

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 10, 2005**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 05/05/10

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'll call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2005-06**

Government Services

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to have this opportunity to present the business plan and the estimates for '05-06.

Before I start, though, I want to introduce the staff that's with us tonight. To start off, we have my deputy minister, Robert Bhatia; Laurie Beveridge, assistant deputy minister of consumer services and land titles; Wilma Haas, assistant deputy minister of Service Alberta and registries; Sue Bohachuk, senior financial officer; Tom Thackeray, assistant deputy minister of government and program support services; and my executive assistant, Dawn McKay.

In developing our business and financial plan, we prioritized our programs and services to focus resources on the most critical areas. To do so, we considered the following factors: the impacts on Albertans, the legislative mandate, the financial benefits realized, and the partnership supported by the service. Another key influence is our continued commitment to service excellence, as demonstrated through our vision statement: "Albertans served with excellence through innovative leadership."

Goal 1. We are in the business of serving Albertans, and our first goal, "efficient licensing and registration services" demonstrates how we touch the lives of all Albertans. We allocate some \$70.8 million in resources to provide services to support Albertans' life events from the time that they are born to when they purchase and drive their motor vehicle, they get married, acquire property and land, and eventually pass away, not necessarily in that order. The robust Alberta economy continues to drive demand for our services, and the ministry's registry system now supports close to 15 million transactions on behalf of Albertans each year. In addition, millions more transactions are completed for law enforcement and other government entities. Funding priorities under the goal of efficient licensing and registry services include responding to the 17 per cent increase in transaction volumes since 2000 and 2001 as well as improving client access and convenience.

Another top priority under goal 1 will be protecting Albertans' personal information held by the ministry. For example, we need to be proactive in addressing the fastest growing crime in North America, identity theft. Our facial recognition technology for drivers' licences is a critical tool for detecting and addressing fraudulent identities. I'd like to point out that this use of facial recognition technology is another example of how Alberta is leading the way for the rest of the country, if not for all of North America. By using this technology, we are able to search the motor vehicle database of images captured since July 2003 for duplicate images of the same person to ensure that individuals do not have more than one driver's licence issued to them or that another individual has not used their name and address. This makes it virtually impossible for anyone to assume, through a counterfeit driver's licence, the identity

of an individual who currently holds an Alberta driver's licence or identification card. It's interesting to note that the federal public safety minister, Anne McLellan, has singled out an Alberta driver's licence as being a good substitute for a passport when entering the U.S. because of its highly regarded security standards.

We will also implement fraud awareness programs for our registry agents and for Albertans so we can further mitigate the risk of identity theft. In addition, we will evaluate our current processes and systems to ensure that we are doing our utmost to protect Albertans' personal information.

These measures of our success for licensing and registration include client satisfaction with accessibility, accuracy, affordability, and security of our services. Our commitment to client satisfaction is evidenced by the fact that we have improved turnaround times with land title services and realized a 12 per cent increase in satisfaction over the prior year. This improvement was largely due to process changes that increased efficiencies and the provision of extra staff to address the 30 per cent increase in land title transactions. In 2004 our land titles folks completed a record high million-plus transactions.

We aim to further increase client satisfaction ratings in 2005 and '06 to 80 per cent from the previous rating of 77 per cent. As well, we will continue to ensure that our fees for services are very fair and reasonable. We provide tangible, everyday examples of the Alberta advantage through such things as the low cost of registering a home, which is currently 81 per cent below the national average, or our car registration fee, which is 18 per cent below the average, or our driver's licence fee, which is 31 per cent below the national average.

Registry agents are key components of our service-delivery model, and we want to ensure that their high client satisfaction ratings continue. We have set a satisfaction rate target of 85 per cent. In total, our registry and licence services are estimated to generate revenue in excess of some \$350 million.

Our second goal is "informed customers and businesses, and a high standard of marketplace conduct." We allocate about \$10.1 million to this important service. Our customer programs contribute to a prosperous economy by promoting ethical business practices and well-informed consumers. An effective and up-to-date legislative framework is key to supporting Alberta's ever-evolving and growing marketplace, and the cornerstone of that framework is the ministry's Fair Trading Act.

The Fair Trading Act allows us to investigate unfair business practices in any market sector if the transaction includes the sale of goods or services to consumers. While traditionally the focus has been on home renovators, collection agencies, door-to-door salesmen, loan brokers, and unlicensed businesses, we have also laid charges against home moving companies, funeral homes, and travel agencies under the act. The Fair Trading Act allows us to impose penalties that can include fines up to \$100,000 or three times the amount obtained as a result of the offence or up to two years imprisonment or a combination of both fines and imprisonment.

There are a number of things that we do to ensure that our legislation continues to address the needs of consumers. These activities include monitoring marketplace complaints and assessing the number of consumers affected, dollars at risk, and the ability of consumers to seek remedies through existing processes; distributing discussion papers to stakeholders and seeking input through external panels, advisory committees, and focus groups; working with other jurisdictions and reviewing their legislation to ensure that best practices are adopted in Alberta. We also monitor news events and industry publications to identify emerging trends and issues. In addition, we conduct compliance audits to ensure that legislative requirements are being met. Over the business plan period we will

develop amendments to tighten up the Fair Trading Act and address emergent marketplace issues such as credit and collection practices to ensure that customers are dealt with as fairly as possible.

8:10

Mortgage fraud is another emerging marketplace issue that we will be addressing under our second goal. Our Real Estate Council of Alberta, which reports to our ministry, administers the Real Estate Act and is leading the country in tracking, investigating, and raising awareness of mortgage fraud. The council provides education programs and a checklist to assist real estate and mortgage brokers in identifying mortgage fraud; for example, by September 2005 all mortgage brokers and agents must complete a mortgage fraud awareness course in order to be eligible for licensing. As well, the council administers an insurance fund to compensate consumers for losses. In addition, a government advisory committee on mortgage fraud was recently established to help deal with this important issue. The committee includes members from the Alberta government, the banking finance industry, the real estate community, and the law enforcement agencies.

Another important issue that we are looking at, in partnership with Alberta Justice, is the establishment of an alternate dispute resolution process to provide an option for handling landlord and tenant disputes without burdening the justice system. Specifically, it will provide landlords and tenants with a faster, less expensive, and more informal resolution of tenancy disputes through a quasi-judicial process. This type of model is already used in other provinces with considerable success. Where possible, best practices from other provinces have been adopted into Alberta's model.

As many consumer issues transcend borders, we will continue to work with our national and international consumer protection initiative and focus on the most serious marketplace violations. To give you an idea of volumes, nearly 77,000 customer inquiries and over 1,500 marketplace investigations were processed last year, with nearly \$300,000 being returned to Albertans. The success of our consumers program is measured according to our client satisfaction, for which we have stretched targets from 75 per cent to 80 per cent.

Another important marketplace issue pertains to the growth in the evolving utility market, which is addressed under goal 3. This goal focuses on protecting the interests of Alberta's 1 million residential, farm, and small commercial consumers in this changing market. The office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, or UCA, has a resource base of some \$4.7 million and works with other consumer groups to reduce overall consumer costs by streamlining the regulatory process and influencing improvements in the utility marketplace. In their first 18 months of operation UCA staff, working with other organizations, achieved \$85 million in utility rate reductions for consumers. The UCA will also continue to respond to consumer questions and concerns and advocate on their behalf to ensure that they are fairly treated.

We are drawing upon the expertise of a number of government departments, including Alberta Energy and the EUB, Seniors and Community Supports, and Economic Development. In collaboration with other consumer groups and their representatives we are actively involved in the EUB hearings on issues pertaining to rates for small retail customers. Government Services and Alberta Energy staff also meet regularly to discuss a range of issues affecting small consumer issues.

UCA projects under way include a plain language contract initiative, billing practice review, a tariff bill code, and the reviews of wholesale and retail market design. In addition, the UCA will continue to increase its efforts to ensure that customers are informed about the restructured marketplace, their opinions and obligations, and where they can turn to for advice and information.

We recognize that awareness is one of the best forms of consumer protection. We have ways to do it in our efforts regarding the restructured marketplace. We do have a number of activities currently under way. These include distribution of information materials such as our pamphlet on what you should know before you sign a retail energy contract, communications through our website and consumer information contact centre, speaking engagements by the advocate and staff, and public meetings of the Utilities Consumer Advisory Council.

We are also in the process of developing a more comprehensive communications and marketing strategy on consumer awareness, which we plan to begin implementing over the coming months. As of March 31, 2005, the UCA had responded to nearly 3,000 inquiries from Albertans and taken appropriate action on their behalf. Success will be measured by stretch targets for Albertans' awareness of the UCA's services and satisfaction with actual service received.

Our fourth goal is advancing the Service Alberta initiative to provide Albertans with accessible, integrated, and quality government services. Resources of approximately \$800,000 are allocated to this initiative with further support received from other champion ministries such as the Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. Key next steps include encouraging ministries to make more of their services available online and enhancing the functionality and content of the Service Alberta website, which receives over 60,000 hits per month. This is an important initiative since 35 per cent of Albertans' contact with the government of Alberta has been through this Internet.

Website information is also a key resource for staff to use behind the scenes in providing consistent and accurate services regardless of which service delivery channel is used. Currently there are more than 1,200 information-based services and over 70 transactional services available online. Our ongoing objective is to provide more online service transactions so that Albertans can submit applications and forms, track their status, and receive notification of the results. As well, we will develop a long-term plan to enhance access to over-the-counter services, which will build on our existing province-wide network of registry agencies.

Implementing cross-government service standards will be another priority under goal 4. In addition to measuring Albertans' satisfaction with their access to government services and information, which has a 78 per cent target, we will also begin reporting on satisfaction with the timelines of those services. Our target for this is 72 per cent.

Our fifth goal is to provide "effective management of, and access to information, and protection of privacy." These services account for about \$3.4 million of our resource base. Our efforts are directed to ensuring that information access and privacy legislation is effective and that the stakeholders who administer the legislation receive support. A major initiative under this goal is preparing for the review of Alberta's private-sector privacy legislation, scheduled to begin in 2006. We will also work with other jurisdictions to harmonize private-sector privacy rules as other corresponding legislation is reviewed and updated.

Albertans' response to the private-sector privacy legislation has been very positive. Both the business community and the public have been making good use of our information resources. For example, we have had 23,000 hits per month on our website and about 140 calls per month to our telephone information line.

Another key responsibility under goal 5 is to promote effective management of the government's information by providing all ministries with advice on standards and best practices as well as delivering specialized training. In addition, we will continue to administer the FOIP program. Our success will be measured by a

target of 90 per cent of FOIP requests handled within 60 days and without complaint.

I believe we have put forward before you a fiscally responsible business plan that reflects our continued commitment to excellence in providing services that touch the lives of virtually all Albertans.

With that, I thank you for your attention, and now we'll engage in discussion. Thank you.

8:20

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to start by thanking the hon. minister for his introduction. I, too, welcome the staff, if they're still with us.

I will start by asking a question with regard to the full-time equivalent employment staff. I asked this yesterday during the budget debate concerning the Ministry of Innovation and Science, and I'm going to repeat the same question to the hon. Minister of Government Services. In fact, the department of the Alberta Corporate Service Centre and its staff were transferred over to the newly founded Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency, and one would assume that a corresponding reduction in the full-time equivalent staff would ensue. We noticed that instead of that happening, we have an increase from 466 in the previous year's budget to 482 full-time equivalent staff in this year's estimate. That's a change of plus 16, or an increase of 16, and I would appreciate an explanation from the hon. minister as to why this did happen.

Parallel to that, I look at the ministry support services expense in the budget for this department. Again, I'm comparing the previous year's forecast of \$5.4 million, which is apparently increasing in this estimate to \$5.7 million, which is a \$300,000 increase. You know, I'm not really arguing against it, but I just need clarification as to why it's warranted and why it's needed.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Chairman, could I ask the hon. member if he could give me the program numbers? I'll never follow him if we start jumping all over.

Mr. Elsalhy: Sure. The full-time equivalent staff appears in the fiscal plan on page 57, and then the ministry support services budget appears on page 202.

Mr. Lund: Give me the program numbers.

Mr. Elsalhy: Oh, this is just the budget. There is no program number yet. I'm not at that stage yet. So it's on page 202.

The Chair: Please proceed. It might be helpful if you referred to the page you're on or something like that.

Mr. Elsalhy: So just a point of clarification there.

Also, I have just a general question with regard to the registries and the privatization of registries. I just would like to get some explanation briefly from the hon. minister as to how this has proven to be beneficial for Albertans.

With that, I also have a question with regard to what appears to be an expense under program 5 on page 207. That talks about registries renewal, which is program 5.0.3. It looks like we're injecting \$1.3 million from last year's forecast into this year's estimate. I guess my question would be: if registries are private-sector companies or private-sector providers, why are we worried about spending more on registries renewal? To me these are private-sector people, and

they should look after their own existence and maintenance and upgrading. So, again, a point of clarification there, please.

The ministry explains in I think the introduction to the fiscal plan that its primary external client is the public and the consumer of this province. In keeping with the spirit that, you know, we do everything in consultation and we ask everybody who's involved what they think, is the minister considering surveying or polling the public with regard to issues that affect everybody, like registries? Are they happy with the registries being privatized? Are they happy with the drivers' education and licensing being privatized? Are they happy with, to use the minister's words, the restructured utility marketplace environment, or would they rather stay on the regulated rate option? I would be really interested if the minister is agreeable on this and if he might actually go ahead and start surveying the public on these issues.

I know that his department is efficient in informing and educating the public about the merits of the different programs and why they're wonderful or why they make sense, but I think it's really a two-way highway, where the information goes back and forth. It should not be unidirectional, the government telling the people what's good for them and why deregulation is great and why private-sector registries are wonderful. So like we discuss the pros and cons, I think just open it up to feedback and input. This is basically what the ministry states: the primary external client is the public and the consumer.

On my own, very simplistically, I conducted a survey, and I asked people a yes or no question with regard to driver education, examination, and licensing. I said in my simple survey: "Should the province resume control over driver examination and licensing? Yes or no." Of the people who responded to my simple survey, which is not scientific in any way – you know, it's a yes or no question – 87 and a half per cent said that, yes, the province should resume control over driver examination and licensing. So that's just an example.

Moving on, the ministry states that it is committed to service excellence and can achieve this by keeping an "ongoing dialogue with Albertans about their current and evolving service needs." How will this feedback be solicited? How will they ask for input, and how will this input be used to implement policy or improve current procedures?

Next on my list – and, again, these are general questions – Albertans expect their government to protect their personal and private information, of course. We understand that protection of privacy is one of the main goals of this ministry, but lately we have witnessed many incidents where information was either stolen or misplaced, lost. These are incidents which are alarming and causing us in the opposition and I think even the layman on the street some concern. Computer tapes were lost, microfiche containing pension information were lost, electronic health records were lost, and we also remember that some information on senior government bureaucrats was misplaced as well and then ended up in the hands of potential crooks. Again, how is the ministry planning on improving this practically? You know, having the intention is one thing, but then having the policies is the other thing.

Moving on, the ministry's fiscal plan also states that it must be proactive in responding to emerging marketplace issues. I know that the hon. minister touched on the issue with the mortgage fraud, for example, and I think we also discussed that during question period. Yes, it is good in responding, but then I think we have to also about things before they happen, like thwart would-be crooks and would-be mortgage defrauders from committing the crime. How will the ministry review its practices and implement strategies aimed at prevention, not reaction?

