

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, March 11, 1998 **8:00 p.m.**
Date: 98/03/11

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the committee to order. That would mean that all committee members are sitting down so that we may begin. Before the committee commences addressing the estimates of the Executive Council, I wonder if we might briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
 The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman of Committees. Before we begin, I'd like to introduce to the Assembly a group of MBA managerial economics students from the University of Alberta who are seated in the Speaker's gallery this evening. They are Mary Ballantyne, Dave Bentley, Jay Cameron, Lorna Kot, Michelle Naylor, Rahman Roust, Joan Welch, and Jacqueline Breault, who is an employee of the Legislative Assembly and manager of financial management and administrative services. Dr. Allan Warrack, the former MLA for Three Hills, 1971 to 1979, is the professor of these students. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Main Estimates 1998-99**

THE CHAIRMAN: Just so that we're clear on the rules for this part of Committee of Supply, the agreement has been reached between the two House leaders that we have 20 minutes from the member of Executive Council, followed by 20 minutes from the Official Opposition and five minutes from the ND opposition. So to commence, then, if that's still in agreement.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Good.

Executive Council

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll call on the hon. Premier to commence this evening's deliberations on the Executive Council.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Chairman and hon. members, I'm pleased to be able to return to this committee to continue our discussion on the estimates of Executive Council. When we last met on February 19, members of the committee asked a number of questions about Executive Council, which includes, of course, the office of the Premier, the Public Affairs Bureau, and the Northern Alberta Development Council. Well, this evening, Mr. Chairman, I hope to answer many of the hon. members' questions about the office of the Premier and the Public Affairs Bureau. I will then turn the floor over to my colleague the MLA for Athabasca-Wabasca and Northern Alberta Development Council chairman so that he can respond to your questions about northern development. [interjection] Would you like to hear the . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: I certainly would.

MR. KLEIN: Right. Okay. Do you remember the questions you asked?

MRS. SOETAERT: I was in another committee at the same time.

MR. KLEIN: So I would like to begin by answering a question that touches on all areas of Executive Council. An hon. member asked about the different business plan and performance measures formats used by the areas under Executive Council. A suggestion was made that all areas should use one format. Well, as all members of this committee know, business planning is an ongoing process, and plans change each year. So in preparing the next set of plans, we will certainly look at ways of matching formats for the various areas without limiting their ability to respond to conditions that are unique to that specific area.

An hon. member also asked a question about salaries for the Premier's office staff members. I would like to point out that the salaries in question were released as part of the 1996-97 Executive Council annual report and public accounts. Salary figures will be released again later this year as part of the 1997-98 annual report and public accounts. When I was asked by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora what the \$115,000 increase was for, I clearly indicated that those were to accommodate salary increases. Indeed, Mr. Chairman, I believe that there is an expectation throughout the public service that salaries will be adjusted during the coming fiscal year.

An hon. member also asked a question about formats and procedures for the Public Affairs Bureau's performance measures. Well, each year the bureau collects performance measure information from four areas: Albertans' satisfaction with the information they receive from government, public satisfaction with the RITE telephone system and the Queen's Printer bookstore, internal government client satisfaction, and fourth and finally, private-sector supplier satisfaction in their business dealings with the bureau. Again, you will find complete details in Executive Council's 1996-97 annual report, which was tabled in the House.

Another question dealt with the bureau's reporting structure. The bureau reports through Executive Council because of the importance our government places on communicating with Albertans. This is no different than many private-sector corporations where communications reports directly to the CEO.

One hon. member asked if my travel expenses are subsidized by the Public Affairs Bureau. Well, I can tell you now, Mr. Chairman, that the bureau does not in any way, shape, or form cover my travel expenses.

An hon. member asked if bureau staff play a role in receiving or responding to freedom of information and protection of privacy requests. In fact, these types of requests are handled by the FOIP co-ordinators in government departments. The bureau does not have a direct role in handling or receiving FOIP requests for departments. Although they may be requested from time to time to add and augment information, they do not handle FOIP requests.

Another question dealt with the Imagis system. The Imagis project is on target both across government and within the Public Affairs Bureau. However, the bureau is not responsible for its cross-government implementation. I believe that lies with the department of information and technology.

One hon. member's question dealt with the release of polling information. Executive Council recently released that information

in response to a request from the Official Opposition. Basically, the government does polling from time to time – or we subscribe to polling services. These are polling services that operate, Mr. Chairman, independent from government, but we do subscribe to their results. Fortunately for the government, the results have been good.

MS OLSEN: Today might be a turning point.

MR. KLEIN: Today will be an excellent turning point. Mr. Chairman, the question was put by the hon. member that today might be the turning point. Indeed, the turning point might be today, because this is the day that the government stood up courageously and reversed a decision. This is an historic moment in government history across the country. When governments and caucus stand up and say honestly and unabashedly, “Yes, we made a mistake, and we’re going to correct this mistake,” that’s what democracy is all about. That’s what people are all about, and that’s what serving people is all about. So I think the hon. member will see a significant rise in the polls as a result of this particular decision.

Hon. members of this committee also asked a number of questions about the Queen’s Printer bookstore. One member wanted more information about the upcoming launch of electronic versions of the Alberta Rules of Court. Queen’s Printer customers will have access to CD-ROM and Internet versions of the Alberta Rules of Court when the newest edition of the catalogue is launched in April of 1998. That is news to me, but I think it’s good news. Bookstore staff will continue their efforts to improve the range of products available. This includes looking at options to better manage inventory, such as producing items with low sales volumes on a print-on-demand basis. Albertans can find out more about new bookstore initiatives, including the growing list of electronic products now available, through the Queen’s Printer catalogue and Internet site.

Mr. Chairman, I did not write that, but it sounds good anyway. [interjections] Well, that was the question that was asked.

8:10

One question dealt with the savings created each year through changes to the RITE system. Due to the use of new technologies, the RITE system saves the government more than \$1 million each year, and I know it does. This is something I know of which I’m talking about. When you phone the RITE system, you don’t now get an operator. I mean, you can just dial directly. So it saves the government more than a million dollars each year, and it reduces the government’s long-distance costs by approximately \$500,000. Another question about RITE asked for more information about future RITE system savings. The bureau’s 1998-2001 business plan will continue to build on RITE savings by promoting RITE’s conference calling services for government offices and the use of RITE’s provincewide, toll-free 310-0000 service as a convenient alternative to some departments’ toll-free numbers.

One hon. member asked about new initiatives for the government’s Internet home page. The bureau is constantly working to keep the page a useful and timely resource for Albertans and for Internet users around the world. Work will continue to ensure that Albertans enjoy quick and convenient access to announcements, special events, and new information, and that applies for those people who know how to use the Internet. That excludes me.

One hon. member asked for an update on communications surrounding the Alberta Growth Summit. Albertans, I believe,

have already received extensive information about the summit at each step of the process. Indeed, the recent budget speech enunciated a lot of the programs that came about as a result of the Growth Summit. This process of release of information relative to recommendations that came out of the Growth Summit will continue with the release of the Growth Summit response card in the next few weeks. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont is responsible for co-ordinating that effort. This response card will include comprehensive information about the steps being taken across government to address the summit’s recommendations.

I would also like to respond to some questions from members of this committee about the bureau’s media-buying agency of record program. This is an initiative that allows government to take advantage of volume rates at a discount when purchasing advertising. Since the program began, the rates for placing government ads in Alberta’s daily newspapers have been discounted by up to 19 percent. The program has also resulted in an additional 15 percent volume discount for advertising with members of the Alberta Weekly Newspapers Association.

A number of other questions from hon. members asked for costs surrounding various communication initiatives across government. Although bureau staff do assist departments with their communications plans, the budgets for those departments are indeed the responsibility of the individual departments.

So, Mr. Chairman, this has answered many of the questions asked by the hon. members during our last meeting relating to Executive Council and the Public Affairs Bureau. I would now ask the chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council to address the committee’s questions on northern development.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca in the seven minutes that remain.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Premier, and thank you, Mr. Chairman. Because of the shortage of time, I will file five copies of some of the answers in detail to the questions asked by the members in the Assembly on I believe it was February 19. I will file these copies.

