

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 9, 2002**

**8:00 p.m.**

Date: 02/04/09

### head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: We'll call the committee to order.

### head: Main Estimates 2002-03

#### Executive Council

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Chairman and hon. members, I am pleased to appear before this committee in my capacity as the minister responsible for Executive Council to discuss the 2002-2003 business plan. There are two main programs under Executive Council. The first one, of course, is the office of the Premier and Executive Council, which includes administrative support to the office of the Lieutenant Governor and the Alberta Order of Excellence Council and the Public Affairs Bureau.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to begin my remarks with an overview of the goals and plans for Executive Council. The goals for Executive Council for the upcoming business planning cycle will continue to be the effective co-ordination of the government's overall goals and strategies and to maintain open communications with Albertans. Much of the work done by Executive Council focuses on teamwork, on ensuring that all government ministries are working together to achieve effective results, particularly in those areas that Albertans have identified as priorities.

Executive Council is also responsible for the Alberta Order of Excellence, which recognizes Albertans who have made an outstanding contribution to the province. Of course, the Lieutenant Governor serves as chancellor of the order.

Another Executive Council responsibility is the protocol office. It used to be under international and intergovernmental affairs but now is under the auspices of Executive Council. This office works to co-ordinate visits from senior international officials and dignitaries. A good example just recently was the delegation today from Mongolia and yesterday from Mpumalanga and various delegations that we've received over the past two or three weeks, including the president of the German Bundestag and many others. So we receive many, many delegations, and the protocol office performs yeoman's service. Of course, Executive Council will continue to ensure that that work is done in the most effective, efficient, and economical way possible.

Relative to the Public Affairs Bureau, Mr. Chairman, a co-ordinated, effective, and efficient service to Albertans is also a focus for the Public Affairs Bureau. The business plan for the bureau identifies four main goals. The first goal is to "increase communications with Albertans in the areas they identify as top priorities." I needn't tell this Assembly what those priorities are: certainly health, education, infrastructure, safe communities, and the list goes on relative to core government businesses.

The second main task is to "make government information more accessible to Albertans."

Third, the bureau strives to "improve the efficiency and coordination of communications across government." That is to make sure that we all know what one another is doing.

Fourthly, to "deliver products and services that allow us to meet or exceed revenue projections" and of course the needs of our customers, and those customers are, indeed, the people of Alberta.

With each of those goals you will find initiatives that bring

effective, co-ordinated, and efficient communications to the forefront.

Initiatives listed under goal 1 highlight the work done in partnership across government to deliver priority programs including cross-ministry initiatives such as the aboriginal policy framework, the Alberta children and youth initiative, the economic development strategy, and the health sustainability initiative. Goal 1 also highlights communications efforts in a number of other priority areas such as fiscal reporting and taxes, workplace safety, education, infrastructure, transportation, and justice. The business plan offers a summary of some of the areas where the bureau's communications staff are assigned to ministries. They will focus their attention on matters pertaining to those particular ministries. This includes ensuring that priority initiatives and announcements are communicated to Albertans in a clear, comprehensive, and timely manner.

The bureau also participates wherever possible in key administrative initiatives such as the Alberta One Window initiative, the corporate human resource development strategy, the Alberta Corporate Service Centre, and the corporate information management and information technology strategy.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to turn now to initiatives listed under goal 2 of the business plan. These goals are designed to both ensure that communications staff have the tools they need to communicate effectively and give Albertans quick and easy access to information. One of these tools, Mr. Chairman, is the Internet. As little as five years ago I don't think anyone could have guessed just how far the Internet would expand in terms of becoming a primary communications source. I'm pleased to inform members that even I have become a regular Internet user. Believe it or not, I said that this is the one thing I would never do, that I would never learn how to run one of those machines. I refused even to find out how to turn one on, but since I did turn one on and since I've learned a little bit about it, I have found it to be an incredibly valuable resource. Believe me, if I can do it, then I believe anyone can. So Albertans are proving that point. Today Alberta is the most wired province in Canada, with more than 60 percent of households using the Internet compared to 48 percent Canada-wide. Actually, we're a world leader when you consider that the Internet household rate in Alberta is higher than the average rates in the United States, Europe, and Australia.

The government is responding to that trend with projects like Supernet, some of the funding for which is coming from lotteries, and with an increased focus on Internet and electronic communications. Bureau communications staff have a role to play in that process as they help ministry clients improve and develop the Internet resources they have to offer Albertans. Bureau staff are responsible for maintaining and designing the Alberta government home page. This fiscal year the page received some 4.7 million visits. That's up from 4.3 million visits last year. That's an incredible number of visits by people who want to know what's going on in various government departments.

Bureau staff will also assist in the development of the Alberta One Window project, which is a project I mentioned earlier. The goal of Alberta One Window is to create a single point of access to government information.

Another direct source of information for government is Alberta Connects, and this is a program that includes both toll-free telephone and Internet resources to ask questions and to comment on government plans, various initiatives, and programs. Again, Albertans are showing an increasing interest in this direct form of communicating. For example, questions and comments through Alberta Connects online are up 60 percent from the year 2000-2001, and yes, even the opposition can use Alberta Connects. It is a wonderful way of getting factual information.

Bureau staff will continue efforts to increase public awareness and use of Alberta Connects as well as another staple communications resource, which of course is the RITE telephone system. This is a system that I think was put in place either in the early '80s or the late '70s, and it proved to be then a tremendous resource for Albertans to reach their MLAs and various departments of government, and it is today even with the advent of the Internet and other communications machinery. The RITE line is a toll-free, provincewide gateway to the Alberta government. Albertans can call RITE to be connected toll free to a government office. If they don't know the number of the office they need, any member of the public can call the toll-free RITE line for assistance from the operator. Last year some 1.3 million callers did just that, and their questions were answered by an operator at RITE's Edmonton and Calgary offices. Initiatives in this business plan will continue to build on RITE as a resource, including making RITE directory listings more efficient and more effective and ensuring that the RITE system is able to respond effectively to caller traffic.

8:10

Another central communications resource for Albertans is the Queen's Printer bookstore. The public can use the bookstore to access government legislation and other publications either on-line or through two locations in Edmonton and Calgary, and like other areas covered in the 2002-2005 business plan, the bookstore will focus on improving efficiency and effectiveness while ensuring that Albertans have easy access to the information they need. This includes looking at the possibility of making the *Alberta Gazette* available on-line, and believe me, it's a lot to read. I don't know why anyone would want to read it – no offence to the lawyers in our caucus and across the way – but it could be interesting reading for someone. It is there, however, in hard copy, and it is there on-line.

Improved efficiency will also come from combining the Calgary offices for RITE and the Queen's Printer bookstore. This move will reduce staffing by one temporary and one permanent position while allowing for more efficient staffing of both services. The change will not reduce customer service in either area.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to conclude my remarks to the committee by giving a brief summary of the projected spending for Executive Council for 2002-2003. We're now in the estimates portion. Total spending for 2002-2003 for Executive Council remains at approximately \$15 million, almost precisely where it was last year, give or take a couple of thousand dollars. As I just mentioned, the estimates also show a reduction in total FTEs for Executive Council. This includes the reduction of two positions from combining the Calgary RITE and the Queen's Printer bookstore offices as well as one position in print services that transfers to the Alberta Corporate Service Centre. I mentioned earlier that the Calgary reductions will not affect client service levels. The same can be said in print services. In fact, moving print services from the bureau to the Alberta Corporate Service Centre will allow for better co-ordination and integration with other purchasing services provided through the centre.

So, Mr. Chairman, that concludes my remarks on Executive Council's business plan for 2002-2005. I'd be glad to answer any questions or to hear any comments my colleagues in the Legislature may have. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be here this evening to discuss the estimates for Executive Council and would certainly like to thank the Premier for his attendance this

evening. He has an incredibly busy schedule, and it's very good to see him here to listen to comments and to answer questions that we have on his department and to have him commit an evening. I know that it would have been more convenient for him to be available in the afternoon, but we try to save most of the afternoon department estimates for some of the larger and perhaps more controversial departments. So thank you for giving up one of your evenings.

In addition to thanking the Premier, we really need to acknowledge the Premier's staff, many of whom are here. Once again the Public Affairs Bureau has had a year of performing miracles, and I think that it's a department of wizards. We just wish that we had them on our side because they seem to be able to spin the government out of some of the most difficult areas.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's called telling the truth.

MS CARLSON: Well, given some of the missteps and how you still come out smelling like a rose, I've got to say that somebody there is helping you out, and I think it's the people sitting up here behind me this evening. So great job. If you ever decide that you want to see a change in government, we'd love to have you for just like two or three months. Then we could do some remarkable changes.

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh, quit dreaming. Quit dreaming.

MS CARLSON: Well, you know, they're pretty good. We think we have some real good ideas, and if they had some actual content to work with, imagine what could happen.

MS CALAHASEN: They do have content. Look at this.

MS CARLSON: Yeah. It's a little shaky, though, sometimes; I've got to tell you. [interjections] They're all awake now. You've got to admit that there have been a few missteps the last little while which are reflected in the polls, so that's interesting. [interjection] Well, yes. Let's talk about it. If you want to talk about the most recent by-election, the government . . . [some applause] And congratulations to your new member, who we will soon see joining us here in this Assembly. You can bet that we will be keeping track of those promises he made, if in fact he can actually deliver on them. I heard lots of those promises, and I tell you, he's going to need lots of help from you guys. So it will be interesting to see what happens over the next year. Particularly what I liked was the one where he said that if the Premier didn't listen to him, he was going to have at least 500 of his constituents phone directly and write letters to the Premier to say that he should acknowledge what he's talking about. So that's going to be very interesting. [interjections] Yeah, you all do that. I don't think so. Oh, this is part of the 4.7 million visits?

AN HON. MEMBER: That's the RITE line.

MS CARLSON: Now I get it. Well, good luck, you guys. It doesn't seem to be working. I don't think it's going to work too well for him either. Anyway, it will be interesting to see as we grade him on his performance in terms of compliance with promises, but of course he will have an excellent department to go to to help him communicate to his constituents why he can't actually deliver. So that will be interesting to see.

You know, when we talk about the missteps that we've seen the government go through lately, it's interesting to see the way the communications were delivered. I'm surprised that the dollars for Infrastructure that were given to Edmonton and Calgary within 48 hours of the budget having been announced were done in that

fashion. I know, I understand the accounting principles in terms of why you did it very well, but what I don't understand is the communication plan that was used there, because clearly you knew ahead of time that there was a pocket of money. It makes me wonder if you weren't just waiting to see where the greatest problems or issues would be for the budget before you announced them. I would have thought that a good communication plan would have announced some days before the budget that there was a pocket of money that was going to be available at the end of the fourth quarter and that you would be assigning it to whatever. So it's interesting to see that you handled it the way you did, because it certainly did look like a flip-flop.

That was, I think, on your part unfortunate. People didn't like that too much. It does tarnish the credibility of the government to some extent. It also enhanced a belief in rural Alberta that this government has a highway 2 mentality, where they focus on those large centres that are on the highway 2 corridor and areas closely surrounding the highway 2 corridor and forget about the rest of the province. We heard a lot of that in the by-election, and it was reinforced by the way the money was distributed there. So I wouldn't mind having the Premier comment on that and on what kind of a communication strategy he thinks he'll implement in the future to address that problem, because I tell you, it was a very real concern. Those 3,000 government supporters that stayed home in the by-election were pretty vocal about their concerns.

