasurer, the former Minister of Labour; I've had occasion to look at his particular budgets for three years in a row. When you look at the Department of Labour budgets, they are very, very well detailed. If you just want to turn to the business plans, on page 219 you see core business; performance measures; success factor; indicator score; description, performance indicator. Yet when I look at page 159 of the Public Affairs Bureau business plan, there's nothing there. There's absolutely nothing there. There's a listing of core businesses. There are some goals and strategies. There are absolutely no benchmarks. There are no performance measures. There's no information. It's a description. It's not a business plan. Again, this is not a new, constructive piece of advice. I don't think it's criticism. I think it's advice that we're providing to the Premier. This has been an ongoing issue for the last four years.

When I look at some of the other issues that were brought up and that I'm going to again bring up as requests: an itemization of what the cost is of cabinet as it now stands and its standing committees, if that cost comes under the office of the Premier for

running the cabinet and the standing committees, if those costs are broken down or if those costs are somewhere else in the budget. If they are somewhere else in the budget, if the Premier can indicate where they are to be found, then that would be much appreciated.

The other cost – and I get calls at my constituency office for this particular one, and again, it's one that we've asked for before – is the cost of McDougall Centre, what that cost is to the taxpayer for essentially a centre that houses only Conservative members of this Legislative Assembly, is not open to the members of the opposition. Now, the reason I'm asking that is that there seems to have been over the last three to four years at times a blurring between the political side of government and the administrative side of government. We saw that this afternoon in a motion, that was voted down, that indicated that standing policy committees should be open to both sides of the House. This blurring, I think, and perhaps some of the items that more rightly should be paid for through the Conservative Party are items that I believe need to be itemized within this budget so that taxpayers can then make their decisions as to how much of their tax dollar is going to support a particular party as opposed to a government.

There are, I understand, 43 people in the office of the Premier/general administration at this point in time. I believe that may be down three individuals. Given the incredible downsizing that has occurred throughout the public sector over the last three to four years, it does not seem that the Premier's office has had the same impact when it comes to downsizing.

8:22

The other information that would be useful to have is whether or not – and there have been rumours – there have been increases in salaries in the Premier's office. If that is the case, then I think, especially given the fact that the government is looking at entering into negotiations with the so-called MUSH sector in the next few months, those employees might well want to know if the Premier is setting a trend with regards to increases in his own office and if that is something that they could then look forward to as well.

There was a request a while back that any polls that the government commissions be made public and that the results of those polls be made public. When I looked again through the *Hansards* – and I believe that would fall under the Public Affairs Bureau budget, and again without having the breakdown I can only guess at what is within the Public Affairs budget – the Premier did make a commitment that he would share that information with all members in the Legislative Assembly. He actually made that commitment on a number of occasions, in two or three separate budget estimates, and I have yet to see any of those polls. So my only conclusion can be that there either were no polls commissioned after the last time the Premier made the commitment, I believe sometime in 1995, or in fact the Premier has forgotten his promise to share the polls with members within the Legislative Assembly.

AN HON. MEMBER: And Albertans too.

MS LEIBOVICI: And Albertans. Thank you.

There is also a question with regards to, when I look at the Public Affairs Bureau, the blurring of roles. It's my understanding that employees within the Public Affairs Bureau are seconded to different departments. Coming from a personnel background, there's always a problem when one has too many bosses. The question I have to the Premier is: to whom are the employees responsible? Are they responsible to the public affairs department, or are they responsible to ensure that Albertans receive the

information that is requested from the departments themselves?

At times there may be a pull and a push with regards to what that information is. For instance, if it is an issue that may be harmful to the government but is necessary to be provided to Albertans – for example, Bovar is one that I can think of off the top of my head – who becomes the master then? Is it the department that, hopefully, would say that individuals need to have that information for their own health and welfare? Or is it the Public Affairs Bureau that says, "Well, given what's happening within the government right now and the timing, it might not be the best time to release that information; therefore, let's sit on it for a little while." It comes down at times to who's signing that paycheque, and I think that's an issue that I'd like to have some answers for.

The other breakdown that I would like to see is the breakdown in the Public Affairs Bureau with regards to salaries, number of employees per vote, where the dollars are for publication services. The dollars that the government retrieves from the sale of legislation and other information: is that under publication services? Where exactly is that? Again, I would not be asking these questions if we did have the information at hand, as we had asked for in the past.

A few other issues that I'd like to touch on with the Northern Alberta Development Council. I know there are other questions that some of my other colleagues have. It's surprising how the speech doesn't change from chair to chair. Quite frankly, if I had picked up last year's *Hansard*, it said very much the same as the current chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council was saying.

Now, my understanding is that this council has been around for 20-odd years, and it was interesting, unless I missed it, that you did not mention that there's a sunset clause, and that's in the year 2000. I assume that with the sunset clause there, it may well be disbanded. If it is not being disbanded, then I would like to know: what is the rationale for keeping it, and what are the studies that are being done to ensure that it is effective and that the dollars that are spent in the Northern Alberta Development Council are in fact well spent? One lesson that I have learned well in this Legislative Assembly is that you need to be able to account, at least that's what the ministers have led us to believe, for the dollars and the efficiency and effectiveness of how those dollars are spent.

When you look at the overall goals, objectives, and strategies for the Northern Alberta Development Council, they're pretty skimpy. Again, there seem to be no benchmark figures. It may be a good thing to do. It's been around for a long time, but that's not a good enough reason to spend close to \$1,300,000. There have to be some measurements and some criteria for continuing with it.

The other thing I found interesting when I looked through the objectives of the Northern Alberta Development Council – a lot of those objectives, I think, are probably better handled under the department of advanced education. When you look at expanding – it's all in goal 3 actually – private- and public-sector participation in the bursary partnership program, assisting northern advanced ed institutions, improving educational attainment and preparedness for postsecondary education, those are all goals that could quite easily fit under advanced education.

There are some overlaps in a fair amount of the bureau that is under the Premier's stewardship, and you begin to wonder whether in fact some of those areas could not more rightly be within different departments. For instance, the Public Affairs Bureau. Is there any good reason that individuals are seconded out of Public Affairs other than the reason of control and perhaps

ensorship? When we're to hire a communications officer, then why should not the Department of Energy be able to hire their own individual? A novel idea perhaps, but maybe one that the government should look at.

The office of the chief information officer is a bit of a question mark. I'm informed that the individual who has that position right now is an individual who used to be an administrative assistant to the Premier. If I'm wrong with that information, then please let me know. I wonder what the qualifications are for that particular position.

8:32

MR. KLEIN: I'm sorry; I didn't get that, Mr. Chairman.

MS LEIBOVICI: It's the office of the chief information officer. I believe it's Mr. Samoil, and I believe he used to be your administrative assistant or an administrative assistant within the department.

MR. KLEIN: He still is. Yes.

MS LEIBOVICI: He's also the chief information officer?

MR. KLEIN: Right.

MS LEIBOVICI: So he's holding two positions.

MR. KLEIN: Right. And soon he'll hold one.