In addition to that, I just want to highlight a couple of issues that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora asked in relation to bursaries. Why does the projected return service rate for the NADC bursaries not go above the 75 percent that was projected? I just want to indicate that there are a number of reasons of course. The fact that we don’t have a 100 percent return service rate shows that there is a strong pull and move toward outside employment other than northern Alberta, and we think that option should always be provided wherever possible. We are, of course, working very closely with the students to try to increase the return service rate by targeting students that are near graduation who are studying for occupations that are in high demand in northern Alberta, such as social workers, education, municipal government, and health care workers, et cetera. We feel we need to be flexible with bursaries since the job market is sometimes limited toward the residence, where students reside, so situations constantly change. We need to make sure that we have some flexibility there.

The other question the member asked: will the bursaries carry them through their education? Of course, high financial need students in the north are eligible for their first and second year of postsecondary training programs under the new northern Alberta supplemental bursary program. The assistance, which will supplement the Alberta opportunity fund, is anywhere from \$500

to \$1,500. It's basically intended as an incentive to attend postsecondary education, first and second year, and also the two-year diplomas through colleges. Of course, students no longer in the program may be eligible for the NADC service return commitment.

The other important area that was mentioned by Edmonton-McClung, the Leader of the Official Opposition, was in regards to transportation. This is a very important issue, because the question was: what is NADC doing to capitalize upon the tremendous economic development potential for the region by creating transportation and communication links north and south for the region but to the west and east coast also? The member is right. The economic potential in the north is great. The recent announcement of heavy oil sands initiatives in Alberta, over \$20 billion: these are all in the northern development council area. That's not even talking about the forestry, tourism, and agriculture that are expanding in those regions. So we are working very closely with producers, shippers, carriers, port officials, and governments to identify and promote ways to improve movement of products to the west coast and west ports.

The other thing we're doing, of course, is working very closely with the western prairie provinces, the Territories, and Yukon in order to prepare a long-range integrated road network. Presently what we find is that a lot of the roads in Alberta and a lot in other jurisdictions in northwestern Canada are not connected. For long-range economic planning and movement of goods and people and services we need to make sure that we have a long-range plan for an integrated road network and roads that make some sense as to future development. We will have a plan completed in June, and it will be submitted to the western Premiers when they meet sometime in August for them to review and possibly move forward. This plan will show roads connected with Saskatchewan and northern Alberta, possibly from Fort McMurray north towards the Territories to Fort Smith, and then an example could be from Fort McMurray to Wabasca, on to Red Earth, Peace River, Rainbow Lake, to Fort Nelson. So these roads then would make some sense as far as movement of goods in northern Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, that is all I have today. I know the time is running out as far as the presentation. The filing I did today will give all of the answers that were asked for at the February 19 presentation.

Thanks.

8:20

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to speak at this time to Executive Council.

First of all, I'd like to start with some of the comments that the Premier made. Initially with regard to the standardization of the business plans he said that they would look at making those consistent now. But I would like him to insist that this type of consistency occurs, because it's very, very difficult to compare even sectors within departments, never mind year-to-year results or department to department, when you have inconsistent reporting formats. So that's something that certainly needs to be looked at.

When he's looking at that, if he could also have the different departments look at staying consistent from year to year in terms of what is included in their department. Even here in Executive Council last year there were different reporting agencies coming

through this. The chief information officer was a part of Executive Council years previously. So if you're trying to track Auditor General comments from year to year to see whether or not the department has in fact improved their status and their reckoning with the Auditor General, you can't do it if you're comparing apples to oranges, which is what happens in this department because now the chief information officer is out of here and into Public Works. So it changes the dynamics of the department completely. Maybe that's done on purpose, Mr. Chairman. I would hope that that isn't the case, but certainly it makes it very, very difficult for anyone who's not working within the department to compare what's going on.

Moving on from that point, I would like to address the business plan of the office of the Premier, Mr. Chairman, except that there isn't one. What we have here in the business plan book, Budget '98: Agenda for Opportunity, is one almost five-line paragraph at the bottom of the page in Executive Council. In the past the Premier has used MBA students to help assimilate information and prepare good documentation. Certainly he did that during the Growth Summit, and since we have students with us here this evening, perhaps the Premier could enlist their aid, as part of one of the projects they have to report on, to help him prepare a business plan for the office of the Premier, because it would be very nice for us to see something in that regard. Certainly they've got the expertise to do so, and I'm sure you'd love to have course credit for that kind of information.

So next year when we come here and report, rather than having five lines to debate on this particular issue, with their good wishes I'm sure that it wouldn't cost your department any more money and that they would be happy to help you out in that regard. Then we can put it in the business plan so the people of the province have the information, Mr. Chairman, so they can see what happens. That is supposed to be the intent of these meetings and this whole process. It's remarkable that yours is the only section in the whole government, the office of the Premier, that isn't reported on. So certainly if he could address that issue, it would be much appreciated by everyone who likes to take a look at the performance measures and goals that are supposed to be existing, the objectives and the strategies that don't exist in this case.

Now I'd like to move on to the salary increases. I read what the Premier had said previously in debate, Mr. Chairman, and listened intently to what he had to say tonight about the increases in this department. While I see that he had a fine time justifying increases here, we're seeing decreases within the same department when it comes to the Public Affairs Bureau. I'm wondering why one area needs increases when the same people there, if not perhaps an additional person I understand, the Public Affairs Bureau has undergone cutbacks in dollars and certainly are doing the same, I would assume, with fewer full-time employees than what they previously had. I think they're losing - yes, they're losing about 17 employees from last budget year to this budget year. So if the Premier could tell us, because he hasn't so far in the two opportunities he's had to speak before this Assembly, how it is that the Public Affairs Bureau can do the same with less and yet his office can't. Certainly we understand there's been a change in staff and they're having to get up to speed. The actions of the last two days would indicate that they aren't up to speed yet, but certainly we can hope they're going to get there soon.

The Premier talked about his traveling expenses, and if they're not covered here through the bureau, I'm wondering if he could let us know how they do get reported. I don't see a specific line

item that deals with them. Perhaps they get assigned to particular departments that he's representing. That wouldn't necessarily seem to be the most accurate way of doing this, so if I'm wrong in that assumption and you could enlighten us on that, I would appreciate it at some point.

He talked somewhat here tonight about his communications staff helping other departments. In that regard I'm wondering if their wages get costed out to other departments when they help them. It doesn't look like it from what I can see here, but that may be a way of more properly assigning the costs that belong in those departments. Certainly it happens everywhere else in various ministries, so I'm wondering why it wouldn't happen there.

I have some more questions on communications services that weren't addressed. Some of these questions were asked previously, and I thought the Premier would be addressing them tonight. In the absence of that, I'd like to remind him of what they are, because I'm certain he had staff go through them, and perhaps answer them at this time. What types of activities are planned in the communications area during this upcoming year that support specifically manpower planning, recruitment, and providing financial administrative support services? I mean, those are key areas for us to learn about, and we'd like to have that information.

Also, what types of training programs are used to train staff as consultants? I'm certain we've seen some of your staff move out of the staff mode and into the consultant mode this year, so we'd like to know if there's some sort of transition that's provided by your department that facilitates that.

Also, what criteria are used by administration, working in conjunction with branch managers in the various ministries, to adjust resources to ensure that communications staffing levels meet the requirements of client departments? This appears to be a problem not just in other ministries but certainly in this ministry. When you take a look at the public satisfaction with government information going from 65 percent in '94-95 to 69 percent in '95-96 and down to 66 percent in '96-97, that indicates some kind of a problem within the department.