8:20

There's also a boondoggle that it will be interesting to see how this government spins out of. Yes, a boondoggle, and that would be the Supernet. The Premier talked about that as being one of the great bonuses for the province, and I think the concept was a great idea, but the fact is that it's already obsolete. If you talk to many of the centres who have the Supernet in and accessible now, they're not using it, because it isn't the fastest or the best technology. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Centre wants to particularly address that issue, so I will leave it for her more complete review. I expect that as we're probably going to recess quite early this spring, we will have quite a bit of time in the latter half of this spring and this summer to do some research. I know the Supernet is on my list to take a good look at, because I don't think we got the bang for the buck on that one. I would expect that your Public Affairs Bureau is going to spend some time developing a strategy to communicate how you could waste so many dollars on something that's obsolete and that in fact people aren't utilizing to any great effect in their regions. So it will be interesting to see how that goes.

I'd like to spend a few moments, if I can, on the Auditor General's report. This is the annual report from 2000-2001 that I'm taking a look at. When I went to take a look at this book, I was a little surprised that there is even anything more than a very cursory mention of Executive Council. The department is primarily a communications department, it seems like there wouldn't be all that much for the Auditor General to comment on. Surprisingly, there was an ongoing issue that the Auditor General referred to again that I would like the Premier or his staff at some point in time to comment on in terms of whether they've got full compliance, and that was with regard to academic health recommendations that were repeated in that year. The Auditor General talked about repeating "recommendations concerning academic health, previously reported under the Ministry of Learning" and repeating them here "because it is unclear [to the Auditor General] who should be responsible for implementing them."

That in itself is somewhat interesting because the Premier referred in his opening comments to one of the key mandates of this depart-

ment being to ensure that there is effective co-ordination between the departments themselves so that everybody knows what's going on. Yet the Auditor General, who has a very key part in overseeing and being the watchdog of government, was unclear on who should be responsible for these particular recommendations, having gone to the Ministry of Learning and not having been able to have them satisfactorily complied with.

So in terms of the Council of Academic Health Centres of Alberta under the byline of governance and accountability, we have the Auditor General's recommendation 9 for this time period where he recommended that

Executive Council assign responsibility for implementation of our prior year recommendations that:

- those who manage and fund academic health activities acknowledge the full scope and magnitude of those activities and the consequences for the accountability of academic health centres
- the entity or entities responsible for academic health, and their mandates, roles, and accountabilities be clearly defined and, on this basis, the appropriate organization and governance structure be established.

So that's the recommendation, and he goes on to spend some time explaining the recommendation.

He talked about these having been included in the '98-99 annual report. In the annual report in '99 they were recommendations number 18 and 19, and for the universities of Alberta and Calgary in the last year's annual report, 2000, that was recommendation 39. He went on to state that "in both years the government accepted the recommendations," which is good. That's the first step in terms of compliance. But he goes on to state that he's repeating them again because he had "evidence of only limited progress in addressing the major risks in academic health." So that's quite interesting, that two years running we've got a series of three recommendations that were accepted in principle and then not fully acted on. Then to the extent that the Auditor General took those recommendations out of Learning and put them into Executive Council, which is the Premier's responsibility and really the communication arm of the government, that is interesting in itself. To me that indicates that the Auditor General found this to be relatively serious in nature, so I think it certainly warrants some concerns, and we would like to know how far along Executive Council is in being able to meet this particular recommendation. More than just accepting it, what actual actions have been taken, and is there full compliance at this time?

The Auditor General went on to talk about academic health as a partnership with a variety of councils and centres, medical facilities, academic physicians, and health authorities. He lists what they actually do and then goes on to talk about the serious risks that academic health faces. Those of us who knew this Auditor General knew that he was soft-spoken and not given to using strong language, particularly in the recommendations, unless he felt that there was some serious deficit. And when he goes on to say "serious risks," then we know that he more than perhaps other people should be taken very seriously and that he saw this as a concern that should be addressed.

When you go on to read the concerns that he listed, you'll see that they're the kinds of concerns that were very fundamental to his understanding of the necessary elements that government needs to have in order to comply with the kinds of outcomes that he expected from a government. One of those was a lack of understanding among stakeholders of the scope of academic health and a lack of transparency of funding. So both are quite interesting and quite serious in nature: the scope of academic health and the lack of transparency in funding.

Now, lack of transparency is a serious problem when you talk

about governments, and this Premier has made a commitment to transparency in government throughout his mandate. It's interesting to see here that this wasn't a problem that was fixed during the course of the audit, which sometimes can happen. Transparency of funding was in fact a problem carried on for three years. So I hope that particularly that issue has been addressed, and we would expect some sort of answer to that.

Now, any of these answers the Premier may or may not be able to give tonight. Some of them are technical or more detailed in nature, and he may or may not have the actual information at his fingertips. We would be quite happy to have the information come to us in writing at some time in the future.

The Auditor General also listed lack of information on the financial status of these centres as being a problem, and that is surprising as well. I remember when I was first elected to this Legislature and my very first question in Public Accounts was to the education minister of the day. I asked him what his budget was, and that initiated quite a bit of to-and-fro between him and his senior staff because apparently when he came back to respond, he said that there wasn't really a budget. I said: "No, no. You didn't understand my question. What was your budget for the past year?" He said to me: "No, no. You didn't understand my answer. There was no budget." Well, this government – I have to give it credit – has come a long way from those days. We see budgets coming forth. We don't see budgets that last for a full 12 months. There are all kinds of surpluses built into the budgets and re-evaluations of how expenses are compiled, and what I would consider to be serious issues, but there are budgets and there are business plans, and that's a step forward. So it's interesting to see that in this particular area the Auditor General recommends that there was a "lack of information on the financial status of the centres." So we hope that that has been rectified and look forward to the answer on that.

8:30

"Inequities in physician remuneration." That's quite interesting as well. When we see human resources being a large component of this government's functions – and certainly there is some spillover of that in this particular department – it's very surprising to see that there are inequities in remuneration, because I would have thought that there would have been standard kinds of grids and information that was accessible that would ensure that these things were done in an equitable fashion. Not in this case, I guess, and we hope that that's also been rectified. If we could find out what exactly was the basis of the former problems in this area, that would also be helpful to us.

The fourth point that the Auditor General lists here, the final point, is: "dependence on external funding of activities that generate administrative infrastructure costs." We would like some explanation of that, Mr. Chairman, and also some information on whether or not this dependence on external funding is still there, what the reason was for having that, and what has happened as a result of that. That's very interesting information here, and we hope that it's been rectified this year.

The Auditor General went on to talk about the estimates of the 1997-1998 cost of academic health at \$350 million, 70% of which was ultimately funded in various ways by the Province. Accountability for the use of this substantial amount of public funds is seriously lacking.

He goes on to talk about how some of the issues "have progressed" but that in fact "no one has assumed leadership" in this area. So we would like some information on what's happened there. Because of the lack of leadership which he expected, I believe, to have come from either the council or the Learning department, he has kicked the concern up a notch to Executive Council and addresses the

recommendation to all the stakeholders through Executive Council. So I'm sure that the Premier has seen this and has made some progress in terms of this issue.

Also, very interestingly enough, the Auditor General had a reservation of opinion on these financial statements "because capital assets costing less than \$15,000 are expensed and are not recognized as assets in the Ministry financial statements." That clearly is a breach of generally accepted accounting principles, so we have a few questions on that. Why does the department do that? Does it continue to do that? Can we have a list of the kinds of assets that normally would have been expensed rather than capitalized and some overall justification for their having done that? It seems very strange indeed. It's been a tradition not to really have capital investment in this department, but clearly there should have been.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. [interjection] According to the Standing Orders, the first hour is allocated to a member of Executive Council and members of the opposition. In the second hour every other member is able to ask.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, Mr. Premier, for appearing and being present for our questions. I appreciate the time you're taking out of your schedule. I know it's a busy one. I will join my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie in welcoming and thanking the staff that's appearing in the gallery. They're a great bunch and they always do their work with good humour and great skill, and I appreciate that both as an MLA and as a citizen.

Now a couple of different areas that I would like to touch on. I'm hoping that I may be able to return after some other speakers and ask additional questions, but for now what I'd like to do is talk about the responses to the Auditor General's recommendations. I'd like to talk about the performance measurements and the targets that are set out, some discussion on the Internet and the web sites that are available, some points raised about the Public Affairs Bureau, and also your human resource strategy.

When I look at the Budget 2002 Fiscal Plan document, at the very back is the response to the Auditor General from the government, and when I look specifically at recommendations that were targeted to the Executive Council, I find a couple. Two of them are under Cross-Government. I know that my colleague has already detailed what the concerns were that were raised by the Auditor General, but here I'm looking at what the government's response has been to that, and I'm looking for a bit more detail on what's being anticipated here or in some cases has in fact already been completed.

The first recommendation on cross-government standards for business cases was that "Executive Council work with other ministries to develop standards for [their] business cases." This is usually the sort of "what if?" worst case scenario, and one of the examples I've used in the past is around the Supernet. You know, what happens if in all of your plans for the Supernet, the company that was going to run the wire or implement it all of a sudden went bankrupt and wasn't available to do the work? What was the business case that was developed to deal with that kind of scenario so that the government wasn't out too much in its planning or its money and everyone else wasn't inconvenienced? The government response in fact says that this recommendation has been accepted and that "standards will be developed and implemented with the assistance of the Deputy Ministers by March 2002." So in fact, according to this document, these standards for business cases have already been developed, and I would like to hear what they are. If that is too much detail to be asking for or to be expecting the

Premier to know off the top of his head, I'd be happy to receive that information in writing.

Likewise, the other cross-government recommendation that was made also pertains quite specifically to Executive Council, and that was that

the Deputy Minister of Executive Council, the Alberta Corporate Service Centre and Ministries take immediate action to develop and sign service level agreements that detail the services to be provided by the Centre, the associated costs and performance measures.

In fact, again there is a response from the minister. It says that the recommendation was accepted and that "revised service level agreements will be in place for 2002-03." So is that work in progress, or has it happened? What exactly is it?

Now, when I look further under specific recommendations that were made regarding Executive Council, there's really only one here, although it's a fairly intense recommendation from the Auditor General. Again, my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie has gone through this, so I really want to concentrate once again on the government's response to this. In fact, the government did accept the recommendation from the Auditor General, which is: "Responsibility for implementing these recommendations will be assigned and prior year's recommendations will be implemented by March 31, 2002." So, again, the work's been done. It must be available to the Premier and/or his staff at this point. Could I find out what that was exactly and what's come out of that? Again, it's certainly acceptable to respond to that in writing as it may be some detailed plans.

8:40

Now the performance measures. I've become a performance measure keener since I came here and once had a very good session with the Auditor General's staff, who were very good in explaining to me what we were trying to attempt by using performance measurements. I have to say that this government does provide an example for other governments both in Canada and elsewhere in the world in its attempt to move to an accountability model. Where performance measurements in fact are set out, there are targets to be achieved. My concern in what the government has done to attain this is that it's sort of ground to a halt. It came out of the gates, out of the chute in the mid-90s developing all of these performance measurements and targets and goals and objectives. All of that was wonderful, but then nothing has ever proceeded beyond it. Performance measurements are difficult animals to get right, and they do require quite a bit of revision and evaluation and retesting, monitoring, and adjustment as they go along. Everywhere I look I see the same thing. The first performance measurements came out and, essentially, stopped. There doesn't seem to have been any attempt to fine-tune this in any way.