The hon. minister indicated that this ministry will continue to streamline services and, again, will seek input from clients on

service delivery. Are there any particular innovative things that this ministry is looking at or considering to streamline services?

8:30

After that, I would move to a question with regard to the Utilities Consumer Advocate, which is goal 3, as the hon. minister indicated. Having a Utilities Consumer Advocate is really not a bad idea. It's a good, sound idea, but I think, like I said during question period and in a previous exchange, this department has to have teeth. It has to be at arm's length from government. It has to have the power to do what it's supposed to do. Educating the public, again, is one component of its role, but I think it's mostly there to protect the consumers and the small commercial users like the residential, farm, and small commercial consumers.

We know that recently the honourable person who was occupying this position resigned, and I'm just going to ask the hon. minister whether a successor, or replacement, has been found and also whether it would be separate from the position of deputy minister so the two are not one and the same. I think it would make sense that we empower this person and allow him to be at arm's length from government to operate independently.

The hon. minister also indicated that the Utilities Consumer Advocate since March 31, if I remember correctly, handled or received 3,000 requests from Albertans, and action has been taken on their behalf. How many of these requests resulted in refunds, for example, from utility companies? Do we have a percentage, or do we have a trend or a pattern that we can say, you know, statistically over the years, this is happening, and this is the percentage that we are able to return every time, which really indicates that this is the percentage by which consumers are overcharged? Can we have a statistic that actually looks at this and studies this? How many of those 3,000 claims were dismissed right off the bat, and why were they dismissed? Were they not realistic in nature? Were they asking too much? We need to know how many of those 3,000 were resolved one way or the other.

In the Auditor General's findings when he reviewed this ministry, I think pretty much they said that not a lot is out of order, and I think they gave it a passing grade. However, the Auditor General noted that several irregularities have been identified, and I can probably point to page 179 of the Auditor General's report. Without really going into great detail, I would notice that it's mostly with contracting practices.

For example, two contracts were found not to be in accordance with the centre, which is the corporate centre that left and went to the ministry of restructuring, but it was under this ministry before. They were not in accordance with the agreements or policies. He also commented that reasons for sole sourcing are not always documented. "No alternatives considered to sole sourcing . . . Contracts signed after work started or after existing contract expired . . . Contract approvals not in accordance with the policies," and so on.

I think if we're really hoping to set the example and show us in the opposition and show the people of Alberta that this ministry is transparent and is doing everything above board and clearly and cleanly, I would urge the hon. minister to really consider rectifying these shortcomings and looking at these recommendations seriously.

Back to the Utilities Consumer Advocate, actually, there is something I would like to ask with respect to its budget, and this appears on page 270 of the business plan, expense by core business. The Utilities Consumer Advocate in the budget for 2004-05 was going to receive \$4.5 million and in this estimate is going to apparently receive \$4.7 million. My question is: why are we really spending as much when, in fact, the hon. minister indicated during

question period that they get their financing from the Balancing Pool? So if they're getting it from the Balancing Pool, what are we spending on under that heading? You know, when it says Utilities Consumer Advocate, is there something I'm missing? Or maybe it's misrepresented. They're getting their finances recovered from the Balancing Pool, so why are we injecting money into it now?

Back to the registries, another point that I forgot was the angle that these registries should be self-sufficient. I heard a lot of talk about registries not only being there for, you know, automobile registries or drivers' licences – you know, take a picture, and we'll mail you your driver's licence – but they are doing other things as well. Then I also remember that when we discussed mortgage fraud and the land titles office, it was described as being merely a registry. So is the word "registry" that large or all-encompassing that it really involves not just the registries? My question is: if they're private sector, why are we spending money on them? Maybe there's something I'm missing, but I would appreciate any clarification I get from the hon. minister.

Lastly, with regard to the departments which report to the hon. minister, I have recently heard of a department called the access and privacy branch, and I had difficulty finding what they do and their mandate. The access and privacy branch, APB: apparently it reports to Government Services. I would be grateful if the hon. minister shared with me even in writing – it doesn't have to be now – their mandate, their structure. You know, why do they exist, and what do they do?

With that, I will retake my seat and encourage other members to participate, or if the hon. minister would like to reply. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lund: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I can give you a list of exactly where the FTEs were added. You're right: there were 16 added. We put one in the business and financial services part under Ministry Support Services. There were two under Service Alberta and Registries. There were 2.5 added in program support. We reduced 1.5 in the Service Alberta section, and we added 10 into the registry services area, for a net of 11 under Service Alberta and Registries. Then under government and program support services, under access and privacy we added two people, and under information management we added two people, for a total of four. So that's where the sixteen were added.

Now, under program 1 you were asking about the budget moving from \$5.4 million to \$5.7 million. The most significant change in the ministry support services arises from an anticipated government of Alberta salary settlement of \$200,000, and the budget also incorporates increases to the ministry service agreement from ACSC. We were expecting changes there. Other factors include increases in WCB learning accounts to government-wide standards of \$500 per employee. In addition to the leadership provided by the ministry to the deputy minister – oh, those don't give the exact numbers that you're looking for. An increase is largely due to the salaries. There was some \$283,000 under human resources. Once again, that was the increase to ACSC. Then, under legal services we had to add \$3,000. I guess that covers all the increases in that program from \$5.4 million to \$5.7 million.

8:40

Then if we go to your questions on the registry, you were looking at registries renewal, 5.0.3. Under that program we had an increase of some \$5.048 million, and that's to do primarily with a transaction that occurred the year before. Really, two things happened. We transferred to capital in the year before some \$3.4 million, which

will be reflected in a higher investment in the capital phase of the registry renewal project. This increase was offset by a higher amortization cost of some \$2.1 million. New funding to address inflation transaction volume increases, some \$0.9 million. The equipment/inventory budget increase also includes new funding, \$1.6 million, to meet growing demand transaction volumes as well as a \$3.4 million transfer from operating expenses to reflect the progression of registry renewal projects into the capital phase.

Now, you asked some questions later on about the registry system. This expenditure has to do with the central system here in Edmonton. All of the registries feed into it, and we're redoing the whole structure. You have to understand that a simple thing like changing the driver's licence, going to the graduated driver's licence, increases our costs considerably because every time we make a little change anywhere in any of those things, you have to make a major change in the central system here. So all of this renewal is not with the equipment out in the field. That's primarily the responsibility of the registry agent. This has to do with the information here.

Now, you talked about polling or how we get information. Well, with the satisfaction of registries – and, of course, you'll see that in our performance measures – we do surveys; we do phone calls; we ask people to actually fill out forms about satisfaction. We continually do this because we're trying to monitor and make sure that all of the registries are operating as we would like to see them.

The registries also deliver services other than just registration. You asked about some new initiatives. Well, one of the things that we're looking at: do other ministries have some connection with the public that could be handled through the registries? One that comes to mind right off the bat under Sustainable Resource Development: the WIN cards, the licence for hunting, those kinds of things. There are a whole host of things that are in other ministries that might be able to be moved closer to the public through the registry system.

You have to recognize that if you compare when registries used to be under government versus under the private sector, with government you're open from 8:30 to 4:30. As soon as you move it out to the private sector, they're open in the evenings, they're open on Saturdays, and they're providing all those kinds of services. So the public in our surveys is very happy with that private sector there.

You questioned about whether the public is in favour of the RRO, for example. Well, I can tell you that we have an advisory committee to the UCA, and that committee – as a matter of fact, I think it's tonight or the 12th. It's this week, anyway, that they're in Bonnyville. They're holding a public meeting out there to gather input about the whole electrical restructuring and what they're doing.

Driving training. That's not in my department. That's in Transportation. We're not responsible for the driving testers. The satisfaction: I'm not sure because that's not in our department.

You mentioned about the loss of private information. This department has a lot of private information. Fortunately, we haven't lost any, but we are, through the Privacy Commissioner – he's investigated those various problems and has made a number of comments about how they can tighten them up to make sure that these things don't happen. We're working with all of the ministries on the security of private information because it is critical. It is something that we have to make sure that we're doing everything we can to make sure that it's protected. As it pertains to, like, registries, because they often collect a lot of this, we're doing some training. We're putting some new measures out in the field to make sure that there isn't access available to people that shouldn't be getting it.

You mentioned about being proactive. Well, we are being very proactive in all of these areas, with mortgage fraud, with vehicle theft. As a matter of fact, tomorrow with the Solicitor General and

the Attorney General – we've had a committee set up looking at vehicle theft. As a matter of fact, the current Solicitor General chaired that committee, and we've continued it, and tomorrow we're making a report of all the proactive things. Some of it is to do with dealers, but the big part is what you as a private individual can do to protect yourself from theft.

You talked about other things we can do, and I think I just touched on it briefly, but you know just think across the government a number of services that we can move out. UCA. My current deputy is the new UCA advocate. You talked about the funding. Yes, that comes from the Balancing Pool, the \$3.7 million. It's not coming out of general revenue.

We'll have to get back to you. Of those 3,000 complaints that were handled, I don't know how many – you asked a number of questions about those. I just don't have that information here, so we'll get back to you. You talked about the trends in complaints. We'll get you that specifically, but I can tell you here now that the complaints have dropped off dramatically – dramatically. They're really coming down.

The Auditor General. As you said, those comments were aimed at what actually has been transferred over to RAGE, so the things that were left for us are very, very small, and he was happy with what we're doing.

The access to information. Once again, I think I covered that pretty much as we were talking earlier about the protection of privacy. It's a big issue, and we're going to make sure that we do everything we can to protect it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me pleasure to stand and discuss further the estimates briefing for Government Services. I appreciate the introductory comments and some of the discussion around each of the roles and responsibilities. A lot of this is new for me, and I hope it won't be redundant, but I would appreciate some further clarification about your role, for example, in the electricity deregulation and what role you would play with constituents who feel that this has not served their interests and how you would address some of the government side at the same time as trying to understand the small consumer, small business and the huge increases they've faced in the last while. I didn't realize that you had any role in that until tonight, so it's interesting to hear more about what you see your role to be there.

8:50

In relation to some of the guidelines in the Auditor's report on conflict of interest I don't know if you commented on some of the recommendations there in relation to how you're evaluating your conflict of interest guidelines year to year and seeing the extent to which your staff both understand and renew or communicate further new conflicts of interest as they emerge.

I didn't hear you comment as fully as I would like on the Auditor's comments or recommendations, I should say, about disaster recovery programs and the capacity to deal within a day or two of the collapse of business systems both in the community and, perhaps, in the government. Perhaps I missed that in some of your comments, but I'd appreciate knowing just a bit more about how you are addressing that question.

Relating back a little bit to the conflict-of-interest policy, have you considered whistle-blower legislation in the same context that we've discussed it at other times in the House, the question from a public perception point of view, perhaps even with other agencies that are dealing with you on a regular basis, licensing registry

authorities? How comfortable can they be in raising concerns about either what's going on in your department or in their own business without whistle-blower legislation? It just seems to me a logical thing for all governments to look at in protecting their due diligence and their public perception of how they deal with dissent and, in a democracy, the free access to speaking about those issues.

So I would appreciate some comments on those specific issues, if you would.

Mr. Lund: Well, the role of the UCA in the electricity restructuring: as you know, the office was set up in 2003, and the role was to assist people in understanding and to give them assistance when it came to doing things like contracts and to assist in the presentations to the EUB because it's only a small portion of the electrical industry that has been deregulated, the generation and the retail. So there are things now that all of the transmission is still a regulated market. As a matter of fact, I know in my own case by the total cost of our bill that it's those areas that are regulated that are costing us much more money than the unregulated side. But, as you know, under the RRO, which is a regulated rate option, there were a number of hearings, and with the help of the advocate and others, like the REAs, there was some \$85 million trimmed off what would possibly have been approved. That's what the utilities were asking, and the EUB shaved some \$85 million off it. So that was a big win for the advocate.

I guess the big area originally – when the restructuring occurred, there were so many billing errors. It was just unreal the number of billing errors there were out there. I can give you a horror story in my own case because we happen to have four taps, and it was unreal the sloppiness. I know that they were changing their systems, but that transition was a real trying time. That's when the advocate came in and was acting and still does. Through that office we get some big mistakes, so the advocate goes to the utility company and works with them to get a resolution to those problems.

I'm not sure whereabouts you found the conflict of interest because I thought that the Auditor General's comments were more to do with the issues around the government services that were transferred over to RAGE. I know there was a lot of controversy about contracts that were not retendered and this sort of thing, but that's in the section that moved over. That wasn't in our section. We're only left with just a minimal amount of comments.

In the information that I had before me – I can read it to you – there were three things. The department made satisfactory progress on our prior recommendation to have recovery facilities and equipment available to resume business operations. That was one. That was one that all ministries went through. The department made satisfactory progress on a prior recommendation to complete a project management plan for the registry renewal initiative. That one is still with us, and we're still working on it. The department implemented a prior recommendation to implement access standards for the use and disclosure of personal information in the motor vehicle registry. Those were the three that were out of the Auditor General's report that were left with us. The rest were part of the identity that moved over to RAGE.

Well, I'm the same as the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Finance, who has said many times in the House: staff know that they can come to me if they have a problem. There is no penalty. We have an open door. We don't need to have so-called whistle-blower legislation. They have access. The 11 years that I have been a minister, that's been the policy all the time. Any employee of my department can phone me confidentially. Anybody in the department. It's an open door.

Dr. Swann: This is to protect people into the future, any department, any leader.

Mr. Lund: Well, I believe that it's an open door, and we have no problem with staff contacting us. That's something that I make very clear with our staff.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a few comments that are going to be very directed in one area. I would say that it makes some sense what the minister has been talking about in terms of the program spending of \$90 million, which is an increase of over \$12 million. As I understand it, it's to address the sustained increases in transaction volumes and rising demand for various registries. The minister has alluded to it. Part of that money, I believe, is going to the privacy and security of information, which becomes a very important issue, especially in view of what's happened in some other government areas. So I think that under those circumstances the \$12 million increase probably makes good sense.

I'd like to just focus in on the Utilities Consumer Advocate. I probably won't take my full time today, Mr. Chairman. My understanding of the Utilities Consumer Advocate is to help consumers help themselves, to inform and empower them in Alberta's restructured energy markets, and to facilitate the representation of regulatory hearings and other proceedings.

9:00

Mr. Speaker, I go back to some of the discussions that we held in the House earlier on. As the minister is well aware, the Utilities Consumer Advocate discussion paper was leaked to the media. This discussion paper stressed that all five options suggested by Alberta Energy for the future residential electrical sales will penalize bill payers and benefit sellers, and then they added: "we are surprised and disappointed . . . Albertans expect and deserve that their Government will protect their interests in this policy, where the individual has little influence or option."

Now, I recollect the question period, Mr. Chairman. I think the minister said at the time – correct me if I'm wrong – that it was just a discussion paper and was not the final paper, but then, oddly, the Utilities Consumer Advocate issued a response to the discussion paper on wholesale and retail market designs. I guess the one question I would ask flowing from that – and I'd be interested in the minister's comments – is: why does the utility market advocate need to respond to its own work? That's what seems to have happened: a response to this paper. You've got the advocate responding to its own work.

The response, if I may so, Mr. Chairman, to its own discussion paper I don't think paints the government deregulation plans in much better light because they say here:

Government's transition to a competitive retail market has the potential . . .

I'll admit that it says "has the potential."

. . . to impose additional costs and risks on small consumers who could face 40% to 45% higher prices based on the current offerings by competitive retailers.