Now, I know the Premier previously said that 35 percent of all Albertans are never going to be satisfied with the information that's available, but all of the other departments in public customer satisfaction, government client satisfaction, and private-sector supply satisfaction seem to hit the high 80s and the 90s. This is the one that seems to be some sort of problem for you, Mr. Premier, so I'm wondering that you're not targeting resources at that to bring it up to speed. I see that you've made projections here for '97-98 and '98-99, targets of 75 percent customer satisfaction. That's a 9 percent increase over last year, and that seems inconsistent with the increases you've projected in the other areas, where they're, you know, 2 or 3 percent. It also seems inconsistent with the kinds of projected increases we've seen in other ministry estimates that have been through the course in this Chamber in the last three weeks or so. I'm wondering what it is you're planning on doing specifically that leads you to believe that public satisfaction with government information is going to see that kind of a drastic increase when in fact what it has seen in reality is a decrease over time. Certainly nothing we've seen would indicate that kind of an increase coming, so you must have some justification for that, and I think we'd like to hear about that. That would be excellent.

8:30

Communications services. If you can tell us its role in helping departments to implement the Growth Summit recommendations

with regard to communications specifically. Certainly we've seen all the data. Certainly we've seen that you've addressed a few of the recommendations that came out of the Growth Summit in some of the ministry plans, but I still fail to see where you have addressed two of the main recommendations that came out of there. One was quality of life with regard to people services being a very high priority for people in this province. I don't see where you've communicated to us, certainly, or to the people of this province where you've been targeting resources or intentions of this government at improving the lives of people. Certainly the actions in this Chamber over the last two days would indicate that you have not targeted resources to increasing the quality of life of people in this province. So if you could address that for us, I'd like to know specifically what you're doing.

We see quality of life for industries like Al-Pac increasing – there's no doubt about that – with the loans forgiven that we've seen over time. But, you know, when you can hand out hundreds of millions of dollars on the one hand and limit access to dollars on the other hand, there seem to be some inconsistencies driving through this that do not speak to people issues.

Certainly one of the number one concerns that came out of the Growth Summit was a concern about the environment. I don't see any resources targeted to communicating that as a primary need in this province. [interjection] Certainly that got the attention of the minister.

We have a concern that dissatisfaction . . . [interjection] It is a big issue. This minister says that that wasn't a big issue. The number one concern coming out of the Growth Summit in terms of people concerns was quality of the environment in this province. If the minister didn't read that information, certainly I'd be very, very happy to forward it to him. No doubt we have addressed it in five or six questions already in this particular session, and if he hasn't got the message yet, we can spell it out in great big large print for him, Mr. Chairman.

Definitely people are concerned about the quality of the environment. I don't see any efforts coming out of the Premier's communication department to share how they are going to alleviate those concerns for the people of the province. So all I am asking at this point is that we see what kinds of resources and what kind of plan the Premier has in that regard, because clearly the minister doesn't get it yet, Mr. Chairman.

In terms of the other information and the Growth Summit and the liaison that needs to happen there, if they could tell us what they're doing out of their communications department, that would be very beneficial.

Also, by what criteria does the communications services allocate communications staff to priority projects? You must have some sort of established criteria for that. You didn't answer that.

MR. KLEIN: You didn't listen.

MS CARLSON: I was listening to everything you said, and I did not hear you address that specific issue. So if you've got some information there in front of you, please send it over to me. I'd be happy to read it here in the Chamber this evening, Mr. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: You're just reading what others have scripted for you.

MS CARLSON: No, I am not reading what was scripted for me. Mr. Chairman, I addressed the concerns that I had specifically to

do with the Premier's comments that he had here tonight. Previous to coming to this meeting, I read through *Hansard* in terms of everything that was asked previously, everything that he answered at that time. I'm doing some roundup questions on information that he did not handle. I couldn't be in the debate the first night he was up here because of the way they schedule these estimates debates. I was upstairs, and that in itself is an abomination. But given that, I have done my research on this information. I am picking up on questions that you didn't answer, and I expect those answers to be forthcoming.

I think it's not a good process for this government to be expecting a vote tonight on this information when we don't have our questions answered. That is a problem that comes up with every single one of these ministries. [interjection] You're frustrated with that? Not at all like we are and like the people of this province who can't get the information.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in the six minutes remaining.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, have some questions this evening regarding Executive Council. [interjection] Well, that's fine.

I look up and down the benches beyond, and one thing I notice, Mr. Chairman, is the fact that there's no minister of fisheries over there. There are a lot of Canadian provinces where the portfolio of the minister of fisheries is a very, very important position. Now, in the absence of a minister of fisheries and seeing the goals and objectives and strategies of the Northern Alberta Development Council, I believe the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca can answer my questions. They're regarding the commercial fishery in northern Alberta.

On page 242 of Agenda for Opportunity, there's an objective, the third one, to improve the viability of Alberta's commercial fishery. This is an objective, and the strategy, I see, is to "review the commercial fishing licensing system and identify solutions to key issues." Could the hon. member tell us in due time: what is the value of the commercial fishery in northern Alberta? Are we able at the present level of the fishery to maintain stocks? Does the hon. member have any concern about the industrialization of the north and the pollution of the rivers and how that is going to affect the fishery?

If he could tell us about this I would be very grateful, because we're going to have in the future less fishermen, from what I can understand. If he's going to review the commercial fishing licences, is he going to further restrict them? How is he planning to do this? Okay? If the hon. member could in due time answer my questions, I would be grateful.

Also, in goal 3 on the same page we are talking of increasing northern skill levels to take advantage of economic opportunities. We all know in the north, Mr. Chairman, that Syncrude has a very, very good program where First Nations people are hired. Nova has a similar program. In my experience working in the north, I found many times where people who live there, residents, have been limited as to what sort of employment they can get. I'm wondering if the hon. member is going to develop a program where these people can get jobs with the resource industries similar to what Syncrude has, and similar to what Nova Corporation has.

Also, the hon. member talks of a road. I believe he said it was going to go from Fort McMurray west across to Wabasca and then through Red Earth on to Peace River. I would like further

details as to the construction of this road: when it's going to happen and how much that is going to cost. I think that is a very good idea the hon. member is promoting. It'll be wonderful for further development of the north.

Now, I have one question to the Premier regarding the Queen's Printer. I have two questions for the Premier actually. The first one is on the RITE system. Why is there a substantial reduction of \$350,000 from this year to last?

The Queen's Printer. There is, I understand, \$1.5 million realized in the sale of legislation. Is that self-financing? How much of the money to run the whole office comes from the sale of publications?

With those few questions, Mr. Chairman, my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood also has a few questions.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood in the minute and a half remaining.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. I just have a couple of quick questions for the Premier. One I'm asking on behalf of my colleague from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, and that is: how come the Premier has two cars in Calgary and two in Edmonton? Is that correct? So we want to know that.

I also want to know – Mr. Elzinga has replaced Mr. Love. Ms Orr has replaced Mr. Dau. Mr. Dau has a new position created in the department, and now somebody has been hired or is going to be hired to replace Ms Orr. So now we know where some of the . . .

8:40

MR. KLEIN: No, no, no.

MS OLSEN: Nope? You're sure?

MR. KLEIN: Yup.

MS OLSEN: Absolutely?

MR. KLEIN: And Fay's getting a raise.

MS OLSEN: Are you sure? Good. Well, that's good. I guess I want to know what role . . . [interjections] Yeah. I don't want to promote that too much here.

What sort of job function now is Mr. Dau undertaking? I heard it was issues management. I was wondering if that is, indeed, his job and, you know, what his qualifications are after today. However, if we could be enlightened as to what new position has been created there, that would be helpful.

Also, in relation to the Imagis program. I'm concerned about the financial package, as that would help meet the quarterly budget recommendation in the Auditor General's report.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the department of Executive Council, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

Agreed to:
Operating Expense

\$12,107,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

That ends this particular part of the Committee of Supply.

We'll just take a moment to let the people in the gallery understand what's going on, if we understand it correctly. This is the informal session of the Assembly. We're hearing from subcommittees that are reporting to this committee, the Committee of Supply. Normally there is more give and take in the reportage. It's much more structured so that the reporting period is 20 minutes on one side, 20 minutes on the other side, and five minutes for the NDs. Then the vote is called. So if you can understand that.