MS LEIBOVICI: Okay. My questions then. What are the qualifications for the job? How did he get that job? How is the salary range determined for that particular position? How does that position, if at all, have any interface with the freedom of information co-ordinators?

Now, from what the Premier said, my understanding was that the office of the chief information officer, the CIO, is to help in the application of information and to share information. It sounds like it's almost a position that will deal solely with computer technology. If that is the case then, again, why is that a position that's within the parameters of the Premier? Would that position more properly perhaps be within research and technology? If in fact that position is to help to co-ordinate what's going on in the MUSH sector, which is again what the Premier indicated, then how does that individual co-ordinate what I am sure must be literally hundreds of computer departments in the school boards, in the hospitals, in the municipal sector? How is that individual going to do that, and what supports are being provided to that individual? He will have a budget of \$500,000. That's a significant amount of dollars. Obviously, that's for more than one individual salary, I would hope. It would be useful to know what exactly the \$500,000 is going to be spent on.

Thank you. I do have some more questions.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Chairman, I can probably take just about as long or maybe a little bit longer answering those questions if you want me to, or I can maybe defer some of those questions to a later date, at which time I'd be glad to provide more detailed answers.

Mr. Chairman, the first question was: how many positions? In the Premier's office we have the Premier. We also have the executive director, Rod Love; his secretary, Lana Schmitz; my executive assistant, Sheryl Burns; my administrative assistant, Nargis Zaver; my secretary, Colleen Marouelli. In the reception area we have Cindy and we have Lynn.

Now, in the correspondence unit, which is not connected to my office but really deals with literally hundreds and hundreds of letters a day to my office, we have writers D. McLaren, B. Guretzki, D. Morgan, B. Joslin, Y. Deakin, T. Lacoste, and H. Pruden, the latter two being on word processing and scrolls. Mr. Chairman, scrolls are the scrolls that are sent out of the Premier's office to those people celebrating their 50th anniversaries, their 60th anniversaries, their 90th birthdays, their 100th birthdays, and so on. These people are very appreciative of receiving those scrolls from the Premier's office. Again, we get literally hundreds of requests from people who want to be congratulated on their anniversaries or their birthdays or on special occasions.

In the Premier's communications office we have three people. We have Jim Dau, who is the director; Fay Orr, who is an assistant to Mr. Dau; and Marisa Etmanski, who is also an assistant to Mr. Dau. Just like the Liberal researchers and their communications people they attend my news conferences and so on. Yes, they keep me advised of the issues of the day, just as the Liberal researchers and their communications people keep them advised as to what the government is up to. And yes, from time to time they act as the hall monitors, just as the Liberal researchers monitor every press conference and many, many public events that I attend.

In planning and co-ordination – and this is ostensibly administrative, Mr. Chairman – we have the deputy minister, Vance MacNichol; secretary, Carol Thomlinson. We have David Steeves, the deputy chief to cabinet: the person who co-ordinates all the cabinet activities, the agendas, and all the numerous amounts of material and information that has to be co-ordinated relative to cabinet discussions and deliberations. We have the co-ordination officer, C. Critchlow. We have policy co-ordinator D. Porter. We have another policy co-ordinator, Wendy Rodgers, who is also a championship bodybuilder.

AN HON. MEMBER: And kick boxer.

MR. KLEIN: And kick boxer; right. We have one vacant position relative to the policy co-ordinator. We have A. Hill as a co-ordination officer, K. Kinnee as a co-ordination officer, and D. Gillies as the House leader liaison.

Support provided by the administrative services centre: there are six individuals. I don't have their names. The office of the Premier, including all general administration, including finance and administration, planning co-ordination, including the Calgary office – and I forgot the Calgary office. I don't know exactly how much it costs to run McDougall Centre. It's a fairly substantial building, Mr. Chairman. It was renovated at great cost to the taxpayers and restored very much to its natural beauty. The overall operation of the McDougall Centre in Calgary would be under Public Works, Supply and Services. However, there are four people who work in the Premier's office at McDougall Centre, and there is a Premier's office at McDougall Centre. It also houses the offices of 2005, and the government has given over that space to 2005 as they prepare for the bid for the world exposition in Calgary for the year 2005. That bid will take place this year in Monaco.

In my office in Calgary there's the director, Gordon Olsen, who was formerly in Ottawa and then before that in this office here in Edmonton. We have a secretary, Joyce Austin; receptionist, Lea Roberts; and secretary, Helena. I don't want to pronounce her last name because I'll get it wrong. But I'd be glad to provide it to the questioners.

In addition, there's an office for which I'm responsible – that is, financially – but over which I have absolutely no control, and

that is the office of the Lieutenant Governor. I see here that there are three people employed in that office. There's an assistant, A. Casavant; a secretary, M. Hunt; and a housekeeper, V. Fitz. The budget there is \$113,800.

The total program in terms of salaries is \$2,122,000 which accounts for, I would say, about two-thirds of the total operating expenses of the Premier's office, and that's pretty well consistent with what takes place throughout government relative to salaries as opposed to other operating expenses, Mr. Chairman.

8:42

The hon. member suggested that there is something to hide. Well, there is nothing to hide. There is nothing to hide whatsoever. I could go on in detail and give you a breakdown, if you want. It'll all be recorded in *Hansard*. But, Mr. Chairman, if we start to do that for every single department, every agency, every component of government, there are not enough trees in the forests of Alberta or in the forests of this world to accommodate all that information, to produce the kind of paper that the Liberals want.

The Premier's office estimates are \$400,000; correspondence, \$267,000; communications, \$205,000; Calgary office, \$184,000 – as I mentioned, that's as it relates to the Premier's office, not the total cost of McDougall, because that's in public works – planning and co-ordination, \$610,000; finance and administration, \$342,200, for a total cost of \$2,008,200. Travel and hosting is about \$280,000; contract services, \$100,500; purchased services, \$2,700; materials, supplies, and other, \$211,615, for a total in terms of supplies and services of \$594,815.

There are further breakdowns here. There is the Premier's salary, which is very, very public, my Premier's salary and my MLA salary. There's the Office of the Lieutenant Governor: manpower, \$113,800, as I mentioned; supplies and services, \$51,200. It adds up to a total of \$2,870,000, Mr. Chairman.

There is nothing to hide. As a matter of fact, it's only the Premier, it's only the leader of the government party that is subjected to scrutiny. The Leader of the Official Opposition is not subject to any scrutiny whatsoever.

Mr. Chairman, there was the suggestion that Public Affairs is part of the Premier's office. It is not. Public Affairs is a service of government. I just happen to be the minister responsible for Public Affairs. I used to be the minister also responsible for the personnel administration office, but I am no longer the minister responsible because it was decided to assign that office to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development. It could very well be that I could assign the Public Affairs Bureau to any other ministry in this government. I just happen to be the minister in charge. But it is by no means under the estimates or the budget of Executive Council. It is a separate department, a separate budget, a separate entry.