One of the methods that the government uses repeatedly that I find less than useful is this use of satisfaction polls, which does not provide us with the real information about whether the service that is trying to be provided in a given ministry is achieving what was set out. It's merely a measurement of whether somebody thinks they're satisfied. Well, you can set it up that anything is satisfied.

I was particularly surprised when I looked under the Public Affairs Bureau core businesses and found that I think every single one but one is satisfaction based. So under the core business of "help government ministries communicate with Albertans," we have a couple of goals, and the measures are "public satisfaction with government communications in priority areas" and "government client satisfaction." Again, this isn't really telling us whether there is good communication with Albertans. There has been some sort of survey, some kind of opinion poll that says: are you satisfied? Well, that's not giving us good information to work from, and I was disappointed to see that in fact that's still happening.

When I look further at how the targets are working under your key performance measurements, in fact I can link it to the same core business and goal. We had a target that was developed in '99-2000. The actual in that year was 66 percent, and again this is a sort of satisfaction level. The following year it dropped by some six points. For the following years, 2000-01 and 2001-02, the target was 75 percent. We don't have a forecast here on what was expected to have been reached by the end of the 2001-2002 year, and then we just continue to have the same target of 75 percent.

So I'm seeing that all the good work that was started to try and develop a measurement and evaluation system has sort of ground to a halt. You know, you had one measurement, the next year the actual dropped in percentage points, and then there's just been a straight, you know, going from 58 percent in 2000-2001 to a target of 75 percent from then on. Why was that done? Why is it considered that it could go from 58 percent to 75 percent and then stay there forevermore? What was being done? It's not a useful measurement, I think, for either the department or for the public to be looking at what's happened, and I don't find that satisfaction polls are ever useful. If we're really trying to measure whether there's good communication out into the public, helping the government ministries communicate with Albertans, well, are we looking at how many Albertans actually know what goes on in a given area? Are we finding out whether Albertans are having difficulty accessing anything, and therefore what could be done to make that access easier or better rather than just saying, "Are you satisfied with this"? You know, you give me enough incentive and I suppose I'd be satisfied with just about anything. If you phone me at suppertime, I'd be satisfied right away if you'd just get off the phone and let me go back to my dinner. So I'm urging the Premier with this department under him to go back to work.

MS CARLSON: What kind of polling should he have?

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, I don't think it should be polling. I think what needs to happen – and this is a long and I'll admit that it can be a very painful process in trying to develop a useful measurement tool. I don't think that opinion polls are a useful measurement tool for how a given ministry is doing its work at any time unless the goal of the department is to have, you know, a satisfied public, and even that doesn't tell you what they're satisfied about.

There are some interesting choices that are made here that aren't explained, so maybe I could get some explanation about the choices that were made. You notice that the RITE telephone system and the Queen's Printer bookstore measure is "linked to core business two and goal two . . . using the RITE telephone system to access government and obtain information" and also rates the ability to access information and materials provided and the "value of products sold" through the bookstore. Okay. So we go from 96 percent in the year '98-99. It drops to 95 the following year, goes back up to 96 – and that's an actual – and then it's targeted at 98 percent. Well, what does the ministry expect to do to raise itself by that 2 percent? That's not explained, and why 98 percent? If you're going for 98 percent, go for a hundred. I mean, there's just a lack of follow-through here. That's what's bothering me. You know, a lot of work was done and a lot of people worked really hard to develop a business plan approach to government in this province, and I'm looking for the follow-through that would give us the really useful tool in the end.

I could go through each one of these one by one, but I don't think that's useful at this point. I think I've made my point, and I'm sure that the Premier will get back to me, and I'm going to move on to some of the other areas that I had concerns with.

The Premier spoke about the Internet, and I'm wondering just on the record whether there are any consultations or plans or departmental work groups that are considering Internet regulation. I'd be interested to know what progress has been made on that, what kinds of considerations have been made by the government as to how it wishes to license or control the Internet. Maybe it's not interested at all. In that case, I'd like to get that on the record. As part of that and probably linking it across government way with the Department of Gaming, has there been a consideration about controlling of Internet gaming? I attended a conference on gaming indirectly sponsored by the government in early March, and there was a lot of talk there about Internet gaming. Of course, it's not tied down to any spot on terra firma, so how does one regulate it? Nonetheless, there are a number of countries now that are actively looking at how to regulate it just because it has such an effect upon its people, and some, in fact, have regulated it.

8:50

Now, the second thing I want to talk about – and again this was brought up by the Premier – is the Supernet. I'd be really interested in seeing a more full-blown report on the Supernet, because I'm getting increasingly suspicious. This whole project is beginning to look very large and very white and probably with a long trunk and a small tail, and it might even be particularly fond of peanuts. I am deeply suspicious about this one.

There are a couple of points around this. For starters, something that I had pointed out right from the beginning is that the province's commitment was to run the Supernet to the outside wall of the municipal buildings, libraries, schools, et cetera, throughout Alberta. That has always been a problem, because with the corresponding cuts to the municipalities, to the school boards, to the libraries, to the RHAs, none of these groups had the ability, had the extra cash to be able to take the wiring from the outside of their walls, drill through the walls, up the stairs, down the corridor, and to the computer. Then you have to start looking at the additional cost of the computer that's going to be of the technology to match the Supernet, and then you're going to have to have the software programs that go with it. So even at this point, if the Supernet's little wires were tickling the outside walls of a library somewhere in Irma, the library doesn't have the money to be able to make this work. So how effective is that?

MS CARLSON: Even if they could, it's better accessed by cable now.

MS BLAKEMAN: And that's the second part. My very clever associate from Edmonton-Ellerslie is just pointing out to me that there is now a real issue about whether the Supernet is obsolete in fact, whether we're not being better accessed through a cable system. At this point I guess my question is: how much money have we spent on this? I have serious doubts that the little wires are ever actually going to connect to any other little wires, so the whole Supernet will have been a very expensive . . .

MS CARLSON: Job creation program.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, job creation, and I would have said public relations campaign as well with no concrete outcome.

I know that the government would not have gone into this without expecting to complete it, and obviously they were very proud of the whole concept of this, but I've been asking these questions. This is my third year now, and I have serious doubts as to whether we're ever going to see this.

DR. TAYLOR: I answered them in your first year, and you're still asking them.

MS BLAKEMAN: No, I didn't get an answer the first year. As usual we have the Minister of Environment loving to heckle into the debate without ever actually getting up. Actually, in about 10 minutes, as soon as I finish speaking, he will be able to join in the debate, and I look forward to what he has to bring to it.

So I would like some answers and some overview about what is happening with that Supernet. Is there a way to save it at this point? Can there be another way of approaching this, or has a whole bunch of money been spent and nothing is going to come of it? There were a lot of promises made. I think it is a good idea, and I think that in a province where we have concentrations of population as we do but then we have very vital centres out there in the rural areas that we want to communicate with and we want to have working with us and up to speed, so to speak – I don't want to see this project fail, but I have the feeling that it's going to. So could I get some information about that, please?

The Premier mentioned high usage in Alberta. Now, I've recently heard 61 percent. I'm not sure if I heard that from the Premier tonight but high usage definitely. Is the Premier aware of whether that high usage is in fact individual households or whether it's just usage, period, in the province? I wonder, given the amount of high-tech business that we're encouraging in the province and also the number of computers that must be used in those office towers in Calgary directing all that oil around . . . [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired] I will come back and finish this.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Hon. Premier, would you like to respond at this stage?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Chairman, some questions I can respond to, and others will be dealt with either in written form or when the appropriate ministers appear before Committee of Supply.

Relative to the so-called highway 2 mentality – although it has nothing to do with my estimates – no such mentality exists other than perhaps someone driving down highway 2, and if they get locked into a mentality relative to the highway, I guess that's one of the manifestations of driving, but it has nothing to do with politics whatsoever. If you will look at the 74 members of this caucus, they come from all corners of the province, and very few of them are along highway 2. As a matter of fact, they're all over, in every corner of the province. You know, I could say the same about the Liberal caucus. With the exception of one they must have an Edmonton mentality, because they're all confined to Edmonton. No, Mr. Chairman, we don't have a highway 2 mentality. We have an Alberta mentality. An Alberta mentality. That's why we're the government.

Relative to Supernet, I alluded to Supernet as a magnificent project to wire the province. The hon. minister will be appearing, as I understand, before the Committee of Supply and has indicated to me that he'll be very happy to answer all of the questions that have been asked relative to this particular project and respond to the allegations, I believe unfounded in many cases, with respect to the value and the worth of the Internet project. I'm sure that the opposition Liberals will have patience and await his reply.

Relative to the Auditor General's comments re the academic health issue, I have the report of the Auditor General here. It's quite detailed and it's quite lengthy, but I will undertake to get a written answer.

One interesting observation that was made alludes to the Public Affairs Bureau and their measuring of outcomes and recording the

levels of satisfaction. It actually started in about 1998, and we started to do that as the result of the Liberal opposition of the day accusing the government of having no record or no list to show a measure of outcome, so this was developed. Indeed, it is very, very telling if you take some time to read the figures, especially going back to 2000-2001, and I'm talking about key performance measures relative to "public satisfaction with government communications in priority areas." Those priority areas are health and education, infrastructure, children's services, and so on, a number of other core businesses.

Mr. Chairman, this is very, very hard to assess, because everything that we do in this Legislature – in the Legislature – is political, and everything that we attempt to do is opposed. There is something very, very interesting in these figures, and figures are worth while if you take the time to read and interpret those figures. It says that in the year 2000-2001 there was 58 percent satisfaction with government communications in priority areas. One of those areas was health. I would remind the Liberal Party that in the year 2000, heading into the 2000 election, there was probably one of the most massive, deliberate campaigns of misinformation that I've ever experienced in my political life relative to Bill 11. Yes, we tried to get the facts out. We tried to get the truth out. We used all the mechanisms that were available to us to get legitimate facts out and bring some legitimacy to the argument. The emotional claptrap – I can't think of any other word – of the Liberals and the NDs was hard to overcome, but if you look at what happened as we neared the 2001 election, people started to believe. Of course, the manifestation of it all, of the misinformation campaign and the manifestation of a good, true, honest campaign of solid information, was the election in March of 2001, when this government got 74 out of 83 seats. That is effective communication, and that is the way you read figures. No wonder they don't like these figures, because those figures decimated the Liberal Party in 2001 to seven members. So the figures are valid. I can understand why they don't like the figures. I mean, if I were sitting over there, I wouldn't like the figures either.

9:00

Relative to the question vis-a-vis the Internet and Internet regulation, again, it's not in my estimates, but one of the hon. members alluded to it. We do indeed have consumer protection legislation as it relates to products advertised on the Internet and purchases made through the Internet. I understand from the hon. Minister of Government Services that the legislation that was developed in Alberta is being used as a template for similar legislation being enacted across this country, Mr. Chairman. I'm told that we do have more than adequate legislation and regulation in place to protect consumers from Internet scams.

So those were all the questions that were asked, and those are all the answers I have to provide. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Hon. members, for the rest of the hour any other hon. member of this Assembly is able to stand up and ask questions, and the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar has indicated that he wishes to speak.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was just going to make a few comments on the record with regards to some of the comments from across the way. First of all, I'm glad that we also have this opportunity to rise and to talk in Committee of Supply and especially to address the areas of Executive Council. I would agree that it's great to see the Premier here tonight, and it's just too bad that the Leader of the Official Opposition isn't here as well.

MS BLAKEMAN: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is rising on a point of order.