This is, as I said, the informal part of the Assembly. Hon. members are allowed to have juice, tea, coffee, et cetera, as well as water, and they're able to walk around – normally in the Assembly they can't go anywhere except their desks and outside – and they're allowed to remove their coats. It's much more informal, and as you can see, some people are quietly engaged in conversation. So it is less formal, just for your understanding.

We'll go on to the next part of the Committee of Supply, which is hearing the reports of the designated supply subcommittees. I just want to review for all hon. members so that we agree at the outset. The House leaders of the government, of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and of the third party have agreed that when the subcommittee reports to the Committee of Supply, the chairman of the subcommittee shall report, and his or her report shall include any recommendations agreed to by a vote of the subcommittee and shall not exceed 20 minutes in duration, after which time the person designated as the Official Opposition critic will also make a brief oral report, not to exceed 20 minutes, and if the third party New Democrats so choose, their critic can also make a brief report, not to exceed five minutes, at which time the vote may be called.

So with that reminder, are we agreed that that rule holds tonight?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Okay.

We will begin, then, the next part of Committee of Supply's deliberations on the estimates of the Department of Justice and Attorney General. To begin those, we'll call upon the chairman of the subcommittee for that department's estimates. So we'll call on the chairman now. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

Justice and Attorney General

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My report will be very brief. I would just like to inform the House that the designated subcommittee of supply for the Department of Justice met on Monday morning, February 23. We had incredible co-operation in the committee, and I would like to thank the minister and the Justice critic for the Liberal opposition, the Member for Edmonton-Norwood, for their co-operation in setting up the motions.

I'd like also to report to you that there were no recommendations that came out of this particular DSS.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Finally, to just comment that I appreciated the give and take in the meeting. We had very good questions from the opposition and good co-operation with the opposition so that the minister could answer the majority of those questions while we were in fact meeting.

Madam Chairman, that's really all I wanted to say. Thank you.

MS OLSEN: I just have a few more questions that I'd like to put to the Justice minister. I'd like to start with some of the goals that the Department of Justice has talked about meeting and basing their achievement bonuses on. Under preventing crime through community policing, identified is encouraging police services to expand to community policing. I'm just wondering what indeed was done by the Department of Justice to encourage that. Most police services over the last eight to 10 years have already made that move. So what specific steps has the minister taken to encourage that particular goal, and what new has he done?

In terms of increasing public awareness and consulting with joint stakeholders, I'm wondering what opportunities the Department of Justice has provided police commissions and police committee members "to broaden their knowledge of their role in the justice system/law enforcement community." So what exactly has he done?

Also, under that particular heading he talks about working with departments to

bring increased focus to ensuring the availability of appropriate prevention/early intervention programs for children who are at risk for future criminal involvement.

I'm wondering what prevention or intervention programs he has developed in this regard.

I've already asked how many Crown prosecutors were hired and if the 18 were hired from last year and if we're keeping up with the number of prosecutors that are leaving and bringing on as many hired by the Department of Justice.

Streamlining the process. I'm not sure what process we're talking about. The department talks about improved case management in the courts. Well, specifically I am concerned – I've brought this up before – about family court, provincial. I talk to lawyers here who say that it's up to 24 weeks to get into family court, provincial. Now I'm talking to lawyers in Calgary who say that it's eight months. I'm wondering when the Justice minister will ensure that this becomes a key performance measure and it's not just provincial criminal court that he has time to trial performance measures for.

Following that, I'm wondering what improvements have been made to the maintenance enforcement program. What specific recommendations have been implemented from the Correctional Services Efficiency Review?

Developing appropriate dispute resolution mechanisms. I'm wondering what the success rate has been for the adult alternative dispute resolutions. The Department of Justice talks about meeting some goals, and they talk about alternative dispute resolutions and examining options for alternative dispute resolutions in civil cases. I'm wondering what action the Department of Justice and the minister took to search out alternative dispute resolutions and different methods of mediation with the victims of sterilization prior to deciding Bill 26 was the brilliant answer.

Also, examining program delivery alternatives. We talk about working with the RCMP to enhance accountability and to improve both cost effectiveness and citizen satisfaction. I'm wondering how this was done. What exactly was your measurement tool in determining that you've achieved this goal?

You talked about expanding the range and appropriateness of

sanctions, and I'm wondering how that was achieved, through what process.

The Department of Justice has opened two work camps for young offenders at Wabasca-Desmarais and the Enviro wildness program in the Calgary foothills, and I'm wondering how many offenders are there, how many staff, how much money, what the recidivism rate is out of that camp.

8:50

Next I'd like to talk about the whole idea of conducting cost-sharing reviews. The Justice minister talks about dealing constructively with federal colleagues on matters relating to the Young Offenders Act, the housing of selected federal offenders, child support guidelines, ensuring the proceeds of crime . . . What exactly did the minister do and the Justice department do to achieve this, and what's the further process down the road?

There's an achievement bonus for meeting all these goals. I'm wondering what percentage of each individual salary management employees will receive as part of the new management compensation package. I'm wondering how much the total management compensation package will be in comparison to the employees' package, and when will the employees know what their compensation is going to be? It's being held off, apparently, subject to agreement with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees until that's completed. Are the employees expected to wait until their collective bargaining is completed, or are they going to get their bonuses when everybody else does?

Next I have some questions about some specific department areas. We talked about no increase to legal aid. We see no increase there, and I'm wondering how that's going to work with the new domestic violence legislation – the review in other jurisdictions shows that the legal aid system has been utilized and so has money been apportioned for this particular project – and what other initiatives the Department of Justice is going to undertake to ensure that this particular project goes ahead. There needs to be a commitment to funding for training all police officers in this province, prosecutors, people in the shelters who work with the abuse victims. So I'm just wondering exactly what the Department of Justice is doing in relation to that, where the cost is going to be shared with other departments. I'm just concerned about it being appropriately funded.

In relation to the court and prisoner services, right now there are a number of problems with court and prisoner services, and I'm wondering how many CAPS, which is the acronym for that particular department, employees have been charged or investigated for sexual harassment. What steps has the Department of Justice taken to address sexual harassment within CAPS? How many women work in court and prisoner services? How many women are promoted? What is the extent of your sexual harassment policy? How much do you anticipate spending on a substantive program? Has that been accounted for in this budget?

How much money did the government pay for outside legal counsel for the good advice to invoke the notwithstanding clause in Bill 26?

How much money has the department paid for outside counsel for the Delwin Vriend challenge? Have you any contingencies, and will you invoke the notwithstanding clause if it's in favour of Delwin Vriend?

How much are you spending on the internal review of CAPS? What does the internal review of CAPS look like? What's the mandate, the terms of reference? What is really going to be achieved? There are some concerns by people that nothing will be achieved out of this. Indeed, as recently as two days ago I

found out that transcripts from members who were asked to comment on the work environment within CAPS – their criticisms of the department were whited out when they received their transcripts. So that causes me some concern.

I'd like to know how much money is set aside in continuing liabilities for expected settlement payouts for the ongoing sexual harassment litigations within court and prisoner security? How many CAPS members who have had sexual harassment complaints substantiated against them are still employed with the Department of Justice? I think you probably know where I'm going with all that.

I'm concerned about performance measures and whether or not we need to see some performance measures from each different department.

MR. MacDONALD: Oh, so we'd have a performance measure on the performance measure?

MS OLSEN: Well, we may have to have performance measurements on the performance measurements.

The Justice minister came up with some great key performance measurements this year. I'd like to see some other key performance measurements. I'd like to see one that's going to show us how indeed we're going to measure the success or failure of the family violence legislation and how that's going to impact actually on the budget of the Department of Justice. I see nothing here that looks like an increase in some of the areas that we need for that particular program.

I'd also like to encourage the minister and would ask him what his intent is to ensure that the family violence legislation is going to be developed and used on reserves. As it stands right now, there's no protocol in place and there will be a requirement. In order for that program to be successful on reserves, there has to be protocol in place and there has to be some training with the aboriginal policing agencies in this province to ensure that they understand the program.