The question was asked relative to standing policy committees: is that in my budget? Well, obviously not. If it were, you would see it, and you don't see it there, do you? You don't see standing policy committees of the government in my budget, and the reason you don't see SPCs in my budget is because they're not there. The SPCs are budgeted within the various departments for which they are responsible and from whom they receive their information and their advice as they set about their task of developing policy for this government.

The increase in salaries. I'll have to find out about that, because I know of no increase in salaries – I would have to check into that – other than when there is a change in the scope of responsibilities, and that happens throughout the public service. When people have their responsibilities change, then the remuner-

ation is normally commensurate with the change in responsibilities.

Relative to polls, well, this time around I guess we haven't been in power long enough to really do any polling on anything. The last polling that was done was on March 11. That was a very public poll, Mr. Chairman, and the results of that poll were shared with all Albertans.

Relative to Mr. Samoil's qualifications for the job, certainly he has served not only as an administrative assistant in my office, co-ordinating a lot of the caucus activities as they relate to the Premier's office and cabinet activities as well, along with Mr. Steeves, but he has been handling this immense responsibility of co-ordinating information technology. It may very well be, as the hon. minister suggests, that this would at some time be assigned to science, research, and information technology. Right now that department looks at the development of information technology that is external to government. That is, how do we encourage and foster information technology more in the private sector and advanced research into that kind of technology? The information technology we're talking about here is the massive amount of information that is generated by government and all the agencies and corporations that depend on government for their information and to link those information systems together: universities, school boards, municipalities, hospital boards, and so on.

One of the great challenges is the year 2000 challenge. This in itself is huge. It's a massive undertaking. The year 2000 challenge is being faced by governments and private-sector companies worldwide. It's a computer problem caused by the general and widespread use of the two-digit year coding in computer programs and affects all kinds of computer hardware and software systems. I'll just give you an example. The two-digit code 97 is meant in computer language to mean 1997. What happens in the year 2000? Because everything is designed, without having it punched in, to have the 19 prefix, we would go back to the year 1900 instead of to the year 2000. This causes huge problems not only for government but for people I guess the world over, because virtually everyone now is using computers. It's especially important that we recognize and deal with this very important component of the computer world from a government perspective.

Relative to Mr. Samoil's qualifications, aside from working in this area in my office for some time now, I understand that he is a graduate in computer studies from Simon Fraser University in British Columbia and has extensive knowledge in this particular field. With respect to his salary, I don't think he's going to get any more than he's getting paid now. At least, I hope he's not expecting to get paid any more than he's getting paid right now.

I have taken down some of the other questions, and I will attempt to answer those questions in as much detail as I possibly can.

Thank you.

8:52

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca to supplement.

MR. CARDINAL: I'll supplement, Mr. Chairman, because the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark also had some questions in relation to the Northern Alberta Development Council. One of her major concerns seemed to be that the speech has not changed, but I'd just like to also indicate that I've been here since 1989 and the questions the Liberals ask haven't changed very much either. But that is not the important thing here tonight. It's not how the speech is delivered but how the job is done out there. I could

have spent more time in explaining what the Northern Alberta Development Council does, and I will attempt to do that as time goes on tonight.

Just briefly, the Northern Alberta Development Council has been around in Alberta since 1963. The focus changed in 1992 and again in 1995, but in order to understand the important role this council plays under the leadership of the Premier – and I believe there is no doubt why it's under the leadership of the Premier. I think the northern Alberta area has special problems. There are also special opportunities. When you go back before 1950 or so in northern Alberta, a lot of our northern residents, the native population in particular, people who were completely self-sufficient and independent, we didn't have the large governments. In fact, in some areas we didn't even have municipal governments, and people lived off the land and lived very happily and very independently without very many programs.

Mr. Chairman, I've mentioned this a number of times in this House. Major changes took place in the early '50s in relation to the north, and it had a devastating impact on the native population, especially the first 20 years, where we saw communities and cultures who were completely independent and self-sufficient for thousands of years within 20 years become completely dependent on government structures and dependent on social support systems. It's not what people want, and it's not the best thing for people to have.

The changes. Of course, the Northern Alberta Development Council works strictly in line with some of the issues I've mentioned, especially since 1992 under our Premier's leadership. The Premier I know understands northern Alberta very well and knows the problems. Since 1992, of course, we've concentrated on restructuring our government, making our government programs more efficient and more targeted to needs, keeping in mind also that we didn't have an endless amount of dollars to spend in running the province, and streamlining social support programs, for an example, which were very devastating in the way they were designed initially. Changes had to be made because that's what people wanted, and I think that's best for all taxpayers not only in Alberta but no doubt across Canada.

That is why, when you look at the Alberta advantage, the number one priority, of course, is economic development, job creation, and so on. The second one is skills development. That is exactly what we've been lacking in the north, not the welfare dollars. People think more welfare dollars will deal with poverty. That does not deal with poverty. It's the economic development, it's the jobs, it's the skills, it's the education that is needed. That is exactly what the Northern Alberta Development Council promotes: the economic development, competitiveness of businesses in the north, and also skills development of the people that live there. People deserve to access jobs that are being developed in the north. Again, I think our government is doing a super job of stimulating the economy and getting investment going in Alberta.

The other area that again was mentioned was the sunset clause. I think it's all right to have targeted sunset clauses in various programs to make sure that the programs are needed and are heading in the right direction. If they are not, then I think this government will definitely look at reviewing and making sure the programs that are needed are in place out there.

The rationale for keeping the Northern Alberta Development Council I think I've answered. I think the rationale is there, and the council and the administration are doing the job. As far as dollars, the dollars are well spent. You know, spending dollars on welfare or social support programs is still not the answer, because it is not what people want and not what people deserve.

The member mentioned that our goals are skimpy. I could have spent more time to explain in detail the goals and how they are measured. Our target is to have a hundred percent satisfaction from the customers we serve out there, and that's the public, the municipalities, other government departments, and native groups. That is how we measure our goals.

The other question that came up is if the objective of the bursary programs and other training programs could be better handled by Advanced Education and Career Development. I believe there is a real shortage of programs in that area right now because of changes that have taken place in the last four or five years in Alberta, and it has a very positive impact on northern Alberta. Also, there is a real need now for financing and supports for people to access postsecondary programs and apprenticing programs. You know, Advanced Ed and Career Development does a swell job, but other supports are also needed. This is where the northern development council comes into play.

The other area that was mentioned, of course, was that some of the programs could be provided by other departments. The Northern Alberta Development Council staff does not deliver any programs, so the departments that are responsible for areas such as housing, for an example, or transportation and road networks are doing that. But the Northern Alberta Development Council and its administration co-ordinate some of these activities in the north – to identify long-term needs, for an example, in a transportation network – and that is the role we play. So I believe there is a need for the council.

The other important area I'd like to just touch on briefly – and that will be my last comment for a while – is that the land mass is huge in northern Alberta, 60 percent of the land in Alberta, and I believe there's only about eight or nine MLAs who cover that area out of the 83. We're not overrepresented in relation to providing services to our constituents, so I believe, at least at this time, there is a rationale for the council to be there.

Thank you.

