



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Fourth Session

Standing Committee
on
Community Services

Department of Housing and Urban Affairs
Consideration of Main Estimates

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6:30 p.m.

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Fourth Session**

Standing Committee on Community Services

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Wednesday, March 9, 2011

[Mr. Doerksen in the chair]

**Department of Housing and Urban Affairs
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to welcome you to the Standing Committee on Community Services. I would like to remind everyone that the usual rules regarding electronic devices and food and beverages in the Chamber continue to apply.

Members and staff should be aware that all the proceedings of the policy field committees in their consideration of the budget estimates are being video streamed. The minister whose department estimates are under review is seated in the designated location, and all other members wishing to speak must do so from their assigned seat in the Chamber. Any official or staff member seated in the chair of a member will yield to the member should they wish to occupy his or her seat. I would also like to remind members that they are asked to stand when they speak this evening.

I'd note to the committee that this evening the estimates of the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2012, are under consideration. I would also like to note for the record that pursuant to Standing Order 56(2.1) to (2.3) Mr. Dallas is the official substitute for Mr. Rodney.

Just to review some of the process for this evening. The speaking order and times are prescribed by the Standing Orders and Government Motion 5, passed on February 23, 2011, and are as follows: the minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on behalf of the minister may make the opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes; for the hour that follows, the members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak; for the next 20 minutes the members of the third party, if any, and the minister may speak; for the 20 minutes following, the members of the fourth party and the minister may speak; for the 20 minutes following that, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly and any independent members and the minister may speak. If there is time after that, any member is free to speak and to get on the speaking list. Within this sequence members may speak more than once; however, speaking time is limited to 10 minutes at a time. We will be timing and calling members or the minister if they reach the maximum of the 10 minutes allotted.

A minister and a member may combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their speech if they plan to combine their time with the minister's time.

Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate as well, but that will be restricted. Department officials and members' staff may be present but will not be able to address the committee.

Three hours have been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs. If the debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the department's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn; otherwise, we will adjourn at 9:30 p.m.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run.

I would also remind members that the vote on the estimates is deferred until the Committee of Supply on April 20, 2011.

Regarding amendments, written amendments must be reviewed by Parliamentary Counsel no later than 6 p.m. on the day they are to be moved. An amendment to the estimates cannot seek to in-

crease the amount of the estimates being considered, cannot change the destination of a grant, or change the destination or purpose of a subsidy. An amendment may be proposed to reduce an estimate, but the amendment cannot propose to reduce the estimate by its full amount. The vote on amendments is also deferred until Committee of Supply on April 20, 2011. Twenty-five copies of amendments must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff.

With regard to written responses, a written response by the office of the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs to questions deferred during the course of this meeting can be tabled in the Assembly by the minister or through the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly for the benefit of all MLAs.

I think that concludes our preliminaries. With that, I'll invite the minister of the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs to begin his remarks.

Please, Minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to present the fourth budget for Housing and Urban Affairs to the House tonight. Just before I begin with some comments, I did want to introduce some members beside me who are typically not seated on the floor of the Legislature. Just to my right is Marcia Nelson, the deputy minister; Mike Leathwood, assistant deputy minister of housing development and operations; Robin Wigston, assistant deputy minister of homeless support and land development; Lana Lougheed, assistant deputy minister of strategic services; Sharilee Fossum, senior financial officer; and sitting a little shyly behind us is my executive assistant, Mathew Steppan. Up in the members' gallery is Dan Laville, my communications director, who's also watching from interest.

I just wanted to give you a bit of a background on the ministry itself. My ministry is comprised of the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs as well as the Social Housing Corporation of Alberta, which holds housing assets and manages delivery of some of the housing programs that we operate in Alberta. The ministry also includes the Community Development Advisory Board, which relates to the development of land in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. The ministry's core businesses are to provide housing options and supports for low-income Albertans, address homelessness through the Housing First approach, and address unique issues related to housing and homelessness in urban centres throughout the province.

The work of Housing and Urban Affairs, in particular goal 3 of the government of Alberta's strategic business plan, is "Strong Communities – Promote strong and vibrant communities and reduce crime so Albertans feel safe." This is a goal that I wholeheartedly endorse. It also supports less directly but no less significantly goal 2, "A Healthy Approach – Increase access to quality health care and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of health care service delivery." I say goal 2 because, to quote Dr. Jeffrey Turnbull, the president of the Canadian Medical Association: if you want to save the health care system money, start by giving the homeless a place to live. Mr. Chairman, that's exactly what we're doing in this department.

I'm confident that these goals, these priorities, and performance measures laid out in this year's business plan strengthen the focus of our work to help homeless and low-income Albertans reach and maintain their highest level of independence, to support the effective management of housing challenges related to housing and homelessness in urban centres. Even so, Mr. Chair, in my opinion the most significant measure of our success is not simply the amount of people that we serve or the amount of money that we spend but rather the amount of people we no longer need to serve.

That is the essence of the Housing First approach. As opposed to managing the problem, our goal is to end the problem, and we're making strides to do that, which I will get into later.

The budget this year highlights the driving force behind my ministry, a belt-tightening of 25 per cent compared to last year's fiscal, a \$125.3 million decrease. In fact, Mr. Chairman, in the last two budgets we've been able to reduce department spending by 36 per cent without affecting the actual level of service. This is a record that I'm very proud of, but this has much more to do with my ministry team than it does with me directly because they share the vision that you don't always need to spend a lot of money to have a significant impact on somebody's life, particularly when you're dealing with homeless individuals or people in need of affordable housing. This is a good-news story both for the taxpayers and for those in need. This has been done through our capital partnerships with federal, municipal, nonprofit, and private-sector organizations and through our open and competitive tendering process and in the wake of a cooler housing market overall.

I've also tightened the belt in my own office in order to try to lead by example. We are doing what we can do to help save money around the office, from simple things like using scrap paper or buying supplies in bulk to the more challenging items such as reducing the number of people in my office on the payroll or reallocating to meet ministry and staffing priorities.

Overall, my budget has taken a cut of 6.3 per cent since I took office here. Likewise, the department has undertaken an austerity campaign to keep costs down and save money. Through reduced supplies and service costs, careful management of staffing vacancies, and shifting some positions across divisions, we've cut ministry support services by over a quarter of a million dollars. Budget 2011 keeps Housing and Urban Affairs on track to meet its commitments to vulnerable Albertans and to also meet their core housing needs but also not forgetting about the taxpayer at the same time.

Total program expenses for this year are expected to be \$367 million. Housing and Urban Affairs' approach continues to focus on working with our diverse partners to identify and develop cost-effective solutions that not only help people in need but also help them to become and remain independent. Again, that is the goal that we seek. Local government, private businesses, and the non-profit sector have proven to be extremely flexible and innovative in responding to the need. These partners are instrumental in leveraging our financial success.

6:40

To give you an example, Mr. Chair, over the past four years Alberta has provided funding to develop affordable housing units in communities throughout the entire province, and we've done it with an average grant of just under a hundred thousand dollars per unit. That's about half what it could cost to do it by ourselves if we went strictly with government builds, government construction, and no tendering. I have to say that earlier this year I asked one of my department to go and calculate how much this competitive tendering approach and the partnerships with the private sector have in fact saved the taxpayer. The answer over the last four years is rather startling. Just over a billion dollars has been saved by this approach as opposed to complete government construction.

It's also why the ministry can absorb a capital grants decrease of \$88.3 million to \$100 million for 2011-2012, or approximately 40 per cent from the forecast last year. The reduction reflects the province's success as it approaches its goal to develop 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012. Every one of these units will have an impact in a person's life and often in many children's

lives as well. To date, funding has been committed to support over 10,000 units, with 2,500 units completed and occupied at present. With this year's and future funding Housing and Urban Affairs will continue to focus capital investments where, in fact, the need is greatest. This includes the expansion beyond the 2,450 housing units we currently support for Albertans with disabilities and with special needs.

An open and competitive tendering process will continue to be used, and a variety of groups – for example, municipalities, for-profits, and nonprofits – will continue to be eligible as partners. Selection of the projects will include consideration of government priorities such as the continuing care strategy and, of course, the 10-year plan to end homelessness. Further out, capital funds and our targets of \$82 million for next year and \$50 million for the subsequent year will support more units that align with key government priorities such as providing 8,000 units for the previously homeless and providing more units for low- to moderate-income seniors.

Some people ask: why are we spending millions of dollars trying to house homeless people? My answer is that it's not that we can't afford to; it's that we can't afford not to. This department is on the right track towards not just managing the problem but ending the problem of homelessness as we know it in Alberta. The cost to support a chronically homeless person, somebody who has emergency medical, social, or other support services, is about three times the cost to house the person under a Housing First model, and to me the choice is clear and obvious. So, too, is the progress we've made in the first two years of implementing the plan to end homelessness by 2019, which is not that far away. This shows again beyond a shadow of a doubt that Housing First, the provision of government permanent housing, and outreach support is the right path to ending homelessness.

Somebody said to me once: do you expect to end homelessness just simply by constructing units and having an individual go into the unit? I said no. That's where the outreach support is important. With the outreach support we treat that person as an individual. That's how every one of us expects to be treated. That's how they should be treated as well. By treating them as an individual, we realize whatever issues they may have that resulted in them becoming homeless in the first place, and we go and tackle those particular issues.