Also, some concerns about the program through the review of the Saskatchewan legislation in that in remote areas the police fail to lay charges or they fail to use the legislation because they cannot guarantee the protection of women in those areas. I'm wondering where the Justice minister will go in terms of helping create a better environment for the use of this legislation in remote areas. He may indeed want to work something out with the department of social services in terms of women's shelters or look at some other alternatives just to make this legislation a little more equitable.

As I said earlier today in debate, I had the opportunity to listen to Madam Justice l'Heureux-Dubé, and she talked about equality in legislation and equality in law, and if we're going to create legislation, it has to be equitable. It has to be able to be applied to everybody across this province. That raises some concerns for me within the whole issue of the domestic violence legislation.

Another concern that I have in relation to the domestic violence legislation is the whole issue of collecting data. I think that in order for us to show that this program has been successful, we need to create a tool that is going to be appropriate for all police agencies, all social service agencies that work with the legislation to measure that. I've recommended a four-part form, one that the Department of Justice pays for: one that would have one copy stay with the agency, one copy to go to the Department of Justice, one to go to the court file if there were charges laid, and one would stay with the file for the emergency restraining order. I'm just

wondering if the minister would undertake to produce something like that so that he, then, indeed is the master responsible for collecting the data and that his department is the one that is collecting the data and producing the information we then can develop key performance measurements from.

9:00

My other concerns relate to the maintenance enforcement program. You've talked about how you've worked to enhance the program. We do not have a specific key performance measurement, so I'm wondering if we're going to be able to do something about that.

The crime rates. Measuring Up, the third annual report on the performance of the government of Alberta, talks about the violent crime rate. The crime rate since 1986 peaked in 1991 and has been on a downward trend since then. It's great that the goal of the Department of Justice is "to protect the safety and security of Albertans and ensure that Alberta is a safe place to live, work and raise families." I'm just wondering what influence he has over his target "to reduce Alberta's crime rates below the Canadian average by the year 2000." That indeed is not something that the Department of Justice has a lot of control over.

Your measurement talks about measuring "the violent and property crime rates over time and compares these to the Canadian crime rates" and that "a formal report must be [made to] the police to affect the crime rate." Well, we also know that there's a nonreporting rate as well, because many people don't report break and enters, don't report certain thefts because the insurance deductible is often greater than the actual property. There's a whole number of variables that go into the crime rate, so I wouldn't want to be giving any one department, be it the Department of Justice, the police, or anybody else, the sole responsibility for reducing the crime rate in this province.

The other thing I'm concerned about – and again, we've talked about it – is the increase in organized crime across this country. We know it's happening in Vancouver. Vancouver is not very far away. We know that the drugs go down highway 1 and we know that drugs travel down highway 16, down those two corridors, and that they're fairly safe routes to go down. I'm concerned when I hear reports that prosecutors in Vancouver often do not want to take on cases that involve members of the Hell's Angels or other motorcycle gangs. I'm just wondering if that has raised some flags for the Justice minister when we talk about organized crime here. Obviously, there are some problems elsewhere, and we have to learn from those jurisdictions. I would like to see the Justice minister get serious about this and work towards ensuring that this province does not suffer what other provinces have through organized motorcycle gangs, which create a severe problem for police and public safety.

With that, I will let my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie take over.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I, too, wish to speak to Justice this evening. My comments will particularly be around the maintenance enforcement program. We have had a very poor program when it comes to maintenance enforcement in this province for many years. It's with some sadness that I see that there are no indications in the next coming year that the minister is going to be paying any specific attention to this particular program. We've got the one key performance measurement that they're considering now looking "at a national level in order to compare the effectiveness of maintenance programs across Canada." I just don't think that's good enough.

We have a situation here where we can make a huge difference in the lives of children in this province, and the minister is just passing that window of opportunity by. That's really too bad, because there are some places in North America that do have a very effective program and that are making a difference. So I hope the minister will take that under consideration.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Justice, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$349,801,000
Capital Investment	\$1,580,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Municipal Affairs

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The chairman of this subcommittee was the hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The designated supply subcommittee on Municipal Affairs met to consider the ministry's '98-99 estimates on Monday morning, March 9, and it is my pleasure to report to the Committee of Supply on our deliberations. The minister and her senior officials gave an overview of their estimates and answered the questions posed by the members present. The minister has committed to table further information in this Assembly and also encouraged the members to bring specific concerns to her attention.

Municipal Affairs is a diverse ministry with four core businesses. As the minister noted in her opening remarks, sometimes we think of only local government services when we're speaking about Municipal Affairs, but in fact the ministry is also responsible for providing affordable housing to those most in need, increasing awareness of consumers in the marketplace, and providing for excellence in the delivery of registration and licensing services. The ministry understands the importance of accountability and has taken steps to make this part of their business plan. This is particularly important given the number of municipalities, housing management bodies, community-based groups, and registry agents that deliver programs on behalf of the minister.

Madam Chairman, the '98-99 budget request of \$472 million for Municipal Affairs is approximately \$194 million higher than last year, and this big difference is due to a onetime grant of \$232 million to repay debenture debt owed by the Alberta Social Housing Corporation. The minister outlined the budgets for each of the core businesses of her department and spent some time describing the new three-year targeted municipal assistance program. Under this program \$10 million will be available in '98-99 to give municipalities a hand up to help them achieve sustainable futures. The ministry is finalizing the criteria for this conditional program.

Madam Chairman, I'd like to quickly summarize the questions

asked by the committee members under each of the four core businesses. In the area of local government services, the minister responded to questions on performance measures, the quality of assessments, unconditional municipal grant programs, the new targeted municipal assistance program, regional planning, sale of parcels of land in the Pincher Creek area, restructuring of municipalities, farm assessments, support to the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, the Municipal Financing Corporation, intensive livestock operations, infrastructure in rural Alberta, and revenue sharing between municipalities.

On the minister's support for housing programs, the minister dealt with questions on support for seniors' housing, group homes, social housing units in Edmonton and Calgary, the budget for housing programs, performance measures, and lodges in rural Alberta.

9:10

On consumer affairs, the minister dealt with questions on telemarketing fraud and home renovation scams and on performance measures.

On Alberta Registries, the minister answered questions on service fees charged by registry agents, the fee for drivers' licences, security of information, training for registry agents, redesign of corporate registries, and the revenue projections for next year.

The minister also dealt with questions on the budget for the deputy minister's office, staff reductions, and accountability.

Madam Chairman, I'd like to thank the minister and her staff for providing comprehensive answers to these questions and for committing to follow up in a couple of areas. It was an informative meeting that gave us a good understanding of the challenges facing Alberta Municipal Affairs. I must say that it was a good, co-operative meeting. There were a lot of good questions asked and more listening done than talking, and that was good.

I'd like to say in conclusion that the goals, objectives, and performance measures of the ministry reflect and support the overall goals of the government and incorporate key recommendations from the Growth Summit.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I have a few more statements and concerns on Municipal Affairs, and this is more to make sure it's on the record, items that I didn't say the other day.

I did say something, and it started around the Growth Summit. The Growth Summit was the 1997 fall session, without elected members of the Legislature. I'm not being negative, but when the government has been playing the same tune on a one-string guitar since 1992, "Cut the deficit at all costs," then the Growth Summit was practical.

Leading up to the Growth Summit, statements were quoted, starting off with how economic growth brings many challenges including increased pressures for improved infrastructure, education opportunities, new jobs, higher salaries. Of these, infrastructure is the most important to the municipalities of Alberta. Since municipal infrastructure is critical to achievement of this government's economic development objectives and since part of the reason for the current infrastructure deficit at the municipal level has been the cutbacks to provincial support, it is absolutely necessary that the Alberta government be full partners in addressing this problem.