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

9:02

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I have some questions relative to programs 1, 3, and 4. I'd start off by speaking in terms of the past request for polls. I think not only of questions that I had asked in March of 1996, but also, I think it was in question period in February of 1995 when I'd been asking the hon. Premier to make available the poll that had been done in terms of Albertans' views of human rights. The Premier undertook at the time that that would be made available. Now, that was approximately February. In fact it was in June, about mid-June of 1995, as I recall, when the then Minister of Community Development made available not the entire survey. It was an edited summary of the poll, that didn't identify, for example, what the responses were in Calgary as opposed to Edmonton, rural as opposed to Edmonton and Calgary.

So I just come back and say again and ask the Premier. This evening before they turn the lights off and we all vacate this place, will he commit that if an opinion survey is undertaken in the province of Alberta paid for by the taxpayers of Alberta, not by the PC Party but by taxpayers, the source document – in other words, the report that you get from the opinion polling outfit – will be either tabled in the Legislature or made available in some formal or informal way so that we can see the questions that were asked, the empirical data that came, the breakdown, not a summary but the breakdown in terms of the people contacted in Edmonton responded this way and the people in Calgary responded that way?

I think the Premier wants to do this, and I think that he has in good faith each time because he does believe that he wants to head up a government that's open and accessible. But somehow between, I think, his good intentions and delivery of that information, at least to the opposition, something seems to go awry. So, Mr. Premier, it's a long-standing matter. I suspect I've even heard the Premier say on occasion that he accepts the proposition that if something is paid for by public dollars in terms of an opinion survey, the result should be no secret.

Mr. Premier, it may well be that you haven't undertaken an opinion survey since March 11, but you've undertaken plenty in the past, and I anticipate that your office will be undertaking more in the future. That kind of undertaking tonight with the appropriate direction to the staff in your office would go a long way to realizing some of the goals that you set out, particularly in your list of objectives in the Public Affairs Bureau's goals on page 205, which talk about making government information more accessible to Albertans. I might just paraphrase that and say that we're talking about making Albertans' information available to Albertans, because of course that poll was paid for by all of us, by all Albertans with their tax dollars.

As you yourself, Mr. Premier, said in the video that goes along as part of the freedom of information orientation package to new government employees, you talk about a new culture of openness, and I can think of no better symbolic way to start than making that sort of commitment in terms of opinion polls.

Now, we've had some discussion about McDougall Centre, and I have occasion from time to time, Mr. Premier, to attend there for different reasons. It seems to me that when the Premier's been asked in the past about having a portion of McDougall made available to the Official Opposition, whom the taxpayers of Alberta are also paying for, to ensure that they have a presence and office in Calgary other than the Calgary-Buffalo constituency office, one of the responses has been: not enough space. Well, it seems to me every time I'm in McDougall - I know that 2005 have had a good chunk of space. I know it's expanded at least once. I'm not sure what the area is, but perhaps the Premier could tell us what the area is that 2005 has been using since last summer. Perhaps he might tell us at the same time how it is that there's no space.

MR. KLEIN: You're not in government.

MR. DICKSON: I'd just remind the Premier we happen to be in this Assembly sharing the space with the Premier. We've also been elected by Albertans, Mr. Premier, some of us even by some Calgarians. We also have a legitimate role to be in a place that's paid for by taxpayers, where we'd be accessible to them.

If the hon. Premier could tell us what the area is that has been made available to 2005, I expect probably right through until June when the announcement comes. If he's had to relocate other people in his office in McDougall, he could indicate that, but we'd be interested I think in that information.

Moving on to program 4, the office of the chief information officer. Mr. Chairman, the Premier and I have corresponded with respect to his information council. I think one of my questions to the Premier would be this. Many Albertans believe that part of the mandate of Mr. Samoil's information council - and the Premier can clarify that this evening - is to find ways of selling government information. I'm not talking about statutes of Alberta, but that part of the mandate is to find ways that this government can generate income, generate cash from selling some of that huge trove of information that the government of Alberta has. I'd ask the Premier firstly: is that indeed part of the mandate of Mr. Samoil's council?

A related question would be: since there appears to be no connection, no interface with your FOIP co-ordinators, freedom of information co-ordinators, one for every office of government in every department - I'd be interested in terms of that information council: when they look at what kinds of government information is going to be marketed and to whom and for what cost, who does the advocacy in that group in terms of the bigger public interest in terms of privacy? I'm just having a little difficulty making sense of it every time I hear the Premier or the minister responsible for freedom of information talk about the importance of privacy. If in fact we've got a group of some of the most senior civil servants in the province forming this group and if indeed they're looking at ways they can sell government information, the government has the power to do much of that by regulation, things that never come into this Legislature for debate. I just come back and say: who speaks for that greater public interest?

I'd ask the Premier why he wouldn't make better use of one of the best resources in his government. I spent two days at a conference dealing with freedom of information, and once again I'm reminded of how effective a number of the FOIP co-ordinators are in the government of Alberta, people who are for the most part extremely knowledgeable, very much committed to the message that the Premier likes to reinforce about openness and the new culture of transparency and so on. It just seems to me, Mr. Premier, that it would make such good sense to ensure that you find a way of connecting that sort of interest in protecting the privacy of Albertans' information with any effort or attempt or consideration of sale of government data for income to other sources. If in fact it's not part of the mandate, I've spent a lot of time that my colleagues may have wanted to take up with other measures.

The other thing I'd just ask while we're speaking. I mentioned openness and accountability and your goal under the Public Affairs Bureau. Would you tell us, Mr. Premier, how many information requests you've received under the freedom of information Act? How many requests were in fact satisfied? Then perhaps the most important statistic: how many cases where a fee estimate was provided by the Executive Council office was the application then deemed abandoned because the fee estimate wasn't paid? It seems to me that for those of us who followed what happened in Ontario, where the minute Mr. Harris decided to follow your lead and beef up freedom of information fees, what Ontario experienced was a 50 percent drop in requests. While we're looking at page 205, Mr. Chairman, of the business plan and speaking specifically of the Public Affairs Bureau and the four bulleted points there, I think it would be useful to have that information.

9:12

Also, I expect you've done a costing within your office in terms of that portion of your budget that would be dedicated to FOI application. We're trying to put together an aggregate cost, so I ask this of each minister and each office, and I'm looking forward to your response with respect to that.

I think my other comment, then, would be: on page 205 your business plan summary for the Public Affairs Bureau is pretty skeletal. Your fourth bullet talks about developing new products and services, and I'm assuming you mean information product, because I don't know what other sort of product and services a public affairs bureau would be dealing with. Perhaps you could give us some specific particulars. I find, frankly, that even though this isn't the most expensive arm of government, nonetheless we're still talking about \$13 million in the aggregate. It just

seems to me that if you're developing new products and services, Albertans would probably be most interested in finding out what kinds of products and services are contemplated. Because I'm sure your office does a lot of farsighted planning and analysis, you must have a pretty good sense of what sorts of things you think you're going to be able to generate cash from. I expect Albertans would be interested in having that information as well.