Well, the minister and the government can talk about new energy and electricity coming on and the rest of it, but the reality is that this is what the small producers, the farmers, the small businesspeople, and ordinary individuals are facing.

Both of these discussion papers, the draft, if you like, and the other one, seem to be saying the same thing, and I think that this is where this department and certainly the Utilities Consumer Advocate should be taking a much stronger role. I know that probably the minister will say that it's just a coincidence, but Mr. Jackson resigned after these two reports. He said, as I recollect, that it was probably just coincidence or something along that manner. But the

minister and the release from the Premier's office did not mention Mr. Jackson's position; he was both the deputy minister and the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

Now, I noticed that the minister has sent out a release and has a new deputy minister, and I was going to ask the question. I think I heard the minister say in regard to some other questions that the new person is both again, the consumer advocate and the deputy minister. I guess I might say to the minister that I wish they would perhaps rethink this policy. Why? I think that the consumer advocate should not be part of government. He should have some more independent role, at least be at arm's length, if he's going to be the advocate for the consumer because it's not always going to be the case. A government deputy minister has a certain role to play within government that may be somewhat different than an advocate, Mr. Chairman. I think this leaves it suspect.

I'll come to why I think it's a mistake by the minister's own department's business plan. The business plan of this ministry is quite clear. It says that it is the job of this ministry to "use consumer feedback and business intelligence to influence changes to retail utility policy and business practices to protect consumers." It says, too, to "ensure the accountability of utility companies in addressing consumer questions and concerns in a timely, accurate, and fair manner." In short, this ministry is responsible for protecting consumers' interest in the restructured utilities market.

Well, Mr. Chairman, by this minister's own business plan it's not doing very well. I'm looking at the performance measures that the minister I'm sure is aware of. I'm looking at 3.a, 3.b, and 3.c, and the percentages. I'll just do it quickly. I know that there are targets down the way but in 3.a the "percentage of Albertans aware of the role/services provided by the Utilities Consumer Advocate" is 31 per cent. Only 31 per cent of the people are even aware that this person exists. Well, I guess what I'm saying is that it's understandable if he's the deputy minister too. That's who they're going to know this person as. Then there's a slight passing grade for "percentage of contact centre customers 'satisfied overall' with services received," but a very failing figure is the "percentage of interveners expressing satisfaction with the cooperative protocol used in regulatory hearings." Only 20 per cent – only 20 per cent – are satisfied.

I guess I'll come back to the point that I was trying to make, that when you tie in the person that's supposed to protect the consumers and you make them the deputy minister, they're really serving two masters, I believe. I think that if that person was more independent – and I wish the minister would think about this – in speaking out, their performance measures would go up dramatically, perhaps perform more the role that I take it the government intends this person to have. I think that most people would feel that as a deputy minister he's not able to do the job advocating for the consumer that he should.

That would be my major suggestion. These performance ratings, I think the minister would agree, are pretty dismal. If he's not prepared to split that apart and make that consumer advocate more independent, what is the ministry doing, then, to improve these dismal performance ratings?

The only other comment, Mr. Chairman, I might make is in the same area. There's another service that the Utilities Consumer Advocate provides. I have them here, a couple of handouts about door-to-door salespeople and the like. On one of these handouts it says, "Electrical Marketing: What Consumers Should Know." On the door-to-door electricity marketing, it tells consumers – and I suppose it's not a bad thing to say – to "take the time to compare prices of electricity and other services offered by each company." The sad reality, though, is that in the two major cities there are really only two big energy providers. In Edmonton and Calgary there isn't that great a selection to sort of sit back and take the time with.

Under the guise of offering consumers a choice, this is what deregulation has given us: two major providers in the two cities, and they're not that different. There isn't that much choice. While it's probably good advice if you're in a deregulated market, what it's saying, you know – when you've only got two, it's not a monopoly but an oligopoly at best. I guess that when that happens, if you're going to argue deregulation and that there has to be a market there and there has to be competition, and that's not occurring, then I think we have to really think about it.

I guess that I'm saying to the minister – and it's probably not going to change; I've been around this long enough – that if the marketplace cannot be counted on to provide the essential services that people need to survive, then the government has to step in and regulate it. I don't consider deregulation of two, sort of, major players fighting each other in the cities real choice.

Mr. Chairman, I know there are other areas, and I appreciate the minister. As I said, I think the budget increase makes sense in view of what they're attempting to do, especially with the management of government records. With all the registry services, I certainly know why you need that extra money.

Those would be my comments.

9:10

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll just make a few more comments on the UCA. I was disappointed to see Roger Jackson go. I want to make sure that you understand that.

The report, of course, came from the advisory committee who are holding hearings around the province. They're just ordinary people, but they've got a very good understanding of the electrical system, and quite frankly some of the comments that you made about the lack of competition: that's what they are saying. That's what they've been saying to us, the advisory committee. Of course, the response to the discussion paper was just that: it was a response. The situation that you commented about, that the small consumer could, if we just opened up the flood gates, be subject to a fairly large increase: that's not going to happen immediately. That would be over time.

I was very, very pleased that the advisory committee was honest and frank. This is what they heard. This is what they believe. They put it in writing and they sent it to us. I admire committees that we set up that come back and report exactly as they see it. As a matter of fact, I phoned the chair and thanked him for being very frank, very honest, and telling us what to look for.

There has been no decision made. We will be working with the Department of Energy and my colleagues. We will be coming to a decision before the end of June on what's going to happen to the RRO. As you saw in that last report, the advisory committee were talking about three- and five-year contracts or a rolling three. I hope to meet with the chair and, hopefully, the whole committee because I just don't totally understand exactly who the entity is that's going to buy this block of power that would be available for the small consumer. That's all evolving, it's coming out, and we'll see where it goes.

Your comments about a deputy versus a stand-alone and which would have the most impact. There are two schools of thought. One you described. The other is that a deputy within government probably has more impact and more authority and more ability to sway government policy than does someone totally outside. I mean, there are two schools.

Actually, when this was set up, I was pleased to see that it was a deputy position that had that office. I can tell you that because this

department is under the Fair Trading Act and other pieces of legislation, we're looked at to protect the consumer not just in utilities. What I'm looking at is even expanding that role so that we wouldn't have just a Utilities Consumer Advocate but, in fact, have a consumers' advocate and have the same advisory committee. I mean, there are other issues that are coming up, these fraudulent situations. Those are very important consumer issues. Automobile theft: another very important consumer issue.

We are expected to be the protector of the consumer, this branch of government, and I take that role very seriously and believe that we need to maybe even expand it and go beyond where we currently are with our advisory committee and our consumer advocate. So that's what we're looking at: even expanding the role. I believe that there is a real function for it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to mention to the minister the goal of the efficient licensing and registration services, which is set out in the strategic plan. I believe that the department is doing an excellent job, and I've noticed that the quality and the efficiency of the registration of motor vehicles is exemplary. I know that there are different ways of achieving that registration, both by mail-in cheque and by appearing at a registry.

I had occasion to appear at a registry very recently in the north part of the city of Edmonton. I was able to present my registration renewal, my pink card, and my credit card to pay the registration on a couple of vehicles, and I was in and out within two minutes. So I compliment the minister on the efficiency of that registry.

I notice also that there's an 86 per cent satisfaction for the registries, and I would compliment the minister on achieving that goal.

I have a question for the minister, however, and that is that I note that there is \$280 million in revenue that's forecast from motor vehicle registrations. A casual and anecdotal observation. In the city of Calgary, at least, there seems to be a lot of people that are taking advantage of the Alberta advantage and coming to our province, and they seem to be driving around with licence plates from Saskatchewan and British Columbia and whatnot. It seems to be in all disproportion to those people that may be here for vacations or whatever. They're here in the middle of winter, not the best time for vacations.

It seems to me that we're losing out on a substantial amount of potential revenue there that could be put into servicing our infrastructure and our highways and streets and roads. I wonder whether or not the minister could just perhaps observe whether or not there are any indices or measurements where we could assess what proportion of vehicles would fail to comply with the proper time periods to get their Alberta registrations.

Finally, I just want to finish up with a compliment to the minister and his department with respect to the amendments that are being brought forward to the Business Corporations Act, which I had the pleasure of being involved with as the sponsor. I think that there are some very positive contributions to the economic position of Alberta in that Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2005, particularly with respect to the provisions that provide for unlimited liability corporations. I know that I've been contacted by several law firms and accounting firms that are anxious to put that legislation into use, and there are deals and transactions that are waiting upon the implementation of that.

I just would also ask the minister perhaps if he could comment and tell the Assembly a little bit about where that process is at, whether or not there are some regulations and implementations that

need to be completed before users can use the Business Corporations Act for the purposes of incorporating those unlimited liability corporations; in other words, when it will be accessible to the people that are waiting for that legislation to go into force.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lund: Thank you. Thank you very much for those comments. It's always good to hear those experiences about the registries. You know, you think about the way it used to be, when you had to take half a day off, go and take a number, and then go and sit down for however long. I remember hearing one individual talk about going to a government registry here in the city. This is just when the thing was being privatized. There was a private one at Leduc. He saw the big lineup, so he drove out to Leduc and then came back here. He had his licence. Had he stayed here, he still would have been sitting waiting for his number to be called. Yes, we know the service is good, and that's why you see that 86 per cent, good and improving.

9:20

Relative to the unlimited liability, a portion of the corporations act, the regulations, are being drawn up as we speak. It should be out very shortly. We will move it just as quickly as we can once the drafters have completed it. So that will be up and running, and we're very, very pleased. I'm very pleased with the staff and how they're very much in tune with the market and what we need to change to keep our legislation very current.

And thanks for carrying that bill. That was very important.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to thank the minister for his introductory remarks and his attempts to answer our questions.

With what I have to consider tonight, I'd like to first of all focus on the ministry support activities, specifically "providing expertise and leadership in . . . risk and information/records management, as well as FOIP support to the Ministry."

For years we have used the phrase "information highway" to describe the electronic flow of knowledge and expertise. Let us pause to reflect how much that means. In the last century governments have encouraged economic and social development in the form of railways, then highways, airlines, and pipelines. Today it is an investment in information services that draws in those who are prepared to invest in and contribute to our society in other ways.

Consumer protection and other types of client services are an indispensable part of this equation. Only when people can be assured that their money is well spent will they be prepared to make their homes here. I am pleased to note that it is this sector of freedom of information and privacy protection in which Alberta is among the leaders in the western world. We led in the introduction of FOIP legislation and in the extent of the powers we were prepared to give our Information and Privacy Commissioner.

We lead in the delivery of a course online from the University of Alberta that is developing and deepening the skills of information access and privacy protection professionals across Canada. The U of A's information access and privacy protection program has been successful in attracting as its new manager one of the top figures in the country, Marc-Aurèle Racicot, who wrote the book on access and privacy protection in Canada and who oversees courses in English and French and workshops for governments across this country. This is very commendable.

Albertans expect their government to protect their personal and

privacy information. Why have we witnessed several incidents of the failure to protect information by the government, including the loss of computer tapes and microfiches containing pension information and the loss of electronic health records? How will this government increase the protection of private information?

I have some other financial questions I'd like to ask. I notice that there's been a budget increase of \$907,000 for strategic information technology services. Why such a drastic increase in budget, and can you explain, please, how the purchases are planned or what purchases are planned? Also, the expense for program support is forecast to rise by 42 per cent, from \$456,000 to \$650,000. I'm wondering why this increase is needed and what you hope it will accomplish. Another one: how is the increased spending on access and privacy management and compliance, accountability, and risk management going to benefit Albertans?

In conclusion, I'm wondering if you would consider supporting a motion from my colleague from Edmonton-McClung, which hasn't been discussed yet, to turn the Utilities Consumer Advocate into a utilities consumer ombudsman. I'm wondering: would you be able to support that direction?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Chairman, the loss of that information that the hon. member mentions was investigated by the commissioner. What he found was that there was a problem with information being shipped, as I understand it, from Calgary to Edmonton, and then after some process it was supposed to be shipped back for storage. Somewhere along the way in transit the information was lost. He made some recommendations as to how to make sure that those things didn't happen again. It was terribly unfortunate the way the businesses handled it, but with the things that the commissioner has said need to be done and with our department working with the commissioner, we hope that we can eliminate those kinds of things from ever happening.

I appreciate your comments on the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. I don't know if you're aware, but I happen to have taken that act through the Legislature, so I'm very, very familiar with it. It was quite a piece of legislation.

On the specific questions that you asked, I'll get back to you in writing. You asked them so fast that I lost track of where you were at. We can easily get that back to you in writing.

As far as the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung's private member's bill – or is it a motion? I don't know which it is. I haven't had a chance to look at it, so I wouldn't want to comment on it until I've had a chance to look at what's being proposed.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thanks, Mr. Chair. One of the, perhaps, advantages of being one of the last speakers is that there's very little to talk about because they've all said my questions. However, I'll take a different tack on a couple of them if you don't mind.

A personal soapbox of mine, I guess, for lack of a better word, is this business of the lack of protection of personal information. The personal health records I think are a good example of things that can go awry. Actually, in my mind, the Americans certainly have access to all of our personal health information through the fact that they supply the IT support systems and, in fact, created the system to begin with.

I'm not sure exactly if this is your department, but it's under privacy. One of the things about actually creating these health files is that it is assumed that if you use the health system, you are allowing the health system to then put that information, your lab results or whatever, into a database. Nowhere has anyone asked me

if I would be willing to share my health records with a database. No one has asked me for that in writing. It is just assumed, and I think that that is a very bold assumption by whoever set this system up. Please correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding is that the last vestige of personal records that I would possibly have control over are the actual ones that are between me and my doctor because it's doctor-client privilege. I'm not sure that even that's protected or that, in fact, I would be able to say: Give it to me, and I will look after it. That is, obviously, a personal little soapbox, but I think it's important. Certainly, other people have talked to me about it.

This is based on a personal experience that I had in Russia. I'm just wondering how much your department actually knows about chop shops. I was in an apartment in Russia just shortly after perestroika – well, it is still fairly lawless, but it was even more lawless at that point – when I actually saw a Mercedes that was painted a different paint job, the serial plates were totally changed, and it was all done within an hour. It went in one door, and it was out the other. Because they weren't afraid of being caught, it was very easy for me to simply walk into that chop shop and watch them. I can't believe that there aren't people in this country capable of doing that. They had high-speed dryers and great big vats of spray paint, et cetera. Needless to say, it was very sophisticated, but six guys were running it. They had a Volkswagen taken apart, boxed up into different parts, in a half an hour. They had a Mercedes sports car crated and onto a truck bound for New York in five minutes.

9:30

So I don't know. I know that there are chop shops around here, and rather than me having to buy those things that you put on your steering wheel – you know what I mean – and locking up my garage and being very fearful, I really would like the government to give me better protection and, you know, really go after the bad guys. Don't say that the onus is on me to always be looking after my things. I would hope that as a citizen of Canada and certainly of Alberta I am free to have some kinds of personal freedoms, that I'm not always looking over my shoulder, and that my government is looking after me from that point of view.

Just one more thing: the Utilities Consumer Advocate. I have a lot of complaints from seniors who are totally in the dark about: regulated, not regulated; yes, I can talk to the guy at the door, no, I can't talk to the guy at the door. I have now come to the point where I'll actually physically help them or my office staff will because they get 800 numbers or they get Internet that they can't handle. Anyone over 75 usually has problems with those sorts of things. They'll get the phone, and they'll get 800 numbers. They'll press a bunch of buttons, and if they're lucky enough and patient enough because they hate doing it, they'll actually get a real-live voice. But it's someone that is just repeating something off of a computer screen – there isn't any sort of human touch – and then they'll hang up in frustration.

