

Title: Estimates of Executive Council, Wednesday, March 8, 2000  
 00/03/08  
 8:01 p.m.  
 [Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

### Subcommittee A – Executive Council

Gordon, Judy, Chairman  
 Severtson, Gary, Deputy Chairman  
 Bonner, Bill  
 Boutilier, Guy  
 Burgener, Jocelyn  
 Cao, Wayne  
 Cardinal, Mike

Ducharme, Denis  
 Dunford, Clint  
 Friedel, Gary  
 Hierath, Ron  
 Jacques, Wayne  
 Johnson, LeRoy  
 Klapstein, Albert

Lougheed, Rob  
 Marz, Richard  
 Pannu, Raj  
 Sapers, Howard  
 Smith, Murray  
 Wickman, Percy

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll ask the Premier to lead off the debate on Executive Council.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Madam Chairman and hon. members. I am pleased to appear again before this committee in my capacity as minister responsible for Executive Council to resume our discussion of Executive Council's 2000-03 business plan.

At our last session questions from members of the committee began with a request from one member for more information about Alberta's tax plan, particularly in comparison to the federal government's plan. This was followed later on with a request for additional information about this government's plans to introduce a flat tax. I offered some initial information about the plan during our last meeting, and I believe the hon. Provincial Treasurer provided a more complete response during his time with the committee on Monday of this week.

Another question from the same member dealt with a new performance measure added this year to track revenue levels achieved by the Queen's Printer bookstore. The member suggested that the targets used are too low and that higher targets should be considered. Madam Chairman, I believe that members of the committee need to take into consideration the nature of the Queen's Printer bookstore and its business. The bookstore sells a very specific and limited range of products, primarily government legislation. That is the bookstore's mandate. There are a number of very legitimate reasons why revenues for the bookstore are estimated in a very prudent fashion.

Firstly, the number of new bookstore products available for sale in any given year is directly related to the amount of new legislation created here in the Legislature. The government staff responsible for determining bookstore revenues can't reasonably be expected to come up with exact sales projections for the coming year if they don't know how much new legislation they can expect to have on the shelf. This year the legislative list will be very light, so I would imagine the demand, if anyone really wants to read that stuff, is going to be very light as well. However, bookstore revenue projections do reflect any additional sales that can be predicted, such as the expected sales for the upcoming *Revised Statutes of Alberta* product. Revenue projections for 2001 will show a fair increase because it's reasonable to expect that the sales will be there.

Another question dealt with the bureau's goal of ensuring public satisfaction with information received from the government. I would like to first point out that this year's results for that question are up over last year's level, reaching 69 percent satisfaction. The goal was actually 70 percent, so 1 percent off isn't all that bad. Oh, I'm sorry; it's 75 percent, which is fairly high given the broad and far-reaching nature of the goal. It was set high to reflect this

government's unwavering commitment to communicating with Albertans. I don't know that it's fair to say that achieving almost 70 percent satisfaction could fairly be described as being singularly unsuccessful, as one member of the committee suggested.

This government has been extremely successful in its efforts to deliver open and honest two-way communications with Albertans. In fact, Albertans have attended a wide variety and number of public consultations where they received information and shared their opinions. New programs like Alberta Connects, combined with communications resources like the Internet, have only served to increase the amount and variety of information available to Albertans. I believe that Albertans have come to expect immediate and comprehensive information from their government as soon as a new initiative or issue appears, and our efforts to meet and exceed those expectations will continue, the most current example being Bill 11, Madam Chairman.

Another question asked about collecting public feedback and performance measurements from other sources, such as the Internet or public consultations. As for consultations, any performance measures would fall under the responsibility of the ministry holding the consultation. As far as Internet goes, the bureau has already begun to post user satisfaction surveys on the government home page to ensure that the resource meets the needs of its users.

Another question from a member dealt with what government is doing to communicate with Albertans about priority areas like education, health care, infrastructure, and economic strategies over the upcoming three-year planning period. As I just mentioned, Albertans have come to expect comprehensive communications from their government, and we plan to meet those expectations. Communications branches across government continually develop and deliver communications as new initiatives and key programs are announced. This, of course, will continue in coming years. In addition to regular and ongoing communications within specific ministries, the bureau will also continue to use the Alberta Connects program to keep Albertans informed about the programs and services that matter most to them.

Another question about the bureau's performance measures dealt with customer satisfaction with the Queen's Printer bookstore products. A member asked if this was the same as the results shown for goal 2, which measures public satisfaction with access to government information through the Queen's Printer bookstore and the RITE telephone system. The measure for goal 2 deals with overall public satisfaction with both RITE and the Queen's Printer bookstore. The results show an average satisfaction level of 97 percent, which I would suggest is about as close to perfect as you can get.

It's possible the hon. member who asked the question confused the two different measures, since they both show the same very high satisfaction level. In fact, the measure under goal 4 relates specifically to customer satisfaction with the quality and range of products available through the Queen's Printer bookstore. That measure also happens to show a 97 percent satisfaction rating.

I should add, Madam Chairman, that all aspects of the bureau's measures, like all the government's performance measures, are fully reviewed by the Auditor General and are checked to ensure that they follow recognized standards for performance measurement.

A member of the committee also asked for an explanation of the \$1.1 million increase to the budget for the Public Affairs Bureau in 2001. I did talk about the increase in my opening comments when we last met. I mentioned that there would be an increase in spending due to the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* project. If I recall, members of the opposition were quite pleased that that project was being undertaken. The *Revised Statutes* will require approximately \$1 million in additional spending to complete. Revenues for the product are expected to fully offset the additional spending. I believe that members of this committee have already gone on record to express their support for the project. The balance of the budget increase for the bureau, which works out to approximately \$100,000, is to allow for salary increases for staff. Members of the committee will note salary increases in every ministry budget this year.

Another question asked for a breakdown of the budget in full-time equivalent staffing in the bureau and also asked if there would be an increase in full-time employees. The bureau is currently staffed with 128 full-time equivalents, and that number is not expected to increase in the coming years. A breakdown of FTEs and budget by subprogram is as follows. Communications services, \$4.7 million and 71 FTEs, and this includes professional staff seconded to government ministries. The Queen's Printer bookstores in Edmonton and Calgary, \$1.3 million and 12 FTEs; the bookstores also account for \$1.5 million in revenue. Approximately \$900,000 and 11 FTEs are for administrative services, which includes overall bureau management and human resource and administrative services. Approximately three-quarters of a million dollars and 17 FTEs are for the RITE centres in Edmonton and Calgary. More than half a million dollars and 11 FTEs are for publishing services, which includes the Internet site, print and graphic design consultation, electronic publishing, news releases distribution, the *Alberta Gazette*, and so on. And \$521,000 and 6 FTEs are for communications technologies.