Now, the other thing I'd just come to briefly - I'm always intrigued, Mr. Premier, with key performance measures. A moment ago you spoke in terms of polling and not having done polling since the election. But as I look at each of these key performance measures, what are those based on if not opinion surveys? When you talk about satisfaction with government information, you talk about providing "information on public satisfaction with the information received from government." Well, what on earth would not be part of that? That's an incredibly broad key performance measure. It's so broad that one is left wondering how on earth you measure that. If you've come up with a way of being able to determine that, Mr. Premier, I'm sure you've achieved some heroic first, because it's such a broad area. It may be that the thing is misstated here, that your speechwriter got carried away and we've got some hyperbole, but I'd be most interested in your telling us specifically what the data is that allows you to come forward and tell us that public satisfaction with information received from government is 69 percent. In fact, the freedom of information co-ordinators have some very different perspectives on that.

MR. KLEIN: Where's that?

MR. DICKSON: Page 206, key performance measures. It's the last part of the business plan summary.

Similarly, public customer satisfaction. Now, that only deals with a very narrow area, the Queen's Printer bookstore and the RITE line. If there were source documents for those things - I don't expect the Premier to bring in a wheelbarrow of information; I think we tried that once in this Assembly a number of years ago. If the Premier might be good enough to indicate the kinds of source documents that are used so that in fact this means something, because right now, frankly, it isn't all that helpful. I'm particularly interested in how you source the percentages you indicate for private-sector supplier satisfaction. You see, here we're only talking about the Public Affairs Bureau. Your first key performance measure refers to presumably the whole government of Alberta, so we'd be interested in knowing what that's based on, Mr. Premier.

I think those are my main questions. I guess the other one, Mr. Premier: a moment ago you were reading out a whole breakdown in terms of expenses in the Premier's office, and you were breaking it out in terms of travel and hosting and many things which are a legitimate part of the Premier's office. Maybe you could simply table the calculation you've got there. There may be other items. I don't know whether you read everything on the sheet you have, but you would expedite things at this stage.

Those are the questions I've got, Mr. Chairman. Thanks very much.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Chairman, I'd be glad to detail as much as possible, but if this is setting a precedent for every single department of government, every agency of government, as I said before, there's not enough trees in the forest to produce all the paper to contain that much information. I would remind the hon. member that the Leader of the Official Opposition has no responsibility whatsoever to reveal anything other than what we

can obtain, I guess, under FOIP, but it's not the practice of this government to FOIP the Liberals like they FOIP us.

Speaking of FOIP, this is in answer to one of the questions, Mr. Chairman, on the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This is not under the authority of the Premier. This is under the authority of the Minister of Labour. How many times have I been FOIPed? I don't know. I know that in the last Legislative Assembly the Department of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs was FOIPed relative to some information they wanted with respect to a mission to China. I'm sure that the opposition Liberals have FOIPed numerous other departments to get certain information. The minister of environment says that he's been FOIPed many times, and most of the FOIPing has been done by the Liberals. I can tell you that for sure.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going from the last question to the first. The last question related to the Public Affairs Bureau, and the question, as I take it, is: what was the mechanism, really, to conduct the surveys? How were these surveys carried out that led to the information that in a survey of 1,002 adult Albertans 69 percent indicated their overall satisfaction with the information they were getting from their government, up from 65 percent last year and just below the target of 70 percent.

I would imagine that's the kind of polling and the kinds of surveys that are done in the normal course of business, just like any other business would do surveys of their customers to say: are you satisfied? Now, I don't know what mechanisms are used, but I'm sure there are standard and recognized kinds of procedures for carrying out these surveys. I would be very, very happy to get you that information.

It's probably the kind of information that the Liberals don't like to hear because it also says that "in a survey of 500 randomly selected users of RITE" - and this is a fantastic system, the RITE system, the government communication system where people can phone free of charge now. Instead of going through the complicated RITE system, you can simply dial the 1-403 and then the government number. But the RITE system is a phenomenal system, Mr. Chairman. At the same time, people within government can phone anywhere in Alberta within the precincts of government free of charge through that same system.

- In a [customer] survey of 500 randomly selected users of RITE and 500 customers of the Queen's Printer Bookstores . . .

Again, a fantastic operation.

- . . . a combined average of 97 percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with the service they received, exceeding last year's figure and the target, both 95 percent.
- The target for 1997 is a satisfaction rate of 98 percent.

And it goes on and on. So obviously the Public Affairs Bureau conducts customer satisfaction surveys on a regular basis, Mr. Chairman, and I think this would be done in the normal course of any business, whether it be private-sector business or government.

9:22

McDougall Centre. This is a question the Liberals ask each year, why they don't have access to McDougall Centre. Certainly from time to time the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo picks up his mail and so on and some correspondence there, because I see it there. I mean, I don't read it. It's usually in a closed envelope, but I see things addressed to Mr. Dickson. Mr. Chairman, I would point out that this has been a question raised in the past. We provide \$47,000 for the hon. leader of the Liberal Party to have an office, his office in Calgary, which is almost equivalent to the amount that we provide for a constituency office. And this is in addition to the \$296,000 that he gets as a leader's allowance, that is to conduct the business of the leader. We don't ask for a detailed breakdown as to how that money is used. We assume that he is using it wisely.

But with respect to McDougall Centre, this building operates much the same as Government House here in Edmonton. It is the caucus precinct, really, of the government. It is used for government functions and community functions and tours and so on. Indeed this building is used in much the same way. But there are precincts in this building that are exclusively those of government, as there are precincts that are exclusively those of the opposition. My office is a publicly funded government office, but that is a government precinct, as are the government MLA offices, as are the offices of the ministers, and as are the offices at McDougall Centre. It really is the prerogative of the government as to how those offices are used. Again I point out that accommodation has been made for the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition in Calgary, and I think that they have been very generous accommodations.

You asked: will I release the results of all publicly funded polls? I have no problems with that question, Mr. Chairman. If he's talking about the kinds of surveys and polls that have been undertaken by the Public Affairs Bureau, there certainly is no problem releasing those figures. I would issue this warning to the Public Affairs Bureau right now: in no way are they to conduct polls that are purely political and partisan in nature. Polls that certainly elicit the public's view on certain policy issues I think would be quite an appropriate activity for the Public Affairs Bureau, and I have no problem making sure that the results of those kinds of polls or surveys are made public, because they are indeed funded publicly through taxpayers' dollars.

There seems to be some confusion relative to this whole situation of the chief information officer. Again, this position has nothing to do with the freedom of information and protection of privacy component. It has nothing whatsoever to do with that legislation. This has everything to do with the emerging technological challenges relative to communications: the Internet and the information highway.

I'm just going to give you a little bit of background, so we can sort of put it all into place. In September of 1996 it was decided that all telecommunication responsibilities would be transferred from Economic Development and Tourism to the office of the CIO. There was no place, really, to house that office other than in my office, and the person who was deemed to be qualified for that position was indeed and is indeed Mr. Samoil, who, as I mentioned, is a graduate of Simon Fraser University, and his major studies were in mass communications and information technology. He got very, very involved in this, but he was also my administrative assistant and, as I mentioned earlier, coordinated a lot of the caucus/cabinet activities with my office.