While several factors, including economic and out-migration, can affect the numbers, I'm very proud to say that several recent homeless counts have actually shown very positive results: a decrease of 21 per cent here in Edmonton, a decrease of 42 per cent in Fort McMurray, a decrease of 53 per cent of the absolute population in Lethbridge, the absolute being the people who may be sleeping rough in the street, in a stairwell, or campsite. Now, furthermore, shelter use in Alberta's seven major cities has decreased on a provincial average of 6 per cent from 2009 to 2010. I've often been questioned by the media: well, isn't there seasonal demand, higher demand for homeless services in some parts of the year versus others? That's correct, but these statistics are calculated on a monthly basis, showing to me, again, that we are having an impact on this problem throughout Alberta.

Success in those priority areas is one of the key reasons we sought for changes in our budget. A \$2 million reallocation from the emergency transitional shelter program, in fact, to our outreach support services will be used to assist more new Housing First clients. The \$8.8 million increase in the outreach support services, of which I spoke a few moments ago, will help up to 500 more homeless Albertans move off of the street, and more than 3,000 formerly homeless Albertans who benefit from the Housing First approach will continue to receive the support that they need,

people like George Whittick, who I met last week on March 3 with the Premier at the Calgary Dream Centre. We marked the second anniversary of the 10-year plan. George is one year sober, he's six months housed, and while he continues to receive counselling three times a week, he's quick to point out that, quote, all I needed was a chance. Meeting someone like George, I can tell you, makes my job worth while because this chance includes support services that will continue to be funded.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. The first hour now will be allotted to the Official Opposition. I guess I'd ask: do you intend to speak for 10 minutes, or do you want to exchange with the minister?

Mr. Kang: I think I would prefer to have an exchange with the minister.

The Chair: Exchange. Please go ahead.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will start. As the minister said, the department budget has been cut by 19 per cent, or \$88 million, from the 2010-11 forecast. The department budget has also been cut by 36 per cent, or \$211 million, from the 2009-10 actual. The ministry also faces significant challenges: continued housing pressures, homelessness, growth in urban centres, falling apartment vacancy rates. The ministry at the same time also has opportunities, significant opportunities: lower construction costs, stakeholder partnerships. I'd just like to preface my questions by acknowledging that first off.

Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs, the Calgary Homeless Foundation, the Edmonton Homeless Commission, and five other community-based homeless management bodies are actively engaged in working to end homelessness in Alberta. The Official Opposition supports the Housing First approach, and I'm pleased to see that such tremendous progress is being made in this area with all those concerns I raised all year. I hope the minister will now indulge my questions in the same spirit.

I'll begin with Alberta's 10-year plan to end homelessness. I talked earlier about the \$88 million cut to the housing budget this year. What effect is it going to have on government's goal to end homelessness in Alberta by 2019? Let's not forget that the department budget, while relatively small, has been cut, as I mentioned earlier, by \$211 million over the last two years.

Can the minister comment on how much of the province's efforts to end homelessness are actually being spearheaded by the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness since Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, and the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo all have their own community-based plans? Also, let's remember that some of these plans preceded Alberta's 10-year plan to end homelessness and in many cases are expected to reach their goal of ending homelessness before the province's 2019 end date.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. Just before I begin with some responses here – I was cut off earlier by the bell, which doesn't often happen to me due to my high rate of speech – I wanted to say a particular thank you to the members of the Alberta Party and the Liberal Party caucus who are here tonight, who have expressed support for what we are doing. At the end of the day we may have some differences one way or the other, but I know that your intention is clear and your heart is in the right place, and the homeless people of this province are the beneficiaries that we even have this discussion. Just as it saddens me when people say that we should abolish our department and all the homeless programs that we

have, it really warms me just to see the support that you have for this, and I want to say thank you once again.

I'm going to endeavour to answer your questions. The member had a few questions, and if I miss one or two, perhaps at the end you could restate them. First off, you had asked about the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness. This secretariat was founded several years ago and actually was the author of the 10-year plan to end homelessness that we have in this province. Currently it is responsible for monitoring the plan and has received a very positive first-year report from the secretariat, that was on my desk a while ago. I would suggest that the secretariat's assistance provided a very good backbone to where we want to be not just in our past policy but where we can always improve the particular policy.

This leads me into just a few comments about the budget itself. To me the measure, again, of our success isn't how much we spend but, rather, the results that we get for it. We've moved further down the partnership model this year with our annual RFP. It's my submission that this is the right way to go. It makes this work for taxpayers as well as people who are homeless.

6:50

The member had asked particularly about an \$88.3 million decrease in capital funding for housing of the homeless and low-income Albertans. I'm just going to respond to that briefly as well. The ministry grants did decrease by this number, approximately 47 per cent from last year's forecast. This reflects the success, rather, that we have achieved in the province as it approaches its goal to develop 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012. To date, in 2011, we're at just over 10,000 units that were forecasted, so we're easily going to be able to meet this goal. Already 2,500 units are actually completed and occupied.

I recognize, again, that homelessness is complex. I've often been told that the gap between being housed and not being housed, when you are housed, is very small, but when you actually wind up homeless, that gap can be very, very, very significant. So that's something that we want to continue to support as well.

I mentioned earlier our open and competitive tendering approach. We're going to continue to use this. We find this to be much more successful than sole-source tendering. This year's RFP: I received roughly three times the amount of projects that we had funding for, so we were able to pick the ones that are the very best for the local community, for the taxpayer, and get basically the best bang for the buck in a particular area as well.

I've been through Lethbridge to Fort McMurray, everywhere in between, and I've heard many stories about how local input towards the homeless policy is necessary. The member had mentioned some of the local plans. He's quite correct. The Calgary Homeless Foundation's plan does precede ours by about a year. But at the same time homelessness isn't an issue in just Calgary or Edmonton; it's a very complex issue across the entire province. When somebody is homeless in Calgary, that's something we want to deal with there. You know, people do travel, and different things are required throughout the province. I think a coordinated approach like the one that we have does actually work in tandem with the local plans in Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat.

I'll give it back to you, Member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'll come back to the secretariat again. In the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness 2009-10 report to the minister it is stated that the secretariat monitors the implementation of the province's 10-year plan to end homelessness, that it reports to the public on the progress and

provides advice to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. This includes advice regarding strategic directions that will advance the objectives of ending homelessness in Alberta and potential revisions through the 10-year plan that may be required. I'm curious as to what regular reporting to the public the secretariat has done since I'm only aware of one report it has produced to date, namely the 2009-10 report to the minister. Should that report to the minister be considered a report to the public as well? How does one report constitute regular reporting?

Mr. Denis: Okay. I want to thank the member for that question as well. The report actually is published every year. It is received through my office. It actually is put online to the public, so in reporting to me we do report to the public just through the fact that it is put online in an open and transparent basis. There is a second report that will be under way. It has not been published yet, but again I will be putting that on the website for the public and this member to go and view.

I just wanted to mention a couple of things about the secretariat. It's very important to me that the secretariat be representative of the entire Alberta population and not just one particular geographic or sociographic area. I'll give you an example. The new chairperson of the secretariat is Dr. Gary Bowie from Lethbridge. People on the secretariat include Dr. Gayla Rogers from Calgary, who is a social worker, and representatives on that particular board are Jane Manning from Grande Prairie; Susan McGee from Edmonton, Homeward Trust; Robb Campre from Edmonton, providing a bit of an aboriginal background as well, as we know that there is a high amount of aboriginal people who are present in the homeless population; Patricia Mackenzie, former Edmonton city councillor; Mike Ellis, a member of the Calgary Police Service; and, of course, the ever-present Robin Wigston, to my left. They have done some very important work, and they've set a very good foundation for our whole homeless plan.

One of the things that is very important to me as well is that we are the only province to have a 10-year plan to end homelessness. We are the only province that actually has a strategy of this nature, that embraces the Housing First strategy. Shelters are important. It's often where somebody will come to receive assistance for the first time, but at the same time shelters are not the be-all and end-all. That's not how you end the problem. Through Housing First is how you end the problem.

One of my priorities is that I'm hoping that over the next few years we can sell this plan and its obvious successes to governments throughout the entire country, and hopefully other provinces can adopt a province-wide 10-year plan to end homelessness. The obvious one to look forward to is B.C. under a new administration.

Mr. Kang: I've got two other questions on this. Since the province's 10-year plan to end homelessness was released on March 16, 2009, has the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness recommended any revisions to the plan? Are we sticking to the same plan?

The second one is: since the seven community-based homeless management bodies in Alberta do their regular reporting on goals, progress, trends, et cetera, does the minister consider the work of the secretariat redundant in this area?

Mr. Denis: Could I get you to restate your last comment about redundancy please?

Mr. Kang: This is regarding the seven community-based homeless management bodies that do their own regular reporting on goals and stuff and progress and trends.

Mr. Denis: Thank you for that indulgence. There have not been any revisions from the secretariat, to answer your first question. There was some advice to provide more rent support, which we've actually done in budget 2011. There are more funds available for rent support, and the idea is that when somebody starts climbing the ladder rungs outside of homelessness, we get them into permanent housing, and then we can go to where they actually have their own place. Quite often they do require some rent support, and that's designed to be on an interim basis just to provide another rung closer to the last one, in particular, on the ladder.