8:11

Yet another question asked about the bureau dealt with plans to look for opportunities to deliver communications support through clustered services or shared resources amongst ministries. This initiative is simply looking at making the best and most efficient use of available resources. For example, communications branches that are housed in the same building are looking for opportunities to share administrative and public affairs officers' positions. Shared arrangements are already in place between communications branches in the ministries of Government Services and Municipal Affairs as well as between the ministries of Children's Services and Human Resources and Employment.

One member of the committee also wanted to know what kinds of courses are included in the bureau's in-house training program. Well, the bureau offers a variety of courses to ensure that staff are continually upgrading their skills. For example, staff are offered ongoing courses to keep up to date with the latest developments in computer software and other technologies. Other sessions are designed to upgrade specialized skills such as writing and editing and to develop general professional skills such as consulting and leadership.

One member of the committee wanted to know more about the bureau's use of new technologies in its communications with Albertans. I can tell you, Madam Chairman, that the bureau will continue to look at the latest and best uses of technology as they

appear in both the private and public sectors and will continue to adopt those best practices for use within the Alberta government. This applies to the government Internet home page and to other new developments like the on-line discussion groups created as part of the recent Alberta Children's Forum. The bureau will also work to create more opportunities for Internet users to provide feedback about the government's home page and suggest new features and options they would like to see made available.

A final question about the bureau dealt with human resources' Intranet, currently under development. This initiative is quite simply an effort to improve the way human resource information is communicated to staff. I think members of the committee would agree that a paperless system that can simultaneously reach staff in some 20 different locations is preferable and more efficient than an endless stream of memos and mail-outs. The Intranet will include various types of information of interest and use to staff, such as pay and benefit details, training course announcements and registration, and internal phone lists.

Turning now, Madam Chairman, to the Alberta Corporate Service Centre. A member of the committee asked a question about the 11 FTEs included in this budget for the centre. At this time only the CEO and the administrative co-ordinator are permanent positions, all other staff are seconded to complete the design framework and proposed implementation strategy.

The design team has started sketching out the centre's organizational structures and identifying core human resources. Once that work is complete, approximately 11 full-time equivalents will be needed in the 2000-01 fiscal year to create a small corporate service core team and service delivery team.

A member also asked whether the PeopleSoft system was being recommended for the shared services initiative. I can tell you that the government continues to use the computer software provided by PeopleSoft for its financial and human resource functions. The program is used by all government ministries, and it will be used by the Alberta Corporate Service Centre.

I would like to conclude my remarks with some additional comments about the centre. As I mentioned to this committee last week, this is a new operating entity under Executive Council. In my remarks I outlined some of the administrative efficiencies and the related cost savings that would be reallocated within departments to frontline programs. But, Madam Chairman, it's much more than that, which is why I would like to elaborate more on our shared services initiative.

Shared services is really about changing the way we do business so that we are indeed more responsive to client needs and ultimately the needs of Albertans. It's about capitalizing and building on the professional skill base we have in our public service while partnering effectively with local businesses. The initiative means new employment and business opportunities, new investment in our technology infrastructure, more effective service delivery in regions throughout Alberta, and more money into programs for Albertans. It will also give us the ability to appropriately identify cross-government issues, expectations, and priorities and will create an effective climate for future change and innovation. We are committed to achieving those benefits with no net increase in funding, and we will not achieve those results on the backs of our employees. The public service has been essential to our past successes, and I am confident our employees will once again rise to this challenge and make the Alberta Corporate Service Centre a centre of excellence. In my view, this initiative is a win/win for government and for the people we serve.

Madam Chairman, that concludes my opening remarks to the committee, and I hope I've been able to answer many of the questions that were asked. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I have some additional questions for the hon. Premier, but first I'd like to thank him for answering my questions from last Thursday afternoon. This evening I'm going to centre my questioning to the hon. Premier on some of the initiatives and some of the observations and recommendations that were outlined by the Auditor General.

My first series of questions for the Premier would be this. What steps are being taken by the Executive Council in the year 2000-2001 in conjunction with government departments to address the concerns and observations and recommendations of the Auditor General relating to capital asset management, particularly managing risks and costs, planning issues, reporting, and performance reporting as outlined on pages 6 through to 13 in the 1998-99 report? What steps also are being taken by the Executive Council in the year 2000-2001 in conjunction with other government departments to articulate best practices in business planning, including guidance on the definition of business plan components, more constructive feedback to improve the quality of business plans, and providing economic and fiscal assumptions at the start of the business planning cycle? For the convenience of the hon. Premier, this is in the Auditor General's report 1998-99, pages 21 through to 23.

What steps, Madam Chairman, are also being taken by Executive Council in the year 2000-2001 in conjunction with other government departments to develop a strategy to improve the quality of performance measures in the business plans? For the hon. Premier's convenience, this is in the 1998-99 Auditor General's annual report on pages 27 through to 31.

Now, on page 33 of the same annual report. My next question for the Premier is: what steps are being taken by the Executive Council in 2000-2001 in conjunction with other government departments to provide guidance to accountable organizations on best practices for annual report presentation?

8:21

Now, the Auditor General identifies a lack of consistent governance principles for appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions. A lot of hon. members of this House have discussed this in the past, and I'm sure it will be an item of discussion well into the future. In fact, I was at a public forum last night, and this whole issue was discussed by the panel members. But to ensure that there is effective governance, there must be performance expectations established for everyone and everyone must be held accountable, I believe. All government departments should be held accountable, and we should have a recognized method for analyzing and looking at results. The government needs to provide guidance to assist ministries in establishing and agreeing on governance practices.

Now, will the Premier indicate to members of this committee how many government ministries continue to use the directive introduced by the Premier in 1993 on appointment of members to these boards? The Auditor General on pages 49 through to 52 in his report from 1998-1999 is concerned about this.

Another question for the hon. Premier: why do government departments no longer establish review panels to select members of these boards, to establish selection criteria, and to screen candidates for board positions against established selection criteria? Now, the Auditor General is puzzled by this, and his auditors bring this up on pages 49 through to 52 of the '98-99 report.

Another question regarding the Auditor General's report to the hon. Premier: why is there failure to provide direction in establishing a process to ensure regular reporting on the governance practices and

assessments whenever we're talking about effectiveness for any internal control system?

Now, we need to also continue here and ask about what steps are being taken by the Executive Council in 2000-2001 in conjunction with other government departments to ensure that employee performance management systems clearly support the achievement of government and department objectives. For the Premier's convenience, for reference, this is discussed on pages 43 through 49 in the Auditor General's '98-99 report.

Will the Premier also indicate to this committee how much, if any, money was spent on polling, market research, focus group research, and consulting fees from vote 1.0.1? I would be very interested to find that out, because we are of course in the process of debating in Bill 11 focus group research and how much of it there was and what exactly was done and by whom on these what are now becoming perhaps the most famous blank pages in the history of this province.