The chief information officer is the primary contact for the federal government, other jurisdictions – as I mentioned, universities, schools, hospitals, municipalities – and industries that have business with the government for telecommunications and information technology policy issues. The chief information officer is the chair of Alberta's Information Highway Advisory Committee, and that advisory group is working to address national standards and issues relative to access to and the delivery of information highway services, protection of personal information in the marketplace. In other words, how do we prevent people from crashing these machines and accessing information that they ought not to have? The CIO is also a member of the provincial/territorial senior officials' working group that is assisting the federal government on this initiative. The office of the information officer is one of the first – as a matter of fact, it was just written up in one of the large information technology publications – initiatives by any provincial government to really address this emerging problem.

The Chief Information Officer Internet Committee is also a responsibility of the chief information officer. It was appointed in the fall of 1995 to plan the development of guidelines and standards of the Alberta government's Internet presence. And we just see that mushrooming, absolutely mushrooming: the amount of information on government and all those agencies related to government now on the Internet.

In October of 1996 the office of the CIO created the Chief Information Officers' Council with CIOs appointed at the executive level in all ministries, so there's co-ordination between Mr. Samoil and an individual in each of the government departments. It's the first such council in Canada. That council will help co-ordinate information resource initiatives across government in support of the government's business needs, and there was a press release issued on that I believe in October of 1996.

9:32

Mr. Chairman, it has nothing to do with the freedom of information and the protection of privacy. It's a different kind of information. It's the kind of information that we have come to know so well as being the electronic information or the new-wave information and how we deal with being part of that information system and how we meet the challenges of evolving technology, and that's what Mr. Samoil's job is all about. Soon he will be too busy with that to attend to his other duties, and that's why we are creating that stand-alone position.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-West. [interjection] Oh, it's supposed to be Calgary-North West. Pardon me.

MR. MELCHIN: No one likes my constituency name, it seems like. It used to be Calgary-Glenmore and Calgary-West. It's now Calgary-North West.

Anyway, Mr. Chairman, I would like to make a couple of overall comments before I get into a couple of the specifics with regards to the Executive Council. As chartered accountants we're always pleased to see that there's a direction in – I like the direction of the Executive Council. There's been a 7 to 8 percent decrease in spending projected for this next year. I've got to say that sounds real good, not just in overall, but I look all the way through. Everything from the office of the Premier/general administration to program 2, northern development, to his program 3, public affairs, and to program 4, office of the chief information officer: all of them have held the line and/or have reduced the overall expenditures in light of the stated, I guess, objectives of the government to make sure our priorities are put into other areas such as health, education. I'm pleased to see that the office of the Premier is taking the lead in showing the departments how to run their own affairs.

I'd like to comment or ask a couple of questions with regard to public affairs in program 3. I guess first to comment. Now that overall there's been a reduction planned for this upcoming year in the spending or the level of services being maintained at an equally high level of service despite the reductions – certainly the areas of public affairs are administrative and oriented to assist the government in communicating – how effective are the plans in going forward to making sure that that same level of service is there not just for the government members but for the public at large? I'd also like to ask a similar question when we talk a little bit about the RITE telephone system. What has the bureau been doing to improve its efficiency with the RITE system?

When we look at the largest spending item which comes under public affairs, 3.0.2, communications services, just for my

purposes anyway, a little more information as to what might be included in that item. What types of expenditures do get added into that area?

Lastly, the 2000 issue. With our coming up to the year 2000 and the changing of all our programs to the year 2000, just as a matter of comment, the progress I guess we might be making on the year 2000. You know, whether or not we feel like we're getting on top of that, whether there's a solution to that issue. Certainly I know that can cause a lot of pensioners and all kinds of people that are on social services and the like great consternation if their cheques won't be ready the first day of 2000. Just a brief update as to the progress the department's making on the issue of the year 2000.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, you'll be happy to know that my list has gotten shorter, as some of the questions have been asked and I hope answered. I have to say as a new MLA and only being in this for five weeks that I am really disappointed to come to this process tonight and be able to watch the answers come straight out of *Hansard* from two years ago. I guess the point is that the questions are not being answered if we have to keep asking them, certainly not in any kind of detail.

I would have believed that the Premier's office would be the most transparent of all, given your attempts at openness and accountability. I'm shocked that there are no goals, no mission statements, operating principles, strategies, performance measurements. Those kinds of things I find in any of the other departments but not particularly in this one, with the exception of the Public Affairs Bureau.

I did have a question asking how many of the full-time equivalents are employed under the different sections, and I don't really feel that question has been answered by having the names of the secretaries read out. But if that's the answer I'm going to get, I guess I'll have to leave it at that.

I'm also interested in how much is being spent – my colleague touched on this a bit – on polling and consulting fees, and how much is projected in expenditures for polling and consulting fees as part of this three-year plan. Given that there's a willingness to produce the information from these polls, then I would like to ask that all of these polls that have been done in all of the government departments be tabled tomorrow. That would be delightful. [interjections] Hey, the information's there. You're willing to put it forward. We'd like to hear it.

Now, my next question is: what steps have been taken to address the Auditor General's recommendation "that the Executive Council improve the accountability . . . for grant expenditures made from the Lottery Fund"? I'm always really interested in the lottery fund because I don't quite understand where money comes from and goes to on that one. So I'd appreciate a response to that.

Yes, there are a lot of questions about this chief information officer. It's a new area that seems to have just popped up. I've been told what he does. I'm still waiting to hear what the qualifications of Mr. Samoil are.

AN HON. MEMBER: He said it three times already. Where have you been?

MS BLAKEMAN: No. I'm sorry. He has not. He said that he has a degree, but he hasn't told me what kind of a degree it is,

and I'd like to know when the degree was taken. Please just answer the questions instead of giving me half answers. It's a simple answer. What kind of a degree does he have? When was it taken? Is it a bachelor of science? It is a masters of science, the qualifications one would presume somebody needs to run this important department? It's not that difficult to answer these questions.

MR. KLEIN: He has a lot of experience.

MS BLAKEMAN: I think on behalf of the citizens we want to know what this experience is. If this is such an important department, what is so difficult about answering these simple questions? Overall I think the citizens have a right to know where their money is going, and being given a four-line budget with a six-line breakdown – you know, I'm sorry if you feel intimidated by asking these questions.

MR. KLEIN: Well, that's a lot more than the Liberals give, I'll tell you that for sure.

MS BLAKEMAN: That's the fourth time you've brought up the Liberal budget. That's well known to you, sir. What we're doing here today is looking at the estimates.

THE CHAIRMAN: Order. Hon. members, we're going to go back to the tradition of the committee and of the subcommittee. The questions are asked to a minister, to the Premier, through the chair, and the answers come back through the chair. We'll dispense with the crossfire here. So if you'd ask your questions, then the Premier in time will answer them.

9:42

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I'm quite comfortable with that. Thank you.