The difference with the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness versus some of the seven management bodies that this member had mentioned is that the secretariat deals on a policy basis whereas these management bodies deal primarily on an operation basis. I'm looking forward to the secretariat's second report. Again, I will post that publicly, and we can have a discussion about the future at that point as well.

Mr. Kang: Continuing with the secretariat, the funding for the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness was cut by \$165,000, or 25 per cent, this year, okay? Since the province still appears to be firmly committed to the goal of ending homelessness by 2019, what was the rationale for this cut of the funding? Is this the reflection – another question I'll just throw in there related to this – of the fact that the secretariat has completed its initial mandate; namely, to develop a 10-year provincial strategic plan outlining a comprehensive, co-ordinated, sustainable approach to ending homelessness?

Mr. Denis: I want to thank the member again for his comments. The initial goal of the secretariat was to actually develop the particular plan. I think they did a really good job with it, actually, developing the whole plan. As we move forward, a lot of the decrease in the budget to the secretariat can be attributed to the fact that their goal was to simply monitor the plan, as is reflected in the last annual report. Again, in the next annual report we'll go and deal with that as well.

Another reason for the decrease in that area is primarily attributed to the funding of the research consortium in 2010 or 2011, which we're not having this year. It is less expensive to keep it going on because the initial research has in fact been completed. It's just on a monitoring basis. I will give you a copy of the second year's report once it is published.

Mr. Kang: Okay. I will continue on with the monitoring question now. The department's business plan for 2011-12 indicates that the secretariat is also responsible for monitoring the implementation of the province's 10-year plan to end homelessness. What exactly does this monitoring entail, and how confident is the minister that the secretariat will still be able to perform this function effectively despite losing a quarter of his funding? Can the minister comment on what the impact of the secretariat's funding cut will mean in real terms? How can Albertans be certain of continuing progress in the fight to end homelessness if the province's ability to monitor its 10-year plan has been compromised?

Mr. Denis: Thank you. To this member: I'm always about keeping a tight ship and putting as much money to the front lines as we can. In fact, there are only three people in my ministry's office. This year there was a 6.3 per cent reduction there as well.

Dealing with the secretariat, the secretariat does meet with the seven areas throughout the province that I mentioned to you earlier, and I won't belabour that point. But they do report once they've actually come back with reports on what may be happening in one of the seven cities, in fact, that we actually go and fund.

7:00

As I mentioned earlier, the secretariat's initial mandate was a policy mandate and was a mandate to actually provide advice as to how to proceed with a plan to end homelessness. Its role is monitoring the plan, and the research has been in fact well funded, so it would be my respectful submission to the Member for Calgary-McCall that the funding reduction in the secretariat will have no impact whatsoever on its goal at this point, having established its original mandate. I think that that money is actually better spent on the front lines either through capital or through operation.

Mr. Kang: So things will be on autopilot. That's what you're saying? Okay.

My next question is regarding the Calgary Homeless Foundation. Few would dispute the fact that the Calgary Homeless Foundation has really been at the forefront of the fight to end homelessness in Alberta. It developed its own 10-year plan to end homelessness a year ahead of the province and is now looking to be the first jurisdiction in Alberta and Canada to implement its own homeless management information system. I have questions about that. I'm curious as to the minister's characterization of the Calgary Homeless Foundation. Is this a case of the tail wagging the dog? I'll stop there.

Mr. Denis: I'll answer your first comment as well. I would actually respectfully differ with this member that the secretariat is on autopilot. To me autopilot is when you're kicking back in one of these chairs and crossing your feet up on one of the tables. Obviously, nobody's doing that here tonight. The secretariat does continue to report on a periodic basis, on an ad hoc basis, as well as in its annual report, so I would disagree that it is somehow just on autopilot.

Now, moving forward to the matter of the homeless management information system that the Calgary Homeless Foundation operates, we do not fund the homeless management information system that the Calgary Homeless Foundations operates. I appreciate the member's concerns about privacy in this session, as he had asked me earlier in question period, as had the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I don't want to get specifically into legal items here because the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and I did receive a slap on the hand about that last week.

Every one of our service providers actually signs a contract that requires them to abide by privacy legislation. Now, I was never a privacy lawyer – some people I used to work with were – but the basic principle of the contract is that they have to go and abide by the privacy legislation to ensure that people's privacy is protected. I don't want to have a situation where people in need of homeless services feel a fear of reprisal if they actually go in to seek some assistance and whatever else.

At this point in time there is no province-wide plan to have a homeless management information system like the Calgary Homeless Foundation does have. I will tell you that one of the reasons we did not fund that particular program is that this government and every government spends a significant amount on information technology services, and if we have seven different IT platforms throughout the province, that's a significant cost to the taxpayer. If we're going to have something like that, it should be on a province-wide basis.

I've also received some information that the homeless management information system the Calgary Homeless Foundation uses is in fact being developed, and we continue to work with them regarding privacy concerns even though we are not particularly funding them.

We also do have an information system that we use to collect information, and we use that just like any private-sector business would, to actually go and try to see where the particular trends are, where the assistance is needed, try to find more efficiencies. But everything we do, just like everything in the government, is subject to privacy legislation.

Something I didn't get to in my original speech was about our homeless identification cards that we are providing. These are on a voluntary basis, and again we worked with the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner before we actually went and produced these because the privacy of all Albertans, including homeless people, is important to us here.

Mr. Kang: Thanks. On page 19 of the fiscal plan 2011-14 it is stated that "nearly \$93 million supports implementation of the 10-year plan to end homelessness. This provides for 3,500 spaces in shelters, as well as outreach services for an additional 500 homeless Albertans." By contrast, in last year's budget \$83 million provided for about 3,600 spaces in shelters while outreach support services assisted 1,300 homeless Albertans.

The funding for emergency transitional shelter support is down slightly this year by \$2 million while the funding for outreach support services is up by \$9 million. Is this a reflection of more homeless people receiving assistance through the Housing First approach and, therefore, a greater emphasis on outreach support services? [A timer sounded]

Mr. Denis: Am I permitted to answer that, or do we go to the next one?

The Chair: Yes, in view of the fact that we've got a full hour here, you can just carry on.

Mr. Denis: Okay. The first question was relating to the \$2 million reduction in emergency and transitional shelter funding and whether or not it'll decrease the amount of shelter space available to homeless Albertans. I can advise that the \$2 million decrease reflects reduced need for emergency shelter spaces as more and more homeless people are provided with permanent housing. Again, this is part of the success story that reflects on both sides of the ledger.

Now, reallocating the \$2 million to the outreach support program will allow my department to assist in new Housing First clients in addition to those who are progressing through, in and out of, the program. In my opinion this is a wise and prudent approach because it helps prevent these individuals from falling back into homelessness. It's forward looking. It's an example of how this plan adapts itself to changing conditions over time.

This member had also asked about a 10-year plan on shelter spaces. Shelter usage has in fact decreased in the seven major cities. I'm very proud of this record. So far 96 shelter spaces have been actually retired between 2009-10 and 2010-11.

Now, as our Housing First programs help more Albertans get and keep housing, we anticipate the demands on shelters will continually be reduced. Again, this is a good-news story because this number depends on need. If we were able to transition people from shelters, managing the problem, to Housing First, ending the problem, that's the number one good-news story here.

In 2011-12 we anticipate to support up to 3,500 spaces with little or no additional winter or emergency spaces required as we continue to see shelter usage decrease again. This speaks to the success of the Housing First program.

Mr. Kang: Thank you. Carrying this further, a fact sheet on the Housing and Urban Affairs website dated March 2011 indicates

that the Edmonton homeless count is down 21 per cent while in Fort McMurray there has been a 42 per cent decrease. I've got a few questions related to this. Why isn't the significant drop in homeless numbers across the province reflected in this year's spending on emergency/transitional shelter support? Why only a \$2 million cut if homeless numbers are down substantially? The second question is: how long does it typically take for program spending to catch up to the major demographic shifts such as we are experiencing relative to Alberta's shrinking homeless population?

I've got two other questions.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. A number of comments that I will make as well. The 2010-2011 shelter budget is allocated on a needs basis throughout the province. I'll give you examples: Calgary, \$24.6 million; Edmonton, \$9.6 million; Fort McMurray, \$2.3 million; Grande Prairie, \$452,000; High Level, \$221,000; Lethbridge, \$1.4 million; Lloydminster, \$154,000; Medicine Hat, \$312,000; and Red Deer, \$286,000. Those figures are rounded off.

The member had mentioned the \$8.8 million increase for outreach supports and what, in fact, that delivers. This actually goes and assists the community-based organizations to provide housing and supports for another 500 formerly homeless people, and that's in addition to the 3,000 that are currently being supported by our 10-year plan to end homelessness. We're also partnering with community organizations, again with local input, to deliver outreach services so that the homeless can remain successfully housed towards work and independence.