Also, could the hon. Premier provide copies of any reports, studies, and cost-benefit analyses prepared for Executive Council with respect to the government reorganization announced on May 25, 1999? Now, I understand there is a 28-page summary document which unfortunately Executive Council will not release under FOIP. I heard the Premier, and I was listening with keen interest whenever he was talking about FOIP and how members of the opposition are not FOIPable, I believe was the word he used. The only thing I can say to the hon. Premier is that I know he's very busy, but if one of his staff would like to come over to my constituency office and see how I deal with the money that the Legislative Assembly gives to me to run my constituency office, all my budget is entirely open for constituents.

AN HON. MEMBER: Is it filed?

MR. MacDONALD: It was filed, but constituents of mine can walk in any time and see what this hon. member does with every cent of that tax money that is acquired through the budget.

Now, FOIP is a very useful manner for me to do my job, and I'm glad it exists. I have FOIPed countless government departments, and I have been disappointed sometimes, but on many occasions I have received information that's very vital and of great interest to the taxpayers of this province.

I have a few more questions for the Premier. Will the Premier provide further information on any top-level planning document, any document or documents that were prepared for Executive Council by deputy ministers which discussed the government's long-term planning framework? Also, will the hon. Premier commit to providing a copy of this document to all members of this Assembly?

Madam Chairman, what steps were taken by the office of the Premier in 1999-2000 and in 2000-2001 to improve its handling and processing of freedom of information requests, as recommended by the FOIP commissioner?

Now, we're all aware of the Executive Council's handling of West Edmonton Mall FOIP requests, but earlier this evening in his response the hon. Premier was talking about a paperless trail and electronic filings, I believe he was discussing. I can't imagine anything more difficult to FOIP, and if I can go back to his words, not mine, I don't think that would be very FOIPable.

At this time, Madam Chairman, that is the extent of my questions, and I look forward to the hon. Premier's response. If he does not have time this evening, well, I can look forward to a letter. Maybe I'll be the 18,002nd letter that the Premier's office is going to deal with this fiscal year.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Madam Chairman, very few of those questions dealt with my estimates. As a matter of fact, most of them alluded to the Auditor General's report. There have been numerous reports of the Auditor General during my tenure as Premier. We get one every year, and I can tell you we do not sweep those recommendations under the table. I think this government has a record that exceeds the record of virtually every other government in Canada in terms of abiding by and accepting the recommendations of the Auditor General. I believe that in the case of the Auditor General's reports generally, we stand at about a 95 to 97 percent acceptance of all recommendations. So for all of the questions that the hon. member asked as they allude to the Auditor General's report, he can rest assured that we have either taken action on those recommendations, that action is now under way, or that plans are being made to take action to abide by the recommendations of the Auditor General.

We put a lot of stock into the Auditor General's examination of government operations and the use of government finances and, yes, how we select people to serve on the various agencies, committees, boards, and commissions. I don't have the Auditor General's reports in front of me, nor do I have the summary of all the recommendations that have been accepted, the recommendations that were acted on even before the Auditor General made a recommendation, or plans that are in the works now to comply with the Auditor General's recommendations, but I can assure the hon. member that we don't take his recommendations lightly, and all those we can reasonably act upon we do.

8:31

I would be pleased to provide down the road – it's going to take a bit of time to compile – all our responses to Auditor General's reports since I became Premier. I'm sure that over the fullness of time we can compile that information and provide that information to the hon. member.

Madam Chairman, I did allude to the opposition parties not being FOIPable. I wasn't referring to constituency offices. All of us make all the information available. We have to make that information available relative to the operation of our constituencies. What isn't FOIPable within the Liberal Party and the Liberal caucus is the expenditure of taxpayers' dollars outside of constituency activities, for Liberal activities for political purposes. How much do they use out of their communications budgets as a caucus for advertising? Who in the Liberal caucus takes whom for lunch? To whom is this highly-paid spin doctor from Toronto accountable? The list goes on and on and on, and we can't get that information. They won't supply that information because they don't have to be accountable. There's nothing in legislation that says the opposition has to be accountable.

Government has to be accountable, and we recognize that. That's why it was this government that brought in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. It was this government. We brought that act in so that the public could have access to certain government documents, government documents that might otherwise be kept secret, so that the general public could have access to this information. It was never set up to be used as a political tool, you know.

When we talk about FOIP, what is the cost? What cost have the Liberals put the taxpayers to in terms of some legitimate FOIP requests but many that have been nothing more than vindictive and vexatious, just fishing trips? We can't get that information from the Liberals because they don't have to be accountable and they aren't FOIPable. That's what I was alluding to. It wasn't the constituency

allowance. We all get the same amount to run our constituency offices. The Sergeant-at-Arms has full control as to how each and every MLA in this Legislative Assembly spends those dollars. No, it has nothing to do with the expenditure of dollars within the constituency and in constituency offices. It has something to do with the expenditure of taxpayers' dollars by the Liberal caucus and whether the taxpayers of this province are getting value for the opposition they receive.

Madam Chairman, I'm just looking at my notes here. The hon. member alluded to top-level documents and whether I have any knowledge of top-level documents that pertain to all ministries relative to their plans. Well, yes, I do. They're called three-year business plans, and they're all made public. They're all made public. It's part of this government's policy of being open and being accountable and demonstrating to the people of this province that we are indeed planning not just year by year but three years down the road. So, yes, there are top-level documents that pertain to the planning processes related to all ministries, and they're called three-year business plans.

The hon. member asked a number of questions. Most of those questions, as I mentioned earlier, Madam Chairman, alluded to recommendations contained in various Auditor General reports. I will attempt to get him the answers to those questions, and I will go the extra length to provide him overall with a summary of all the recommendations we have responded to. I think he'll be pleasantly surprised and pleased to find that year after year after year we have a record of complying with about, as I said, 95 to 97 percent of all Auditor General recommendations.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's certainly a pleasure to join in this evening's debate on the estimates. After reviewing the estimates for Executive Council, I have the following question to ask of the hon. Premier. Mr. Premier, the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* appear to be one of the most sizable projects under way for the Public Affairs Bureau. What does the project entail, and what costs, if any, are associated with it?

MR. KLEIN: Denis, what was the question again?

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Premier, the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* appear to be one of the most sizable projects under way for the Public Affairs Bureau. What does the project entail, and what costs, if any, are associated with it?

MR. KLEIN: Thank you. Madam Chairman, as I mentioned in my earlier remarks, this marks the first time the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* have been consolidated since 1980. Literally there were volumes and volumes and volumes of statutes, so at some point or another they had to be condensed, had to be updated, and they had to be made to become relevant once again. This is a much-needed project that will greatly benefit Alberta's legal community as well as other industries affected by provincial government legislation and regulations.