The other issue I have is about public affairs. Some people do consider it more of a censorship function than an information function, and that's certainly what I've been surprised to hear from constituents in the short time I've been an MLA. I'm aware that the public affairs officers do sign an oath of allegiance, and it's to the government, and I think there can be times, as my colleague suggested, when information may not be distributed promptly and widely. I hope that's not the case.

Just also a brief comment on the RITE line. Going strictly to the technology where there's no operator involved has caused access problems for older people who are not technologically literate, and I have had some people phone me with that. They feel they've been cut off from government, and they don't understand how to get through the system, and they just seem to keep going around and around. So just a suggestion there.

I'm going back to the chief information officer. I take it with the questions that have been asked so far that this information council definitely does not have a mandate to study ways on how to market government-collected information. I hope that is the case. It is a concern to me when we talk about linking together a number of different information systems. People gave that information to the government for a specific reason, and I don't think that when they gave it they realized it might be linked together with other sources or possibly even sold. So I certainly hope that's not the case.

So just a few brief questions. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you. There were a number of questions. I've got so much paper here. [interjection] Well, with respect I'll try and get clarification on Mr. Samoil's academic qualifications, but I can tell you that he's had a lot of experience and has worked with virtually every department of government in developing information systems within the government and co-ordinating those activities with the federal government and, as I mentioned, agencies that depend on government for their funding and by their very nature need to have a close communications link with government. Again I talk about universities and hospitals and schools and municipalities and various segments of the private sector.

With respect to the RITE system, the question was asked relative to how this system has changed. As you know, it was quite complex. You had to phone the government RITE number, get an operator, and the operator had to transfer the individual to the appropriate government department. Now Albertans enjoy, I believe, faster, easier, and more direct toll-free access to the government. It's called the new RITE dial service, and this allows Albertans to call the RITE system from anywhere in the province by dialing 310-0000. Quite simple. By consolidating the RITE centres in Edmonton and Calgary, we now can offer faster and uninterrupted service, extended calling hours, and increased convenience and flexibility to Albertans calling government offices.

RITE direct has not replaced operator-assisted services. Public callers could still place their call with the help of a fully trained RITE operator. Bureau staff are working with provincial building managers in communities where RITE centres were closed. We will ensure that effective alternatives are in place in cases where RITE operators acted as receptionists for the building, and that indeed was the case in many instances. It's a vastly improved service, and I think all Albertans, including members of the opposition, should be very happy to hear that we have such a complete and effective service.

[interjections] It sounds like Edmonton won. I really hope they did.

The question was raised relative to full-time employees, and I would seek some clarification from the hon. member relative to what she's driving at in terms of FTEs in the Premier's office or those FTEs who are responsible to Executive Council. I gave you about as extensive a breakdown as I possibly could relative to those who are directly responsible to Executive Council.

I will make one clarification however. There was a question earlier on with respect to the standing policy committees and whether there was anything in the Executive Council budget to accommodate SPCs. As I explained, SPCs are mostly covered by the departments from whom they receive their information and advice, because the departments are really accountable to the SPCs, not the other way around. There are two people within Executive Council, two individuals who serve as secretariat to the SPCs, and they're funded out of Executive Council. There are two individuals who are funded from Executive Council.

Relative to lottery funds there was a question.

Again I would seek clarification – I'm sorry. Maybe I could ask, Mr. Chairman: what more does the hon. member wish in terms of FTEs in relationship to Executive Council? What more information does she require that I haven't already provided?

MS BLAKEMAN: I'm sorry. You're asking a question about the FTEs?

MR. KLEIN: Right.

MS BLAKEMAN: Okay. What I was looking for was the breakdown of how many were employed in the Premier's office and how many under general administration and the details of it. Were these all full-time employed people, or can you combine part-time people to make a full-time person? I was looking for the detailed breakdown on that sort of information. Are they on contract? Are they wage? Are they salary? That kind of detailed breakdown.

MR. KLEIN: Well, I don't know, because, Mr. Chairman, I only know – I won't say with a certain degree of intimacy – the people who are in my office, so to speak, and in the office of the executive director, Mr. Love, and of course the office of the senior deputy, Mr. MacNichol, because they all work within the confines, really, of the Premier's office. I'm not familiar with the staff in correspondence nor the staff in the Lieutenant Governor's office nor the staff in some of the administrative offices. I'm familiar with the communications staff, of course: Mr. Dau, Ms Orr, and Ms Etmanski. Other than to see these people from time – some I can attach a name to the face, and some I can't. In my office there's a very, very small staff, believe me. There are seven in my office, seven in correspondence, three in communications, and four in the Calgary office, so that makes 11 in total, 12 including myself. Okay? In planning and co-ordination – and this is really associated with the deputy minister's office – there are 10. In finance and administration there are six, and in the office of the Lieutenant Governor there are three. Now, as to whether they're all full-time equivalents, I really don't know. I would have to ask that question. I know there is one vacancy.

9:52

Relative to Mr. Samoil's qualifications, I've got the answer. Are you ready? George Samoil: bachelor of education degree, 1981, University of Alberta; bachelor of arts degree, 1986, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Simon Fraser University, with a specialty in mass communications and information technology; 10 years with the government of Alberta; and I understand that Mr. Samoil went to high school with Laurie Blakeman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to deal with the area of the business plan that is in relation to the Northern Alberta Development Council. Earlier we heard in this Legislature from the chairman of the council that he has a vision of facilitating the development of a thriving and progressive northern economy. I would put forward that that's going to be a very, very difficult task. I believe it will be a difficult task to have this vision of being a thriving and progressive northern economy actually go ahead. I think it will be difficult because the chairman also painted a picture here for us of 60 percent of our land mass being in northern Alberta with 10 percent of the population, which is a very sparse population. One of the things he did say that I found very interesting was that all of Canada's oil sands development is located in northern Alberta.

So with 10 percent of the population and all of Canada's oil sands development located there, I'm interested in the aboriginal community and how they will relate to the development of the oil sands, especially in northeastern Alberta. I know we've heard recently in the news that the oil sands developments are proceeding and that they're based on the National Task Force on Oil Sands Strategies. I'm going to ask if the chairman would kindly expand a bit on that and how that strategy relates to the

aboriginal community. I say that, too, knowing, as the chairman in the past has told the Legislature, that the aboriginal community in northern Alberta has a very high unemployment rate. Hopefully, as I was saying, this thriving economy will include employment for aboriginal people related to this overall development of the oil sands.

Mr. Chairman, I'm also interested in the last goal on page 157. Under objective/timing of goal 2 I'm interested in "assess Alberta Environmental Protection's permit wood program." How do you plan to review and evaluate that program? What sort of recommendations are you looking for for improvement?

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to comment as the chairman of the human rights, citizenship and multiculturalism education fund. The reason that I comment on this is that we know that educational attainment is very low in the communities in northern Alberta, and I applaud the chairman for goal 3, which is "to increase northern skill levels to take advantage of economic opportunities." I find that very impressive, and hopefully the strategies that are outlined here will actually come about for the northern communities.