#### Point of Order

##### Referring to the Absence of Members

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am aware that you may not have caught that, but certainly it's well known that in this Assembly we don't comment on the presence or absence of any given member. Perhaps he could be corrected.

REV. ABBOTT: Mr. Chairman, I apologize. That was completely uncalled for. Oh, look; he's coming into the Assembly now as we speak.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar has apologized. You can proceed now, sir.

#### Debate Continued

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it would be important, though, to point out that as the Premier talked about the \$15 million budget and how that has either stayed the same or actually decreased, we see that there are a lot of efficiencies happening within the Executive Council. We see that as the efficiencies are happening, the satisfaction levels are going up. In fact, the members across the way did mention the excellent work of the Public Affairs Bureau. They mentioned what a good job they're doing, and I'm glad to see that they could mention that, because the fact of the matter is that most of what we hear from across the way is very, very negative. In fact, in the last year I have to stress my disappointment in how all that seems to happen, especially during Committee of Supply, is that all we hear is negativity and all we hear is just endless, endless talk about nothing. It would be nice to have an effective opposition that would bring up some serious points so that we can answer some of these questions.

But getting back to the topic, the performance measurements, as you can see, are very, very high. That's one of the things that I really like about this Executive Council business plan here as I look at it. All the departments strive to meet the highest performance measurements. As we can see, over the past three years, the ones that we have recorded here, they've been able to meet those. These three-year plans also are something that I know the constituents of Drayton Valley-Calmar are very interested in. They like this. They like to know where the government is going. Again, it seems that we have either met or exceeded in many cases the performance measures that have been laid out.

I look into the estimates here in the area of goal 1, to "increase communications with Albertans in the areas they identify as top priorities," and see the eighth bullet, where it talks about:

Continue the dialogue with Albertans on all priority areas related to kindergarten to grade 12 and post-secondary learning; work with student groups to improve awareness, access to and planning for post-secondary supports; improve information provided to parents related to curriculum and other areas.

It's great to see this, and it's great to see this government and this Premier committed to education.

I know that this topic came up this morning in some of our discussions, and the Premier outlined the fact that he has completed his grade 12, that he's completed his college, that he's now in university, and that he personally is committed to improving his own education. In fact, he's even proven that in his great abilities that he has displayed and demonstrated in his use of computers, Mr.

Chairman. It's excellent leadership that I know many Albertans are following. I know that, again, the people of my constituency are glad to know that our Premier is committed to high-quality education and that he himself is a part of that process.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to end with just a general comment on being wired, saying that our province is 60 percent wired. Again, I know that that leads the country. To hear that 4.7 million hits on the government web site through Alberta Connects and through the Public Affairs Bureau, et cetera, have happened is something great. I know, again, that it's the Premier's office that is leading the way in making those connections available, and as the Premier alluded to, the only highway 2 mentality that he holds is the two-way street on communications that he has very excellently outlined for us this evening.

So, Mr. Chairman, in conclusion I'd just like to say that I hope we don't hear further unfounded and unsubstantiated negative comments from the Liberals, because we know exactly where those are leading, and we know exactly what they have done for them in the past.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, are you rising on a point of order?

MS BLAKEMAN: No. I don't think that's necessary at this point.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

9:10

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. Well, that was very sweet from the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. I actually thought the Premier was doing very well in defending his department. I didn't think that he really needed a champion, but it was darn nice of the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar to get up and just try and pitch strikes for his boss. [interjection] Yeah, hat tricks and flip-flops. That'd be interesting to see.

Well, just a couple more points that I wanted to make or questions that I had around what the Premier had raised already. I think we're doing very well as a government and as a Legislature with the information that we're putting out on the web sites. I know there's great competition between the different ministries about who has the better web site, and there are pools and bets and all kinds of things that go on about who has the best one. Fine. I'm finding this very helpful both in my constituency office and in being able to refer my constituents to get direct information off various ministry web sites. I think we've actually done a pretty good job in that.

I particularly am using and enjoying and very proud of what we've done on the Legislative Assembly web site. For the first time constituents, citizens in Alberta are now able to have a look at bills that have been proposed in the House within a 24-hour time period. They can go to the Assembly web site and pull down that menu and download and print off any bill that has been brought forward in the House, that has been tabled in the House, which is excellent.

I think one of the most important things that we do in here is find out what our constituents are thinking, what's important to them, and to get their feedback and establish a feedback loop with them about new legislation that's being proposed in the Assembly. This is excellent. I'm able to phone or send out an e-mail to different groups that have expressed an interest to me on a given subject in the past and say: "That bill is up now. It was introduced today. Go to the Assembly web site." They can print it off themselves and then e-mail me their feedback on it, which is excellent.

I'm certainly supportive of any attempt to get the *Alberta Gazette* on-line. I realize that this is not a particularly easy task. One of the issues that I have brought up many times in the past here and will continue to bring up is how difficult it is for citizens to access and to understand what's happening with orders in council and particularly with regulations being introduced and changes in regulations. If you're not part of this Assembly – and I think probably even for some people that are part of this Assembly – being on top of when regulations have been changed that affect the interpretation of a given statute is very hard. I think that to have the *Alberta Gazette* on-line would be a very valuable service, and I certainly encourage the department and the Premier to pursue that.

Two other points I wanted to touch on briefly. Another very useful program that Public Affairs Bureau had was the calendar that they produced, the special-days calendar. I notice that it's no longer going to be produced by Public Affairs Bureau. Now, perhaps I've missed this and it's gone to another department or someone else is doing this, but the last time I downloaded it, which was a couple of days ago – it used to come through visitor services – there was a little note on the bottom that says that Public Affairs Bureau is no longer doing this. This is the one where it says: this month is national lung cancer month and daffodil month, this day is soil conservation day, and this is such-and-such a week. I certainly used it a lot. It was a very valuable source also for other groups to be able to quickly access all of these bits of information about what special day it is. That seems to have disappeared, so I'm wondering why. Maybe I was the only person using it. I'd be interested in knowing if the service has been cut. If it has, why? What was the usage of it? If it went somewhere else, where did it go? I haven't been able to discover that.

Now, the last point I wanted to talk about. When we look under goal 3, "improve the efficiency and coordination of communications across government" – I'm on page 152 of the business plan – the second bullet is talking about building "on the human resource programs and supports available to staff" and achieving "goals set out in the Corporate Human Resource Development Strategy," and this is including the Alberta government ambassador program, training, and the corporate executive development initiative. I'm wondering if the Premier can expand a bit on any new initiatives that are taking place under this section, or is this carrying on with what was put in place previously?

I know that we're in an odd situation in that we need good people in our civil service to support the work that we're doing but more importantly to support and provide the programming and services to the citizens of Alberta, and at the same time the government is fighting against an impression that the bureaucracy is not an efficient deliverer of service, that there's red tape. You know, there are all kinds of negative connotations involved with the civil service there. So, on the one hand, we know that we need really good people, but it seems to have a very bad reputation right now. We've also lost, you know, the government has cut, a lot of staff positions. The Premier himself was just talking about dropping one or two FTEs, full-time equivalents, in this budget year. So these programs are put in place to start to turn that around and to highlight the good work that was being done. I'm looking for an update on this. Are we looking at any new initiatives here, or is this a stay the course sort of year that we're in right now?

Under the core businesses and goals that particular goal ends up with government client satisfaction as the measurement, which again is one that the target for 2001-02 to 2004-05 is 75 percent, and once again it's some sort of satisfaction poll, so this is not, I think, as useful as it could be both to the government department and to the public that is interested in monitoring this.

So those are the additional questions and points that I wanted to raise with the Premier, and I'm perfectly willing to accept the responses in writing.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It has been terrific to watch the debate so far. I'm sorry that I was a bit late. I was at a meeting at a school in my constituency. Actually, it's in one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods of Edmonton, and they were struggling over how they're going to afford computers to hook up to the Supernet when it arrives. So, anyway, I did miss . . .

MR. KLEIN: What school? I'm going to go there and find out.

DR. TAFT: The school is Laurier Heights.

MR. KLEIN: I'll make a note of that.

DR. TAFT: They'll be delighted actually. They asked me tonight to raise the issue, so I am delighted. I'll contact them tomorrow.

MS BLAKEMAN: Instant turnaround.

DR. TAFT: Yeah, that's performance. Thank you, Mr. Premier.

I'm not sure how we got into the Supernet discussion. I won't dwell on that, but it's a good concept. I, like my colleagues here, am concerned about the execution, and I'm hearing worries about how it's going to come off, but I'm sure that we will be reassured.

It was interesting also that the Premier raised Bill 11 from a couple of years ago and the role of the public communications branch in that and the expenditures and how the government was able to maintain a 58 percent approval rating, I think, throughout that process. I would be delighted to learn, if we can go back there, what the expenditures of the government were on its whole campaign around Bill 11.

9:20

MR. KLEIN: Nowhere near the expenditures of the unions, the Liberals, the NDs, and all the friends of who, what? Title, and where and why.

DR. TAFT: Well, the people being held accountable tonight are the government. At least, we're trying to hold the government accountable. So that's one of my questions. I didn't initially raise Bill 11, but I'm interested in it. I always will be.

I'm now switching to the business plans, and just a few things have caught my eye as I've gone through the business plans for the Executive Council. On page 151 there is goal 1, which is to "increase communications with Albertans in the areas they identify as top priorities." The third bullet talks about:

Assist in the communications and promotion of key economic development plans included in the government's Economic Development Strategy, such as industry diversification.

We're all, I think, concerned about diversification in the Alberta economy and our dependence on the oil and gas industries for government revenues and for job creation in general. I'm concerned about the accuracy of some statements from time to time that have been raised on this issue, and I'm thinking back to a couple of very bold government statements made last year in terms of the idea that the Alberta economy was no longer reliant on the petroleum industry for stability, that we had outgrown the petroleum industry, and that it was no longer the core of Alberta's economy. In fact, I think that

recent events have shown that it is. So I would encourage as much accuracy and precision as possible in the implementation of that particular goal.

Moving through some of the other issues here. I'm sure that the Premier still has a southern office, but I don't believe that there are any details broken out for that office in the budget here. So I'd be interested to know what the expenses are for the Premier's southern office, what they're proposed to be for this year, how that would compare to last year, and, along that line, how many FTEs were employed in the southern office last year as compared to how many are planned to be employed this year. Just to get a little bit more detail.

As well, on the issue of detail and clarity I haven't gone and compared it to every other department, but I suspect that it's the case. Every other department has a line item for the deputy minister's office in that department, but the estimates on Executive Council do not have details on the chief of staff office for the Premier. So it would be useful to have that information, and it would be consistent, then, with all the departments across the government. That would be a bit of useful information.

There's also curiously – surely it's the smallest number in the entire set of estimates. Under Revenue, page 175, premiums, fees, and licences for 2000-01 actual were \$1,000. I'm just curious to know how the Executive Council would earn \$1,000. Then the other category under that is Other Revenue, which is estimated at being \$2 million for this year. Other revenue: other compared to what? There's no other here. We have no clue at all on page 175 what's included in other revenues. Normally other revenue is sort of a catchall after listing several categories. When other revenue is the only category, then it's just a very curious kind of entry. So if the Premier could tell us what other revenue is, that would be useful.

I think that that's enough. My remarkable colleagues from Edmonton-Centre and Edmonton-Ellerslie have carried the debate very effectively, and if we get answers to questions we've had, I'm sure we'll be delighted. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the hon. member for his questions and his comments.