To give you an idea of the scope of the project, consider that every year the Members of this Legislative Assembly debate and pass a number of pieces of new legislation as well as a wide variety of amendments to existing legislation. For example, last year the Legislative Assembly passed a total of, I think it was, 37 bills and enacted those bills into law. That translated into some 1,700 pages of legislation for publication in the annual volume. Now, consider that similar volumes and numbers of pages have been published by

the Queen's Printer each year since 1980 in one or more annual volumes. That is a lot of reading. That is a lot of print, and a lot of it is very, very dry, to tell you the truth.

AN HON. MEMBER: Unless you're a lawyer.

8:41

MR. KLEIN: Well, only lawyers would appreciate it.

If you're someone doing research on a specific act, for example the Municipal Government Act, you would currently have to consult the original eight volumes published in 1980 as well as every annual volume published since 1980 to see every amendment related to that act. As it stands now, that would mean researching through more than 29 separate annual volumes that span an estimated 20,000 pages.

I know that when I was the mayor I had to become somewhat familiar with the Municipal Government Act, but I usually concentrated on I believe at that time it was section 3, the duties of the mayor. I don't know where it stands right now. But for anyone involved in municipal law, can you imagine the reams and reams of material one would have to read to fully understand it? Twenty thousand pages. I think it's fair to say that we're talking about a task that would consume a considerable if not an unreasonable amount of time, resources, patience, and money. Someone is paying for all this, whether it's a municipal legislator, a municipality, or whether it's just an individual hiring a lawyer to research a particular component of the law.

Over the past year the Queen's Printer bookstore staff has been working closely with Alberta Justice to consolidate all those 29 annual volumes into one comprehensive product, and that will be the *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000*. When the project is complete, the current 20,000 pages in 29 volumes will be reduced to a single set of 10 volumes with approximately 12,000 pages. The effect: the current volume will be cut in half.

Now, Madam Chairman, there are two steps to the process. First, staff at Alberta Justice must do the revision portion, which deals with consolidating all the individual changes to laws into one comprehensive piece. This will certainly make the statutes more user friendly. The second part of the process is also aimed at making the product more user friendly. The second phase, which is being completed by the Queen's Printer bookstore staff, deals with converting the documents to a more user-friendly and readable software. Some examples of the types of things they're doing include changing the way columns are formatted in order to make the statutes easier to read and making it easier to move between different electronic formats. Staff have completed the initial steps of the project and are now on track to have it completed by the spring of 2001. Work to update related items such as the Alberta regulations, the *Alberta Gazette*, and specialty products will continue through to the winter of 2001.

Of course, Madam Chairman, a project of this magnitude does require some additional spending. However, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, with any spending increases in this business planning cycle you can also expect to see corresponding increases in revenue. In fact, we anticipate that due to high customer demand for the *Revised Statutes 2000* and related products, sales will fully offset the approximately \$1 million in increased spending for the projects.

I thank the hon. member for his question.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Let me say first of all that I wasn't here last Thursday afternoon, so if I repeat some

of the questions or some of the information that's already been discussed, I pass on my apologies right off the bat. Secondly, I can understand that the Premier may not be able to answer all my questions tonight, and for those that can't be answered, I would hope he'd be able to provide written responses further down the road.

The Premier made reference to the Liberal caucus budget. I've always viewed our expenditures in the caucus budget as being very, very astute from the point of view that we try to ensure that those dollars are for the benefit of the Alberta Liberal caucus, not the Alberta Liberal Party.

As far as the spin doctor that the Premier referred to is concerned, I thought that all the spin doctors had already been hired by the government. I didn't realize there was still one floating around in Toronto.

MR. KLEIN: Who's the fellow who sits down there with Nancy and says: stay around, members of the media; Mrs. MacBeth will now . . .

MR. WICKMAN: Listen; this gentleman that the Premier refers to is a really good person. He's a good person, and he's doing his job extremely well. I'll bet your government would love to get their hands on him, but we're not letting him go, and he has no desire to go.

Madam Chairman, as I look through the documentation, the budget of the Executive Council, the business plans, the ministry statements, and such, I see a great number of references made to information being accessible and so on and so forth. At the same time, to get the information out is good. We see information going out right now on Bill 11, for example. One assumes that when information goes out, it's to provide Albertans with the opportunity to respond and that their response is going to be taken into consideration.

I found it very, very disheartening when I listened over the weekend in this particular instance, for example, and the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness had something like 21 media hits, and I heard him just blatantly say on TV that despite the opposition Bill 11 is going to go through. Now, to send out the information and make information more accessible is great, but is it benefitting Albertans if it's used to that purpose? Even the Premier himself now has readjusted his odds of Bill 11 going through.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, with due respect, we are dealing with Executive Council.

MR. WICKMAN: Yes, and I'm going to concentrate on the communications services aspect of Public Affairs. When we're talking about communications, it's difficult to sort of separate, because the public affairs division, of course, works with all the various departments. But if I get out of line, you just tell me, and I'll step back in line, Madam Chairman.

I'm just concerned about information being accessible, because that is referred to. When we talk about information being accessible, there's more and more of a dependency on the Internet, which is good. We use the Internet to a great extent in the constituency office. Amazingly, when I was first elected in 1989, the same year the Premier was elected, we didn't have access to Internet in the constituency offices for communications purposes to access the government web site, for example. We've had that now for — what? — three or four years.

It's a marvel. It's of great assistance to constituency offices and staff. It's of great assistance to Albertans in terms of seeking out information. When I go through there, I can pull up *Hansard*. I can

pull up minutes of meetings. I can pull up the bills. I can pull up the various government departments. I can go to those government departments and break down consumer affairs. I can go to workers' compensation, for example, and pull out the questionnaire that's just been developed for injured workers. So I find that a really, really good method of information becoming more accessible. As time goes on, Madam Chairman to the Premier, there is more and more of a dependency on the Internet and computer technology when it comes to communicating not only through governments but through business, through the private sector: the whole shot.

Before I get specifically involved with my questions on Public Affairs, just some general sort of questions and comments. In the initial stages, when I was first elected, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities of course was created by the former Premier. Under his umbrella, under his arm it became a direct function of the Premier's office, and it was initially when this particular Premier took over. From there, it was downgraded – I'll use that expression – to a ministry. My understanding now, when I look at the new structure, is that it's been sort of downgraded to an associate ministry. I just wonder why something that held such status at one particular time seems to be falling down in terms of priorities, in terms of other departments and such.