I see the objective of achieving "a 75% minimum return rate among NADC bursary recipients." I see continued student bursaries "in occupations where there is a northern shortage." I see marketing "the Bursary Partnerships program to attract new private and public investment in northern student skill development," and also improving "educational attainment and preparedness for post-secondary education and employment in northern Alberta," and that I see will be done by identifying and facilitating "the development of stay-in-school strategies in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo."

I think it's very important that - in fact to me, Mr. Chairman, goal 3 is one of the most important that I see here in regards to education for the aboriginal communities. I would ask the chairman of the council if he would comment on what I've put forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll be reasonably brief on some of the objectives and plans we have for next three years in relation to some of the questions the member asked.

Mr. Chairman, earlier in some of my statements I indicated, of course, what the north was like prior to 1950 and how people lived in that part of Alberta. The changes that took place in the '50s were very negative for about 20 years in that part of Alberta, but since then major changes have taken place in relation to providing improved services for those residents.

The member asked what we are doing now in relation to ensuring that the aboriginal community accesses the economic opportunities. Well, Mr. Chairman, I think one of the most important changes that took place that would have a positive impact, no doubt forever, on northern Alberta, especially to those northern communities, is this government and the Alberta advantage. Where we are is we're encouraging planned economic activity and also ensuring that while we are doing this, the skills development of people takes place at the same time as a priority item. The timing is right. We have a lot of people now completing grade 12 education. We have a lot of people in northern Alberta that are interested in pursuing further education either through universities or colleges or through the apprenticeship programs. Of course, the major obstacle in the past was the lack of job opportunities. With the activity that is taking place now

because of the Alberta advantage, the jobs are being developed not only in northern Alberta but across Alberta, and that has a real positive impact.

The second most important area, of course, is skills development, and this is where I believe we can do a lot of work in the next three years or so to ensure that not only the training opportunities and the career development opportunities are there for the individuals but the finances. The bigger problem seems to be the finances for the first and second year of postsecondary education and apprenticeship programs. This is one area, I believe, where the Northern Alberta Development Council along with the government departments that are responsible for that, both federal and provincial, and also the private industry - the private industry is interested in playing a very important role in providing the necessary supports to ensure that training opportunities are provided to local residents so that they can access the jobs that are coming open in those areas. I believe these are the two key areas that will be taking place in the future.

10:02

We do have a bursary program. Part of it is run solely by the Northern Alberta Development Council, but there is a second portion that is in partnership with private industry. As chair of the council I had already asked the executive director to give me an update on the status of that particular program, because I think this is where our government has to direct a lot of the resources, to the bursary programs.

The other area which is very important that the member mentioned briefly was in relation to environmental protection and the review of the wood supply for the small sawmill operators. That area, again, is prospering, and it's because of some of the major development that's taking place by larger sawmills and pulp mills like Millar Western and Alberta-Pacific.

As these industries go in to harvest the aspen in those forest management agreements, there is always a percentage of the wood supply that will be used as sawlogs, and that's the spruce and the pine that's available. That new supply or volume of timber now has to be allocated to small sawmill operators, because the pulp mills themselves, as part of the agreement, were not to utilize spruce and pine sawlogs. They were to go to small sawmill operators. This is where the Northern Alberta Development Council recently played a role in reviewing how this new availability of timber resources would be allocated. In addition to that, of course, there were local timber permits, and there were also commercial timber permits.

Again, there needed to be a long-range plan involving local small operators on how these new timber allocations could be allocated and enhanced, in fact, to support the small sawmills that were out there that had been struggling for a period of time. So the role of the Northern Alberta Development Council is key in that area, and the program is going really well.

I believe that is generally all I need to answer in relation to the questions here tonight. If I missed any, then I will try to answer in writing at a later time.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you. I just have a few questions, because I think everybody else has managed to get questions out. I don't necessarily need long, detailed answers at this point. Maybe a written response would be really beneficial so we don't go on and on and on, not necessarily saying anything.

My questions to the Premier will be very direct. You campaigned or, should I say, you ran on keeping your promises, so

I'd like to keep you to some of your promises. For three years in a row the Premier has stated that he doesn't have a problem releasing the polls. You know, we've asked for detailed statements in the budget, much like other departments in the budget. So if I can refer back, even as far as 1993, to where the Premier comments that he just doesn't have a problem releasing his polls, I'd really like to see that commitment fulfilled and for us to get those.

One of the goals of the Public Affairs Bureau is to "study where and how Albertans get information from government, and find ways to make it more easily available." Will the Premier take the first step to ensuring the greatest level of openness and accountability for this government by committing to make the public accounts and general revenue fund details of expenditure by payee available electronically? We've got all these great communications tools. Can we use them? We can have them on disk or on the Internet for the public as well as in their current print form.

My next question for the Premier. Many of the publications through the Public Affairs Bureau are compiled with taxpayers' dollars, but they're available for cost. Is this on a cost-recovery basis, or are we using this as a source of revenue, generating revenue for this? Those are all the questions I have regarding the Public Affairs Bureau.

I have some questions regarding the Northern Alberta Development Council. Last year nobody knew the boundaries of the council, so I'm interested in knowing if this year the chair of the council could provide us with some boundaries.

My next question regarding that is on page 156 under core businesses.

The NADC meets with representatives of key northern organizations to determine their development priorities and identify areas of cooperation.

They conduct research and sponsor workshops, and this is supposed to be available to the public. So I'd like to know how the public is notified of their meetings and, you know, the attendance factor.

Also, I'm concerned and would like to know about goal 1 on page 157 under goals, objectives, and strategies. The NADC is responsible for encouraging "greater aboriginal and local business participation in heavy oil development spin-offs." What other benefits have there been to the aboriginal community in the north as a result of this council? What other benefits have they reaped?

Also under goal 1 is the objective to "raise awareness and encourage uptake of northern opportunities." Under that strategy you talk about disseminating information. I'd like to know to whom they are disseminating the information.

Under goal 2 you talk about a strategy to "work with rail, transportation and Port officials." Last year in *Hansard* there was extensive talk about working with the railways. It seemed to be a very important and hot issue last year. So what's happened, and why is this not as important this year? Have you met some objectives? Has this strategy failed? I'd like to know the answers to that.

Under goal 3 the objective is to "achieve a 75% minimum return rate among NADC bursary recipients." My question there is: how are you achieving this goal? This was a goal last year, to achieve 75 percent. Was that goal achieved? What was the achievement level last year?

My last question would be under performance measures on page 161 in relation to NADC. You talk here about private-sector suppliers. What I'd like to know here is: how are the contracts tendered, and can we get a list of the suppliers there?

So I'd appreciate that information. Like I say, we don't have to go on. It would be really great to have those in written form. That would really be helpful.

Thank you.

10:12

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My colleague and I will take these questions under notice and provide the answers. I understand that we have another session that will go just about as long, and hopefully we can provide some of the answers to the questions that weren't answered in detail today in addition to other questions that might be raised at that particular time.

At this time, Mr. Chairman, I would move the committee rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Premier has moved that the subcommittee do now rise and report. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

[The committee adjourned at 10:16 p.m.]