I've been quite critical over the last few weeks, stating that the government has not been listening to the Growth Summit or to what has come out of the MASH segment. I'd like to congratulate the announcement last Friday – and that was leading up to our meeting on Monday – of the Premier's infrastructure task force. I have great confidence that maybe this will bring together a group of people from the province that have full knowledge in this segment and hope that the remarks I've said over the last few weeks will turn out to have some effect on pushing this forward.

I must stress that for this government to regain the confidence of Albertans, the task force cannot perform this assessment in isolation. Hopefully, this will lead to support for municipalities in order to deal with the extreme financial constraints in the past four years. The MASH sector at the Growth Summit have had to defer repair or replacement of capital assets. A 1996 survey of Albertan municipalities has found that the most common method used by municipalities to adapt to the provincial grant cuts and to the service downloading was reduced spending on infrastructure, notwithstanding implementation of the national infrastructure program during the same period.

I'm going to lead into a few things. In July and August 1997 we the Liberal caucus sent out a survey to all municipalities, towns, villages in the province. We have results back of 39 percent. Some of the questions asked – I made statements to them. It was not knocking the government, not doing any more than setting out some plans that if we were government, what would happen?

Number one. "Municipalities and the provinces should work as partners." Hopefully, this Premier's council can do that. Example:

Municipalities should not only be consulted when decisions are made that impact them, but should have an active role in the decision making process.

It is one thing to go to banquets and talk to your local MLA, but when it comes to the decision-making, I hope you take those considerations in place.

Number two. The statement to them was:

A formal declaration outlining the roles and responsibilities of these two levels of government should be written and signed by the province and municipalities.

This is something that I read in an article in the paper last week that I hope maybe will come into effect.

Number 3:

A three-year rolling grant funding framework should be provided by the province for all municipalities to plan their infrastructure and other financing needs in advance. Such a framework will have been developed through negotiation between the province and municipalities where both parties take an active role in forming this framework.

Some of the questions that I put out to these municipalities where downloading from the province has impacted negatively on services and infrastructure in municipalities – the results: 91 percent agreed or strongly agreed to this; 4.5 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 4.5 percent were neutral or no opinion.

Another question that I put out there was: property taxes should no longer be used to fund education. Eighty-two point one percent agreed or strongly agreed; 7.4 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 10.5 percent were neutral or no opinion.

I know we've just gone through a study on the MGA, and that is coming up in the near future, but this is another question we put out there: the Municipal Government Act is too complicated in its application. These are the results from the question: 29.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 35.8 disagreed or strongly disagreed; 34.3 percent were neutral or no opinion.

Another question was: amalgamation of municipalities should only occur after a majority of citizens within each municipality approves such a move. The answers to this one were: 91 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 3.0 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 6 percent were neutral or no opinion.

On the amalgamation one, one thing I did say in the designated subcommittee the other day is that if the province is going to go into this type of application and ask for amalgamation, then the province should be there for the next few years afterwards to work in conjunction with the municipality so that can come to some future drawing card. What's happening up in the Fort McMurray area? I did go to AUMA and I listened to them. After that I asked some of their councillors what would happen after the honeymoon is over, honeymoon meaning: you've got the councillors that bought into it right now; what happens in the next five to 10 years, whether or not they are going to back this one?

Some of the other things I want to bring out and some questions probably. I did praise – I did send a letter off to the members of the nonprofit organization on tax exemption. In reading papers throughout the province, I just wonder if there is any fallout from it. I myself am totally for it, and from what I've read, I see a lot of pluses in it. I just wonder: is everybody happy? That maybe can be a question that can be passed on. Or are there any major concerns around chambers of commerce, golf courses, curling rinks, and so on?

Some of the other supports that we should be looking at. In the Calgary area, not only do we talk about the infrastructure, the Deerfoot, everything that's happening down there, but the other item that was happening this year was the lack of housing. I'm wondering whether or not there has been any signed partnership or any partnership in the Currie barracks; that is, in the movement of people from downtown out into that area. Or is this just another one of those statements like: not in my backyard, the NIMT, not in my term, phrases coming from politicians in that area? The reason I lead up to that is that in meetings with the Salvation Army – I probably met more inner-city groups in Calgary than I know in my own city of Edmonton – they all stressed the fact that maybe that's where you could send the new Calgarians that came in that are actually working at \$6 an hour jobs and free up the buildings downtown and the facilities downtown for the street people that have been using those areas for a long time. Then you wouldn't have a thousand people sleeping on the streets every night down there. Thankfully we didn't have too many days of minus-40 weather.

9:20

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

The other point I want to bring up is with respect to some of my tours. One of my tours was to Jasper. I want to read to you what the Jasper town vision statement is.

Jasper is a small, friendly community with a unifying sense of purpose, set in the natural splendour of Jasper National Park. Residents value and promote quality services, controlled growth, affordability, equitable taxation, eligible residency and environmental integrity.

Jasper is represented by locally-elected, accountable residents administering a form of municipal government designed and accepted by the community and Parks Canada. Planning and decision-making are characterised by a high degree of local participation which respects both community and National Parks values and authorities.

Development within the community demonstrates a local commitment . . . to plan, control, and balance growth. Commu-

nity values emphasise the appreciation and preservation of Jasper's history and traditional architectural . . .

But one thing that is very emphasized. Let's take their education tax comparison. This is an address of a property: 100 Patricia Street. The estimated levy on this house in Jasper is \$2,240. If this house were located in a similar location in Hinton, it would be \$395, which is a 567.1 percent difference. The same house in High Prairie: \$381, a 587.9 percent difference.

We go into what the municipal taxes were. In 1994 they were \$361. They only jump to \$400 in 1997, 2000, and 2005. The education tax, though, in 1994 was \$638. The education tax in '97, 2000, and 2005 is expected to be \$2,240.

The federal government's municipal charges are just as bad as the provincial education tax. It's \$35 in 1994, \$35 in 1997, and \$800 for 2000 and 2005. Utilities and land rents. The land rents are jumping in 2000 to \$2,795, and 2005 being \$5,591. Today it's at \$125. So just to show the ministry some of the dollars and cents there: with the education tax and the federal municipal charges, these have actually brought what was a levy of \$1,434 in '94, \$3,125 in 1997, up to \$9,530 in 2005.

I've got lots of things I could explain about Jasper. I believe the ministry probably has these, but we have to stress that the town of Jasper – the other items that are happening hopefully in Banff leading up to March 26, the meetings there, will bring some help to them.

Also, going back to some statements made at the designated supply subcommittee about urban and rural. The problem between the urban and rural can only lead to the fact that a sheer magnitude of traffic is the problem. Calgary roads per day carry 120,000 vehicles on the Glenmore at the causeway, up to 85,000 on Macleod Trail, 14,000 at 4th Street N.W., and up to 40,000 at 52nd Street N.E. In comparison the north/south corridor carries 2,000 vehicles per day at Coutts, 15,000 between Lacombe and Leduc, 15,000 to 20,000 between Calgary and Red Deer. So just to clarify something, hopefully this new Premier's infrastructure committee will be looking at these differences in traffic flow and not just say that it's urban against rural. I think everything I've said up to this point is that I defend rural a lot.

Also the housing starts in Calgary. It's got to be emphasized here, and I think it has to be put on the books as to what's really happening. It's fantastic for Calgary. In 1997, 59 percent of all growth in the province in permits was in Calgary. Edmonton, my city, is comparably 26 percent. So there is great stress on the roads and the freeways and that down there.

Lastly, I'm going to talk about a couple of things. It was brought up somewhat the other day in designated supply, and that is the province pondering the role of being in the manure management business. Hopefully, from what I read in the Lethbridge paper and so on, those different things will be looked at quite seriously.

Is there anything that anybody else can add to this? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have some additional questions for the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. I must say that I enjoyed our exchange the other morning, and I found it quite useful and worth while.

My first question for the minister this evening is on page 307 of the Agenda for Opportunity. The fourth goal that is proposed reads:

Ensure that Alberta's recreational, agricultural and undeveloped

private lands continue to be owned and enjoyed by Canadians while preserving the opportunity for foreign investment.