8:51

At the same time I see that happening, I also see happening – and, again, if I'm getting into an area that's outside Executive Council, correct me, but I believe Executive Council would advise the Premier or consult with the Premier or the Premier would consult with them when there's discussion about how these cabinet departments, the various government departments are going to function and which ones should be expanded or added to or which ones should be decreased in significance like you see Learning now combining two former departments. That brings me to the question of the former intergovernmental affairs division, whatever it was called, which again was under the Premier's direction, within his area, and now has been transferred to a full-blown ministry. I wonder why the Premier would have taken that from the Premier's office and actually created it eventually as a full-blown department. The same situation occurred with Gaming, which has grown into a full-blown department.

I wonder if I can get into some specific questions here. When I look at the business plan for Public Affairs, on page 213, between the fiscal periods 2000 to 2001 and 2001 to 2002 we see a projected increase in Public Affairs spending of \$1.140 million, or a 12.9 percent increase. Now, that's projecting a tremendous increase in a future year, and I'm not sure why those amounts of dollars are going to be anticipated to be required. These are the types of questions that I expect the Premier may have to respond to in writing further down the road. Of the \$8.837 million we see in the current budget for the Public Affairs Bureau, I'd like to see a breakdown as to what portions of that go to salaries and wages, travel expenses, the advertising, communications, data processing, hosting, and outside contracts, consultants, dollars that are spent outside. The budget is very, very skimpy when we talk in terms of the actual details.

Likewise, the full-time employees show as a total of 128. We don't have the breakdown as to how many of that 128 are involved in the administrative services, how many in the communications services, how many in communications technology, in the Queen's Printer bookstore, the publishing, and for the RITE telephone system. I wouldn't mind that as well. If we look towards the next fiscal period after the one we're dealing with now, what projected number of full-time employees is there to correspond with the projected increase of 12.9 percent, or \$1.14 million, in that particular budget?

In the Internet, which I referred to earlier, one of the things I look at – and maybe this is being a little too idealistic, but I'll read it in here. Of course, there are the two pages. There's the provincial government page, and there's the Alberta Progressive Conservative page. I don't want to mix the two up. If I recall correctly from looking at them, I'll see copies of the throne speech, for example, but I don't see any response to the throne speech that the taxpayer or citizen can access through that site that I assume is paid for by taxpayers' dollars and not the Progressive Conservative Party. It would be nice if the Leader of the Official Opposition was also given the benefit of having her remarks included when we talk in terms of the response to the throne speech or the response to the budget. I do say that that may be a bit idealistic, but I just say that it would be nice to do. We don't always have the opportunities to communicate on the same basis as government does, because of course they have certain advantages.

Again correct me if I'm wrong here, but even when we look at the amounts of dollars that are spent on the Premier's sort of fireside talk in January, do they come under the public affairs department? Do they come out of the Premier's office expenditures? I'd be curious as to how those dollars are achieved, because my understanding, of course, is that they are in fact taxpayers' dollars.

Now, one of the events that is coming up – I'm sure the Premier is looking forward to it just like the rest of us, and whether the Premier intends to be here at that particular time or if the taxpayers or Albertans choose to have him here at that particular time I guess is a question we can't address right now – is the year 2005, which is the 100th celebration of the province of Alberta. That's going to be a significant event, a tremendous event. A hundred years since the province was legally formulated is some good period of time, and it's got to be recognized in some fashion.

I recall – what was it? – the 75th anniversary, when the two auditoria were built, the one in Edmonton and the one in Calgary.

MR. MAR: It was the 50th anniversary.

MR. WICKMAN: I was just a young pup then, and I don't really remember it too clearly.

I haven't seen really any initiatives being taken, and I've had service clubs that have actually approached me and said: is the government making dollars available yet through lottery funding for projects, say, by the Rotary Club, which is already looking at the year 2005? I wonder if the Premier's office in conjunction with the Public Affairs Bureau is looking at ways of celebrating that very, very significant year and what they're looking at in terms of a legacy when that year comes to a conclusion. It is an ideal opportunity to leave a legacy behind for future Albertans which symbolizes the century that the province of Alberta has been legally in existence.

Again with Public Affairs. A great deal of the Public Affairs Bureau expenditures, I assume – correct me if I'm wrong – are spent outside the bureau itself. In fact, our dollars are sent out to various advertising agencies and that. Now, when we talk in terms of these dollars being awarded to various outside agencies – public relations agencies, advertising agencies, communications agencies, whatever – is there a tendering process? How does the Public Affairs Bureau determine which particular agency is going to get a particular contract or a communication that is occurring at the present time?

I wonder what role the Public Affairs Bureau plays in terms of communicating when it comes to assisting the Ministry of Health and Wellness, for example, on communicating the government's policy statement and legislation on the health care issue? I'm sure Public Affairs has to be involved somewhat. My understanding of Public Affairs is that it basically co-ordinates the activities in terms

of communications, advertising, and such of the various government departments, although most government departments of course have their own small communications branch or communications spokesmen as well. How much of that \$4.76 million that is under communications in the upcoming fiscal period has been allocated to assisting the Department of Health and Wellness, the Premier's office, whatever, in communicating the information pertaining to the changes in health care?

The communications services budget – of course I asked that question: how much of it goes to outside consultants, and how is it determined as to who gets it? The other group I didn't mention in there that I should have is the focus groups, because I assume the government uses focus groups, and also the polling. They do use polling, because I've been called myself as a citizen, as an Albertan just at random. It's nice to be called, because it gives one the insight as to what type of questioning the government is concerned about and what their priorities are. Now, who pays for the polling? Does that come under the public affairs division? What percentage of that is spent in polling?

For some reason I'm being asked to stop now.

MR. WHITE: Finish your sentence.

MR. WICKMAN: I'll finish my sentence but not my 20 minutes.

AN HON. MEMBER: You've only got another three or four minutes, Percy.

MR. WICKMAN: Okay. A few more questions here. I can always come back later too.

The Queen's Printer bookstore. That's an interesting one because with the amount of activity we see on the Internet now and the access to information on the Internet through the government web site in terms of bills and all that, I would have thought that would have meant a significant decrease in the demands on the Queen's Printer bookstores, yet when we look at the total expenditures for the year 2000-2001, we see an increase of 12.5 percent. I would have thought that figure would have gone down. With the Internet being as accessible and as used as it is now, I would think the demand would lessen considerably on that printed material, which, of course, you pay for. On the Internet it comes for free. I'm surprised we still have that kind of action.

**9:01**

This is my last line of questioning in this area. The RITE telephone system, of course, falls under the program too. We saw the consolidation of the former six regional RITE centres to the two centres in Edmonton and Calgary. My question here is: has it expanded the caller service options and, at the same time, improved the level of service efficiency?

Lastly, what is the total number of calls that occurred in the previous year and the current year or are projected to occur next year through the RITE system? It would be nice to have that three-year pattern to see just the increase in calls being made as a result of the supposedly more accessible RITE service. The RITE service, of course, just like the Internet, is a must. It's a means of taxpayers – we've got to remember that they're taxpayers – being able to access government departments, elected representatives, and such so that they can voice their concerns and so on and so forth.