These are the people that are living in their homes, trying to hang on, to stay in their homes, and their utility bills are just totally discombobulating them, I guess, for lack of a better word. They really don't know what to make out of it. They just keep paying it, and it keeps going up, and I'm sure that you can appreciate the level of frustration.

And one other thing. I believe that the Auditor General's report has already been alluded to, but just bear with me. Again, this may have been transferred to the other department, so please correct me if I'm wrong. It was on page 179 about government contracts and what measures have been implemented to ensure a fair and accountable system. I'm not sure if that's referring to the accounting system, and if it is, I would like to know what accounting system

you use. Do you use the Canadian generally accepted accounting principles system?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Your comments about the health records. First of all, that's in the health records. The Minister of Health and Wellness, I believe that was within her department, so you might want to have that discussion with her tomorrow.

You talked about the U.S. having access to some of our information. The B.C. Privacy Commissioner did a study on the PATRIOT Act and how that can affect us and what the possibilities are there. Our commissioner is currently working with them. We will be getting advice as to what steps are going to be necessary because, yes, we don't want and won't accept that information that we gather from people here somehow finds its way into the U.S. and is accessible to U.S. agencies down there. We don't accept that, so we're looking at how we can fix that problem.

You talked about auto theft. As I mentioned in my comments earlier, tomorrow in conjunction with the Solicitor General and the Attorney General we're going to have the folks that did the report for us – Staff Sergeant Derek Curtis from the Calgary city police. He's chairing it now, and he's going to come, and then we'll be having a talk on it. There are a number of things that you can do to protect yourself. Government can't do everything, but we're also going to be doing some things proposed in the report that I think will go quite a long way to helping prevent this movement of stolen vehicles and curbers and other folks that have a way of assembling a vehicle. There's another issue that's out there that's a real big problem, and that's to do with vehicles that have been written off by insurance companies and then finding their way back into the marketplace. We have to put a stop to it.

I think you were probably on a lower level, the smaller stuff, the pawnshops. We're going to have to probably take a closer look at some of that activity. For example, in Quebec they don't allow your money shops, your payday-loan type institutions. They don't allow them, but they do allow pawnshops. Well, probably there's more problem in that area than there is in the payday loan. So we're looking at the activity of pawnshops. Now, there's a place for them. That's the thing that we have to recognize. There's a place for all of these, but we've got to be able to make sure that illegal activity is not occurring in those places.

The power situation and seniors. You just made the argument for maintaining the regulated rate option, and that's a reality. That's what the advisory committee is saying, so that will be part of our discussion when we make a decision on exactly how that's going to be handled. I urge you: if you have seniors that are having a lot of problems, they can certainly contact our office. We can send them information. If there are enough of them and they have enough problems, I would be prepared to ask one of my staff to go and talk to them because there are some basic things. We're trying to get any contract that might be out there in plain language so people can understand it. But I think that if there are a number of seniors in the community that are having the same problem, contact us and we'll see about sending somebody to talk to them.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to add to what the hon. member has just said about vehicle theft. I think I understand that there's something called the Alberta Vehicle Theft Committee that's funded by Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Yes.

Dr. B. Miller: Not in conjunction with the Solicitor General? It's Government Services. Okay. It's a serious issue because statistics seem to indicate that vehicle thefts in Alberta are up 15 per cent in 2003, including, interestingly enough, a 22 per cent increase in Edmonton alone. The person who is coming to give a report tomorrow is from Calgary, and I hope that he will take into consideration the Edmonton situation. I have no way of explaining why the increase should be greater in Edmonton than in Calgary, but certainly new strategies ought to be in place to deal with this, a great concern to the public. So that's my first issue, but others have mentioned it.

Now, land titles. I saw a very frightening program on television not too long ago – I think it was the CTV network – about horrendous stories from across Canada about families suddenly seeing a for sale sign go up on their front lawn because someone had managed to get into the land titles office and just changed the land title from one name to another. I was wondering if the minister could explain the process in Alberta. I haven't heard any stories about Alberta. Hopefully, there's a lot of security in place in terms of the land titles office, that and real estate agents or whoever is dealing in the sale of property have to show identification. Hopefully, it's not an easy thing for people to do. That's a horrendous kind of story, that a person's savings in their home could all of a sudden be put in jeopardy because of some security issue with land titles. I guess mortgage fraud fits in there, but I was especially concerned about what happens at the land titles office.

9:40

Vital statistics comes under Government Services. As a former minister in a church I've dealt with marriage licences for some 30 years, and to me I think it was a step backwards when marriage licences moved from vital statistics to private registry offices. Vital statistics still deals with marriage licences, of course, but now we send couples to private registry offices, where you can get a fishing licence and whatever. It seemed to me at the time a kind of dumbing down of the importance of marriage licences. I think that the public had a kind of attachment to vital statistics. That's where they went to get their licence.

I applaud, though, that in that process a lot of the functions that ministers had to perform were taken over by those private registry offices; for example, the receiving of all the information for the forms and the filling out of the forms. That happens in the registry office, and now clergy don't have to engage in that, and that's probably a good thing.

I guess that the only question that lurks in my mind, and maybe I'm just suspicious, although we have perhaps – I hope I'm not wandering into something that's completely hypothetical here. There is legislation before the House of Commons about same-sex marriage. Is the department considering getting out of the marriage business and leaving it to churches and synagogues to register marriages and to exercise their faith, whether they should marry a same-sex couple or heterosexual couples? Then the government would not have to deal with that issue. Is that being considered?

I hope not because the permission to perform civil marriages is laid down in the British North America Act, and it's a federal issue. Provinces are just supposed to carry out the licensing process, but they have to follow what the federal government, what the House of Commons, decides in terms of who should get married. Anyway, I have that question.

Now, to move from marriage to death – and for some people that's a distinction without a difference – I notice that the Cemeteries Act

and the Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board are under Government Services. It's interesting that in a reference to the Cemeteries Act – of course, I've had some experience with this as a minister in a church over the years. There's a reference to the modernization of the Cemeteries Act, or one of the strategies of the business plan is to "develop and/or modernize consumer legislation (e.g. . . . the Cemeteries Act) to address marketplace issues." I just wondered what that is about.

Does that have something to do with changing trends in terms of moving away from the burial of bodies in the cemetery to cremation? Cremation seems to be more popular now, so maybe funeral homes are not making as much profit in terms of the option of cremation because you don't even need an urn. You don't even need to use cemeteries because you can spread ashes anywhere. In fact, a lot of churches have developed memorial gardens right next to the church, where they place the ashes, not a receptacle – that would be against the Cemeteries Act – but the ashes. I am assuming that the Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board oversees the regulations in respect to funeral homes and sets standards for funeral homes and the costs that are associated with funerals.

My last point is just about Service Alberta, and here I'm asking the question as a new MLA. I notice that your goal 4 in the business plan deals with all the different departments and trying to work with ministries to promote their service. I was just wondering how this relates to our constituency offices. As a new MLA I'm conscious of the fact that we have to answer all kinds of questions and enable people to get access to government services. It would be a great idea, I think – and I don't know; maybe this is already happening – if our constituency managers could have some sort of orientation, especially if they're new, in how to access government services. I know, for example, that in WCB there are government liaison people that we can access, that we can call up, but what about all the other departments? I think our role as an MLA is to promote government services and to enable the ordinary person to get in touch with what they really need, whether it's AISH or whether it has to do with WCB or whatever. That would be great if we could have some direction in that respect.

Thank you.

Mr. Lund: You touched on a number of different things, so I'll go over them briefly. The auto theft issue. Yes, the city of Edmonton police are going to be present tomorrow along with the committee. Apparently, they're having some demonstrations. I don't know the full program, but this is an issue that's across the province. While it's currently this ministry that has championed this issue, it will be broken out into sectors and different departments. We won't be handling the legal stuff; that will be handled through different departments.

You talked about somebody breaking into land titles. No, that's not what happened. It isn't what happens. Nobody has broken into land titles, but there are some issues out there. In order for these schemes to work, there have to be a number of things happen. Often what happens in an identity theft is carelessness on the part of a landowner with private information and somebody is able to access that, a different individual, and then through different means – you heard just a couple of months ago about that driving school in Calgary where there were drivers' licences given out that were fraudulent, those kinds of things. Well, you had a number of people that you would consider to be trustworthy, professional people, and it turns out that they weren't.

So in all of this – with mortgage fraud, with identity theft – you get a team working together, and they find ways of doing some of this activity. Through the Real Estate Council, the Insurance Bureau

of Canada, and others, we've now got a committee currently working on this whole issue of mortgage fraud and what we need to do to make sure that they can't do it here in Alberta.

Yes, the vital statistics are in this department. You talked about marriage. The fact is that we don't marry people; we just simply register their marriage. Currently, of course, it's between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, and they can get a licence from us. You talked about lowering the importance of it by allowing it to be issued through a registry. Well, quite frankly, I think that changing that definition of who can get a licence is degrading it much more than moving it to the private sector ever even came close to doing.

9:50

The issue with cemeteries and bringing in that legislation. It has a lot to do with things like salespeople with prearranged funerals and a number of things that are happening there to make sure that our legislation can deal with those kinds of activities because that, once again, is a very active field that is changing almost monthly. What we need to do is make sure that we have enabling legislation that allows us to pass regulations and be able to get at it when we find that there is something going on that is dangerous to the consumer.

Service Alberta, to be able to call. That's exactly what I was talking about earlier, about having more services out. Registries would be one great place to deliver some of those services. Filling out forms, for example, to apply for various programs: well, maybe one of the efficient ways to do it would be through the registries.

Now, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East commented about elderly people not being able to use things like the Internet because a lot of this is available through the Internet. Well, yes, that's absolutely true. It's not only seniors. There are a lot of others that also don't have access. Maybe through registries would be a place. That's the kind of thing. Now, I urge you to get ahold of our office. We have a call centre that covers a whole host of the issues that you likely are facing, like landlord/tenant issues. Those seem to be pretty prevalent. There are a lot of those conflicts. They can get very good information through a phone call to our call centre.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate being able to just take a few minutes this evening to discuss Government Services. I guess I want to talk first a little bit about goal 2, "informed consumers and businesses, and a high standard of marketplace conduct," and the Fair Trading Act. "Marketplace awareness initiatives are targeted to both buyers and sellers, with a focus on educating them on their rights and obligations and empowering them to help themselves."

From there I want to move to deregulated electricity and the problems that it's causing Albertans. In goal 3 you talk about the Utilities Consumer Advocate. It's set up for the interests of residents, farmers, and small commercial businesses. That makes up a very small percentage of the actual electricity used here in the province, I believe between 15 and 20 per cent. Yet we've come up with a shortage of electricity, and as we all understand here, there's a . . . [interjection] Well, that's what there was, Luke. That's what there was and why we had to deregulate, we said, because we needed to spur some activity in the production.

So what we've done here, and the fear that we've heard this ever since NAFTA was signed is that if we start selling water to the States, if we sell electricity – we've opened up our natural gas – we have to compete with those individuals. It has driven up the price, which has been good for big business and for the government and the income that's come in here.

The area that I want to discuss, though, with electricity is that it really is an essential service here in the province, and it seems that for such a small group on the user side, the 15 to 20 per cent of the consumption, there has been a shortage that has come forward because of the demand from industry. There needs to be some way for the advocate to help the small producers, the small businesses, and the residents here in Alberta.

One of the things that has crossed my desk, that people have brought forward and that I'd like to share with you tonight, is to protect those small areas, perhaps, by having a two-tier system where the consumer, as in the residents, doesn't have to compete with big industry, who needs the electricity. It's been a regulated market. There should be some way of going back to regulate and say that this first 15 or 20 per cent needs to look after with the needs of Albertans. Then if industry wants to compete and have that free market after that, it would allow for free-market development, and they could use the electricity that they need.

The other area that I wanted to talk on is the rules and regulations. Ontario tried for a little while having what they call zero-base metering. It would be a market-driven area where producers could get and produce electricity. By setting up two meters – and the technology is there – they could run the meters back and, therefore, feed into the system and not have to pay the extra charges. The purpose of that is to spur more electrical production, especially from such things as we've talked about today and in the last few days: biomass reactors, windmill generation, and other areas that are coming forward with the new technology. The way it's set up now, they can't tie into the grid. It's very prohibitive. We need to open that up. I'd hope that it would be an area that Government Services would look at in being more innovative.

Also – and I've referred to it before – we give huge tax incentives and royalty breaks to those who are producing and working in the tar sands. If we were to give that same break and if people could put capital money into windmills or thermobiomass reactors and the likes of that and be able to write that capital off, that would be a huge incentive for small business to get in and produce. In my area there are school divisions, hospitals, and towns that are wanting to put up windmills, and it would be a great incentive if we would take the same attitude that we have in the oil and gas and mineral exploration and allow those writeoffs in the production of electricity.

I guess that's all I really wanted to share this evening. I appreciate Government Services and what we're trying to do for Albertans, and I hope we'll continue to be mindful that it's the Albertans that we're serving and not big business. Thank you.

Mr. Lund: Just very briefly, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member is right. The small consumer, or identities that consume less than 250,000 kilowatt hours a year, amounts to about 17 per cent of the total load, so that's true.

As far as water export to the U.S., we currently have a Water Act that prohibits any bulk export of water to the U.S. There would have to be a change in that legislation before that can happen, so I'm really not too worried about that one.

Your other comments about zero-base metering and the windmills. Those are interesting comments, and they could be fed into the Department of Energy. I can just tell you some of the work that I've done so far. I know that the idea of zero metering is an interesting one. The problem is that it's very expensive to implement, so unless you're producing quite a lot of energy, the cost of doing it is more than you're going to get out of it. So that's why that just isn't taking place.

Windmills. That's an interesting comment, but one of the things that we have to remember – and you may not be aware of it. When

I was Minister of Infrastructure, we purchased – 90 per cent of the government's power is now green. Half of that is windmills. The thing that you have to be aware of when it comes to windmills is that they only generate power about 35 to 40 per cent of the time. So you have to have all of the infrastructure backup for when the wind is not producing power, and that increases the cost. When you do the full life cycle cost, it's quite a bit higher. It's nice to have green, and it looks like it's cheap, but quite frankly it isn't that cheap. As a matter of fact, it turns out to be in the higher end.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to ask yet one more question of the hon. minister. It's in response to your comments to the questions asked by my colleague from Lethbridge-East with regard to the PATRIOT Act. I appreciate your comments. I, too, would share your concerns that we're totally against information being accessible by agents and authorities in the United States or any other jurisdiction, for that matter. What about data and information that is handled by American private service providers or contractors? I would just quote people like IBM or Microsoft, for example. This government relies heavily on partnerships with people like IBM and Microsoft. So what safeguards do we have in place that would prevent these companies or these private-sector partners from accessing this information whether we approve or disapprove? Also, should a leak happen or should a breach happen or should some of the information get funnelled to the U.S. . . .

10:00

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(4), which provides for not less than two hours of consideration for a department's proposed estimates, I must now put the question after considering the business plan and the proposed estimates for the Department of Government Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$99,046,000
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The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Pursuant to Standing Order 57(2) I move that the committee rise and report the estimates of the Department of Government Services and beg leave to sit again immediately to deal with the estimates of the Solicitor General.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, 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, 2006, for the following department.