Mr. Chairman, relative to oil and gas I have said on many occasions that our dependency on that resource is reducing and that we are no longer as dependent on oil and gas today as we were perhaps 10 or 15 years ago, when it used to account for about I believe it was 40 percent of the province's total revenue. That's down now to about 20 percent, and there has been tremendous diversification. That's not to say that oil and gas is not important to the economy. Indeed, it still is the engine that drives the economy along with agriculture. These are the two primary industries in the province of Alberta. But we are moving and making great strides to diversify our economy, including the oil and gas industry, by adding value to oil and natural gas products. The petrochemical industry: if you go through Joffre and see what's happening there or Fort Saskatchewan, if you see what's happening in the oil sands, you will see tremendous diversification as it relates to cogeneration relative to the development of power.

Oil and gas are extremely important to the province, but there has been tremendous diversification. Yes, relative to the revenues it still has tremendous impact, especially gas, and we saw the effects of that last year in particular, maybe a little over a year ago, when the price of natural gas went to I think an all-time high of about \$10. So it has an impact on the economy, and it has an impact on our provincial budgeting, but we are diversifying, and we're doing it, I think, very effectively.

I'm so happy that the hon. member got around to the estimates, because that's what I thought Committee of Supply was all about: the estimates. He did ask relative to the southern office and who works there. I can only speak to the Executive Council staff. I do know that we donate a portion of the building as a government – and I would hope that the opposition has no problems with this – to the Calgary Homeless Foundation. They do very effective work out of that building. I know that the Alberta Economic Development Authority is headquartered at McDougall Centre, again under the Department of Economic Development.

I know that there are some support service people there at McDougall Centre relative to the staff of Executive Council. There are five people who are directly under Executive Council: the executive director, of course, Gordon Olsen; a secretary, Joyce Austin; receptionist Lea Roberts; a secretary, Helena Gryckiewicz; and a communications manager, Jim Law. All the rest are assigned to various departments including, I believe, Queen's Printer and some other storefront services and government services that are run out of McDougall Centre but are under the control and direction of other departments and ministries, Mr. Chairman.

9:30

With respect to the office of the Premier, the 2002-2003 estimate numbers detailed by type of spending are as follows: for the office of the Premier including the protocol officers – and I mentioned the protocol officers that have moved from international and intergovernmental affairs to Executive Council – there was a total of \$3.6 million in salaries, wages, and benefits; \$870,000 in supplies and services; \$141,000 in financial transactions and other items. That includes the Premier's salary plus payments for agenda and priority members Carol Haley, Janis Tarchuk, and Yvonne Fritz. These are three private members, one of whom, of course, is the whip. It's been a dramatic change relative to how we deal with agenda and priorities. For the first time we've incorporated private members into that very important part of the planning process.

There are also salaries that have to be paid for the office of the Lieutenant Governor: \$140,000 in salaries, wages, and benefits; \$115,000 in supplies and services. Three full-time employees are assigned to the Lieutenant Governor's office.

The Public Affairs Bureau of course has a much larger budget: about \$8.2 million in salaries, wages, and benefits; \$2.2 million in supplies and services. That is for 127 full-time employees.

I don't have a breakdown relative to the salaries for each and every specific employee, including Mr. Elzinga – I know that the hon. member alluded to Mr. Elzinga – but I don't think that that's a problem. Virtually everyone's salary in government is public. At least I think it is; is it not? But I can tell you that in the Premier's office we have Mr. Elzinga; Joan Zowtuk, who is the secretary; the executive assistant to the Government House Leader, David Gillies; the deputy chief of staff, Jamie Davis; special assistant, Pam Livingston; director of my scheduling, Heidi Inkpen; my administrative assistant, Nargis Zaver; secretary in my office, Colleen Marouelli; receptionist, Colleen Borden; receptionist, Lynn Hall, who has been here, well, certainly since the days of Loughheed and maybe even before that. The list goes on and on and on. I mean, I could read the list.

We have people, of course, in the correspondence branch. We have people in the Premier's communications branch, including the director, Gordon Turtle; the assistant, Marisa Etmanski; the assistant, Linda Bates; and co-ordinator, Joanne Rosnau. The Calgary office I already alluded to. Then in the Executive Council's office there's also the Deputy Minister of Executive Council, Julian Nowicki, and the list goes on and on there. He's got 15 people working under

him. Then in protocol, of course, there are six individuals. I don't have the breakdown and the salaries for each and every one of these.

What is the \$2 million in revenue? I'm advised that it's sales from the Queen's Printer's various publications. The \$1,000 in fees – I wish someone up there could write a little bit better. I have no idea. I'll tell you what. I'll just hand it over to you, and you see if you can decipher it.

Is the 60 percent Internet usage figure individual households? Yes, it is households. I can read that. Sixty percent of households use the Internet in Alberta. Okay. Thank you; I can read that. This other one, I can't make out hide nor hair, but obviously there is an answer to the \$1,000. So I'll get someone to write clearer, and we'll get you a better answer.

I think those are all the questions, and I tried to answer them to the best of my ability. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We'd like to thank the Premier and his staff for some of those answers which were quite complete and some which we expect to be more complete as time progresses.

You know, I can't stand here, Mr. Chairman, without responding to some degree to the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar's comments.

MR. KLEIN: Oh, okay. I've got the answer on that.

MS CARLSON: Would you like to stand up and give the answer now, and then I'll carry on?

MR. KLEIN: I don't know if you're going to like the answer. I finally figured it out. We earned this money through fees that were paid through FOIP requests and primarily by the Liberal opposition.

MS CARLSON: There goes our research budget. You're right; we don't like that answer very much. I certainly will include the fee schedules as a part of the FOIP review that we're currently undertaking. Certainly there's somebody else that you can get the money from, you know. [interjection] Oh, you know, that's actually a very good question. In fact, my colleague from Edmonton-Centre raises a very good point.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's a first.

MS CARLSON: Well, she raises a lot more good points than you do, but that's another topic which is good for at least a 20-minute debate.

While we really wouldn't want to say that we're all that similar to the government in the way we operate, for money transfers it is the same organization. So when you transfer from one party organization to another, it's a transfer technically, not really revenue. So that should probably be clarified in the statements.

A follow-up question on those statements too. That Queen's Printer revenue: is it on a cost recovery basis, or are there profit margins built into it? Now, I know from the FOIP requests that while we feel that the fees are often exorbitant, they aren't cost recovery for the most part. But in terms of the other revenue that was generated there, if we could have that question answered.

Before the Premier could figure out how to read the notes, I was just going to refer back to some of the comments made by Drayton Valley-Calmar. We are definitely going to put him on the Christmas list for a pair of pom-poms. In my experience watching what goes

on in this Legislature, that kind of cheerleading is not an instant move up to the front benches. He's trying hard, but I'm not sure how successful he's going to be. [interjection] Yes. Well, that's right; he really didn't need to defend the Premier. The Premier did a very good job of that on his own, including one of his occasional pastimes, Mr. Chairman, which definitely would be Liberal bashing. Some of the stuff that he said was in terms of everything that happens in here is being in opposition, and Drayton Valley-Calmar picked up on that by saying that we didn't have anything good to say. Well, in fact, we did have some compliments in the first parts of our discussions where the Premier and his staff and the department were deserving of them. In fact, I would like to remind the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar that we have brought forward some very good ideas in this Legislature over the years.

AN HON. MEMBER: Name one.

MS CARLSON: Well, let's talk about a stability fund for one of them. Let's talk about Alice Hanson's bill that ultimately got passed as a government bill in this Assembly. Let's talk about freedom of information, which was the Premier's very first bill in one session. Let's talk about things like benchmarking, which was first part of Laurence Decore's political platform. Let's talk about some of the things that this government has entertained over the years, like talking about best practices and efficiency audits. Those were the kinds of ideas that came from the Official Opposition. So everything that we say isn't in opposition. In fact, you know, if that's your belief, we're going to keep a little closer track and remind you of every time we vote with the government, because according to the calculations I have here, 75 to 80 percent of the time we actually vote with the government at the end of the day on the bills.

9:40

What do we bring forward? The concerns that we hear from people and efficiencies and ways of improving. How do we make them heard by this government? Sometimes you need a two-by-four to hear any opposition, and we have often seen – in fact, there was just an ag bill that came up that we passed in the last week before we recessed for the spring that our leader made an amendment to and that was accepted by the government and was passed under his name. So don't say that all we do is oppose what happens in here, because our goal is to strengthen what happens, and in fact most of the time we end up voting with these folks, except when they are completely out of line on some of the issues. Then it is our responsibility to keep their feet to the fire and to bring up dissenting views in the province. I bring that up because the Premier talked about it, and it certainly is within the mandate of the review of estimates to respond to any statements made by the ministers or the Premier or comments in rebuttal.

I do have a whole list of questions that I wish to get through before our time limit is up here for this evening, so I'll start with them, and then I intend to come back to some of the comments that were made, not the least of which is those satisfaction polls, which still seem to be of concern. The web page visits and the protocol office are some other issues that I want to talk about.

First of all, one of the things that we saw in program 1 is a title change from the office of the Premier/general administration to office of the Premier/Executive Council. It's not often that titles are changed like that. Does this mean that there is some internal change in focus? What would the reason be for having done that? So if we could get that.

The Premier kindly provided some detail in terms of salary expenses, but there's quite a bit more there that he didn't have and

that we would appreciate receiving in writing at some point, and that's the gross operating expenses of \$4.616 million that is directed for the Premier's office and Executive Council. So we got some breakdown of wages, but the other items within that framework we would like to hear about, specifically travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, contract services, professional technical labour services, data processing services, hosting, and other purchase services.

The Premier talked about the movement of the protocol office out of international and intergovernmental affairs, and it's probably a good idea. Drayton Valley-Calmar, are you listening? I said it's probably a good idea to have done that. No doubt, visiting dignitaries would always want to meet with the Premier. That's the main focus of their coming here: to meet with the government. They also like to come and see what's happening in the Assembly. I know that the number of visits increases significantly when we are sitting, and likely it is better handled through Executive Council instead of through international and intergovernmental affairs. But I don't see any specific dollar allocations there or staffing. I'm assuming from that that the staffing requirements, the additional roles, have just been absorbed into the existing complement. If that isn't the case, could you let me know? Do those costs come under hosting, or are they combined with some other expenses? If we could get a breakdown of those, that would be helpful for us.

In terms of really understanding what goes on in the office of the Premier, it would be helpful for us if we could know the types of weekly and monthly reports that are prepared, particularly with regard to tracking the views of Albertans, particularly on the key hot buttons, which for as long as I've been elected certainly include public health care and public education. Also, in terms of private clinics and private hospitals policy and tax reform, that would be information that would be helpful to us. Now, we know that there is a lot of correspondence with the Premier on these issues and that there are a lot of phone calls. We know from the feedback we get that people aren't always satisfied. They seem to think that the correspondence goes into some big room where the door is opened, the correspondence is tossed in, and the door is quickly shut, and that's the beginning and end of it. Lots of the comments we get back are that the information doesn't seem to have been responded to. So if we could get some comments on that. Does the Premier reply to every letter that's sent to him, or if not, is it tracked in some fashion? Is that information shared with the sender of the letter? Also, the same goes with phone calls.