As my 20 minutes is slowly coming to an end and the Member for Edmonton-Calder is anxious to do something, I'm going to conclude my remarks for now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, that's the first time I've seen one of your own try to shut down the debate.

MR. MAR: Madam Chairman, I seek unanimous consent of the committee for a 10-minute adjournment.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's fine. We can seek the consent of the committee. We don't need it to be unanimous, however. A simple majority will do.

Having heard the motion by the hon. member that the committee recess for 10 minutes, all those in favour say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? We will recess for 10 minutes.

[The subcommittee adjourned from 9:04 p.m. to 9:13 p.m.]

MR. KLEIN: Madam Chairman, a number of questions were asked. I'll attempt to deal with the questions asked by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

The last question was: has the RITE system improved since it was consolidated from six centres to two centres? Well, yes, it has improved. Consolidation has allowed the RITE system to extend its operating hours from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. That's an hour on each end, as I understand it. It's made it possible to introduce one toll-free provincewide number, which is 310-0000. About 6 million calls go through the RITE system every year, and as I alluded to earlier in my remarks, the satisfaction rate by Albertans with RITE is 97 percent. So that's a good indication that that service is well received.

Another question posed was: with the Internet why has the demand not gone down relative to written material from the Queen's Printer? Most of that material is legal material. It is law. It's not the normal kind of library material that one would reasonably access through a library system. It is very specific to the legal profession, and the legal profession wants and demands the original and written copy of all legislation.

The hon. member also asked the question: why has the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities been downgraded to an associate ministry from the Executive Council? Well, of course, what the hon. member is alluding to is: why is it not now under the Premier's jurisdiction, and why is it not under Executive Council?

We wanted to give this committee as much latitude as possible. As a matter of fact, the chairman of that committee, the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, is in the Chamber tonight. He's done a fantastic job with the committee. The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities reports to an associate minister as well as the Minister of Health and Wellness, and I believe both ministers are capable of dealing with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, as indeed is the chairman himself.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford also asked for a breakdown of budget and full-time equivalents for the Public Affairs Bureau. Madam Chairman, I thought I included those in my opening remarks, but I can reiterate what I said ostensibly in my opening remarks and probably add a little bit to it.

First of all, the estimates for Executive Council for 2000-2001 total \$15.3 million. He can see that in his own estimates book. The increases are related to two items: salary increases that apply to staff across government and funding for the new shared services centre. As I indicated, that funding over a period of time will probably save

the government about \$20 million, and these costs will be fully recovered from ministries, resulting in no net increase to government but over a period time, as I said, savings hopefully of up to \$20 million.

With respect to the Public Affairs Bureau's estimate breakdown, \$7.5 million goes to salaries, wages, and benefits; \$1.3 million in supplies and services. There are 128 full-time equivalents. So the bureau's spending will total \$8.8 million but will be partly offset by \$1.5 million in revenue from the Queen's Printer bookstore.

Madam Chairman, relative to the Public Affairs Bureau a question was also posed related to polling. Well, it's my understanding that an agreement was reached with the Liberal opposition that the results of all polling by the Public Affairs Bureau would be made available to the Liberal opposition within a specified period of time. I'm not sure whether it was eight weeks or eight months, but it was a specified period of time anyway. The fact is that the agreement was reached, and it was signed off by the Liberal opposition as being fair that within a certain time limit all polling information would be made available to the Liberal opposition. So that information either has been made available or at some future date will be made available.

Earlier the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked a question related to the Auditor General's recommendations to Executive Council. Now, he asked a number of questions related to the Auditor General, but one related specifically to Executive Council, and that was the Auditor General's recommendation regarding cross-ministry co-ordination. I can assure the remaining members of the Liberal caucus that that is being dealt with by the deputy minister's committee and the various ministries involved, and I'm sure there will be a report on that in the fullness of time.

There was another question by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. The question was: who has been working with the government on the Premier's Advisory Council on Health and the Alberta foundation for science and engineering research, and how much did this cost? Well, Madam Chairman, the government of Alberta has engaged the services of Davies, Park, which is a human resources consulting firm, to solicit, interview, and help make a final selection of candidates applying for positions on both the board of the Premier's Advisory Council on Health and the Alberta foundation for science and engineering research. These are very important committees and authorities, and we want to make sure that the people responsible for making decisions and/or recommendations to government are, indeed, the right people and have the proper expertise.

I can't tell this Assembly at this time what the costs of the services will be. It will depend on the number of qualified candidates that are found and the number of board members each chair determines is appropriate for his or her board. Again, there will be an accounting. That is the law of this province. Everything eventually has to go through public accounts.

Another question from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was regarding FOIP requests. I have alluded to it. The question specifically would be: would a more paperless trail not mean that it would be more difficult to launch FOIP requests? I would remind all members of this Assembly that every document, communication, both written and by e-mail, pertaining to government business is FOIPable unless under the rules of FOIP it is exempt. Therefore, a paperless trail would pose no difficulties in responding to a FOIP request.

9:23

The question relative to polling was raised not only by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford but also by the hon. Member for

Edmonton-Gold Bar. As I mentioned, all research done by the Public Affairs Bureau will be released according to our agreement with the Liberal Party. I would like to add that all research done by the Public Affairs Bureau relates to current issues, relates to business plans or performance measurements, and I can assure all members of this House that the bureau does not do blatant partisan political research. The bureau does not do research for other departments. Communications staff may advise departmental clients on research from time to time, but the information remains the property of the department.

How does the bureau collect its research? It does it through subscriptions, through reports like Focus Canada and the Angus Reid report. Like any subscription client we are required by law to respect the nondisclosure elements of the subscription content. We have, as I mentioned earlier, responded to the opposition's requests for information by obtaining special permission from research companies to share some of the requested materials. The research companies agreed that the opposition could examine requested material six months after publication. However, no copying is permitted, and this is required by law. We will continue to work with the opposition and research companies to find solutions that honour this government's commitment to open communication.

Madam Chairman, I'd like to point out that governments across the country use research to give the public a voice in planning programs and services and to measure whether or not those programs and services meet their expectations. Yes, part of the polling process and part of the process of gaining public consensus on issues is the use of focus groups, but again there is a confidentiality matter that has to be considered. When people are asked to participate in focus groups, their confidentiality is assured. It is guaranteed. Yes, we do publish the comments in various publications, saying that a person in the focus group said this, or a man in the focus group said this, or a woman in the focus group said this, or a child in the focus group said this. But we have to respect the anonymity of those people who participate in focus groups because they have for the most part asked for and have been guaranteed anonymity.

So basically our use of polling, research methodology, focus groups, and so on is no different than a private-sector business or a media outlet, for instance, using research to get feedback from its customers.