In order to access outreach support funding, each of the seven major centres is required to have in place a multiyear plan to address homelessness in their respective communities. We don't want to just be going at this alone. The plans look at the unique needs of the community while remaining in line with the overarching Housing First philosophy in the provincial 10-year plan. In addition, each year the communities are required to provide us with a service delivery plan on how funds will in fact be spent, so there is direct accountability for some tax dollars here as well. Some outreach supports also include medical, psychiatric, and case management services; life skills training; landlord liaison assistance; addictions counselling; and other services.

7:10

I also have before me some emergency and transitional shelter numbers. I have a comparative chart for January 2010 to January 2011. There is not a large reduction as the homeless counts indicate, but there is still a reduction that's showing us that we are, in fact, on the downward spiral. For example, Calgary, 4.6 per cent reduction; Edmonton had a 9.3 per cent reduction; Fort McMurray, 4.1 per cent; Lethbridge, 10.8 per cent; Medicine Hat, 6.7 per cent; Red Deer, 21.1 per cent: a global reduction of about 4.9 per cent.

Again, my point is that one of the drivers for homelessness can be a lack of employment. Unemployment has gone up the last couple of years. You'd expect to see these numbers going up, but the fact is that you see them going down. The only logical conclusion is that the Housing First approach is actually working for us throughout this province.

Mr. Kang: Thank you. Okay. You're talking about the funding. How closely is that funding for spaces and shelters and outreach services expected to match with the actual need? Is it matching with the need? How do we really know since we are operating without the integrated provincial electronic homeless management system? Does that funding closely reflect the need?

Mr. Denis: First, I just want to respectfully correct something. There is no province-wide homeless management information system. That is something used exclusively by the Calgary Homeless Foundation. It is not funded by us. They are required to abide by the privacy legislation.

Mr. Kang: Actually, I didn't say there was one.

Mr. Denis: Okay. I just wanted to put that out there because you mentioned the homeless management information system again. That has nothing to do with our particular department.

Our demand actually does track need in the local community. About 3,500 people have been housed to date. That need is forecasted on a particular level. Calgary does have the largest homeless issue. A lot of that is simply because it is the largest city. Nothing against the Member for Calgary-Buffalo's constituency, but it is largely located in downtown Calgary. There is a problem here in Edmonton. The other seven centres and even High Level, as I mentioned, have a lower need, but at the same time we do fund them to anticipate that need. Homelessness is typically not something that you do see in rural Alberta.

Our shelter budgets are based on the number of beds occupied each evening, and we do get a count on that basis. I have met with some people from larger cities such as New York who try to operate on a 98 per cent capacity. Well, we're not nearly that size. Our goal is always to have space available in emergency shelters, particularly when it's been as cold as it has been in Alberta the last few weeks. Let's face it. It is cold in this province. We want to make sure that nobody who needs assistance and wants assistance will actually be without assistance.

I do think it's more important to have a co-ordinated approach. I'll give you an example. About five or six years ago the city of Calgary retrofitted the former Brick warehouse on 16th Avenue and Centre Street, close to the first law firm that I worked at. While I thought that it was great that the city did that, I later found out that that building was actually scheduled for demolition. Not a really good use of taxpayers' dollars when you make these temporary shelters in that particular place. It's better to have the co-ordinated approach that we have. Through our partners, management bodies, and our Housing First approach that's exactly what we're doing, to focus in on a more permanent solution rather than these Band-Aids, however well intentioned they are.

Each year we also look at the need for shelter spaces, and we adjust our budget accordingly. That goes on a local basis wherever the need may be. We also are able to have a conversation with some of the local management bodies to see what particular issues there may be in that area. I'll give you an example. I went to visit a shelter in Lethbridge, where there is a very high aboriginal population of people who are homeless, much higher as a percentage than anywhere else. That's something, obviously, that we go and respond to as well. So the local context is important with the reporting that we do get from the shelters on a periodic basis.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, sir. Mr. Minister, when you say that outreach support services will assist an additional 500 homeless Albertans this year, does this mean in relation to the 1,300 formerly homeless people referenced in last year's budget? Is that correct? Or are we now talking about outreach support services supporting a total of 1,800 homeless Albertans with Housing First wraparound supports?

My second question. Agencies that serve the homeless face ongoing challenges of staff leaving for higher paying jobs. I'm wondering if the minister is contemplating boosting funding for

the homeless service agencies to enable them to improve salaries for better staff retention.

Mr. Denis: To answer the member's first question, the 3,500 that I referred to includes the previous 3,000 units that we had constructed in the past plus the 500 this year. That's 3,500. These units involve, again, permanent housing. It's our hope that we will get individuals through Housing First to graduate from this system and then free up those particular units. We try to embrace a scattered approach model throughout the city so that we don't have an overconcentration.

You mentioned agencies as well. We do fund agencies on a global basis. We have increased their particular funding. I recognize that that can be an issue. I also recognize that one of the biggest competitors for these people providing these services can be the government itself. The government itself has undergone a wage freeze in the last couple of years. I've actually spoken with several of the other ministers about what we can do to reduce competition for staff between ourselves and these bodies upon which we rely. We don't want to be biting off the hand that feeds these particular individuals.

We've also increased funding, about \$41 million, from the previous year. I could go through the exact amount per city, but I don't want to waste this member's time. I can pass him the information later.

Mr. Kang: Okay. Coming back to homeless management information systems, strategy 2 of the province's 10-year plan to end homelessness is to establish a provincial electronic information management system and provide funding for its development. Earlier, Mr. Minister, you said you didn't provide funding for that Calgary system. The minister also commented in question period on February 28, 2011: "The most important thing to us is that we have a province-wide system because I don't want to have seven or eight systems that don't integrate with each other." Since the Calgary Homeless Foundation is already rolling out its own homeless management information system this year in advance of the Edmonton Homeless Commission or the other community-based homeless management bodies, doesn't this prove that the goal of creating an integrated provincial electronic management system has gone awry? Can the minister advise if his department has provided any funding – you said you didn't – for the implementation of the Calgary homeless management information system? I'll stop there.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. I did receive some interesting questions about this, of course, last week from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. We do have an information-gathering system that is province-wide. It's just like quality assurance control would be in a private business. I've always believed that knowledge is power. When knowledge is collected properly, used properly, and analyzed correctly, it can result in a better service delivery package for the client but also quite often a reduction in costs as well. Where costs actually do go awry, I'll say to the Member for Calgary-McCall, is when you have an IT system that does not integrate. Now, I'm not an IT professional, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out either.

The HMIS system that the Calgary Homeless Foundation got on its own, without any funding from us at the present time: we've looked at it, and in effect it would integrate with a province-wide system. My concern with that particular system in Calgary is that if we had another one in Edmonton, another one in Fort McMurray, ones in Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, there's no guarantee that if they do that on a local basis, we're still going to be able to have that type of integration. I

don't have a figure on exactly how much this government and all governments throughout this country spend on IT over a four-year term, but I know it is quite high, and we always have to go and look at this as well.

I would also refer you to page 20 of the Housing and Urban Affairs annual report from last year, which indicated that

the Ministry worked with community-based organizations in the seven major [cities] . . . on plans to develop an information management system by collecting reliable and standardized data on homelessness from providers across the province. A paper-based information management system was implemented in May 2009, and the Ministry continued to provide direction and support for the planned move to a web-based system to track aggregate data, which will be operational in [subsequent years].

That's on page 20 of the Housing and Urban Affairs annual report 2009-2010.

7:20

Security is important to me but also privacy. Whether it's done on a local basis or on a province-wide basis, the privacy rights of the individuals will be maintained. The system itself that the Calgary Homeless Foundation uses, again without funding from us, has actually been approved by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, as have many of our other programs.

Mr. Kang: Thank you. Well, I'll take this a little further. On November 18, 2010, a news release issued by the Calgary Homeless Foundation indicated that it has selected Bowman Systems as a software vendor to develop their homeless management information system. Did the province have any involvement in the selection of the vendor for Calgary's homeless management information system? Since the relevant news release seems to suggest that this was done entirely at the discretion of the Calgary Homeless Foundation, did the province have any input into this?

The second question. Establishing an integrated provincial electronic management system would seem to imply that the Edmonton Homeless Commission and five other community-based homeless management bodies now have no choice but to use Bowman Systems when they set up their own homeless management information system. Is this the case? Otherwise, we are going to have a patchwork system that runs completely counter to the notion of integration.

Mr. Denis: First, I'll say again that as a result of not funding that particular program that the Calgary Homeless Foundation uses, we've had absolutely no input whatsoever into what software they may actually use. That's solely on their own. We have our own provider. Again, we try to focus on particular outcomes. I'm not a software analyst, but I can tell you that the system that they use they obviously decided was in their best interests. But that system can integrate with ours. Once again, we can communicate between our system and theirs at some point in time if we want to, but that was something that they decided solely on their own. I'm someone that believes in tendering projects, and we were not involved in that tendering if it was tendered.

Mr. Kang: I believe that is running counter to what you've been saying, you know, to have a province-wide integrated system. Are you abdicating your responsibility to establish and integrate a provincial electronic management system, then? You said before that we want to have an integrated provincial electronic management system.

Mr. Denis: Okay. Well, we'll integrate with the provincial system if, in fact, it goes down that way, and we will provide all the data

that we need. One of the underlying premises behind our approach that has made us successful is our partnerships with our community-based organizations. If I'm not funding something in a particular community-based organization, I don't see it as an abdication of somebody's responsibility but, rather, me just recognizing that particular community-based organization's autonomy. That is the case with the Calgary Homeless Foundation.