Government Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$99,046,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Committee of Supply**
(continued)

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'll call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2005-06**

Solicitor General

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present an overview of the Alberta Solicitor General's estimates and the 2005 to 2008 business plan. With me this evening from my department are Eric McGhan, the Deputy Solicitor General; Brian Skeet, the assistant deputy minister and director of law enforcement; Arnold Galet, the assistant deputy minister of correctional services; Jim Bauer, our new senior financial officer; Annette Bidniak, our new director of communications; and Peter Davis, my executive assistant. Thank you very much for coming this evening. They usually work till 11 o'clock, so we'll try to be done by then, but we'll see.

Mr. Chairman, over the next 15 minutes or so I'll present to you highlights of the services and support the Solicitor General provides Albertans for their hard-earned tax dollars. Following my presentation I'd be happy to answer questions that remain, but should we run out of time, I'd be pleased to provide responses in writing to the hon. members.

The vision of the Solicitor General's department is to "ensure Albertans have safe and secure communities in which to live, work and raise their families." Each and every day we strive to achieve this vision by providing Albertans with a variety of supports and services.

The five goals that lead the programs laid out in the business plan are: one, to "ensure safe communities in Alberta;" two, to "ensure secure and efficient custody, community supervision and transportation of offenders;" three, to "facilitate the rehabilitation of offenders;" four, to "ensure the safety of Albertans by providing government security services and crisis management planning;" and five, to "provide services to victims and ensure they have a more meaningful role in the criminal justice system."

To help achieve these important goals, Mr. Chairman, the Alberta Solicitor General's budget for this year is more than \$405 million, an increase of more than \$46 million over last year's comparable forecast. Of the total budget \$207 million goes to policing services, organized and serious crime response, and crime prevention; \$146 million is spent on remand and correctional centres, offender supervision in the community, and rehabilitative opportunities for offenders; \$22 million covers courtroom security, prisoner transport, counterterrorism crisis management, and Executive Council security; \$15 million goes to victims' programs and services, and \$15 million also goes to the ministry support services. All told, this is a significant investment to improve the quality of life in our communities.

When you examine the services we provide the citizens of this province, it's clear that this ministry is inextricably linked to the overarching goal of the Alberta government, which is to make Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit. A safe and secure community is where people want to live and, of course, visit. I'm pleased and proud to tell you that Alberta continues to have the lowest crime rate among the four western provinces, and we intend to keep it that way.

To help maintain this enviable position, with the additional \$46 million in the budget this year we will add nearly 200 police officers to Alberta communities. This is the single largest increase of police officers in this province in 20 years. More than 100 of these officers will be new RCMP officers hired for rural Alberta. Up to 30 more RCMP officers will be redeployed from court security and prisoner transport duties to front-line policing duties. Sixty new police officer positions will be created to enhance Alberta's response to organized crime, and these officers will immediately tackle the priority problems of meth production and distribution and marijuana grow operations, which spark other serious crimes or provide seed money for other crime ventures.

The Solicitor General's department is also chairing a cross-ministry working group on the challenges and impacts associated with methamphetamine. The illegal drug business does serious damage to our society, and it also sucks young people into gangs with the lure of excitement and fast money. Gangs do the dirty work for those at the top of the criminal food chain, and organized crime is now extending its reach into smaller centres. It's not just a big-city problem anymore. Young people everywhere are at risk. The only way to disrupt these activities that degrade our communities is to build a plan that targets all levels of the organized crime business. We must go after the roots of the poisoned tree too, not just clip the branches.

10:10

The extra 60 positions in this budget more than double the number of police officers already funded by the province who are dedicated to investigating organized crime. The work of these organized crime investigators is supported by the Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, that is also funded by the province. The role of CISA is to collect, analyze, and distribute criminal intelligence to law enforcement agencies, conduct threat assessments of organized crime in the province, support joint force operations, and provide specialized police training.

Over and above the 200 extra police positions we will dedicate resources to establish an integrated child exploitation investigation team that will focus on Internet-based crimes that target children.

This year we modified the policing grant formula to significantly decrease the financial burden on smaller towns and cities, especially those with populations between 5,000 and 20,000.

To replace the RCMP officers who will be redeployed to the front lines, dozens of provincial protection officers will be hired to provide courtroom security and courthouse perimeter security as well as prisoner transfers, of which there were 47,000 in the province last year.

We will be putting more staff into correction centres and making investments in safety equipment for correctional officers. Correctional officers in this province will be the first in Canada to be equipped with stab-resistant protective vests.

In addition, with equal investment from Infrastructure and Transportation the Solicitor General will implement court video conferencing across the province. This will reduce the potential for security breaches by enabling offenders to make routine court appearances from remand centres rather than being transported to and from courtrooms.

The Solicitor General will continue to ensure that victims are treated with dignity and respect and that they promptly receive information, assistance, and financial benefits. The report of the Alberta victims of crime consultation laid out a 10-year vision and makes a number of recommendations to achieve this vision.

Our department has already initiated several of the recommendations. Among them, the victims' grant program budget has been increased and has more than doubled in the past two years. Plans have been submitted to implement a revised organizational structure within the victim services branch, including the addition of positions for a training officer and aboriginal programs co-ordinator. A proposal will be developed this year to provide funding to pay travel expenses for victims to attend trials and observe sentencing.

Amendments to the Victims of Crime Act have been submitted to the Legislature, and we expect they'll be passed this spring. Once this occurs, victim services providers will be provided with the revised principles and expectations.

Mr. Chairman, in addition to the budget and resource increases there are other key initiatives that our department has undertaken. They include but are not limited to a number of significant changes which have been proposed under Bill 36, the Police Amendment Act, 2005. The key issues centre on more accountability by police through stronger oversight from civilian police commissions and the Solicitor General's director of law enforcement.

Where the decision to request an outside investigation currently rests with a chief of police, an amendment allows the police commission to initiate an external investigation. In addition, the amendment allows an external investigation or monitoring of any complaint or incident where it would be in the public interest to do so. The amendment contains a clause that ensures that police commissions are trained in their roles and responsibilities.

Our department accepted the MLA Policing Review Committee recommendation calling for the establishment of a police training college for recruit training and ongoing professional skills development. This single-site training facility will help ensure consistent recruiting standards and the highest standards of training for all police officers and other law enforcement related personnel.

Mr. Chairman, we are also conducting a special constable review, where Art Johnston, MLA for Calgary-Hays, is leading a review into the province's special constable program, which provides limited peace officer appointment to those who provide a supplementary level of service to our 5,000 sworn police officers. While they provide a variety of important services, they should not be seen as potential replacements for sworn police officers. Once the review is complete, we will have a clearer vision of the roles and responsibilities of special constables in the province and how they best fit into the law enforcement matrix in Alberta.

Aboriginal policing initiatives are another priority for our ministry. We are working with First Nations communities to provide adequate, effective, and culturally sensitive policing throughout the province. Currently there are five tripartite First Nations police services operating in Alberta. First Nations police officers now receive a salary and benefits package comparable to other municipal police services of a similar size. Their patrol equipment has been improved and is either ahead of or similar to other police services. Their uniforms are new and up to date, and soon their patrol units will be equipped with new in-vehicle records management technology. All First Nations police services must now meet the same selection and recruitment standards as all municipal police services.

Other First Nations initiatives include a police officer secondment program, a forensic identification program, and an aboriginal police studies program. The Solicitor General also funds First Nations

crime prevention co-ordinator positions through several contract agreements. We also have a number of programs in place for the benefit of First Nations people that support the cross-ministry aboriginal policy initiative.

Mr. Chairman, Alberta is renewing its crime prevention strategy and community justice policy to encourage communities to develop initiatives that deter crime, as well to address the root causes of criminal behaviour, and through the co-ordination of youth justice committees to strengthen community bonds that have been broken by criminal acts.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Solicitor General is to serve Albertans by ensuring safe and secure communities through effective policing, security, and correctional services, and when crime is committed, to assist victims of crime. The overview I have presented of our programs and services clearly shows that we have met this expectation.

This concludes my presentation. I'd be happy to answer questions at this time, but should we run out of time, I'd be pleased to provide my responses in writing.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess I have to say at the outset: why are we always talking about policing so late at night? It seemed to be 11:30 when the Police Act came up for discussion – 11:30, quarter to 12, whatever it was – and again tonight. Is this some sort of revenge on the opposition?

An Hon. Member: It's the night shift.

Dr. B. Miller: It's the night shift.

Mr. Stevens: We're here too.

Dr. B. Miller: I know you're here too. Right.

Mr. Mason: Well, that makes it better.

Dr. B. Miller: Right. That makes it better.

I would like to commend the Solicitor General and his departmental staff for their work in producing the 2005-06 estimates and the business plan.

At the very beginning of our legislative session we were faced with the tragedy of four young RCMP officers who were killed, and I know that the Solicitor General felt this loss very deeply. I wrote him a letter conveying my sympathy. It was not easy to just go on and continue with work in a normal manner given that tragedy. It was important for us to set aside partisan politics for a while and unite together to mourn and to remember those fallen officers.

The Solicitor General's department has a huge responsibility, as the Solicitor General has pointed out, in carrying out the vision of ensuring that Albertans have safe and secure communities in which to live, work, and raise their families. Most of us take this safety and security for granted until our lives are interrupted by a break-in or a child who has a drug problem or an identity that has been stolen.

10:20

I notice in the performance measures under goal 1 that the public perception of safety is quite high, that the percentage of Albertans who feel not at all worried about their safety from crime is about 71 per cent, and that's quite high. On the other hand, one-quarter, 25 per cent, report that they have been the victim of crime in the past year, and I think that is quite high. That is startling. I think that

maybe when you look at statistics like this, it's sort of an averaging out over the whole province. The problem with crime is that there are communities and neighbourhoods where there's a much higher percentage of crime than other places.

This came home to me in a study that I was a part of for the Quality of Life Commission here in Edmonton. We commissioned a person to go into the inner city and interview children about their feelings about their community. The study was quite startling because we thought that the children, especially in poor neighbourhoods, would talk about food and lack of recreation and so on, but the top issue that they talked about was safety, not feeling safe in the community. Children in all of the interviews routinely described experiences with guns and knives, domestic violence, police, theft, fire, drugs, alcohol use. It was clear to us that we have to start looking at particular communities, especially where our youth and our children do not feel safe; in other words, we have to focus on communities and community policing.

I'm encouraged by the fact that the mission statement, the vision of the Solicitor General's department, does mention – I think this is a long-term strategy – that “it will focus on the continued reduction of violent crime by improving its commitment to policing, and community policing programs.” I guess in a few minutes I would like to raise the question whether the additional police that are being added to the department will be focusing on community policing. It seems to me that that is one of the greatest needs.

In line with this, it is encouraging to note that there is an increase in the overall budget of 12.9 per cent and that \$24 million in new funding will go to increase provincial policing programs.

The Solicitor General mentioned the adding of police, and I wasn't quite sure about the numbers. At the end of the estimates there's a mention of the FTEs, that there is an increase of 200, to 2,290, which is up from 2,090. I wasn't clear about what these new police are going to do; for example, what the ratio is – I think you stated it – between rural policing and urban, and also how IROC fits into that. I think you mentioned that there are going to be 60 additional positions in IROC, integrated response to organized crime. Are those 60 additional positions a part of the 200, or are they taken from other areas? I think we just need a little bit of clarity on the new policing, how that is in place.

You know, I think that the department has a big challenge. It's different from other departments. There's a tremendous amount of public interest in policing, and it's increasing. Even though, as you mentioned, crime rates are relatively stable – and you expressed some pride in the fact that Alberta's crime rates comparatively with other provinces seem to be quite good – the interest on the part of the public in the functioning of the police and in the performance of the police is increasing. There may be a number of reasons for that. I think that the scientific development in investigative practices like the use of DNA has led to a lot more sophistication, and that is intriguing for the public. The popular TV programs, of course, like *CSI* and movies and so on that focus on policing lead the public to think that it knows something about policing, but probably in most cases the public is wrong.

The public is more interested, I think, in helping out and getting involved. I found that there was a lot of interest in the Police Amendment Act, 2005, even in my own constituency, where people asked to come and see me because they were concerned about the complaint process.

I think this interest of the public also dovetails with the whole notion of community policing. Community policing involves a partnership between the community and the police. I think that there is a great deal of interest, that there should be more integration of the police with the public, being responsive to the public's wish to be

involved. I don't know. Throughout the business plan community policing doesn't get I think the attention that it deserves.

Let me point out a few things here in the business plan that I have questions around. The first one is 1.1 on page 404, where the strategy in terms of ensuring safe communities in Alberta is to “implement changes to the Police Act to ensure accountability and public confidence in law enforcement through citizen and government oversight.” That's a reference to Bill 36, which is making its way through the Legislature.

There are a lot of questions about this whole issue of proper public civilian oversight, and we keep having to deal with issues that occur, events that occur. For example, the recent event – and I think that I can talk about this because it's not before the courts anymore – the Edmonton police officer who used a taser in respect to an individual who was sleeping in a car. I think he used it some five different times. The judge who handled the case of the person being dealt with found the use of the taser to be excessive. What was the expression? Cruel and unusual punishment. Then this was turned over to the Calgary Crown prosecutor's office. In order to not appear that there be any bias, it was turned over to the Calgary office, and then it was sent back to the Edmonton Police Service, to the acting chief of police of the Edmonton Police Service, where there's an internal investigation.

There's where the problem is. How can an internal investigation by the acting chief of police satisfy the public in terms of public, transparent, open accountability? It's still a case of police investigating police. I think that as long as we're going to have all those kinds of incidents occur, then the public will continue to ask questions about the complaint process and about accountability to the public in terms of oversight.

Now, the next point, 1.2: “Develop a model for police funding to ensure that adequate and effective policing is maintained throughout Alberta.” We've already asked questions in the Legislature about, for example, Crowsnest Pass feeling shortchanged by the Solicitor General's department in terms of their policing needs. We've raised questions about: what is the process? What is this model for police funding if it's always a question of, “Well, you have to sign on the dotted line, or you won't get any money”? There's the failure to honour previous agreements in the case of the Crowsnest Pass, the amalgamation of municipalities to form the Crowsnest Pass. They thought that they were going to get the funding that they needed. So are the rules being changed in mid-course?

10:30

Also, in terms of the model for police funding I've heard the Solicitor General mention the importance of policing for rural municipalities as extremely important, but what about Edmonton and Calgary? It still is the case that funding for police in urban Alberta at \$16 per capita is the lowest in Canada. So it's nice to see the increase in the budget, but still we have to ask the question of whether the funding for policing, especially in a city like Edmonton, is adequate.

Just to mention another point, 1.7, on that same page. This is the issue of the exploitation of children via the Internet, and I think this is extremely important. No one would disagree with the importance of this issue. I'm also wondering about the funding for a provincial ICE team similar to what we have in other provinces, like the Toronto police's child exploitation section or the Ontario project P unit. Manitoba has a program, integrated child exploitation unit. What is Alberta planning to do in terms of fighting child exploitation through the Internet? What kind of strategies are in place, and what kind of funding should be put in place?

Well, there are so many issues here. Let me quickly go on to a

couple of other points through this business plan. Under goal 2, the need for training, ensuring that training opportunities are provided to staff raises the whole issue about the staff in respect to courtrooms and so on. The Kyle Young incident I think brought to our attention the whole issue of whether courtroom guards are properly trained. There were two guards involved, and one only had a couple months' training, and here he was working in the courthouse. Is that adequate? So I think the issue of level of training is really important.