That's quite a statement, considering that there are some provinces in this country that have strict controls on the foreign ownership of their land, in particular their farmland.

I realize that the minister has the best interests of Alberta at heart, but now that we're talking about the MAI, the multilateral agreement on investment, I'm curious as to: what is the purpose of this goal? If we are talking about more globalization, borders are going to be open for all sorts of investment, and I think, as I recall, there was \$180 billion of foreign investment in this country. The care and protection of our farmland, all land in this province, is of particular interest to me because I'm a nationalist.

This is quite interesting because we know that the multilateral agreement on investment is going to mean a lot to this country. Canada is a trading nation, and Alberta certainly is a trading province. All we have to do is look at the construction that's going on here with natural gas pipelines to the south to emphasize just how important trade is to the economic well-being of this province. But the provincial government has a responsibility to Albertans to ensure that this MAI agreement is a deal that fully supports our interests, meets our requirements, and safeguards our values as a society. Now, if the minister could please tell us what her department has in mind in relationship to the MAI with this goal, I would be very grateful.

9:30

The other day I didn't get a chance to talk at length about CKUA. CKUA is a matter that I guess is behind us. The radio station is up and running again, and I hope it runs well into the next century without any shutdown. CKUA is a voice that we need to hear throughout the province, whether it's on the AM or the FM band. It's comforting for a guy like me to know, whenever I go up north to work in the oil fields, that CKUA is always there. I think that in order to ensure that history doesn't repeat itself, we need to make the members of this Assembly aware of the events that led up to the unfortunate stoppage of CKUA.

Now, Mr. Chairman, the Auditor General last summer had a lot to say about CKUA. I'm skeptical of a lot of these business plans that come forward, and so was he about this particular business plan. Now, he goes on:

Between August 1, 1994 and March 31, 1997, the Foundation paid consulting fees and salaries totaling \$772,000 to the Chair and four of the Foundation's directors (or organizations controlled by them).

Now, this is an example of privatization and deregulation not working. I will continue with CKUA later.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Municipal Affairs, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Okay.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense	\$472,072,000
Capital Investment	\$2,542,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$22,900,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Health

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll call upon the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. The designated subcommittee met on Monday, March 9, and I'd like to compliment the minister. He listened intently and gave his commitment to written answers.

It's my pleasure to report on the meeting of the designated subcommittee on Health. We met with the hon. Minister of Health and several senior officials from his department. Accompanying the minister was Mr. Donald Ford, deputy minister, and Mr. Aslam Bhatti, chief financial officer for the department. Members from both sides had an opportunity to ask questions of the minister with respect to the 1998-99 estimates.

I would also like to thank members from both sides of the House for their co-operation in making the meeting run efficiently. We covered a number of topics, and I would like to provide a brief overview.

The minister informed the committee that Health spending would be increasing over the next three years by a total of \$489 million. In the last year's estimates funding for health authorities will be increased by \$82 million, with a onetime allocation of \$40 million for equipment in addition to that. Several RHAs will also receive funding for this year only to eliminate the deficit and debts they inherited when they were established.

There are other areas which are to be receiving funding increases. They include the Provincial Mental Health Advisory Board, the rural physician action plan, and physician services. More funding will be going to palliative care patients so they can get the care and support they need in their homes, which I was pleased to see.

As well, specialized services offered in Calgary and Edmonton such as organ transplants, renal dialysis, and cardiovascular and neurosurgery will see an increase of funding of \$29 million.

Discussion ensued, with members enquiring about the department's performance measures, regional health authority funding, population-based funding, and some of the information technology initiatives the department currently has under way, such as Wellnet. Many more issues were discussed, and I'm sure that over the next few days the minister will be responding to the points raised by the opposition.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

In presenting the report, Madam Chairman, I'm not able to deal with every matter that was considered by the subcommittee. This is just an overview of the discussions that took place. I would encourage any members who are interested to review the debate in *Hansard* for that day.

Once again I'd like to thank the minister, his officials, and members from both sides of the House.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I see the minister is going to table several answers, and I appreciate that. We will read through them since we can't all be in the same committees at the same time.

I have a few more concerns that seem to come up regularly in health care, and I would bet this is almost the hottest department, of course next to Justice, most of the time. A few things – one in fact that I heard tonight from a senior who didn't want to wait for eye surgery so got cataracts removed at the Gimbel centre for \$1,000 and then had to buy eyeglasses on top of that. Now, she was wondering what kind of coverage there is for seniors. Does that regularly happen? What's happening with the Gimbel Eye Centre in that regard? Now, I know it's a private clinic, but certainly we have some control over that.

One thing I am particularly interested in is the definition between auxiliary hospitals and nursing homes, because I think they're virtually doing the same job. I know nursing homes often have a religious affiliation to them. I guess I'm thinking of the Youville Nursing Home, which is in St. Albert, and some of the concerns they have with capital funding. They can't get capital funding because they're a nursing home, yet they do the job of the auxiliary hospital. Now, I know they will be making a submission to the task force, and I hate to say this, but I am sceptical about that task force. I am very concerned that people will spend hours getting submissions ready and they will yet again be ignored. So I would like a real commitment from this minister about that task force that is set up to look at long-term care, because we have an aging population and I don't see any real planning for that, any real vision of that in this budget. I would like to see that.

I would like a sense of comfort for our seniors, and I don't have that within this budget. Certainly if it's just a feel good, do nothing task force again, I'd like to know what that will cost us, and I am very concerned about that task force. [interjection] I'll repeat it. The one that's set up about long-term care. I'm very concerned that it's a feel good, do nothing. I hope it's not, because many others have been.

MR. JONSON: It's hardworking and very frugal.

MRS. SOETAERT: Hardworking and frugal, says the minister. I hope he can prove that right.

I'd like to see the expenses of this task force – are they open to the public? – and where they spend money and what they do. I don't know if that's been tabled for the boundaries task force. If it is, I'd appreciate that. I'm sure that wouldn't be a problem for the minister.

I was saying that the Youville home in St. Albert is a nursing home, and they don't get any capital funding because they're a nursing home with a religious affiliation. I'm hoping that those kinds of issues between an auxiliary hospital and a nursing home will be addressed. I know they're going to make a presentation to that task force, and certainly the work they do is equivalent to an auxiliary hospital. I see some support around the room, so that would be good, because they do marvelous work there and don't have any capital dollars.

As you know, there's no riding – no hospital in my riding, but I'm not asking for one. No riding in my hospital, thank God. No, and I don't expect one either. However, I have real concerns, and you know this. I know my hon. colleague wants a few minutes, so I'll make this quick. I am really concerned about the

boundary issue in health care. I know it's starting to sound like highway 794 in transportation, but my seniors are very worried about accessing, for example, the Youville home because it's in a different boundary. St. Albert is the line. Where I live is five miles away, and they can't get access to those long-term care beds. I know you've heard that from me before. Eventually you'll get so sick of it that those boundaries will open up and we'll have more long-term care beds.

I'm very concerned about red alerts. I'm very concerned about HRG and what it's doing. What part of "no" don't we understand with this? One other question just before I let other people talk. The Red Cross now is not going to be distributing blood – right? – or it's up in the air. I'd like to know what our role is in that and what's happening with it. I went to Ottawa once with the mayor and council from Spruce Grove when they were trying to get the blood plant or whatever it was called at the time in Spruce Grove, and that all fell through. I guess I'd just like to know the process that's going to happen with the Red Cross not playing the role that they always did.

So with those remarks, Madam Chairman, I appreciate the time of the minister. Thanks.

9:40

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Good evening, Mr. Minister. I'll start off by saying I've been waiting anxiously for responses to the many questions put forward by my colleagues when we had the designated subcommittee of supply. I see the minister is gesturing to a voluminous pile of material on his desk. I take it that he's signaling he has the responses here, at least some of them. I appreciate that.