We were not involved in any tendering process, but we have spoken to them about our concerns. They've gone about this on their own through other funding that they've received, not through us. Again, we were not part of that particular project.

Mr. Kang: Now, I'm just coming back to what you said in the question period, sir, that "the most important thing to us is that we have a province-wide system because I don't want to have seven or eight systems that don't integrate with each other." What if there are problems later on? Will the province be paying the Calgary Homeless Foundation to get a new system? How would that work if everybody went on their own?

Mr. Denis: If, in fact, there is a problem with that system, they'll actually have to go and pay for it themselves because we haven't been involved.

With respect to this member, though, at one point in question period he's asking me questions about privacy with this particular system; at the other end, now he seems to advocate for a province-wide system. I suggest, you know, that we can work together on this whole particular issue. I appreciate his concerns about privacy, about compliance, about the cost as well.

One of the things that's important to me is management based on actual evidentiary burdens as opposed to just seat-of-the-pants management. We want to make sure that we plan properly, and we want to see what exactly the goals are. I want to look at the cost of this particular system but also what the benefits are and if it actually goes. If one outweighs the other, we can decide on it accordingly.

We're developing a province-wide system, actually, in partnership with six of the community-based organizations, and Calgary is developing theirs on their own. Even though they're developing theirs on their own, it does actually input with ours later. That's what I was referring to in the quote that you mentioned two or three times, the fact that I don't want seven systems that don't talk to each other because that's when the costs escalate. The HMIS that they use in Calgary will integrate with our system, but they're going on their own at this point.

The Chair: Okay. I'll invite the member to continue for his third 20-minute segment, please.

Mr. Kang: In April 2010 the Edmonton Homeless Commission released its one-year update on the city's 10-year plan to end homelessness. In that update the development of homeless information and management systems was listed as a strategy under way. Is it just me, or does that sound like Alberta's other major homeless management bodies are now examining the creation of their own homeless management information system?

You answered the question somewhat independent of any provincial government's involvement or leadership, and I'm still, you know, having a hard time believing that this government has the ability to get its act together on this. Can the minister advise if the province has had any involvement in funding or otherwise? You said that you didn't have any involvement. Do you have any involvement in developing Edmonton's homeless management

information system? And, if any, then what about the selection of your software vendor?

Mr. Denis: Well, again, I don't want to say to this member that it is just him because I know there's someone in his office who thinks they're an expert in FOIP. I would go and challenge that because the same question is being asked over and over again. I keep getting the same question, and I keep giving the same answer. I think it was the Minister of Transportation who said that once, so I'll have to pay him a royalty on that phrase.

I'm not quite sure where this member is particularly coming from. We've already answered the question. We are not funding the Calgary homeless management information system. It is subject to privacy legislation.

To recap again, we are looking with the other six community-based organizations at a province-wide system, but at the same time they have to talk to each other. The system in Calgary does integrate with what we were particularly looking for. We want to make sure that all the data is provided.

I think I've just recapped my answers to this member's rather persistent line of questioning, for which I thank him.

Mr. Kang: Thank you. Coming to rent supplements, funding for the rent supplements program has increased to \$77 million this year, up \$2 million from 2010-11. According to page 19 of the fiscal plan 2011-14 the \$77 million in rental assistance is expected to help approximately 15,000 low-income households. According to the Housing and Urban Affairs news release of March 3, 2011, \$4 million from this year's budget will provide rent supplements for 1,000 formerly homeless people who only need help with their rent and no longer need Housing First wraparound support.

Finally, it is worth noting that in 2009-10, with a similar budget of \$75 million, the direct-to-tenant rent supplement program ran out of cash after only a few months. In last year's main estimates debate the minister suggested that upwards of 80,000 low-income Albertans would receive assistance through the rent supplement program in 2010-11. That was the funding of \$75 million, yet this year, according to page 19 of the fiscal plan 2011-14, the government is estimating that it will assist 15,000 low-income households with \$77 million in program spending. Something doesn't add up here. Can the minister provide clarification as to how many Albertans received assistance through the rent supplement program in 2010-11? How many are expected to this year? Again, I'm interested in the rent supplement program specifically.

The second question: was the \$75 million in funding for the rent supplement program in 2010-11 sufficient to last the entire fiscal year, or did the money run out again prematurely, as it did in 2009-10?

7:30

Mr. Denis: There are a few questions here, and again I'll endeavour to answer them in the order this member has asked them. If I do miss one, I'd just ask for your indulgence, and I'll get up again as well.

This member had indicated, quote: the numbers don't add up. Well, in fact, they actually do, but we're comparing apples and oranges here. The rent supplement program: 15,000 households. It's 15,000 households, and 25,000 Albertans will receive support through agreements either with the landlords directly or with the tenants themselves. If it is with the landlords directly – and I've had meetings with some of the landlords recently – what specifically happens is that the amount of money comes directly off their rent. So if the rent is \$1,000, for the sake of argument, the supplement is \$200. That would just be reduced from their rent and

paid to the landlord as well. The average monthly subsidy is \$500 per month per household, or \$6,000 per year, and the subsidy is based on market rent for a particular local area less the tenant rent, set at 30 per cent of their total household income.

The market rents are regulated either in the agreement with the private landlord or the direct-to-tenant agreement and also reviewed annually and are typically set based on the CMHC market rent survey, which is done semi-annually in larger centres, or on the ministry's own rental survey for smaller centres, which we do annually. There are over 240,000 reported rental units in Alberta, only 15,000 under the rent support program, so it's about 6 per cent of the market.

One of the things I've always been very opposed to is the imposition of rent controls. The economic data about the negative effects of rent controls is almost irrefutable. Instead of just going and negatively affecting the entire private market, I'd rather actually go and target assistance to the 6 per cent of people who do require that assistance and let the 94 per cent of people handle themselves on their own through the free market.

To give you some particular information here as well, I have some statistics which I will quote to you, and I can give you a written copy as well. Rent supplements: we had 4,900 households last year use the private landlord supplement. That's 7,350 Albertans. Direct-to-tenant: we had 9,100 households, or 16,380 Albertans. Again, my success story, the graduates: 1,000 households, or 1,500 Albertans, no longer requiring rent supplements. That is the real success story, when we, in fact, can help somebody without any assistance as well.

I think that answers all this member's questions this time. If not, let me know.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, sir. I'd maybe get a little more clarification here. Is this year's \$2 million funding increase for the rent supplement program based on a plan to assist a target number of Albertans, or is this an arbitrary increase, where the government is simply trying to help as many low-income Albertans as it can? In other words, what are the justifications, if any, for the \$2 million increase in the program?

It was mentioned in the Housing and Urban Affairs March 3, 2011, news release that \$4 million will provide rental assistance "to 1,000 formerly homeless people who only need help with their rent and no longer need Housing First wrap-around supports." We talked about this earlier, too. Is this \$4 million part of the \$77 million in funding for the rent supplement program, or is it in addition to this?

Mr. Denis: To the best of my ability, I think this question was about the rent supplement program being increased by \$2 million and where that's going. Is that correct? Okay.

The focus of this additional funding is to provide rent support to formerly homeless Albertans who have graduated, again my success story, from the housing program and who carry on their transition to the greatest level of independence. Basically, if someone is homeless, you don't just go and put them in a particular apartment or other facility and say: there you go. Quite often they'll start in a shelter. Our ultimate goal is 21 days maximum that they spend in the shelter, and then they're transitioned into permanent housing. They get to permanent housing, there's a period of outreach support, and then the next step from that is that we try to get them on their own if, in fact, that is actually possible.

This \$4 million for graduates is part of the \$77 million rent support budget. It's a net \$2 million increase from last year. The rent supplement program, again, is designed not to be something to help someone on a permanent basis but, rather, on an interim

basis to give them a stopgap to where they are at. As opposed to the former homeless and eviction prevention fund, this actually has a plan to administer it. It's quite efficient, and we're seeing some pretty good results through it.

Interestingly enough, in any given month my ministry helps 77,000 people with their housing needs, and in that same month about 800 of those people will graduate. Then we try to bring people in on the waiting lists, and that goes on a needs-based basis. One of the requirements is that you have to be in critical need of housing, and that enables us to look at somebody's individual circumstances and who are the people we can affect the most positively with this funding.

Mr. Kang: What kind of waiting list do we have? Do you have any numbers?

Mr. Denis: Typically right now we have approximately 8,400 nonseniors, people under 65, who are on the wait-list, and then about 1 percent, about 800 of those, get put into the month. We help the people who are the most in need first and just move the rest of the people up the list.

I should also clarify. That's not just through the rent supplement program. That's through entire social housing programs in Alberta.

Mr. Kang: Thank you. Coming to affordable housing, last year's budget saw affordable housing capital grants decrease to \$188 million, a drop of \$102 million, or 35 per cent, from the budget of 2009-10. In last year's main estimates debate for Housing and Urban Affairs the minister indicated that this year's funding target for affordable homeless housing was \$200 million. In fact, affordable housing capital grants further decreased to \$100 million this year, a drop of \$88 million, or 47 per cent, from budget 2010-11. Despite bleeding cash in this area, the minister has continued to insist that the province will meet its target of developing 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012.