I think that just about answers all the questions that were put to me.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, I did indicate that I would recognize Edmonton-Calder, and then I will call on you. He had asked quite some time ago to speak.

Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you, Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

The Premier is all refreshed from answering the questions, and I haven't started in on the hard part. I'll start in on the gentle part here.

First of all, the Premier's tie, looking from this side, is particularly attractive. I must say that I haven't seen one like that for a long time. Let's hang it out over the edge here. It's one of those days. It's probably the same tie he wore this morning, but I was looking at it with different eyes, I guess. I don't know. It looks better tonight.

Now, I do have to carry on here with a little story. There's a Tory and a Liberal talking, and it happens that in Alberta they actually do talk. The Tory says, "You know, that Ralph is going to go down in history as one of the best damn Premiers there ever was." The Liberal says, "How do you figure that?" He says: "Well, he's a real



nice guy. He's a roly-poly kind of guy. He's one of those kinds of guys you can meet anywhere." He says: "Yeah, that's probably so, and you know what? He's going to go down in history as running the best damn Premier's bar in the history of Alberta." The Liberal says: "Yeah, that's probably so. You know, I wouldn't mind cracking a sack of beer with that guy and having a chat." He thinks about it for a minute. This is the Liberal still speaking; he says, "But I wouldn't want to have him run my bar." That's a little for both people, you see. [interjections] No, it's the way it is for a Liberal in Alberta, you see, because a Liberal in Alberta would like to have him as a friend, but I would sooner take care of my own money. [interjection] We shall do that. We shall do that. [interjection] It's about as good as you can get.

Mr. Premier, in answer to some of the questions earlier from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you referred to the Auditor General's report. It's with pleasure that I speak of the Auditor General's report because, as you well know, I happen to be the chairman of the committee that reviews those reports. Without being able to question yourself—I gather your time is called upon so heavily that you're unable to come and report to the committee. If that would be the case, if you're just unable to come, it's accepted, we don't complain about it, but it does bring up a question.

Earlier I believe you said something to the effect that across Canada your office is the most compliant or close to the most compliant with the Auditor General's recommendations. Well, page 333 of the 1998-99 report reads as follows, and this is the status of numbered recommendations. There are numbered recommendations, and there were 38 of them in '94-95. Of that, the number that have yet to be implemented is 26 percent, a pretty good rate. In '95-96 that number went up to 34 percent; these are yet to be implemented. In 1996-97 that same number, those that have yet to be implemented, went up to 46 percent. Because '97-98 is the last year of reporting the unimplemented numbers, last year this went up to 82 percent.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, if the chair heard correctly, the Premier has already answered a number of questions to do with the Auditor General's report and talked about that. I think it was Edmonton-Gold Bar that brought it up, and he has answered the question.

MR. WHITE: Well, it seemed that there was an error in the page number or something that the Premier was reading from. So we'll leave that. The Premier will be able to answer that in his time if he so wishes.

Another area that the Premier spoke of in answer to some other questions was FOIP applications. Well, it's true that Liberal caucus documents are not FOIPable, but that occurs in virtually any FOIP legislation, and so it should. We would not expect nor should we expect to have your caucus documents FOIPable. Those are working documents in a caucus. In any caucus it's expected that ideas will come forward and they'll be kicked about. Sometimes they'll be implemented and sometimes they will not be, but those certainly aren't for public consumption nor should they be, I would think.

It interests me that this particular forum, this Legislature, has SPCs, which are a hybrid of a caucus and a legislative function. It doesn't fit well in either. It's sort of one of those critters designed by a committee. It just doesn't fit, and when telling other members of other Legislatures of this kind of function, it doesn't work. They can't understand how a committee can be only government members and then can exclude opposition members from meetings. It just doesn't compute. The ministries pay for these committees, but it's structured such that I assume it's at the Premier's behest.

9:33

The other question that comes to mind. The Premier spent a great deal of time talking about the \$4.7 million in the Public Affairs Bureau and how all the findings were then reported to the Liberal caucus six months afterwards, after disclosure to the government, to Executive Council, I suspect. It may or may not be exposed to or allowed to be viewed by the government caucus. But six months is an awfully long time in the history of polls in that polls are always described as a snapshot in time, and of course snapshots fade rather rapidly, particularly in the polling industry. They're almost useless in six months. Quite frankly, I don't remember ever seeing one in my history here. So the value to the opposition would be next to useless.

In speaking of focus groups, the Premier went on at some length saying that he would not want to identify, even by generic description, 30 or 40 mail-ins from rural Alberta that may identify that person. Well, I would be satisfied and the members of this caucus would be satisfied to not even attribute those comments to any kind of descriptor but just the comments that came from the focus group and the summation by the monitor or the adjudicator of what came out of those meetings. We'd be satisfied with that, but that certainly won't be forthcoming, as evidenced by some 31 pages that came back totally and completely blank, which were less than useless except as a political battering ram, if you will, which is not a pleasant tool to use in this Legislature. But when you have no other information to deal with, that's the way it occurs.

There are advertising budgets, and the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford asked a number of questions about the Public Affairs Bureau with regard to the 2005 Alberta centennial. I should like to ask a similar sort of question, as to what the Public Affairs Bureau is doing in conjunction with the Friendly Games in Calgary or the 2001 games in Edmonton, what surrounds that with the visiting dignitaries and the like and when those budgets will be published. Surely there'll be some money spent this year in preparation for both those two wonderful events in our province.

The Public Affairs Bureau hires a number of agencies, and I think the member asked about what criteria were used. If he did, I'd like that answered at some point or other and whether in fact there are political overtones tied to these selections, as I'm told there are. If an organization has some political ties with either a government party or an opposition party, would that help or hinder their opportunity to bid for work and to lay their talents bare before the Public Affairs Bureau.

In relation to advertising budgets, why would the figures not be published as to how these budgets are allocated. I'm thinking of Highwood Communications, Calder Bateman, Hill & Knowlton, Palmer Jarvis, and like firms. Why would those numbers not be published such that one can discern whether in fact there is any political connection or not? It would be clean and open and accountable to do so, this member believes. The allocation of the advertising budget for those firms: it would be nice to have it be laid out in just one simple little table.

Further to the communications services, I assume there's an allocation for the polling between the various firms that do polling. It would be good to have a breakdown of that also to be open and accountable and completely above-board, with those numbers laid bare before the public. I would think that would be a reasonable position to take.

It would also be nice to know the status report on the specialized communication training program that, I gather, the departmental staff were put through. I gather the training programs for those staff, particularly in the regional offices, contained general communica-

tions, planning, writing, editing, and printing of graphic design and advertising. That's something that I'm sure the staff will know. That's not something the Premier would be expected to know.

A further question, sir. How has the consolidation of the six regional RITE centres into two centres, Edmonton and Calgary, improved the efficiency . . .