Goal 3. I just mention that I think that this is a really important area. We don't have time to go into it fully in terms of the rehabilitation of offenders and all the different programs that are involved and the funding that's necessary for all of those programs. I know that it's so important to enable offenders who have served their time to find their way back into the community, and societies like the John Howard Society, of course, have been working on that for years.

I did have the opportunity recently to sit down with a number of ex-cons who have served their time and who are now in various kinds of programs, and they brought to my attention how difficult it is to find their way back into the community after serving time; for example, coming out of a correctional institute without any ID and not able to even go to a bank and open an account because they have no ID. Some of them it took weeks, months to be able to find an ID. I think that there's so much that needs to be put in place in terms of enabling people to find their way back into the community.

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

Another question I have is about the victims of crime fund. According to the estimates there actually will be a surplus in the victims of crime fund. On page 340, where the victims of crime fund is outlined, in fact, in 2004-05 there was a \$6 million surplus, and in the 2005-06 estimates it appears that they're almost at a \$4 million surplus. So I was wondering what happens to these surpluses. Do they stay in the fund? Do they disappear into general revenue? Are these surpluses going to be used to help fund various programs for victims, fund various organizations that can assist victims of crime, fund sexual assault centres, for example? What happens to that money?

Also, I think the idea of a one-time payment to victims based on the injuries they receive is, as far as I'm concerned, quite problematic; for example, the example that we dealt with today in question period where a young man was raped in the remand centre and received one-time payment. But the payment only went so far. It didn't enable him to actually have the kind of long-term counselling that he needed. Also, it only provided medication for a short time, and then the money disappeared.

It seems to me that we have to do more. We just passed legislation looking at the basic principles of justice and respect for victims. Certainly, we need more work and more money channelled in the direction of caring for the victims of crime, especially those who are under the care of the government in their remand centre.

If I can make this comment, I didn't appreciate the reference to this young man as being some sort of criminal who deserved somehow not to be treated as a real human being. The remand centre is where people who are awaiting trial go, and they're presumed innocent until they're proven guilty. It's not a correctional institute like some of the others.

Mr. Magnus: How much should he have got for that?

Dr. B. Miller: \$11,000.

Mr. Magnus: Yeah, how much?

Dr. B. Miller: That's all he got. Well, that's another issue.

What criteria are used to determine how much money a victim of crime gets?

I think that my time is up, right? Okay.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora raises a number of very good questions and some very good issues that I want to respond to.

He did mention the issue that occurred on March 3 of this year in Mayerthorpe, where four young RCMP officers lost their lives in protecting and serving this country as well as this province as well as the residents of Mayerthorpe-Whitecourt. It was a tremendous loss to all of us but, as well, obviously, a learning experience for all of us as we look at some of the issues that police officers have to deal with on a daily basis, the criticism they receive from both the public and the media on a daily basis, but as well their outpouring of service to the community and the fact that they will put their lives on the line to protect citizens.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to start off with the issue regarding IROC that the hon. member brought forward. I just wanted to provide him with some information regarding IROC. In fact, in 2004 there were significant increases in the amount of marijuana seized by the northern and southern Alberta marijuana investigative teams, known as NAMIT and SAMIT respectively. In 2004 these teams seized marijuana with an estimated street value of \$131 million. These large-scale well-organized grow operations are almost exclusively the product of organized crime, and of course other criminal activity associated with marijuana grow problems, such as mortgage frauds, home invasion robberies, health issues from contaminated homes, underscore the increasing collateral damage associated with marijuana grow operations.

10:40

The RCMP report on the growth and the number of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories discovered in Alberta over the past several years. Of 23 labs discovered, 11 of these labs were known to have organized crime affiliation. This is a growing and a disturbing trend.

When we talk about organized crime and gang activity, look at the recent statistics that indicate that over 50 per cent of homicides in Calgary and Edmonton can be linked to organized crime and gang activity. Once thought to be a problem associated with major urban centres, organized crime and gangs are now spreading their tentacles to all corners of Alberta.

The Hells Angels have recently doubled their ranks and have begun a high-profile strategy of intimidation in an effort to re-establish their criminal influence throughout Alberta, as was seen in the province of B.C. just recently. Other organized crime groups, in particular Asian, aboriginal, Jamaican-based networks, have also begun to establish themselves in all parts of the province. The growth of aboriginal street gangs, including the Redd Alert, the Indian Posse, Alberta Warriors, has been realized most notably in northern Alberta. Traditional Italian organized crime links have been expanded in the Calgary region.

When we talk about the integrated response to organized crime, Mr. Chairman, that began just two years ago, the response and the work that has been done so far has been tremendous, needless to say, and the funding that is provided to them does provide for 51 officers that work both in Edmonton and in Calgary and with the RCMP in

an integrated model. They work together sharing information, sharing resources, sharing intelligence so that intelligence-lead investigation provides the information they need to in fact work together to target major organized crime in the province.

When the hon. member speaks about the 200 officers that were included in this year's budget – some say it was the largest increase of police officers in Alberta since the March West. I don't believe that's so, but it would be close. Budget 2005 included \$24 million for the deployment of nearly 200 police officers into Alberta's communities. Over 100 new RCMP provincial police service members will be hired for rural Alberta, and these officers will be in those communities that the province pays for, so they'll be in those communities that are all under 5,000.

The equivalent of an additional 30 RCMP provincial police service members will also be redeployed from the court security prisoner transport duties that they presently have throughout Alberta. Whether it's in northern Alberta transporting prisoners or whether they're sitting in the courts in Grande Prairie, Peace River, or Drumheller, Mr. Chairman, these officers will be redeployed with provincial protection officers that will be replacing them and their duties in the courts to ensure the protection of the judges, the prosecutors, defence counsel, the public in the courtroom as well as the court premise and the security of the court building or provincial building.

The 60 new positions that the hon. member mentioned, Mr. Chairman, will be created to enhance Alberta's response to organized crime. These 60 new positions will be in a combination of provincial and municipal police positions: 20 of them will be allocated to the RCMP, and 40 will be allocated to municipal services; namely, Edmonton and Calgary as well as Medicine Hat and Lethbridge.

An additional \$6 million for municipal policing grants should also result in an increase in municipal police resources, although it will be up to the affected municipality to determine exact numbers. These new officers will be brought on stream as soon as possible, recognizing that police services will have to recruit and train individuals to fill the newly created positions. When we talk about these 60 new officer positions, we don't want to take 20 from Edmonton and take them off the street, Mr. Chairman, or from Calgary or from the RCMP. What we want to do is ensure that for the 18 that we're going to be funding here in Edmonton, they're also going to be hiring 18 so that they're not going to lose any manpower on the street.

The hon. member mentioned as well the Police Amendment Act, 2005, that is before this Legislature in third reading, and the need for amendments to the act. The act is almost 20 years old. It was probably drafted in 1985 and proclaimed in 1988, Mr. Chairman, so obviously there's a need. I think many, many of us on this side of the House firmly believe that legislation should be evolving, that it shouldn't remain static. We should always be looking at legislation in the future to see that as society and trends change, we ensure that we're staying on top of how the legislation should be affecting every Albertan.

The draft changes that the hon. member mentioned with regard to the new act will enhance the role of the local police commission in overseeing the complaint process by ensuring that each commission has a public complaint director, allowing the commission to initiate an external investigation, ensuring that commissions are trained in their roles and responsibilities, requiring the chief of police to provide the commission with 45-day progress reports. As well, it will enhance the oversight of complaints at the provincial level by making the director of law enforcement responsible for monitoring the process of complaints, requiring that serious incidents that may

require an external investigation or process monitoring system be reported, and allowing for external investigations or monitoring of any complaint or incident where it is in the public's interest.

Obviously, Mr. Chairman, these are extremely important amendments to this Police Act here in Alberta. We are taking the lead with regard to civilian oversight. No other province has four arms of civilian oversight, so obviously we are making changes forward in ensuring that civilian oversight has the ability to ensure transparent investigations with regard to internal investigations.

I want to assure and advise the hon. member, though, as well, that there are two clear and distinct investigations. One is a criminal investigation, and one obviously is a conduct investigation, which is governed by the regulations, which clearly lists all the offences that an officer could be charged with and could be reprimanded for. Again, it provides for discipline from a reprimand to dismissal from the police service. So all of those issues with regard to discipline, with regard to misconduct are all listed in the present regulations.

The act will provide for increased public oversight to ensure that investigations are timely, that they're done appropriately. Our time limit ties in with five of the 10 provinces. We have a one-year time limit. Ontario has six months, and Newfoundland and Labrador has a three-month time period for the laying of complaints, which we feel, obviously, is extremely short.

10:50

Mr. Chairman, the hon. member talked a little bit about the issue with regard to the taser situation and the investigation that took place originally back, I believe, in 2002-2003. An incident occurred, and a criminal investigation by the Edmonton Police Service took place. The file went to the Crown prosecutor's office in Calgary. It was reviewed by two senior Crown prosecutors independently of each other as well as an additional review by the chief Crown prosecutor before the file was sent back to the chief of police here in Edmonton, Chief daCosta, who was advised, obviously, through the chief Crown in Calgary that there was not a reasonable likelihood of conviction; therefore, no charges should be considered laid. That, of course, was released this afternoon to the public.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

I should mention, though, as well, that now that the criminal charge has been dealt with, Mr. Chairman, the process of the internal investigation will just begin. Therefore, that internal investigation will look at the regulations to determine: was there excessive use of force? If there was excessive use of force, obviously the process will have to undertake itself to determine, in fact, what that was. Of course, there is a process in place under the act to provide an internal hearing for the individual.

When we talk about the use of taser or we talk about the use of enforcement where they talk about the use-of-force policy, all police services throughout Alberta have a use-of-force policy. The hon. member mentioned that with regard to use of force, and I just want to bring that up, Mr. Chairman, because there are use-of-force policies throughout the province. Are they consistent? That, in fact, we're going to be working on. First of all is the arrest control techniques; second is the use of a baton; third would be pepper spray; fourth, possibly the taser – I don't know where that fits in, but we are working on that – and fifth, of course, is lethal force, which would be your sidearm. But provincial standards regarding policing initiatives are critical in where we want to go, and standards have been created and forwarded to all police services in Alberta for implementation.

We've begun the process of staffing and auditing, that will be able

to assist our police services in addressing the needs outlined by the standards and ensure that the standards have been implemented and are adhered to. These, of course, Mr. Chairman, come in alliance with our Auditor General's recommendation regarding policing standards. So we are responding to those issues. The police services were amongst those calling for provincial leadership in this area and were also key stakeholders in the development of the standards, so we anticipate no issues with compliance by various police services as we move forward this year and into the future with regard to other areas of policing standards to ensure that policies and procedures fall in line with each other and that they are similar throughout our various police services.

The hon. member brought up the issue regarding the new model of policing, and I want to touch on that and the fact that it's a very, very important issue. The town of Crownsnest Pass was mentioned. But I do want to just let the hon. member know that prior to budget 2004 the department consulted with the AUMA and the AAMD and C on a prospective policing funding formula. At that time they agreed to a formula that would come about, but obviously with concerns in the budget last year the numbers weren't the same as what they had hoped for.

This year, last fall, we met with stakeholders regarding our legislation but, as well, regarding funding. We met with the AUMA and the AAMD and C and looked at what we could do with the funding that we had in place but, as well, what Treasury Board was going to be providing to us. We also received numerous letters from towns and cities with populations between 5,000 and 20,000 because of the significant costs of providing funding for policing and the minimal tax base that some of those smaller towns have. That's the issue that we wanted to address. We wanted to address the fact that those smaller communities needed the additional funding. Those smaller communities don't have the tax base that the larger communities do. In total there are eight municipalities between 20,000 and 100,000.

So what we did, obviously, is that we came down with a formula that would determine that those communities between 5,000 and 20,000 each receive a base payment of \$200,000 with a per capita of \$8 on their population over 5,000. Those communities between 20,000 and 100,000 were given a base rate of \$100,000 and a per capita of \$14 on their population over 20,000. Calgary and Edmonton continue to receive the same per capita grant as they had the prior year, with a little extra funding going to Calgary with a population increase and the same amount going to Edmonton as their census hasn't come into play yet.

Mr. Chairman, those are some of the issues with relation to the budget.

The Crownsnest Pass issue is a very interesting one that we've had to deal with and work with. Four communities have amalgamated into one with a total population of, I believe, 6,700 people. The Police Act clearly states that municipalities under 5,000 will receive policing provided by the province of Alberta. It doesn't talk about a policing grant. It doesn't talk about a municipal policing grant. There is no mention of a grant in the Police Act. What it does say is that municipalities with a population under 5,000 will receive their policing paid for by the province of Alberta.

So the policing grant program provides for funding to communities over 5,000, and that's where the issue is. I know that the hon. Minister of . . . [Mr. Cenaiko's speaking time expired.]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. minister for his explanations. The only other issue that I think was not dealt with is the victims of crime fund.

I wanted to focus for a few minutes on correctional services. I notice in the budget on page 335, vote 3.2.1, in relation to adult remand and correctional centres there is an increase in the budget of \$6 million. I'm not objecting to the amount. I think that in time as the critic for the Solicitor General I'd like to investigate correctional institutes throughout Alberta and find out what kind of conditions they have and what kind of improvements are being made, but maybe you could help us understand how that increase in money is going to be used.

Of course, the Remand Centre in Edmonton comes up for discussion, it seems, every year. If you're looking back at previous reviews of the budget, there seem to be lengthy discussions about the Remand Centre and often references that it's a kind of Third World situation. Even today we had a discussion in question period about it.

11:00

Double-bunking. I know there are statistics about doubling-bunking across Canada, but that doesn't give us the excuse in a very rich province to have overcrowding at the remand centre. The remand centre isn't even a place for people who are sentenced to periods of incarceration. Inmates are sent elsewhere for that. In the remand centre you're waiting for trial, innocent until proven guilty, so why are we putting people into those kinds of situations?

In the past it's been the case where people actually asked for longer sentences so that they could get to go to Fort Saskatchewan or some other correctional centre and not stay in the remand centre. All kinds of studies have proven how detrimental overcrowding is to people in those kinds of situations. So how much of this money, this increase, is going toward the Edmonton Remand Centre? What kind of plans are there in the future to deal with the remand centre? How about building something different, something that is more humanitarian than what we have now?

The other issue, if I could switch completely to another issue, is the reference on page 404 under 1.10 to the youth justice committee program and especially the relationship between youth justice committees and probation officers. Can the minister tell us under what authority, specifically, probation officers have to review decisions of youth justice committees? What is the process of appeal if a young person is unhappy with the decision of a youth justice committee? Can probation officers, then, just reverse what the youth justice committee suggests? There was an example in Stony Plain just recently where a youth justice committee resigned because of a difference of opinion with the probation officer. I was wondering if you could shed some light on the role of youth justice committees in relationship to probation officers.

Two further questions.

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much. I'll finish up answering the hon. member's questions as well. The hon. member mentioned with regard to project ICE, the exploitation of children, and obviously how important this project is going to be for us in Alberta. Although it's not mentioned in the report or the term isn't mentioned in the budget, we do address it in the plan that we're working on presently with the police services throughout the province, having just met with, in fact, the chiefs of the RCMP in Edmonton and Calgary yesterday.