My question is: why was the minister so far off the mark with this funding target for affordable housing this year? We are talking about a difference of \$100 million in a ministry with an already limited budget. I think the minister would agree with me that it's pretty significant, a \$100 million cut.

Mr. Denis: Could I answer that please?

Mr. Kang: Yeah.

Mr. Denis: Okay. Yeah, in terms of dollars I think this member is right. That is a significant amount. But I think that where the member and I differ in philosophy is that to me the measure of our success or lack thereof is the results that we have as opposed to simply how much money we have. Any person can go and just write cheques, but it's the real results and the management that actually count.

We are actually on track. This year we're at just over 10,000 units planned or in the ground. Next year easily we'll be able to make up the 750, 800 units to make the 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012.

If we just talk about money, well, there was a project in Calgary, a so-called affordable housing project; \$320,000 a door was the cost. Our average cost is \$97,500 a door. I think that that's a success story that we can actually create through our partnerships and through our open and competitive tendering process as opposed to sole sourcing, units that are less than a third of the cost to the taxpayer. I think that's important as well.

We also have been able to really seize the day, and the fact is that our construction costs at this juncture in the economic cycle are 15 to 40 per cent less. When the next boom actually does happen – and I’ve been to Fort McMurray and met with Melissa Blake a few times up there as well about some of the boom that’s already starting to happen there – we’re actually going to be prepared. We’re not going to be caught with – well, I won’t use any anecdotes there. I’ll get ruled out of order.

At the same time we are going to be prepared for the next cycle, and we’ve provided very good value to the taxpayer. When the boom starts going again, which could happen sooner than we think, we’ll be in a situation where we’ll be prepared for the new group of people who are coming to this province, as I did 11 years ago, and at the same time the constructions costs will have been significantly lower than we otherwise would have had if we would have only dealt with the problem on a seat-of-the-pants basis.

Another thing that’s important is that there is a lag time with construction. It takes months, even years sometimes to build some of these particular units. We have to plan, again, for the future today, and by doing that, we’re saving money for the taxpayer and doing what is best for the individual need. I’ve often said that affordable housing has to be affordable for both the client and the taxpayer, and that’s exactly what we’re doing.

7:40

Mr. Kang: Thank you. According to the Housing and Urban Affairs February 18, 2011, news release the minister claims that the 2010-11 housing capital initiatives program has enabled the province to save \$80 million through partnerships and competitive tendering. Can the minister provide some specifics on how he arrived at this figure?

Mr. Denis: I’m not quite sure what this member is referring to here dealing with the cost of the partnership per unit. Could you specify which page you’re referring to, please?

Mr. Kang: This was in a news release, sir. The minister claimed that the 2010-11 housing capital initiatives program has enabled the province to save \$80 million through partnerships and competitive tendering. Are there some specific details on where the \$80 million was saved from?

Mr. Denis: Absolutely. What happens every year, and I appreciate that this can be complex, is that instead of doing just simple government builds, saying that we want to build in Calgary-McCall – let’s say that we wanted to build a tunnel there. We’re not just going to go and put that in the ground and start hiring the construction crews. What we do is we seek actual tenders, and I mentioned earlier that it’s about a 3 to 1 ratio of what we receive versus what we actually can go and fund.

We provide a grant. Last year it was \$97,500. This year it’s about the same. That’s about 55 per cent of the total costs. What happens is that one-third of the grants typically have gone to private developers, one-third to nonprofit corporations, and one-third to housing management bodies and municipalities. Often in a lot of these cases the local community-based organization will put up money on their own.

I’ll give you an example. One of the first projects I announced last year was a project that the Mustard Seed was doing here in Edmonton. They actually put up 35 per cent of the money on their own, and I just think that that’s incredible. It’s incredible in the fact that they will actually go and assist us with running it. Our statistics show that they can run it better than the government can. It also shows me that there’s a real commitment in the particular

community because these housing projects have to be acceptable to the community itself.

I definitely feel that this is the way to go. Our statistics show that through this partnership model we’ve saved over \$1 billion over the last four years just in construction costs. I think, you know, you can help a lot more people when you have local involvement through this as well.

This isn’t an actual line item or savings in the budget. Rather, we’ve actually done our own internal statistics as to what it would have cost as opposed to the contribution from the particular private-sector, nonprofit, or local community-based organization.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, sir. In last year’s main estimates you said that you will make additional public land available for affordable housing and will work together with different levels of government and various stakeholders to ensure that land continues to be made available for affordable housing, with a particular view to the Parsons Creek development in Fort McMurray. That was the immediate focus. Besides Parsons Creek, I’m wondering: can the minister name any other recent examples of where the government has made Crown land available for affordable housing? My information is that we are not doing nearly as well in this area as the minister, I think, would have us believe.

Mr. Denis: Again, if I missed the last part of your question, just poke me or throw a rock over at me.

When Parsons Creek is completed in Fort McMurray – currently we have just over 13 per cent, or a thousand units, that will be dedicated to, quote, affordable housing. That’s an approximate number. Recently I released 135 acres of land in Fort McMurray for tender. The minimum price per acre that we were accepting was \$450,000. I can’t release any of the specifics of the tenders until they are announced. They will be announced shortly. This was phase 1. In phase 1 20 per cent of the housing units, or approximately 400 of those units, are dedicated to affordable housing.

You asked: other than Parsons Creek what role do we play in provincially owned land? We continue to explore options with other ministries or levels of government to create affordable housing sites. This is through trade, or land swaps, as they’re colloquially referred to, leases, or other arrangement. My department continues to participate in cross-ministry decentralized land disposition as well as the cross-ministry subcommittee on land meetings. But it is primarily up in Fort McMurray.

One site that does come to mind is a four-acre site in Red Deer. That’s continued for affordable housing and is going through the phase of approvals.

I don’t believe that there are any tunnels on that list.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The Chair: Thank you for that exchange.

The next 20 minutes will be available to Mr. Boutilier of the third party. I guess I’d ask you: would you like to do an exchange with the minister, or do you want to use your 10 minutes and then have 10 minutes of response?

Mr. Boutilier: I’m quite prepared to exchange back and forth.

The Chair: Good. Thank you. Go ahead.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. I thank the minister’s staff for being here tonight and for answering some questions that I have on the budget. Of course, my observation of the budget is that it’s been cut by about 19 per cent, down to \$378 million. There is no capital

investment. The housing development program delivery was cut by \$2.8 million, to \$1.5 million, which is a 64 per cent cut. The affordable and homeless housing – I think all members of this House certainly do not want to see one Albertan homeless – was cut by 47 per cent, or \$88 million, to \$100 million. Yet the minister purports to go forward in trying to solve the problem of homelessness. Pertaining to special-needs housing providers, that was cut by 33 per cent, amounting to about \$2.7 million. Also, the debt repayment assistance to Alberta Social Housing Corporation is actually up 22 per cent, by \$27 million.

As I look at the budget in terms of the actuals in '09 and '10 of just under \$600 million, to the point of now being estimated for this year to come in at \$378 million, I have to first of all ask the question: is this minister and this ministry committed to continuing to reduce homelessness in the province of Alberta based on its 10-year goal?

Mr. Denis: I want to thank the member for that comment. I appreciate the member's particular concern for homelessness as opposed to comments that I've received from other members of his caucus thinking that we should abolish these programs. I really appreciate his particular concern here. I've often said that homelessness is not a partisan issue; we all should work together to make it better.

One of the things that's most important for me is that we are dealing with taxpayers' dollars here, of course. The measure of the success is not how much money you spend but rather the actual impact that we are having. I went through earlier the reduction that we're having in shelter numbers. To me this is very significant because you would typically see shelter numbers increase during a time of higher unemployment, but in fact through our Housing First approach, which is working, we are seeing a reduction in homeless numbers as well. I believe the number was just over 40 per cent, actually, in the member's community of Fort McMurray.

Alberta, in fact, was the first province to develop and commit to a province-wide strategy to end homelessness, and I can tell you that we still are the only province to commit to and develop a province-wide strategy to end homelessness. Again, we look at the Housing First approach. It isn't good enough to simply put someone up in a shelter; you want to give them permanent housing and deal with whatever issue may in particular be on their mind.

Now, Housing First is successful because it doesn't mean housing only. Those experiencing homelessness are provided with access to permanent, safe, and affordable housing but also to supports that they need to remain housed and to move towards greater self-reliance. These supports can be just as diverse as the people themselves. They can be financial, physical, mental health issues, addictions treatment, life skills, job training. I've also talked to some women who have become homeless. Domestic violence is, unfortunately, a big issue and why a lot of women end up homeless in the particular area. If people can address their issues from the safety and the stability of their homes, they have a much greater chance of success.

7:50

Moving forward, the member mentioned that we have reduced our spending. Yes, I'm quite proud of that, that we have been able to reduce our spending by 36 per cent since I took over this particular department. It's important that we don't just look at how much we spend, again, but look at the actual results. We're on track to meet 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012. We're moving forward when it comes to the outreach services as well as the services required by any particular homeless person. We're

also dealing with some of these local management bodies. We're dealing with places from Lethbridge up to Fort McMurray. Everywhere I've seen that we're seeing positive results when it comes to ending the problem of homelessness.