I remember one department last year where I got the responses to questions in the middle of the summer. It certainly wasn't the Minister of Community Development, let me assure you. But I got those responses, you know, virtually a half year after I needed them to be able to make an informed vote in terms of the estimates. So, Minister of Health, if you've got the responses, I'm encouraged by that. But if the government is going to compress the time for budget scrutiny, we have to find a way, we have to find time to be able to get the responses to members before we get to a vote.

Just a couple of things I wanted to raise, Mr. Minister, that I don't think I got to in the designated subcommittee. There is always a lot of focus in terms of breast cancer screening, but cervical cancer I think in many respects poses a bigger challenge in this province. I refer you to *The Alberta Doctors' Digest*, February 1998.

The health issues council struck a committee to develop an action plan for improving delivery on cervical cancer screening services. The note was there that

"opportunistic testing reaches only part of the target population. This approach leaves a significant number of Alberta women at risk, particularly in hard-to-reach populations, for this treatable but otherwise fatal disease."

So, Mr. Minister, I'm going to be pressing you, both this evening and in the immediate future, to find out what steps your department is taking to address the gap in assessment that's been identified by many people. Some health researchers have also shared the concern that we're not doing a very good job there, Mr. Minister.

There are concerns I'm going to be able to address because it

looks like the legislative element in your department is suddenly very busy. We're seeing some health bills, so I expect we'll have some good discussion around some of the issues you put in front of us, and more yet to come. I would say, though, as I look at core business 3, the report on corporate governance of regional health authorities, I'm assuming that element 3.3.2 refers to that corporate governance report. My question would be: if so, what recommendations are being referred to? The only recommendations I can find in that report concerning public input are in relation to community health councils, and even then the report acknowledges that many of these community health councils are dysfunctional.

So those are ongoing concerns, and I look forward to reviewing even postvote, postestimate, the responses to undertakings. I hope the minister will provide all of the undertakings. I'll undertake to share them with both of my colleagues who were part of the designated committee.

I do want to acknowledge that I thought the chairman did a good job. This was one of the more productive committees I was part of, although we didn't have time for more interaction with the minister and his deputy.

Having said that, Madam Chairman, through the agency of the pages we've had distributed an amendment which I draw to the attention of members. The motion is that

the estimates for the standing policy committee on health planning under reference 1.0.15 of the 1998-99 estimates of the Department of Health be reduced by \$89,000 so that the operating expense to be voted is \$4,181,711,000.

Now, the reason for that. If the Conservative caucus wishes to keep their members occupied and busy and if we want to provide another chair position in lieu of a cabinet seat, I understand why the government may want to do that, but surely to goodness, Madam Chairman, the dollars for that – and this is no slight on the chair of that committee. I don't want her to think I'm picking on her. She's clearly one of the harder working members in the government caucus. My point is one of principle, and the principle is simply this: if the Conservative caucus chooses to involve their members in that kind of fashion, they're perfectly entitled to do so, but all of the dollars for that ought to come from the Conservative caucus budget, not through a budget for the Department of Health.

The reason is: I've been able to attend some of those meetings, and you have the public discussion . . .

MR. HAVELOCK: That's why they're there.

MR. DICKSON: I'm surprised the Minister of Justice shows any feistiness tonight, Madam Chairman. I would have thought by this time of the night he would have found some quiet place to do some ruminating.

My point, Madam Chairman, on the amendment is simply this. I think it's important that dollars in the Department of Health go to providing health service, to managing health service, not frankly spent on Conservative MLAs. If in fact the government wants to utilize dollars in this way, let's expand those committees so they're all-party committees and they can provide some useful service to the people of Alberta.

I've caught the attention of the Minister of Health. I think he may support me on this amendment, Madam Chairman. In the same fashion that we've asked some Senators to stand aside and create a Senate election, I think that my friend from Calgary-Fish Creek is also going to show that remarkable kind of leadership,

which we see rarely in this Assembly, but we may see it tonight.

Madam Chairman, I'd also have to say that it was the chairman of this standing policy committee – and the reason I say she's hardworking is that she's the one who taught me this great lesson. She said: instead of bringing in these big monster private members' bills, if you just brought in smaller good ideas instead of a big package of good ideas, you'd have a better chance of getting them through. I've been following that member's good advice. It hasn't worked yet, but on this amendment I have a feeling that we're going to be able to turn the tide.

With that, Madam Chairman, I'm going to invite the vote on the amendment, please.

[Motion on amendment lost]

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, I'm going to have to talk a little longer then. It's important to mark that this is perhaps the fourth or fifth amendment of a similar nature. I think there's an important message here, an important signal to the Government House Leader, to all members to reconsider the role of standing policy committees or at least the inappropriateness of using department dollars to pay for those standing policy committees.

9:50

In fact, I'm going to suggest to the Minister of Health – because the Minister of Health is somebody who's been open to new ideas in the past, and I can see in fact a little glimmer of light in his eye now at the prospect of being a bit of a reformer this evening. Madam Chairman, my proposal to the minister is this: notwithstanding that I haven't been able to persuade his colleagues this evening to support this amendment, I'm going to challenge the Minister of Health – I'm going to challenge him this evening – to say that from now on when the standing policy committee meets, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek not only is going to share with the opposition Health critic the agenda in advance in terms of who's coming but is going to reserve a chair right beside the two representatives of the Alberta Medical Association who get not only to hear the public presentation but then get to go into the back room to hear the private meeting. If you have two unelected people sit in the committee meeting, why not a third? I'll promise to ask no questions. I would even be prepared to simply sit there and take notes. Well, we could do it on a trial basis, and if I'm a good, quiet, compliant MLA, maybe then I could move up to having a chance to ask one question a meeting and, if I worked really hard and I really followed the rules, maybe get to where I could ask a whole series of questions.

Why this is important, Madam Chairman, is that what we find in this Health budget, as effective as the Minister of Health is, as effective as the Deputy Minister of Health is – and we have a new deputy with a lot of energy. But the point is: you can't operate a department with more than a \$4 billion budget without some effective challenging of how those dollars are being spent. We know that this budget process doesn't afford the kind of scrutiny that's essential and that's required.

The Member for Medicine Hat I think is going to move in a moment unanimous consent so that I can continue past the limited time afforded me, Madam Chairman, and I want to thank the Member for Medicine Hat in advance of that generous act. I want to thank him right now. It's a kind and generous thing to do.

The point, Madam Chairman, is that we have to do it a better way. Health is simply too important. It involves too many tax dollars. There are too many potential issues in terms of access to service to simply consign all of that important area to a one hour

and forty-eight minute period of questions, one wad of material that comes in by way of responses minutes after the vote is taken on the estimates for the department.

So we have to do better, Madam Chairman, and I'm just advising the minister that I'm looking forward eagerly. Now that we've got Bill 26 out of the way, I'm looking forward to joining debate on bills that are going to take away the statutory guarantee for seniors receiving the ASB not to have to pay the Alberta health care insurance premium. I look forward to joining debate on the rules in terms of independent health care facilities. I look forward to joining debate in terms of how we ensure that regional health authorities' resources, when they identify what their pressure points are, what there needs are, are made available by this government, by this minister, by Alberta Health.

Those are the points we're going to continue to stress in the balance of this session: problems in home care, problems in mental health services, access to both of those. Those are issues that can't wait until the 1999 budget session, so we're going to be pressing this minister inside the Assembly, outside the Assembly on those points. For the benefit of Albertans we have to do better, Mr. Minister. We simply have to do better.

So with that, Madam Chairman, I suspect that the sand has just about run out of the timer. Thank you very much for your patience.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Health, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense	\$4,181,800,000
Capital Investment	\$1,150,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

MR. HAVELOCK: Madam Chairman, I move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1999, for the departments and purposes indicated.

Executive Council: \$12,107,000 operating expense.

Justice and Attorney General: \$349,801,000 operating expense, capital investment \$1,580,000.

Municipal Affairs: operating expense \$472,072,000, capital investment \$2,542,000, nonbudgetary disbursements \$22,900,000.

Department of Health: \$4,181,800,000 operating expense, capital investment \$1,150,000.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all documents and amendments considered by the Committee of Supply on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

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