It's interesting to note that the Premier talks about – and we see it documented – the high satisfaction levels. Particularly, the Premier talked about – I believe I wrote this down right – 58 percent satisfaction, with one of the areas being health. We get lots and lots of complaints from people who say that they can't get through on the phone lines or that sometimes the people who answer the phones are rude. I was going to say not polite, but I think rude is even a nice way of saying what people share with us. They get handed off, and they're not satisfied with what happens there. Clearly, there's some sort of a communication glitch in that office. So if we could get some information on how that is handled. Do they have a phone bank for times when hot issues are the topic of the day, when there may be an overflow of calls or communications? Anyway, if you could give us some detail on what happens there, how that's handled, and how those particular complaints fit into the client satisfaction criteria that the government has developed. When we see those numbers, there seems to be some disconnect between what's recorded and what we're hearing. You know, even if we're only hearing from 1 percent of the dissatisfied people, that's quite a few people. So if we could get some information on that.

In addition, some more detail on the steps that are taken by the office to follow up or respond to concerns that are expressed by Albertans through monthly and weekly reports. It seems to us from questions asked in the Assembly and information available out in the general public that there was inadequate tracking of correspondence received regarding the year 2000's Bill 11 as well as the policy that was released prior to the bill's introduction. It's still an issue of importance to people, and there don't appear to be any documentation or records from the Premier's office regarding the correspondence received. Now, maybe there is, and you just don't want to share it with us. Let us know, at least.

The Premier referred to the vast amounts of money that were spent by various groups in the Bill 11 debate for what he said was misinformation. Well, of course, from our perspective there wasn't a great deal of misinformation there, and I have to tell you that between our offices and our party less than \$100,000 was spent on the total information we had. This government keeps opposition in this province on such a tight financial leash that we can hardly breathe, never mind have access to dollars to mass any kind of huge marketing campaigns. That has been the sole ability of the government with their advertising budgets. So, once again, I add my voice to the voice of my colleagues who have asked for some detail on how much money was really spent there in communications.

9:50

So let's talk about communication from here and all the cross-communication that was done through a variety of departments, because no doubt this is a David and Goliath situation in this province in terms of the ability to spend dollars on marketing. We know in this time that we live in that to have your voice heard requires a lot of money and a lot of marketing expertise, both of which are in short supply on our side and in large supply on that side. So I certainly am not very pleased with the Premier's comments on how much money was spent. I have no clue how much was spent by other people, but I know that from our perspective it was very, very, few dollars.

Could the Premier or his staff tell us how much of the \$4.6 million in expenses will be allocated to policy co-ordination and business planning? You know, if there is a shortfall in this government, it certainly is their ability to do long-term strategic planning and to do the follow-through. We've heard some comments about that in terms of meeting the benchmarks in the business plans, and definitely this department, that is so good at communicating, I think could do a great service to the government in general if they were also to put a little heavier focus on strategic planning, implementation, co-ordination, and actual business planning, business planning in terms of business models, not the framework that this government has built that doesn't actually have the accountable benchmarks and benchmarks that are tied to actions that are implemented by the government, which has of course been an ongoing concern of the former Auditor General as well.

Also, I am wondering if there are any dollars allocated specifically to supporting standing policy committees. That's always a contentious issue with us. We believe that standing policy committees should be all-party committees because committees that are paid by the taxpayers of the province should be open, accountable, and accessible to all elected officials, as they are in other jurisdictions and certainly at the federal level. The outcome of that is policy that can only be strengthened, because we do sometimes have some good ideas. Anyone in a business planning model will know that when you surround yourself with people who think like you do, you don't always get the very best results. You need a little contention. You need the occasional dustup. You need somebody to challenge the

thinking processes. The outcome of that is much better policy and, I would think, a more effective government. It isn't like we would be able to overturn any government decisions – we would be so few in numbers – but what we would be is another thought process at the table. Instead, this government chooses to run the standing policy committees like extensions of their caucus, and if that's what they want to do, then people on those committees should not be paid. That is just a flat-out abuse of taxpayers' dollars, and they need to change it. If you want them to be internal caucus policy development committees, then don't pay the people on those committees with taxpayer dollars. Pay them out of your own budget if you want to but not from taxpayer funds. So that's, I think, my point on that.

The Premier answered the questions that I was going to ask about the office of the Lieutenant Governor, and I thank him for that. Also, I think he answered how much is allocated to the chief of staff for his office. I know he talked about salaries. Is that public information? If so, we'd like to know it.

Some more questions on the chief of staff. Does the chief of staff have the same rein and responsibilities that a deputy minister has? If not, what exactly would those responsibilities be? How, in fact, does the Premier define the role of the chief of staff, and what is his mandate?

I'd like to spend a little bit of time talking about the Premier's Advisory Council on Health. This year that controversial report was released talking about the introduction of changes to the health care system that certainly will see a promotion of privatization and a downloading of costs on individual Albertans. Some of that we saw already implemented in this budget. But in spite of the huge impact that this is going to have on Albertans over time, we don't really know very much about the council and its proceedings, so could we have a breakdown of the costs to Executive Council regarding the selection, proceedings, research, and public relations for this advisory council on health? We know the costs to the department of health, but we don't know them in terms of this department. So if we could have that.

Also, will the Premier provide a breakdown of the costs on this council for any outside firms hired or retained by Executive Council to provide services of any kind for this council? We would like copies of any polling, focus group testing, or public relations exercises conducted by or for the Public Affairs Bureau regarding health care in Alberta and copies of correspondence between Executive Council and members of the Premier's Advisory Council on Health, including its chair, Don Mazankowski. Now, of course, the problem is that you're never going to give it to us, and we're going to have to FOIP it, so we're going to be transferring moneys back into your department. But it's fair to ask for this information, it's fair for the government to provide it, and we would hope that that would happen.

Could we also have a copy of the goals, mandate, and directives given to this council by Executive Council? It would be very helpful for us to know that. We need a breakdown of any work – a cost breakdown is particularly what I'm looking for – done by the Public Affairs Bureau for either the Premier's Advisory Council on Health or the Alberta government's Health First initiative.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** We have three more minutes left. Does the Premier wish to make any remarks?

**MR. KLEIN:** Well, I can just make a few remarks relative to my chief of staff, Mr. Elzinga. I've already alluded to his salary. I just don't know what it is, but I'm sure it's public information, as are the salaries of all senior public service employees.

Relative to his duties the list is almost endless, Mr. Chairman. He

looks after just about everything. You know, as much as I appreciate the public service and have great appreciation for public service employees, people don't know them. They don't know the public service employees like they know the Premier's office, and that's why I get stacks and stacks of mail. They don't write to, I would even say, the Liberal opposition as much as they write to me, and I deal with literally a dozen or more issues, different issues, entirely different, each and every day. I can't possibly – there simply isn't enough time – address each and every one of those issues personally.

So Peter and I go over the list of issues. He then contacts the appropriate person within the administration, within the minister's department, or perhaps the minister directly or the minister's executive assistant to make sure that there is follow-up and there is action on these concerns that are brought to my attention. In addition to looking after the concerns that I bring to him, there are countless hundreds of people who have access to Peter who phone him directly and say: "Can you check this out on my behalf? Can you do this on my behalf? Can you do that on my behalf?" So I would like to see anyone in the Liberal opposition come up with any person who works half as hard as Peter Elzinga on behalf of the people of this province to address their concerns.

Relative to the other issues, Mr. Chairman, I could go on at great length, you know, with respect to the Premier's Advisory Council on Health and some of the issues and questions that were brought up by the hon. member, but they will be well recorded in *Hansard*, and we will attempt to get her the appropriate answers.

Thank you very much, sir.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$15,044,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Opposed? Carried.

10:00

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report the votes and request leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: 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, 2003, for the following department.

Executive Council: operating expense, \$15,044,000.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

## head: **Government Bills and Orders** **Second Reading**

### **Bill 14** **Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2002**

[Adjourned debate March 18: Mr. Stevens]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to speak in second reading on Bill 14, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2002. I will be speaking on the principles of what's being brought forward in this bill. I haven't decided yet whether or not to support the bill. There are certain sections that I do support. There are other sections that I have some real concerns about. I have sent the bill out into the community and through the various stakeholder groups to see what they have to say about it. Some of that I've received back. So I will be putting forward some questions, and I'm sure that the minister will make note of them and get me a response as soon as possible.

There are three issues in this bill that I want to talk about tonight. The first is around some of the sort of housekeeping changes that are being brought forward here, and some of those have come about basically through experience with the Gaming and Liquor Act up until now, just things that we've learned or that operators have learned or the AGLC has learned while this legislation has been operational, and therefore the changes are being asked for as a result of that. I think there's also an expansion of gaming here, and I also have a concern and some questions about moving away from a charitable model.

It's put out here that the changes that are being brought about by this bill are a result of the gaming review that was held by the department. I'm still interested and still awaiting a more thorough list of exactly who got consulted with. I've been told things like, you know, bingo groups but without being told where they were or who they were. I know it's of interest to me. There's some controversy in what's being proposed here, and I am aware of people in Edmonton even – some of them would argue one way and some would argue the other. So I'm interested in the choices that the minister has made here.

I hear the minister say repeatedly that the government is controlling gaming and it's making changes to control gaming, but really what I see are changes being made to expand gaming and not to control it at all. Perhaps that's just a difference of opinion on wording that the minister and I will always have. We'll see by the end of this bill.

Now, the sections that are the sort of we've learned from experience and want to change and update some of these are around things like minors and licensed facilities. I've got a couple of questions around the issues being brought up here. One of the ones that we've already heard and that was in the press release from the minister when the bill was introduced was that the staff would be held to a certain standard about not serving intoxicated persons. I actually had someone phone me and say: why is the staff being held to a different standard in this case than in any other case? Now, this is not about minors drinking but about intoxicated persons in gaming facilities. Why are these staff in the gaming facilities being held to a different standard about serving intoxicated persons than would be the staff, for example, in a pub or a bar? There is a different

standard here. Why is there a different standard? Was that intentional or was it accidental on behalf of the ministry?

We also have some sections about permitting minors to be in licensed facilities like a casino or a racing entertainment centre. I want to come back to this definition of a racing entertainment centre. That's partly arising because we can't seem to quite decide what we want to do about minors and gaming. On the one hand, we seem to have a desire from some charitable groups that they want to be able to have minors as volunteers, for example, working their bingos, but then there's an abhorrence generally to exposing children to gaming. So, in that sense, we still look upon gaming as not a good activity or not a healthy, positive activity for children. I think it speaks volumes that charitable groups would still be looking to have minors working at their bingos, for example, because they really need the volunteers, that they're so desperate for volunteers and to keep their charitable status and to get that money coming in through the bingos that they would have youth on the floor.

An issue that has come up under this that was a real problem for some of the people I've spoken to is the whole thing of paying gaming workers, in essence, in the bingos. I know that that's been discussed by the Federation of Community Leagues. I've heard from some small theatre groups as well. An artistic director phoned me and said: "Why should I have my staff, who should be working on plays, out there working a bingo all afternoon once or twice a week trying to raise money when they should be in the theatre doing what they're actually trained to do? Let me hire and pay a worker five bucks an hour to be working these bingos and raising the money." On the other hand, I have the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues saying: you know, this is money out of our pockets.

If this is allowed to happen, the feeling was that it would very quickly move to an accepted standard that there would always be more paid workers on the floor and that this could amount to a substantial loss of the revenue that the bingo associations would be taking in. We're talking millions of dollars, \$6 million to \$10 million, up to 20 percent of the total profit of all of the bingos in Alberta if we looked at using the figures from 2001, which were \$51.1 million estimated profit on bingo in that year.

10:10

So I'm looking for a bit more detail from the minister on why that choice was made. Knowing who was lobbying him from both sides on that, why did the ministry make the choice they made to go that direction, and what do they think the long-term effect of that is going to be? For some groups who don't want to end up paying all of their floor workers, will they be able to maintain five years from now that way of doing things?