I'm also hoping that throughout the rest of this country we actually have another province that picks up this program because this program, as was engineered by the secretariat and the former minister here, the Member for Calgary-Cross, is something that is working for the average homeless person. We've already housed over 3,000 formerly homeless people in Alberta, and I have another 500 people here.

At the same time, though, despite the rude gestures I received from that member, I'm going to continue to answer his questions.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Chair, a point of order.

Mr. Denis: Let's argue the point of order, then. Let's argue the point of order right now.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Chair, this is an interaction, but I was questioning . . .

The Chair: Just a minute. This will be an exchange.

Mr. Denis: I was answering your question, Member.

Mr. Boutilier: Okay. He was not answering my question. I'd like to proceed with my next question.

The Chair: Please proceed with your question, and then we'll take another answer, and we'll try to balance the time.

Mr. Boutilier: Okay. Thanks. I'd ask the minister to restrain and to keep to a minute's reply.

Mr. Chairman, I find this interesting, the rosy picture he paints. I have called Fort McMurray my home for almost 35 years, and I find it interesting that he's referenced Parsons Creek. He's made reference to the mayor, but I have been speaking to members of council, and members of council are not at all pleased with the lack of action that this minister and this ministry have been taking relative to Parsons Creek and to many other issues that have been taking place. In fact, there is a policy in place in this government where they have a practice where they've given land to other municipalities, not to the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo but to other municipalities, in the last couple of weeks for a dollar, yet that is in keeping with the policy that they have when it comes to fast-growing communities.

So the question that I have to ask is quite simply this, and I'd ask him to be precise: why was land that falls under your ministry given for a dollar to other municipalities across Alberta? The policy says that we deal with high-growth areas, yet you chose under a proposal not to give the land to the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, which the councillors are not at all pleased with. In fact, your government is bragging about collecting over \$7 billion in revenue from the economic engine of Alberta in Canada, the oil sands, between \$4 billion to \$7 billion over the next few years. At the same time, you're failing to feed the goose that is laying the golden egg, yet somewhere else across Alberta you're giving land away for a dollar. That was publicly in the newspaper in Fort McMurray.

Members of council in the regional municipality, despite the rosy picture he attempts to paint, were very concerned that Fort McMurray and Parsons Creek and others were not treated the same way. So I'd appreciate a response why.

Mr. Denis: I'd be happy to respond, Mr. Chairman, but I will not and refuse to limit my response to one minute when that member, particularly, asks many very, very important questions.

Now, this member has made some very spurious allegations here.

The Chair: Can I just interject for a moment, please? This exchange is being timed, and I'm going to say as the chairman of this session that it's fairly balanced, and it will continue to be fairly balanced. So I'd ask you both to stick to the subject matter at hand.

Mr. Minister, please.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I've had the privilege of meeting with Melissa Blake in Fort McMurray on numerous occasions, and I want to tell you that Fort McMurray is important to this government, but so, also, is a measured approach when it comes to actual management.

Now, this member has made some very spurious accusations with respect to nominal sum disposals. This is a process that actually has been discontinued on a go-forward basis. I am not aware of any sum of land disposed of for a dollar other than the fact of maintenance of previous commitments. It's very important to me that we maintain our previous commitments, and those are already listed in the report.

With respect to Parsons Creek, as I mentioned, I did earlier this year release 135 acres of land in Fort McMurray for open and competitive tendering. The minimum price was \$450,000 per item. In fact, Mr. Chairman, I'm very pleased and I'm sure this member will be pleased as well that we are one year ahead of schedule when it comes to Parsons Creek with this 135 acres. I'm looking forward to the day when we can actually release the second parcel of land there.

Through our Community Development Advisory Board I've actually met with many developers from the Urban Development Institute as well as the mayor, many members of city council, the Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce, and we continue to work with them on a go-forward basis. The one thing I would agree with this member on is that Fort McMurray is not just the economic engine of Alberta but also of the rest of this country.

I also think that moving forward, again, we need to have a very measured approach. Looking specifically at the situation there, the last thing that I want to do is release too much land. Then you end up negatively affecting people's property values in Fort McMurray, which is the most expensive place to live in this province, as I'm sure this member is well aware: \$650,000 for the average household there. We have to bear in mind not just the interests of this member's rich developer friends but rather the interest of the entire community, and that is exactly what we're doing, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to continue on this track because, obviously, the minister's view of the world in Fort McMurray and that of the people of Fort McMurray and members of council are very different.

It's interesting to me, in fact, pertaining to the issue of land development in the budget, that as I look at the categories, land development program delivery actually is going down. Now, in this House members of this Assembly heard the minister talk about the boom that's coming in Fort McMurray, the economic engine of Canada. He's quite correct when he talks about it, and I'm glad to see that he is up to speed with the fact that it is the economic engine of Canada. But you have to feed the goose. The amount of land that this province – and further to the comment

that we are ahead by a year, everyone in Fort McMurray is shaking their heads. In fact, you're about five to 10 years behind. The reason behind that is that the provincial government owns so much land. That's why the provincial policy was put in place to be able to deal with high-growth communities.

Again, the minister is somewhat new to Alberta, as he indicated in his earlier comments. Having lived in Fort McMurray for almost over 35 years – and I'm proud to call it home – having sat as the mayor of Fort McMurray, speaking directly with the mayor and council on quite a frequent basis and also speaking directly with citizens, this minister's view of what program is being done in Fort McMurray is beyond belief.

Now, my question quite simply is this. We think that it was good that there were some acres released. Of course, it's been a couple of years, and for the developers and others that we have spoken to and members of council it was way too slow in terms of its release. But my question to the minister is this. You spend in your ministry \$7.7 million on what is called ministry support services. Don't you think that if the ministry was rolled in with another ministry in terms of the economic times that we face today, we could in fact direct those dollars more appropriately in helping homelessness and helping others?

What's referred to is half a million dollars for the minister's office. The deputy minister's office is \$692,000; communications is \$224,000; human resources is \$312,000; strategic services is \$5.984 million. That's not building one home or having any impact. This is bureaucracy. By the way, with a master's of public administration from Harvard, I understand the bureaucracy. I think they create a valuable service in terms of what we do. But with the economic reality that we are facing today, we would far prefer that that overhead be – I mean, let's look for a moment in terms of the half a million. I'm sorry, the \$509,000 – I stand corrected – for the minister's office: I would suggest that the \$5.9 million for strategic services, adding to \$7.7 million, could be better served in helping the homeless.

8:00

Mr. Denis: Thank you. You know, this member mentions that I'm relatively new to Alberta. Yeah, it's been about 11 years. In fact, I want to remind this member that he sold me my first PC membership in this province.

The \$9.7 million decrease that he had mentioned in land development actually is not a decrease. It is the difference between the 2010-2011 budget for Parsons Creek and the \$58 million being carried over from 2011 to 2012 to continue the development of phase 1 and the start of the development of phase 2. Alberta, in fact, has invested \$166 million to develop the first phase of the new Parsons Creek community in Fort McMurray, as I mentioned. When completed, Parsons Creek will be home to about 2,400 residents, likely in this member's constituency if he does continue on as a member.

The offer to purchase the first 135 acres did close on February 28. Again, we are looking forward to the next release of land. One thing that this member has failed or neglected to address is the fact that if land is released on a basis that is too quick or having regard to the current market conditions, we risk actually having a decrease in people's home values. That's not something that we want to have.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I run a very tight ship in this business. In fact, I only have three people in my office. My actual department budget, I'm sure you can see, has gone down by 6.3 per cent. It really, really, really saddens me that this member maligns my staff and the job that they are doing. The overall support and administration in this department is around 2 per cent of the entire

amount. Other members of his caucus have suggested that we abolish this department, that we abolish our homeless programs. I've never heard anything so far out of step with the average Albertan in and of itself.

The other thing the member should also consider is the fact that through this ministry we've been able to find significant savings through our actual budget, a 36 per cent reduction in spending over the last two years. I shudder. When this member was, in fact, a minister in other departments, I doubt that he could even beat that track record himself, Mr. Chair. It's a very small number of staff, about 149, having a very significant impact and also finding ways to actually reduce our spending and realistically improve the services that we provide. These are done at the same time. These are done concurrently because of our private-sector partnerships. This isn't an idea that this member had thought about as well.

I'm very proud of the staff that are here beside me because these staff are needed even if, in fact, they're rolled into another department.

Again, there are only three people in my particular area. I eliminated a position this year. I doubt that this member did the same thing when he was a minister in the previous administration.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. I'd like to correct, and I will be brief in my question. First of all, let the record show that I did not even know this member, nor did I ever sell him a membership to the particular party that he refers to.

Mr. Denis: Yes, you did.

Mr. Boutilier: It's simply not true. He can actually apologize for that comment.

Also, I might add that he used the term "malign." Obviously, we will go back in the *Hansard*. Clearly, it will indicate that he actually stood here to brag about the money that he cut from homelessness. That's literally what he just did. The record will prove him to be wrong in what he said.

With a master's in public administration we recognize the important role. Unfortunately, this minister likes the idea of building bureaucracy as opposed to actually putting the dollars where they need to be. How a minister could ever brag about reducing the cuts to homelessness I'll never know, but that was my interpretation of what he just did.