The accessibility and anonymity of the Internet has dramatically increased the dangers of child exploitation. The Internet allows pedophiles to make contact with children and youth and exchange illegal pictures of abuse, all under the guise of secrecy. This makes

addressing these forms of technological crime very challenging, and it's important that police and other stakeholders are educated about new technologies and methods of interception. RCMP and municipal services are proposing establishing in conjunction with the Solicitor General an integrated child exploitation, or ICE, unit in Alberta to better address these serious crimes by supporting law enforcement and exposing and prosecuting those who use the Internet to sexually exploit children.

Mr. Chairman, we are currently addressing this problem through collaborative partnerships between key players such as government ministries, law enforcement agencies, Internet service providers, and the public. A recently developed strategic plan known as the prevention of child and youth sexual exploitation under the Alberta children and youth initiative outlines five key areas of action: education, awareness, prevention/protection/enforcement, research, and training. Several ministries are involved, and the Alberta Solicitor General is involved in implementing specific strategies for each key area of action. Alberta will effectively investigate and enforce laws specific to the exploitation of children through the use of increased funding provided in Budget 2005.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. member spoke briefly about issues related to the training of officers within our corrections system regarding various issues that have happened in the past. It's a very good question, the fact that training is a tremendous issue. Training will ensure that practices are done properly, but as well it ensures that officers don't forget what their role and their responsibility are and what their purpose and what their duties are on a day-to-day basis. As one knows, one can become complacent at times, and therefore ongoing training and lifelong learning are critical in any occupation, whether it's in corrections or whether it's in the provincial protection officer category. So while ensuring that new staff receive training required to successfully perform their basic employment responsibilities, the department also remains focused on ensuring that ongoing training initiatives are available to better prepare staff to meet new priorities and new challenges.

Mr. Chairman, the Solicitor General is committed to ensuring that its staff are provided the skills necessary to fulfill their responsibilities to protect the community and to provide appropriate rehabilitative opportunities to offenders under their supervision. When issues occur, as the hon. member mentioned, this department takes it very seriously, through an internal investigative process, whether or not discipline is required. It takes it very seriously. On the incident that occurred, was it a lack of training, or has a new program come into place where possibly training wasn't provided? These are some things that we're looking at. As I mentioned, lifelong learning is one of the areas that I'm stressing within our department and all the way through all of our various branches for individuals, that ongoing training is essential to providing effective service levels within this ministry.

The hon. member mentioned and spoke briefly about offender rehabilitation, and obviously it's a very important area. As he mentioned, he didn't want to go through a whole bunch of different programs, and I'm not going to either for the sake of time, but I will mention, Mr. Chairman, a few points. The Solicitor General is committed to working with partners to ensure the safety of the community by addressing the mental health and addiction needs of young offenders. We have those programs in our young offender centres now, and we'll continue to provide those services to them, whether they're through nurses, whether they're through psychologists, whether they're through trained personnel that can provide the program needs that these young kids have.

As well, partnerships with other youth services ministries are key to providing youth with the skills, programs, and supports that they

need. As cross-ministry initiatives we need to be working together with Children's Services with regard to ensuring that those kids that are in government care that end up in one of our young offender centres are provided with the programs and, as well, with the continuing education that they require to build to their full potential.

11:10

Transition support for offenders remains a priority, which includes both successful transition back home to their community from custody and successful transition from adolescence to adulthood. Mr. Chairman, I can mention this as being extremely important as well in the fact that in reviewing the Child Welfare Act and the proclamation of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, we in fact did build into that act the transition funding provided to kids between the ages of 18 to 22 that provides them with funding so that at age 18 they don't stop being a ward of the government just because they're an adult but can continue on in a program funded by the province to ensure that they can continue on in education. As in that program, we also want to ensure that we are providing those supports for our offenders that are transitioning out of a facility back into a community.

Just a couple of other areas here. With regard to the rehabilitation of offenders, Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to bring up the pilot project in Calgary. The Calgary domestic violence court began operation in May 2000, and its outcomes are being evaluated. Although this domestic violence initiative is shared between partnering ministries, specialized courts fall under the jurisdiction of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

The Alberta government is committed to providing safe communities for all Albertans, and that includes freedom from violence within our homes. Victims of domestic violence do not have to stop the violence on their own. The criminal justice system can and will take the lead role. As I mentioned, the Solicitor General will continue to work with its partners to develop family violence initiatives throughout the province.

The hon. member mentioned the victims of crime fund on page 340. I couldn't turn to it quickly enough, but I believe he was talking about the Victims of Crime Act grant program funds. I can tell you that the surpluses that occurred – well, first of all, the program funds eligible groups and organizations that apply for funding to provide programs and services that benefit victims of crime, and the act establishes the Victims of Crime Programs Committee, appointed by the Solicitor General, to evaluate applications for grants and make funding recommendations. The Victims of Crime Programs Committee meets twice per year to evaluate the grant applications, and the program initiatives that are approved for funding are required to enter into agreements to ensure that the funding they do receive is properly expended.

I'm just looking at the \$3.879 million. Is that it, hon. member? That's one area from the previous year to this year. The increase of \$3.3 million includes the new funding approved, or \$2.9 million, plus an internal transfer. The funding increase will be directed towards consultation implementation, as recommended by the MLA review committee. So the overexpenditure of \$3 million in the year 2004-05 represents primarily the \$2.9 million funding increase for consultation implementation, which was approved by Treasury Board.

The hon. member mentioned 3.2.1, the adult remand and correctional centres, looking at the increase there. The adult remand and correctional centres provide funding to operate the eight remand and correctional facilities throughout the province. Of the \$93 million in 2005-06 approximately \$79 million, or 85 per cent, is allocated for manpower costs – that's 85 per cent for manpower costs – and

\$14 million, or 15 per cent, is allocated for various supplies and services.

I believe this also will include the funding for the new vests that all of our corrections officers will be receiving, which will be the first corrections officers in the country to be provided with the option of having one or not having one versus sharing a vest, which we felt was inappropriate.

As well, under that section, 3.2.1, the adult remand centres include the Edmonton Remand Centre, Calgary Remand Centre, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, primarily centres housing offenders that are awaiting trial. We currently service approximately 1,320 offenders on a daily basis. The adult correctional centres, which are included in this area as well, include Fort Saskatchewan, Calgary, Peace River, and Lethbridge. These centres provide custody and rehabilitative program services for approximately 900 offenders, with programs including counselling and addictions programs, education, and work programs.

Now, the hon. member also mentioned the Edmonton Remand Centre. In reviewing last year's *Hansard* – the hon. Member for Edmonton–Centre was the critic at that time. Obviously, similar questions arise probably every year, but I did read the hon. member's concerns that were raised a year ago. Some are very similar to the questions that you raised today with regard to the centre.

The Edmonton Remand Centre continues to function adequately for its designed purpose. Recent increases in the staffing complement have been made in response to higher inmate populations, and the drug testing programs have also been enhanced to further ensure inmate and staff safety.

A request to replace the aging Edmonton Remand Centre with a new and larger facility is currently under consideration for capital project funding. Once approved, it's expected it'll take some time to design and construct, but in the meantime all the necessary steps will be taken to ensure that this facility remains appropriate to the demands placed upon it.

Now, the hon. member also mentioned with regard to double-bunking in this facility as well as in our corrections facilities. This is basically an issue of population pressures throughout North America, throughout Europe. Population pressures are currently being experienced in remand centres and correctional centres throughout Canada and the United States. This segment of the inmate population is growing beyond forecasted expectations both, as I mentioned, provincially and nationally. In 2003 the corrections services division developed a series of contingencies for managing remand offenders, including plans to relocate remand offenders as population pressures in existing facilities dictate the need to do so. While the current remand facilities are being operated at more than their original designed capacity, they remain viable in providing safe and secure custody for our offenders.

11:20

Now, the final question that I have from the hon. member is with regard to youth justice committees, and he wanted a little bit of information regarding the program and the appeal process. Currently we have 116 youth justice committees in Alberta, which have been established under section 69 of the Young Offenders Act and section 18 of the Youth Criminal Justice Act. The committees work with Alberta's justice system to deal with young offenders in their communities. They provide a forum for citizens to work out differences between young offenders, victims, and the community. They also offer an alternative to the formal court process and the possibility of time in custody for offenders. The committees are also concerned about victims and their rights, and the victim's input is encouraged whenever possible.

Some youth justice committees provide sentencing advice to local youth court judges. In 2004 the Alberta Solicitor General provided \$325,000 in funding to help the communities recruit volunteers, conduct training, assist co-ordination, and provide administrative supplies. I've signed hundreds of certificates of recognition, which have been presented at annual meetings and volunteer recognition events to recognize the dedication and commitment of the volunteers. Of a special note, Alberta hosted the first national youth justice committee workshop in February of 2002.

The Alberta Solicitor General has utilized the youth justice committees as a tremendous partnership between the community and young offenders, with the ability for the young offender to assimilate back into the community having known that he made a mistake, having known that he may have made two mistakes but that the community itself is not giving up on him. The community itself will deem a punishment, minor though it may be, a punishment that may be suitable for the individual to ensure that he continues, hopefully, on the right track and not on the wrong track.

As I mentioned, Alberta has 116 youth justice committees, and they work with Alberta's justice system to hold young offenders properly accountable for their crimes, and they do offer an alternative to the formal court process.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've got a few questions here for the minister, and I know that some other members are anxious to get questions requested too in the time limit. I'm not sure if the minister had an opportunity to finish his comments on the youth justice committees, but if he didn't, he could certainly fill us in some more.

I thought I would focus on just a couple of areas. Traffic safety is one I'm particularly interested in. It's in the business plans in various places. I choose to focus on this because I think traffic safety affects the lives of a huge number of Albertans. The department's own business plans mentioned that there were 113,000 traffic collisions in Alberta in 2003, and that works out to basically one every five minutes, every hour, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. So in the amount of time that we will debate this budget, two hours, there will have been about 25 traffic collisions, and that's far too high. That really doesn't indicate the seriousness of this problem because it makes no mention of the fatalities and the injuries that result, the cost to the health care system.

I know that families are shattered by traffic fatalities. I've seen that too often in my own family and in my extended family, where a number of relatives have died in car accidents with just devastating effects. There's no sense here of the cost of traffic collisions to the health care system either or to the entire economy when productive, healthy, contributing individuals are suddenly injured or paralyzed or killed. It's a terrible cost to our society. If anything, I think it should be a higher priority here because it seems to me that it's one of those areas where prevention would pay off so well.

I wonder, when I look here and see maybe four sentences mentioned in a couple of places, why there isn't greater priority, and I know that other departments are involved: Infrastructure and Transportation, Justice, and maybe some others. But I'm looking for some real leadership on this issue from this government, and I would like to know from this minister what progress is being made, what measures are being used to assess that progress. Are we looking at a comprehensive set of measures that includes the cost to the health care system, injuries, fatalities, the financial cost to society? What kinds of measures are we seeing? Some kind of cost-benefit analysis would be helpful. My guess is that investments in reducing traffic

collisions have a tremendous benefit financially and emotionally and otherwise for society. So I'm really left wondering why we aren't seeing more aggressive efforts at traffic safety education, and I'm wondering what leadership role this minister is intending to play on issues around traffic safety.

I noticed that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and the critic for this department asked some questions on the youth justice committees, and we do have some concerns around those committees and their independence and their legitimacy and authority to act in the way sometimes that they act.

I will just limit my other comment this time, so that others have a chance to get up, to some specific questions on the communications unit of the department. In particular, I am looking at the ministry organizational chart on page 400 of the business plan. There is one whole box here called Communications. Interestingly – and this is typical of departments of this government – the communications branch comes between the deputy minister and everything else in the department. So it seems, at least in the presentation here, to have a certain mediating role and, undoubtedly, substantial influence on the correctional services, the public security, the aboriginal justice initiatives, and presumably strategic services and strategic human resource services. All of those are at one level, and above them is communications, spin.

I would be interested to know from the minister how much is spent on communications, how much is spent by the Public Affairs Bureau in addition to the Solicitor General's own budget on communications, what mandate and role they have, how many staff. What are the categories of staff? Is there a director? Are there communications officers? Ultimately, who does the director of communications there report to? Does that person report to the Deputy Solicitor General, or in reality does that person report to the Public Affairs Bureau and from there through to the chief of staff of the Premier's office?

11:30

With those questions, bearing in mind that others have questions to ask, I'll take my seat. But I do look forward to some comments on traffic safety, any completing comments on youth justice committees, and some details on the communications function and unit of this department.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Hon. minister, did you want to take another?

Mr. Cenaiko: No. I'll be happy to answer these, please.

Just regarding the youth justice item that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview brings up as well, as I mentioned earlier, the ministry continues to support and assist all communities that have expressed an interest in establishing a youth justice committee because there are a number of communities out there that aren't involved and haven't been involved yet. We do have individuals, obviously, within our department that have a vast experience and a vast knowledge in working with young people as well as working with communities and the fact that they're developing a committee. The majority of the committees are involved in administering these extrajudicial sanctions programs for first- and second-time offenders who have committed minor offences. The youth justice committees provide sentencing advice to the local youth court judge on occasion.

The department supports the youth justice committees through annual grants, as I mentioned earlier, provincial, regional, and local training opportunities, ongoing case management liaison, office space and supplies, and volunteer recognition, which is extremely important as there are approximately 1,500 volunteers involved in

addressing youth crime in our communities throughout the province. Each community is assigned a liaison probation officer, who provides training and ongoing case management advice. Those are provided throughout the province and, of course, vary in degree as to how busy they are, obviously, from community to community.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview as well mentioned and discussed at length issues within our strategy 1.16 and traffic safety. I just wanted to mention that – and, in fact, I have it here, the strategy. This is good reading material for the Legislative Assembly on those nights that it can't get along. The Alberta traffic safety plan, which was provided by the retired assistant commissioner, Don McDermid, provided a very detailed and lengthy report, *Saving Lives on Alberta's Roads: Report and Recommendations for Traffic Collision Fatality and Injury Reduction Strategy* report.

The traffic safety review is a multiministerial initiative, which is co-chaired by the Solicitor General, Infrastructure and Transportation, and the Minister of Justice, and involves 35 government and nongovernment stakeholder organizations for a made-in-Alberta solution. Now, the recommendations from the McDermid report have been examined by a number of stakeholder committees, strategies have been identified and prioritized, and we expect the final report to be completed very soon, actually; the end of this month, I'm hoping, and that's as the co-chair. I'm hoping it's the end of the month, but it will be very soon.

From an enforcement perspective, though, we've identified a need to increase traffic safety resources and to review existing legislation to determine efficiencies and alternative service delivery methods. The work on this project is moving forward as quickly as we can effectively manage it, and I anticipate we will be able to address the goals of the vision 2010 traffic safety program. Funding requirements associated with these strategies will be identified, and we hope to move forward to Treasury Board with our funding needs as soon as possible.

There are some major funding requirements in this that I have to look at as the Solicitor General, in fact, because of course one of the issues that was identified during the review was the fact of the number of RCMP officers we have in rural Alberta. So part of that strategy has changed because of the fact that we needed to get, now, an additional 200 officers, approximately 130 new RCMP officers in rural Alberta.

The issue is: how do we deploy those officers? We can't deploy all of them to work on highways and look after selective traffic enforcement programs, so not just myself but obviously the assistant commissioner of the RCMP will have to look at those major issues in rural Alberta regarding the high number of collisions. The high number of collisions in rural Alberta leads to a higher number of fatalities as well.