I'm just going to go back to the clauses that are in here about the workers in the casinos being held to a different standard than other food and beverage workers; for example, those working in a bar or a hotel or a restaurant. I'm wondering if there's an expectation, then, that there would be some other kind of law come into play here. What are the enforcement provisions that it's anticipated will go along with that? In other words, what citation is the police officer going to be able to give when they walk in there to deal with this episode after it's gotten out of hand? You know, who's going to get charged here and under what provision? Also I'm interested in how the enforcement is going to be paid for. Is it going to be paid for by the casino? Is it going to be deducted off the profits prior to the division of the profits between the casino and the charity? How is it anticipated that this is all going to be paid for?

Now, the minister and I both attended a conference on gaming that was put on by the Gaming Research Institute five weeks ago here in Edmonton. I know he wasn't able to attend the whole conference,

but there was quite a bit of discussion about how little effort and staff power and financing we put into inspecting and monitoring our casinos. One of the major examples that was made was that New Zealand, for example, has an entire police detachment on-site. They also have a full contingent of gaming inspectors that are on-site in each of their casinos, and this can amount to up to 60 people that are looking at all of this. Maybe we're innocent or naive here in Alberta that we haven't looked at that. Are we being naive? Certainly there are examples in other parts of the world that we can look at, and they definitely have a lot more on-site inspection and enforcement than we do. Why are we making different choices here?

So I talked about some of the housekeeping changes and some questions that I had there. They don't all seem to be as innocent and straightforward as I was led to believe. I'd like to talk a bit more about expansion of gaming and moving away from a charitable model, and I think there are a number of things that come into play under this. One of the first things that I started to notice was the extension of hours in the casinos. Because we are supposed to have a charitable model in Alberta, that means that our nonprofits and charities supply volunteers to be the workers in casinos and bingos. That was an onerous enough task, to round up 60 volunteers from your group that could go in over a two-day time period to work a casino for you, but you raised a lot of money.

Now, it has pretty much always been the case that the waiting list between casinos was two years and sometimes more, so you had a lot riding on your one casino. When I saw that we were expanding the hours that the casino was open from midnight until 2 – and I think we're now up to 3 o'clock in the morning – I think this was to me marking the beginning of moving away from a strictly charitable volunteer model, because it became increasingly difficult to get your membership, those average citizens in Alberta, to volunteer practically all night long to work in your charitable casino. Really, especially for those people that were in the count room, which was often a dozen people, they didn't start counting until the casino closed, and if it closed at 3 o'clock, those people weren't walking out the door until 5 a.m. At the time I thought: hmm, I wonder if this is a way of pushing everyone towards having completely paid staff, because we just won't be able to muster the volunteers. Charities are still mustering the volunteers, but it is much more difficult than it used to be. You're practically having to ask someone to take the day off work in order to work those night casinos for you, so it's becoming even more of a donation from your supporters.

I'm putting it on the record that I have a suspicion that a negative outcome of all of this could be a couple of years down the road when the government turns around and says: well, you know, your group doesn't really have that many volunteers that are on the floor anymore; therefore, we think you shouldn't be getting as much of the proceeds out of this casino or bingo as you were. Certainly that comes into play with what's being put into this legislation, where we have the likelihood of the bingo workers being paid staff. Now, it's saying that the key workers will still be from the volunteer organization, but for those of you that have worked the bingos, we're talking about a paymaster here and probably the bonanza chairperson, and that's likely to be it. Those are the two people that are supposedly overseeing the money sort of coming in and out there.

That's a real fear for me, that my friend with this small theatre who wants to hire people because his own staff are needed to make the plays is therefore going to pay people 5 bucks an hour to work his bingos for him. Five years from now he's told: well, sorry; you used to make \$1,500 a casino, but we're only going to allow you to have \$750 now because it's not really a volunteer casino because you don't really have your volunteers out on the floor. I'm looking for an assurance on the record from the minister that that is not

anticipated in a long-term plan. I think that if we're really going to stick to a charitable model and the minister really means it, he can put it on the record that there's no anticipation that things would flow in that direction, because to my eye they are flowing in that direction.

Another part that comes up in this legislation is the granting of facility licences. Now, previously those facility licences were very clearly granted to the bingo association, which was a conglomerate group of every club or nonprofit association or charity that joined together to form a given bingo association. But it was the bingo association that the licence went to. Therefore, all of those groups were in on the decision-making. That was appropriate, and the groups were willing to carry that workload. We're now anticipating in this legislation – and when we get into Committee of the Whole, I can talk about this sort of clause by clause – allowing the granting of that to an individual. In other words, you could have a manager or one club only that would be able to control the facility, and there are concerns being raised from the community about that.

10:20

Now, when we talk about control, one of the things that I've seen happen here – and it's been much in the media in the last few days, so the timing of this bill is most interesting. I thank the minister for delaying the debate on it so that we could in fact incorporate what is happening with the community lottery boards into this debate, because in fact the two do mesh here. We go back and look at what resulted from the 1998 municipal plebiscites around removal of VLTs from the community and the corresponding commitment from the government that there would be local decision-making and an amount of money returned to 88 regions in Alberta so that they would get some of the money that was being vacuumed out of their communities coming back to their communities by way of these community lottery board grants. I think that now that those community lottery boards have been completely cut in this budget, it does bring what's in this legislation into an entirely different light, because I think this does uphold my concern that we're really talking about expanding gaming and expanding gaming revenue for the government rather than controlling it on behalf of the citizens.

I'm going to run out of time right away, and I'm most interested in continuing this discussion. I will look to speak more on it in Committee of the Whole. Twenty minutes isn't enough to deal with this bill.

What I'm really seeing the minister do is not so much controlling gaming in the case of VLTs but expanding the opportunities for it. His response to the gaming review was to move VLTs from less well-producing locations into higher producing locations. This was his example of how he was controlling VLTs. That really lit the lightbulb for me about how this particular minister's take on controlling gaming was going to play out, which is why I'm looking for the assurances on the record. I'll return to this.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am quite happy to have an opportunity to respond to Bill 14, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2002. It's nice to get this bill up and debated so that we can have some of the issues brought about and discussed in the Legislature.

Every time I see a bill that has to do with gaming and liquor, then I have some concerns, Mr. Speaker, because in the years that I've been in this Legislature, gaming revenue has contributed an increasing percentage of the revenues that this government uses to

operate their budgets on. In fact, I believe it's reached such a percentage that it's an irrevocable piece of the inflows of revenue. We couldn't reverse the decisions in here even if we wanted to, and there is really a very good argument for reversing some of those decisions.

Liquor is the same thing. You know, we've seen some dramatic changes occur in this province since '93 both with regard to how gaming is organized and how liquor is organized in the province. I'll be the first to admit that I opposed liquor deregulation when it was first brought forward and the first to admit that in fact we were wrong about that. It's worked out quite well. I was very concerned at the time that the cropping up of all of these small liquor stores in the province would deliver unreasonable expectations for the business owners, because there would be a huge influx in the marketplace and I was very worried that they wouldn't have enough revenue generated in order to be able to stay in business over the long term. That turned out not to be true. It seems like Alberta has an unlimited capacity for corner liquor stores, and in fact they are on practically every corner. Certainly in my constituency this is true, and that leaves open a number of concerns in itself.

Talking about the changes that happened at that time, one of the biggest concerns that we faced and is still a concern for me is that in the course of privatization a number of the provincially owned buildings were sold for much less than their value. There were concerns raised at that time about who profited from that. Who was in line to be able to pick up those buildings at bargain-basement prices? For the most part, it seemed to be people who were a little better connected than others who got that first priority.

That raises a concern always when you talk about gaming or liquor revenues. Traditionally in a North American model these are the two areas that have historically been open to the greatest amount of abuse and have opened the most number of doors to criminal activities and those kinds of revenues. So we must always be vigilant when we talk about these issues, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that any changes made to legislation increase the degree of scrutiny, increase the reporting abilities, increase the legislative arm in these areas rather than decreasing them. This is an area where an eagle eye is required at all stages so that we can prevent the kinds of abuses that we have seen in these two industries in many jurisdictions and I daresay in this jurisdiction as well.

So every bill that comes before this Legislature dealing with gaming or liquor, particularly dealing with both, deserves the highest degree of scrutiny from this Legislature, and I would certainly hope that we are going to see the kinds of points raised that would parallel my thinking on this by other members in this Assembly. It has become the habit of all private members to participate to some degree in debate, and this is a bill where I very much look forward to seeing that kind of debate proceed, because it is an area that we very definitely have to be vigilant in our scrutiny of because there are some fairly substantive issues being discussed here, not the least of which are the offence provisions. I think those look like they're actually a good idea.

I'm not quite as thrilled with the new definition of the video lottery terminals, slot machines, and other gaming machines as gaming terminals. It's one of those situations where you wonder what the end intent is.

I still am a little unclear about the objectives that the government had in the changes they made for the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission to become part of the Ministry of Gaming and it acting as an agent of the government of Alberta now with both a board and a corporation. Is this operating like a Crown corporation would? They're stating that it's accountable to the Ministry of Gaming, but traditionally when we've seen other entities like this, the government

has taken a very strong stand in terms of ditching any responsibility when problems arise, and problems always do arise. So is that the intent in going into this kind of a model? I think that that's a question that should be answered.

I would also like to know the criteria under which the board were named, because as I look at this list, Mr. Speaker, they look to me like a very interesting list of people who are friends of the government. It's not that they may not be qualified for the positions that they're fulfilling, but I certainly would like to see the criteria that existed for their recruitment. If we're going to have such a very important board overseeing what are logically going to be huge dollars and important decision-making occurring over the next few years, I think that it is incumbent upon this government to have ensured that the people who will be making these decisions are well qualified in terms of having the right kind of technical background to make the decisions. I know from reading this list that most of the people, I believe, have the expertise in terms of the size of organizations that they were with and the level of decision-making they had in previous lives, but it's a little bit of a concern for me on the technical side. So if the minister could provide that information to us in writing, it would be very helpful.

10:30

I'm not clear on the exact mandate of the board and the corporation, and I would like a little more information on that. As well, why a corporation? It's not a usual kind of framework to build. We're more commonly used to the delegated authorities, and this is a little different setup, so I'm wondering if the minister could comment on that.

Now, second reading of a bill is reading in principle, so the majority of the . . .

DR. TAYLOR: Please, Debby, please.

MS CARLSON: You get a full 20 from me tonight. There's no mercy on this bill. It's a big bill. I guess a full 15 actually. Being the second speaker, you get five minutes to ask me questions, so I look forward to anything you have to say on this. [interjection] There you go. Then I'm sure that my colleague is also quite interested in participating on this particular bill.

DR. TAYLOR: Do it tomorrow.

MS CARLSON: Well, you know what? I'd love to do it tomorrow, but in fact your House leader didn't keep his agreements last night, is not keeping them this night, so we're here as long as it takes.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, please speak through the chair.

MS CARLSON: Yes. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I was provoked but felt that it was really important to outline some of the reasons why we are here so late this evening through no fault of our own. [interjection] That's right. A deal is a deal. When we make a deal with the House leaders, we expect those agreements to be kept. When they are not, the only recourse we have is to extend the debate, so you're the lucky people today.

What happened last night, Mr. Speaker, was that the government was supposed to adjourn debate on a bill that our leader was the critic for and didn't do that, so that opened it up for further debate and further discussion, and it was greatly prolonged. [interjection] That's exactly right, and that's why we're staying here extra long tonight. So you can take it up in your caucus meeting.