MR. KLEIN: I answered that, or similar.

MR. WHITE: Oh, did you, sir? I'm sorry. It must have been earlier in the evening. I recall your answering a number of RITE questions. [interjection] Hugh asked them. I'm sorry.

Well, the FTEs were asked and answered, as I recall.

Mr. Premier, for the moment those are all the questions I have for you. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier, did you wish to . . .

MR. KLEIN: It's hard to answer questions that haven't really been asked. There was one question that was asked that's not specifically related to my estimates, but it could be. I think it's a legitimate question down the road. That is: what preparations are we making vis-à-vis protocol and so on relative to major events that will be coming? The protocol office is within Executive Council. As I explained earlier, it used to be in the department of international and intergovernmental affairs, but it's directly responsible now to my department.

Yes, there will be a protocol function for the Premier and I would assume for the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, and we plan to have as many Members of the Legislative Assembly from both sides of the House participate in these events as possible. Without doubt, the resources of the protocol department within Executive Council will be used to co-ordinate some of these events, luncheons and so on.

9:43

I can't give the hon. member a breakdown right now as to how much of that budget will be allocated out of Executive Council. Basically, the use of the protocol resource will be spread around all departments and will come out of the general allocation that has been agreed to by government to host the world track and field games in Edmonton in the year 2001. We have committed \$40 million to those games. That funding was contingent on an equal contribution from the federal government and, I believe, an equal contribution from the city in kind, and certainly matching dollars from the private sector. Within that budget I'm sure we'll be able to accommodate whatever protocol functions will be associated with those games.

The second major sporting event will be in the year 2005 in the city of Calgary. The city of Calgary has been awarded the right to host the Winter Goodwill Games. The expenditure there is not going to be nearly as much because most of the facilities are in place and the funding that has been requested of government is mostly for upgrading. The latest figure I've heard is \$5 million, and again this will go to offset some of the protocol costs and costs associated with government activities as they relate to those games.

There was a previous question asked by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and that was a question relative to the centennial. Without doubt, that is going to be the most significant year in the history of, well, this government, because I'm sure we'll be around in 2005. It is going to be very significant indeed.

As you know, there was a report prepared, and I'm pleased to say that my wife was also part of that report. A number of good-thinking Albertans were members of the committee, and they

brainstormed a number of ideas for projects and reasonable expenditures to help celebrate Alberta's 100th birthday. That report was submitted some time ago to the Minister of Community Development, and he is in the process now of preparing business plans and identifying projects that will come to light and will be clearly identified as centennial projects, I would assume, starting next year, in budget year 2001-2002. They'll clearly be identified as centennial projects.

Just to give the hon. member an idea of some of the kinds of things we're looking at, certainly one of the major 50th anniversary projects was the Jubilee auditoriums in Calgary and Edmonton, so one of the projects is the refurbishing of those auditoria. Because, you know, it hasn't really been done in a major way for 50 years. [interjections] It will be 50 years. Another project that is being seriously considered is the Archives. As you know, that building needs upgrading. [interjection] Well, it's in rough shape. So there are projects of this nature that really will be reasonable and responsible expenditures, but we'll make sure the legacies that were created in the past are restored and maintained and are there for future generations.

That's about all I have in terms of answers to questions. If there are any I haven't answered, my staff are sitting in the gallery, I'm sure they've made notes, and we'll be happy to provide hon. members with answers to the questions in due course.

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

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I listened with interest to some of the comments earlier, and it seems that many of the questions relate to communication, which is certainly part of what I wish to address this evening as well.

I was pleased to hear the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford regarding the Premier's council and the recognition that was granted to the work of the council by the Premier as well. I had the opportunity today to rise in the Assembly and table *Status Report*, the quarterly newsletter of the Premier's council, which certainly is an attempt on the part of the Premier's council to get information out and receive communication back from the disability community.

This particular quarterly report talks at length about the disability strategy discussions throughout the province that are taking place, and communication is a major part of that as well. The council has been out and around the community, the province, talking with the disability community in six different locations during the past few months, seeking input and trying to determine what kind of direction the disability community wants the Premier's council to move in. We have some feedback from them, and we're seeking to carry on and come about with a disability strategy that includes that input.

In this particular issue members would be interested to know that there's a good article by an architect by the name of Ron Wickman, the son of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. This article talks about barrier-free building design, and it talks about parking spaces in parking lots for the disability community members and how best to design those. It's an interesting article, a mechanism for communication that the Premier's council seeks to utilize to give information out and receive information back from the community.

Anybody reading *Hansard* that may wish to get a copy of the Premier's council quarterly news report called *Status Report* can contact the Premier's council by phone at 422-1095 and order a copy. There is also a 1-800 number. The number is 1-800-272-8841, and they can request to be put on the mailing list. Currently the mailing list has about 6,000 addresses to which they're sent out, and that information is received by members of the community.

9:53

The other questions that were asked related in large measure to the use of the Internet and some of the mechanisms whereby people in Alberta are able to access that information. We know that many members even in the Assembly utilize the Internet during the times when we're able to listen and work at the same time and find out information that way. So the Internet certainly has become a very valuable tool. Like one of the members opposite mentioned, certainly in our constituency office for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan it's utilized to a great extent, and we find it to be a very useful tool. Of course, e-mails are another mechanism for quick communication, and we can even do that from within the Assembly, which we really appreciate being able to do.

Web pages, getting those constructed and set up, are a great expense if you hire a professional, but often we can get somebody we know in the community, a volunteer, to set those up, and we can have some really good information accessible, a web page and the linkages that we have to other pages, and then we can work away with community members in getting information from them and delivering information back to them.

The questions that I would have for the Premier regarding the Executive Council business plans, which like the government business plans make references to the needs and priorities of Albertans. I'd like the Premier to comment on how those needs and priorities of Albertans are determined from his perspective, and what he'd like to comment on and let us know about the determination of those needs and priorities. As well, if the Premier could identify

how the government knows that those plans and initiatives are addressing the priorities of Albertans. Those are questions that are important to Albertans, and we know they have a keen interest in hearing what the government has heard from them and how they would see their communication being received. Of course, as I mentioned, the Internet had been talked about by some of the members opposite as being really important. I'd also like to hear to what extent Albertans actually make use of those different types of communication opportunities.

Those questions may take some time to answer, and in fact I would be willing to have those answers in writing if there is not time left. I see that we're near the end of the opportunity to ask and receive questions here today. So in light of that, Madam Chairman, if there is too little time for the Premier's response, I would go along with receiving the answers in writing.

I would ask that the committee rise and report progress, and then we can adjourn debate on the Executive Council estimates.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member. Having heard the motion, does the subcommittee agree that we now rise and report progress?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? It's carried.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 9:57 p.m.]