Those are some of the issues that we are going to be discussing, the manpower requirements that may be required. Again, traffic safety is a priority, but so is protecting our communities in rural Alberta, so we'll have to balance the needs of the community versus the needs of traffic enforcement. I'm hopeful that we're going to find a solution or a medium in the middle there that will be able to provide the biggest bang for our buck, so to speak. So we are going to be addressing those issues regarding traffic safety.

The hon. member also spoke somewhat regarding communications and the communications chart, talked about the director of communications. Really, a director of communications is hired by the Public Affairs branch but is the director for the Solicitor General's office.

Dr. Taft: Who pays the bill?

Mr. Cenaiko: The Public Affairs Bureau, I believe, pays the bill. If I'm wrong, I apologize, but to my knowledge the Public Affairs Bureau pays the fees for her salary.

Mr. Stevens: He gave you a thumbs-up.

Mr. Cenaiko: Oh, okay. Good. She does report directly to me. She doesn't report to the deputy Solicitor General; she reports directly to me. We do have communications staff within our office, though, that obviously have to look at incoming mail, letters that are coming in, and, of course, drafting some responses to some of that mail. So there are employees within the department that provide communication support within the ministry, but the staff for, I guess, the strategic portion of the Solicitor General's office is provided by the Public Affairs branch.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Just a couple of points that I wanted to raise with the Solicitor General. First of all, could I get a more thorough breakdown on the plan for deputy constables? In his opening remarks the minister spoke on the special constables and solidifying their role in the process.

The idea of deputy constables was first floated in the draft MLA review of the Police Act in 2000, I'm thinking maybe 2002. It stayed in the final draft, which is one of the few things that survived. The unmanned aerial drone disappeared between version 1 and version 2. I thought that was very entertaining; we could spy on all those anarchist cows out there in rural Alberta. That didn't make the cut to the second one, but the deputy constables did. I'd like the minister to outline very clearly: what exactly will be the role that the deputy constables play? What will be their pay scales, particularly in comparison to what I would call full-fledged police officers?

11:40

What will be the policy around arming deputy constables? What level do they have? I know that with police officers they're trained that you one-up the response. If someone's coming at you with fists, the officer is to use something one up from that, a club. If they come at you with a knife, you use a gun, et cetera, et cetera. So where are these deputy constables going to fit, and how are they armed? What role exactly do they see them playing, and how does the department see this fitting if they, for example, do checkstops? Okay. Yes. But when we look at the evidence, Mr. Chairman, that shows us that a number of firearms infractions and, in fact, drug busts are actually discovered during checkstops. So to say, "Oh, checkstops are pretty innocent," well, no, they're not actually, and it escalates very quickly.

I do not understand this government's ongoing desire to put lesser trained people into jobs doing most of the same work but not all of it and pay them a lot less. That's what I see happening with these deputy constables. It's just a way to not have to pay police constables for all of their training. I'm very concerned about this, so I want this outlined in detail. What are the expectations? How much are they going to get paid? How are they going to be armed? Exactly what jobs they're going to do, and evidence-based decision-making on whether that's appropriate for them to be involved in.

Ms Pastoor: Same as LPNs.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. It's exactly the same as the LPN structure. That's what my concern is, that they just get them to do most of the

work for a lot less pay. I really hope that's not the case, but I suspect, knowing this government, it is. So I will wait, if necessary, for a detailed response in writing on that one.

I'd like to go on to the next subject now, and that's the definition of victim. I have been campaigning for some time to get full funding for sexual assault centres in Alberta, and nobody's picking up the tab here. It bounces around between the Solicitor General, who sort of picks it up, kind of, sort of, under victims services and under domestic violence. Except sexual assault isn't domestic violence; it's sexual assault and shouldn't be lumped in with that. The way you treat it is different, and the way you detect it is different, and the way it goes to court is different. They keep lumping it in there, but they don't pay for very much of it.

A big part of the problem in being able to get funding for the sexual assault centres was the definition of victim. Now, this came up in the review that was done and stickhandled through by the Member for Calgary-Shaw, and I know that there was a series of recommendations that came out of that review. I know that there's enough in the surplus that that department has been stockpiling to pay for the implementation of the recommendations that came out of the review, but a snagging point was the definition of victim. So has the definition of victim been revisited? Has it been expanded to move forward into the new millennium and be able to deal with some of the issues that have been identified around the old definition of victim?

Next subject. I was listening carefully, and I thought I heard, but I'm not sure. Could the minister please outline exactly what treatment options are available to people who have been convicted of offences and are serving time? What is the array of programs and particularly the treatments that are now available to people that are serving time in provincial jails? Particularly, I'm interested in what kinds of treatment programs are available for drug and alcohol addictions. Do they get a three-day program, a one-month program, no program at all? What exactly is available if you are incarcerated under provincial sentencing for drug and alcohol treatment? Additionally, what programs for work enhancement or education are available to people that are serving time?

The minister didn't seem to quite understand what we were asking about when we talked about the surplus that was last year \$13 million. That's the surplus we're talking about, that has been accumulated through the victims of crime fund. The surcharges are collected by the courts and directed back to the victims of crime fund, and that money is to then be flowed through to victims of crime programs.

What the ministry and the previous minister, anyway, had been doing was that if they took in \$6.5 million, they only spent \$3.5 million or \$4 million. Each year they'd been accumulating, oh, \$2 million, \$3 million, \$4 million, and over several years, while I've been watching it – last year we were at a \$13 million surplus. This is the money that I was saying could be used to implement the recommendations that came out of the victims of crime fund review led by the Member for Calgary-Shaw.

So that's the surplus we're talking about. How much is it today? How much do you expect it to be by the end of the year and why? If there's still a surplus, why? That money is supposed to be spent on victims' services. Why is the department hoarding it?

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I want to go back again around the youth justice committees. Can the minister tell us under what authority or what act specifically empowers probation officers to not only review but to arbitrarily change the decision of youth justice committees? Can the minister inform us of what the process of appeal is if a youth is unhappy with the decision of a youth justice committee? Are probation officers trained to render sentences to young offenders, or

is their role to ensure that they comply with the conditions of their sentences?

Additionally, can the minister explain how a youth justice committee is supported if any decision that they make can be arbitrarily overturned by a probation officer with no consultation with the committee and without informing that committee? This is obviously a very real case I'm referring to, that happened in Stony Plain. I'd like the minister to explain how the legislation allowed that situation to happen and all of the various questions I've asked specifically around it. Under what authority – what act empowers this to happen? How do the monitoring and compliance take place?

Those were the issues that I wanted to raise specifically with the minister. I appreciate the opportunity to do that. Any questions he's not able to answer fully at this time, I'm happy to receive the answers in writing. Although this places some pressure upon him, I would ask to receive the answers before we're expected to vote on the final budget of the appropriation bill. Difficult for me to know whether to support the budget if I don't have the answers to my questions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to get up and say a few things about the Solicitor General's department and the budget. I want to just start out by acknowledging the tremendous loss that was suffered with the loss of the four officers at Mayerthorpe and the tremendous respect in which all of the peace officers in this province are held.

I do want to say that from our point of view the increase in police as contained in the budget is a positive one. We certainly had tried to make an issue of policing levels in the province and think that 200 additional police is a good start, but it's confined to those municipalities that have RCMP policing. There's a need to increase funding for larger municipalities that have their own police services. In particular, there's a need to provide support for community policing initiatives within the large municipal areas. I think that that is something that I've seen firsthand, in my work as a city councillor, as a tremendous success story. I regret that the police services in Edmonton and Calgary, in particular, have backed off a little bit from that direction. I would like to see that initiative renewed.

I'd certainly like to know from the minister generally what the strategy is around gangs in the province. I know that he's talked about it a little bit already, but I'm particularly interested in the initiatives that are being taken to combat organized crime at the highest level, not talking necessarily about small-scale operations but the very sophisticated and well-organized gang.

11:50

I want to talk just briefly, Mr. Chairman, about the need for police to have some civilian oversight. I think we need to strengthen our police commissions, and we need to have some means of making sure that the police are not investigating the police. There are a number of recent examples, including the tasing incident, where police investigating the police have failed to deal adequately, and it's taken a judge to actually point out how serious that situation is. The Randy Fryingpan issue I think was not dealt with appropriately by the police. It did take a judge to point out just how serious that case is. I do believe that there are, in fact, methods that complaints can be dealt with by others other than the police. There can be trained investigators who are not police. I would like to know the minister's reasons for shying away from that.

I think, given the lateness of the hour, Mr. Chairman, I'm just going to leave it there just very briefly. I have a number of other major comments, but I'll have an opportunity, I'm sure, to talk to the minister about some of this stuff later.

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre raised a very good question with regard to the special constable program. The recommendation that came out of the MLA policing review did mention the term "deputy constable." As she's aware, I'm sure, the review of the roles and responsibilities of special constables, the MLA review, is being chaired by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, who is a former sergeant with the Calgary Police Service so obviously has a background regarding working with law enforcement officials. The whole idea behind the review is to do just exactly all the questions that she asked.

Ms Blakeman: But you did it twice.

Mr. Cenaiko: No, the special constables were never reviewed. The special constable review is going to be looking at special constables. The police review looked at police. There's a huge difference between – a special constable is not a police officer. They are peace officers under the Police Act. This one is a police officer who has this authority, and a special constable has this authority. That's the issue.

If you're confused by it, I would think that 99 per cent of Albertans are. There are a lot of people confused regarding what roles and responsibilities these individuals have in a community when they're working right next to the RCMP officer or they're working for the city of Edmonton as bylaw officers, or whatever you want to call it. This is the issue, and this is the study that is going to be implemented.

Actually, the first public meeting is going to be held on Friday in Calgary. The whole role and responsibility of these individuals is going to be reviewed to determine: what role can they play? In what area within law enforcement can they actually provide services to the community? Does it need to be very expensive – the RCMP's numbers are \$144,000 per officer; Edmonton's are approximately \$130,000 per officer – to respond to, possibly, a three-day old garage break-in where there's no evidence? What about a stolen bike? Do you need an emergency responder to attend a call like that?

This is what the questions are that we're going to be asking the public. We're going to be asking municipalities, municipal districts and counties, towns and cities throughout the province to find out what, in fact, these officers provide for them now and what, in fact, they could be providing in the future.

Now, there are two pilots that are going on right now, Mr. Chairman, that are very exciting. In fact, one is in the hon. member's riding, Edmonton-Centre, that the Edmonton Police Service is going to be announcing here, I believe, very shortly. I am actually going to be providing funding for the pilot for four additional officers that are going to be I believe called community support officers or something of that nature, that are actually special constables. They have the special constable designation, but they are actually peace officers that will be providing services within the inner city, within the hon. member's riding. So that's going to be announced here very shortly, and I'm very proud to be able to fund four of those positions.

We have the same program in Calgary, that was announced just two weeks ago with Mayor Bronconnier with regard to providing nine officers in the inner city, regarding the Beltline and the East Village areas, to have peace officers walk the beat in the community.

They'll be problem solving. They'll be meeting with the residents. They'll be meeting with the business owners. They're going to look at: what are the issues in the area? Is there graffiti? Can they work on the graffiti and use the community supports to remove graffiti, use the community supports in the neighbourhood to remove the needles? Issues in some of these areas that have been lacking in some of those resources.

So these are two pilots that are going on, both I believe for six to eight months in length. I'm very proud to say that we're looking at these two pilots, which will help us in our review of the roles and responsibilities of special constables.

Having travelled the province just recently in various areas of the province, I can tell you this, Mr. Chairman, that there are some very good areas in the province that are utilizing special constables or peace officers in their role in the community, hired by, for example, the city of Grande Prairie. It has a tremendous program there. I think it's one that we want to look at as a future template or a future model.

I just use Grande Prairie because I haven't been to all of them, but Grande Prairie's was tremendous in the fact that they work hand-in-hand with the RCMP. They have a clear authority and role of what they can do in the community. They are in radio communication with each other. They provide non-urgent calls in the community, which frees up those police officers to respond to emergencies, to respond to those calls which police officers have been trained for. So, therefore, this program is very good. Obviously, that will be coming out in time, and I'll get the hon. members from Edmonton-Glenora and Edmonton-Centre – the booklet or the questionnaire will be coming out, I believe, within about two weeks. So I'll ensure that I get copies to them because they can definitely, as well, participate in the review.

The hon. member mentioned the issue regarding the definition of victim. She didn't mention the area of victims of a sexual assault. She's aware, I think, that on other occasions I've mentioned that I've investigated over 600 sexual and physical assaults on women, young girls, and children. So this is a very large issue. I'm very supportive of the Alberta sexual assault association and very supportive of the Calgary Sexual Assault Centre because I worked with them hand-in-hand when I worked with the police service. As well, I continue to meet with the staff there on occasion. So we don't have a listed definition of what a victim is, but I'm sure *Webster's* dictionary does.

As well, though, the victims can apply for funding under the victims of crime fund. There also is an appeal mechanism for them if they feel that the funding that they're receiving isn't appropriate. But there is funding that is available to them. Obviously, there's a need for ongoing assistance regarding psychological assistance for them, but again that funding is made available to them and should be there.

12:00

The programs with regard to drugs in jails. Mr. Chairman, I don't have a listing of all the programs that we provide in the prisons, but I can tell you that there are programs, obviously varying from the young offender centres to the corrections centres. There are projects regarding dealing with FAS offenders to ensure that the appropriate treatment is provided. I can tell you that education is provided. In our young offender centres we ensure that kids remain in school, that they're taking their core courses in school, ensuring that when they do leave, they can leave as if they hadn't missed school.

The issues relating to mental health and substance abuse. Programs are available looking at disrupted school experiences,

inappropriate sexual behaviour, and involvement in the criminal justice system. Programs regarding these natures are all provided to these young individuals in our young offender centres. At this point in time, right now, even though our young offender centres are approximately 65 per cent full, the programs are extremely important because these offenders are leaning more towards the hard-core offenders versus the softer core with assimilating programs in the community.

In the correctional facilities, Mr. Chairman, we do provide programs with staff that are obviously well trained and through psychologists and through nursing and community support staff. They're there to provide them with programs with regard to sexual behaviour as well as alcohol and drug abuse. That's provided to them as well as education. In some of our correctional facilities we do provide them with an ability to work in the community and train for various functions, whether it's with their hands and/or some of their skills.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood brought up the fact of civilian oversight. I can mention again, Mr. Chairman, that the legislation, Bill 36, is before the Assembly now in third reading. It's there to ensure accountability in law enforcement and to restore public confidence in the police. The drafted changes will enhance the role of the local police commission in overseeing the complaint process by ensuring that each commission has a public complaint director. It allows the commission to initiate an external investigation, it ensures that the commissions are trained in their roles and responsibilities, and it requires the chief of police to provide the commission with 45-day progress reports with the status regarding the investigation of a complaint.

It also enhances the oversight of complaints at the provincial level by making the director of law enforcement responsible for monitoring the process of complaints and requiring that serious incidents that may require an internal investigation or process monitoring system be reported. It also allows for external investigations or monitoring of any complaint or incident where it is in the public interest. As I mentioned earlier: where it is in the public interest. That's why these changes are being made, to ensure that transparency is provided regarding the new legislation in our Police Amendment Act.

The Chair: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of the Solicitor General for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$390,556,000
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The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the committee rise and report the estimates of the Department of the Solicitor General.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: 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, 2006, for the following department.

Solicitor General: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$390,556,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I'd move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 12:07 a.m. on Wednesday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