Back to the issues of this particular bill that we're not very happy with or have some concerns about and feel should be debated at greater length. The first one that I would like to address is one of the issues that my colleague from Edmonton-Centre talked about, and that was to deal with the changes with the charitable models. I'd say particularly to deal with casinos but also to deal with bingos.

We've seen that gaming here in this province has shifted very far away from the charitable model that was one of the reasons for the initial introduction of gaming in this province in the manner in which we see it today. This government stated that by bringing in casinos and expanding bingos beyond the church basement kind of variety, we would be opening up a revenue stream for nonprofit organizations and for schools and for organizations like that to generate operating funds. This revenue stream would be something different and separate from what was currently available through government funding and would give an opportunity to those organizations who wish to fund-raise to do so by providing volunteers to provide basic services.

While some churches and other organizations decided that they would not participate at the casino and bingo volunteer level because they felt that there was a conflict of interest for them in terms of living off the avails of gaming, which I don't disagree with, in fact most organizations found that in order to get any kind of revenue stream, they just had to participate, so this occurred. In the initial stages casinos were windfall revenues, because by having 30 or 40 workers for two-day shifts, that were relatively reasonable shifts – you showed up at 11 on one day and you were gone by 2 or 2:30 at the outside on that night; most organizations ran two shifts of workers for two days – you could generate a lot of money, \$60,000, \$70,000.

Bingos, similarly, were about a five-hour commitment from volunteers. You show up with 20 volunteers, they work the floor for the five hours, and your organization could generate a minimum of a few thousand dollars to a maximum sometimes of \$15,000 or \$20,000, so that was a great way of getting dollars into the hands of organizations at a grassroots level. But what has happened over time is that this government has expanded the number of licences to such an extent and expanded the scope of gambling in this province to where it really doesn't have the same kind of benefit for grassroots organizations anymore.

I was just at a meeting of the Presidents' Council of Mill Woods Community League last week, where a report was given. It was a report that was given on behalf of the Federation of Community Leagues of Edmonton, where they stated that in a review of bingos in the greater Edmonton area, bingos had in fact become not profitable, that by the time the organizations got in and reimbursed workers for their food and their share of expenses, as has been dictated by the rules and regulations, there wasn't any money left over. So these volunteers are working for nothing or sometimes going in the hole and sometimes with very small profits. It's really because of an oversaturation of the market. It's just a supply and demand problem. Plus, people are gravitating towards the satellite bingos because those are the big payoffs. [Ms Carlson's speaking time expired] Not done. I have to come back at committee.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to speak to this bill. I know that other members of my caucus would like to address it as well. They were here last night when it was on the Order Paper, and I hope they'll have a chance again to speak to it at this reading.

Well, we might as well start at the beginning here. The bill has a

new definition of VLTs and slot machines and other gaming machines as gaming terminals. Anytime we see a change of language like that, the question is why and what's the necessity of it. What's being achieved by the changes in the provisions making it an offence on the part of licensed facilities to allow intoxicated people to gamble? It makes provisions for minors to be fined for being on casino or racing entertainment premises, and it ensures that retail liquor store licences are separate from other businesses. There's also one other interesting aspect to this act, which is the addition of a privative clause.

There are aspects to the bill that are probably well worth supporting. It's just a matter of fleshing those out and understanding them and making sure that the public has the opportunity to have their say on it, to review the debate and decide on how things have been handled.

10:40

There's a lot of background to this particular bill. Going back some years, of course, gambling has been for many decades, I suppose, a very controversial issue in this province. The controversy around it has risen dramatically in the last eight years as the gambling industry has expanded and as we've seen casinos and VLTs and all kinds of other facilities grow across the province in our cities, in our towns throughout the province.

As a result of that growth, there were several plebiscites on the removal of VLTs. In 1999, of course, this all ended up, I suppose predictably enough, in the courts. The court cases have ended up delaying the enactment of the plebiscites. Communities that have voted on the removal of VLTs have not had their wishes fully recognized because action was taken in the courts, and the results of that action, as I understand it, are still pending. So there has been no decisive action on VLTs and the removal of VLTs as a result of the local plebiscites. That sort of turmoil sets the stage for this bill and for the ideas and principles and rationale behind the bill.

Now, among the many issues stimulated or raised by the bill, I'll just go through a handful this evening. One of the most serious has to do with the law-and-order approach that the bill proposes for controlling what occurs around gambling machines and who's allowed to play them, what condition those people need to be in when they play them. In particular here I'm referring to the sentiment, one might put it, of saving intoxicated gamblers from themselves. I'm sure all of us here probably have seen people sitting in lounges or restaurants playing gambling machines and drinking alcohol at the same time. Undoubtedly there are many situations in which the gamblers are not as sober as they perhaps should be for putting their loonies one after the other into these machines. So I can well understand the sentiment of controlling the amount of alcohol consumed and the level of intoxication achieved by gamblers in gambling facilities. So I think that's a step in the right direction with this legislation.

I also think that controlling the access that minors have to gambling is the right idea, and fining minors who are caught on premises or caught gambling is certainly worth serious thought and worth more debate in this Assembly. It's a curious reflection of the ambivalence we have as a society towards gambling that we don't allow minors, we don't encourage minors to be gamblers. I think it's an acknowledgment that gambling is at times a problem, certainly a problem for many adults, and if we aren't careful, it becomes a problem for children as well. Children who are exposed to gambling at a young age probably – I haven't seen the research on it – I would think have a higher rate of gambling problems as adults. Certainly there's a concern with that. Children who smoke, children

who consume alcohol or drugs: it may well be – the AADAC people could advise us on this – that the same pattern holds for children who gamble.

The fact that we're having to bring this into legislation raises the question about possible changes in the face of gambling in Alberta. As gambling becomes more widespread, are we seeing more social problems with it? Are we seeing more people gamble when they're intoxicated? Are we seeing more minors trying to get into gambling establishments to play the machines? Is there a trend there that we are trying to stop, or are we moving quickly enough through this legislation that the trend never really got under way? In either case, there are steps I think that we could all probably endorse and support. So good ideas here.

It would be useful as backup to this legislation – and maybe it has been undertaken by the minister, by his department, by AADAC, or by other groups – to look at the social costs of gambling – the costs on families, the costs on communities – and whether this legislation is going to reduce those costs or have any effect on those costs and what we're trying to achieve through this legislation in terms of those costs. Do we have any background research or business plans that are laying out benchmarks that we're hoping to reach through this legislation in terms of reducing the social costs of gambling?

There's also the notion here that we are taking steps maybe not to protect people and maybe not to protect minors or protect society but mostly to protect a revenue stream from unsavory public attention, the kind of unsavory attention that gambling was getting a few years ago in this province when there was so much controversy over VLTs. So are we really here motivated by preserving and protecting a stream, an immense stream of money, or are we motivated by building a better society? I think that our motives are important as to how we approach these issues and how we enact this kind of legislation.

There is no mention in the bill and I'm not sure that there's any provision at all in the bill for allocating a percentage of revenue to addressing some of the social problems or personal problems that are caused by gambling. Those are some concerns in terms of the revenue stream coming from gambling.

The minister as a lawyer undoubtedly will have a much more extensive knowledge of the nature of privative clauses than I do. My knowledge is limited to a very limited bit of reading, but my sense is that the nature of that sort of a clause is to try to hive off an activity or an area from intrusion from the courts and to set a particular area aside and protect it from the inquiries of the courts. I think that we need to be careful of that. I think that it's probably worth reading into *Hansard* a few statements on privative clauses. The addition of a privative clause in legislation is cause for concern. Quoting *Halsbury's Laws of England*:

Statutory provisions giving jurisdiction to inferior courts, to government departments or to bodies created ad hoc must be strictly construed, and the procedure prescribed must be exactly followed where it is important to do so having regard to the general object intended to be secured by the statute.

10:50

So I think it's incumbent upon this government to justify, hopefully through engaging in debate in this Assembly, the necessity of this sort of a clause in this legislation. In fact, there are many words written on privative clauses. Again quoting here:

It is no secret, the effort has been ongoing for quite a number of years now, legislatures have attempted to shut out the courts [in particular areas] claiming, in certain matters, full power for [themselves].

In other words, the Legislature wants to set aside an area, saying:

this is ours and ours alone, and the jurisdiction of the courts should be limited. This sort of thing is done by inserting a privative clause in the legislation.

It is a clause which forbids the court to involve itself in questions of what is right and what is wrong, where a resolution can be had from the mechanism which exists in the legislation itself.

For example, a statute might establish an arbitrator such as a board or a tribunal.

Now, I'm sure in some cases this is justified, but the courts historically have never liked such clauses and for probably understandable constitutional reasons. After all, the Constitution in many ways is a balancing act, a set of rules that is intended to create a constructive tension among different institutions in our society: on the one hand, the Legislature; in another area, the judiciary; and in a third area, the administration. Those institutions should be, as I say, in constructive tension, and when you have one of them trying to close itself off from that tension, from accountability, from balance, from the others, then we may find that the fundamental principles of a functioning parliamentary democracy are threatened. So we need to be very careful about privative clauses.

Again quoting from some rulings relating to privative clauses, "There can be no doubt that a statutory tribunal . . ." [Dr. Taft's speaking time expired]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Any questions for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview?

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, my comment to the Member for Edmonton-Riverview is that I'm sure he is unaware that the Minister of Gaming is in fact invoking closure on this bill by demanding a vote at second reading this evening. It is a substantive bill. All of our members wish to speak to it, and in spite of it being on the Order Paper many times over the past few weeks, this is the first opportunity to speak to it, and the Minister of Gaming is demanding a vote on it this evening.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: A question to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview from Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes. I, too, am wondering if the Member for Edmonton-Riverview is aware of the situation that has occurred tonight. There's a strong difference of opinion here, with the Minister of Gaming insisting that . . .

DR. TAYLOR: Are you suggesting that he's not bright enough to be aware of it? He's got to be a genius.

MS BLAKEMAN: I'm sorry; perhaps you could help him then.

What's at dispute here is that essentially the minister is insisting on closure and only allowing three members of this caucus to speak in second reading to this bill. In the past anyone that has ever wanted to speak would be allowed to, and this is being cut off tonight. In private conversation the minister has indicated that he felt that I was delaying this bill coming up, but I've already sent him information that shows that in fact it was on the Order Paper, and I was here and ready to speak to it. So I think that this is a very bad

sign and another form of closure that the government and their ministers have decided to use.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming to close debate.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd like to thank the hon. members, all of them that chose to speak this evening. I appreciate that not all of them did, but they obviously chose to remain in their seats notwithstanding the urging of the hon. members for them to rise. So I can only assume that they'll have an opportunity in one of the later sessions. I do however appreciate the comments that the hon. members have made, and I intend to respond to those in my opening comments in the next stage, Committee of the Whole.

At this point in time I would ask that we proceed with the vote on second reading.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:57 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Horner	McFarland
Amery	Jacobs	Melchin
Broda	Johnson	O'Neill
Calahasen	Jonson	Rathgeber
Cenaiko	Knight	Renner
Coutts	Lord	Stelmach
Doerksen	Lougheed	Stevens
Ducharme	Lukaszuk	Strang
Dunford	Lund	Taylor
Goudreau	Maskell	VanderBurg
Graham	McClelland	Yankowsky

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Carlson	Taft
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Totals:	For – 33	Against – 3
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[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a second time]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour I move that the Assembly stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 11:10 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]