My question through the chair, Mr. Chairman, on the budget is this. As we go forward, Parsons Creek has truly, from the public, from developers, from members of council that I've spoken to – clearly, this minister and this government have forgotten the goose that is laying the golden egg. Because of that, in the budget it refers to the fact that under land development program delivery he is moving from the comparable budget of '10-11, where it was at 700 and some thousand dollars, to \$550,000. Now, that's only \$200,000.

The real issue is this. I'm going to come back to my question. Seven point seven million dollars was spent in overhead for your ministry. As much as I compliment the minister that he appears to have reduced some of the costs, at the end of the day, though, wouldn't he believe that the \$7.7 million, if it were merged with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, in which, in fact, I had the honour and privilege of serving Albertans and the people of Fort McMurray for over four years – I would seem to think that you could still deliver the front-line services by doing . . . [Mr. Boutilier's speaking time expired]

The Chair: Mr. Boutilier, the next 20 minutes will be available to the New Democratic party.

Mr. Mason, would you like to go in an exchange with the minister, or do you wish to use the 10 minutes?

Mr. Mason: Thanks. I think that sounds like fun, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: It does. Go ahead.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Minister, for being here, and to your staff as well. I want to start with some comments you just made about how you had overseen a 36 per cent cut in your department. You seem quite proud of that, but I'm not so sure that it's a good thing.

Since the province announced in 2009 its 10-year plan to end homelessness, the overall expense by core business has decreased steadily. The 2009-10 budget decreased by 11 per cent from 2008-09. In the 2009-10 fiscal year the ministry ended up overspending still by \$42.8 million, or 7 per cent, then slashed the budget again by \$112 million, or 18 per cent, in the 2010-11 budget. Once again this year has shown that the government is making substantial cuts, this time \$132 million, which is a cut 25 per cent greater than any other ministry. My question really is: how are you going to make these cuts and still deliver on all the promises that this government has made and this ministry has made to end homelessness and to deliver affordable housing for Albertans?

Mr. Denis: I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for his constructive comments. It's nice to hear something actually constructive that we can talk about, how we can better the lives of people who are homeless or who are in need of affordable housing. The main measure of our success is not how much money we spend but, actually, the results that we achieve. We're able to do better for the taxpayer. We are able to do better for the homeless person or the person involved in affordable housing.

In fact, I'm just going to indicate to you a few things that are in our report. We're on track to support 11,000 affordable housing units for low- to moderate-income Albertans by 2012. We're continuing to move forward in the 10-year homelessness plan. In fact, I'm very proud that we've been able to support about 3,000 formerly homeless through outreach and support services and about 77,000 low-income Albertans through rent supplements, which we're continuing to do. We're continuing to support emergency shelters across this province. We continue to focus capital funding where this need is greatest. We continue to maintain Alberta's social housing of \$40 million to update or place government-owned social housing units for low-income Albertans in all four corners of this province. We continue to make land available for homes in Fort McMurray.

The difference, though – and it may be just in our philosophy. I'm not saying one is better than the other, but I'm telling you that over the last four years we've been able to save just over a billion dollars through our open and competitive tendering process and our partnerships with places like nonprofit organizations, our management bodies, as well as for-profit providers as opposed to just going with direct government builds. We have accelerated the shift over because it does save so much money. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, we're actually down to just under \$100,000 per unit when it comes to the actual cost to the government for construction. This is as opposed to that one infamous place in Calgary that cost over \$320,000 per unit.

I will defer to you.

8:10

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. You know, I want to just sort of comment on some of the reductions in terms of homelessness

that we've seen. Because of the recession for the last couple of years there's been a real easing of the housing situation in this province. There are more vacancies, rents are lower, and more people are able to find and afford housing than was the case four years ago, five years ago. It's interesting that certain things like rents and homelessness are countercyclical. In other words, they get worse when the economy is strong, and they ease when the economy is poor. It's kind of counterintuitive, but when you think about it, the demand for housing drops, the ability of people to pay rent goes down, rents drop, and it eases the housing situation. That's what's happened.

The government is trying to take credit for this. The government is trying to say: our programs are working, and therefore we can cut the budget very dramatically because, obviously, we've got results. But, Mr. Chairman, the last homeless count shows that 80 per cent of the people that we had two years ago are still homeless. The problem has not gone away. When the economy recovers and the housing market tightens again, we're going to see an increase again in homelessness, and then the government's claim that it is solving this problem will be exposed for what it is. The cuts that are being made today are in fact going to seriously rebound upon this province again.

I think the government is short sighted. Obviously, they want to tighten the budget. Obviously, the homeless numbers have improved, so it's a very easy place to cut. But I think this minister should stand up in cabinet and should stand up publicly and fight harder to keep his budget from being cut. I want to know what this minister is going to do to try and make sure that when it comes to the Treasury Board, when it comes to the cabinet table, when it comes to setting this budget, we are still seeing the commitment to end homelessness made.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Chair, while this member and I may differ on some philosophical and operational issues, again, his heart is in the right place when he talks about wanting to reduce these homeless numbers. Where I would differ with him is that the results are our main benchmark as opposed to simply how much money we're spending.

This member is actually correct that rents have come down, but they really haven't come down very much. I'm just going to quote a statistic here. This member is from Edmonton, so if you look around here, the vacancy rate in October 2006 was 1.2 per cent and in October 2010 4.2 per cent. So the vacancy rates have gone up but not significantly. It's a fairly balanced market. If you look around – I'll again quote Edmonton as this member is from Edmonton – in October 2008 the rental rate that I have here is \$930 and in October 2010 \$917. So this member is correct. The rents have come down, but that's not even a 10 per cent reduction from where they were in the boom. Where am I going with this, Mr. Chair? Well, in fact, it shows again that our plan is actually working.

Moving forward, this member is correct that as we go forward into the next boom, whenever that does happen if anybody has a crystal ball here, what we can actually see is that you're probably going to see a further increase in rental rates. But the difference versus last time is that we have a concerted plan through 11,000 affordable housing units that are going to be on the market. There is a construction delay. We've built these at a discount because of the economic downturn, and we're going to be in a position, whenever the boom does happen, to actually deal with more immigrants. When I say immigrants, I mean people from out of province and out of the country who come to this province. We're going to be able to deal with that particular situation, and we will have these infrastructures in place.

The last thing I'll just mention as well, and I'll let this member get to his next question, is that the homeless count is down. Yes, that is correct, up to 40 per cent in some cases, but it's important to look at the actual rate of decline. We have seen a significant reduction but also a reduction in shelter usage, showing me that our Housing First approach is working.

Back to you.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you. I remain unconvinced that we've got permanent progress with respect to this issue, but I'm going to move on a little bit.

The rent supplement issue. I think preventative measures are essential in the area of housing security, both to reduce costs over time and to provide safer and healthier prospects for people, and rent supplements are a good way to do that in our view. People who have a long-term probability of earning less than the cost of housing need their rental costs supplemented, or they'll consistently fall victim to various forms of homelessness. Others who are adequately housed and who experience some temporary challenge to their economic situation such as a loss of a job or a health issue or a breakdown of a relationship and so on will fall into homelessness or inadequate housing unless they can access a rent supplement. With more people in Alberta, rents moving up again, and vacancy rates very low at the end of the rental market, more people are at risk. Despite the strong need for the province to address homelessness before it becomes a problem, the rent supplement program is only moving slightly up from \$75 million in 2010-11 to \$77 million in 2011-12. That compares, Mr. Minister, to \$144 million in 2008-09.

Without an overall plan to address the issues of poverty in our province which lead to homelessness, how does the minister expect to achieve this important goal when we're significantly underfunding the appropriate programs? I'd like to know why this government won't adequately support preventative measures such as the supplement program to assist some of the most vulnerable individuals and families in the province. With the economy still struggling, rent costs still relatively high, and population levels not dropping – that's putting it mildly – how can the government not recognize the need to see that such programs are adequately funded?

Mr. Denis: Again, the emphasis is on outcomes as opposed to actual funding. This member would probably be happy that there actually is a slight increase in the rent supplement program this year. That is because we recognize that when someone is homeless, the next step may be a shelter, the next step may be Housing First, and the next step, hopefully, is their own place. Sometimes they do need some temporary assistance, just another rung in the ladder to becoming independent.

I wanted to just describe briefly to this member – and I won't quote a bunch of numbers – the direct-to-tenant rent supplement that we have, which actually helps about 9,100 households, not people but households. This program provides subsidies directly to eligible applicants based on the difference between the rate of market rent and 30 per cent of the applicant's total household income. We also have a private landlord rent supplement, and that helps 4,900 households, again, not individuals but 4,900 households. This involves management bodies that provide landlords with rent support equal to the difference between market rent and the amount of eligible tenants' pay based on 30 per cent of their actual household income.

The new program, to which I earlier referred, will assist approximately 1,000 graduates of the Housing First program who require only some rental assistance to help prevent them from

falling back into homelessness. This is something I think that the member would appreciate as well. Typically, people who apply for rent supplements do have to requalify every year to ensure that we help the people who are most in need, but the benefits do qualify for a period of 12 months.

The \$144 million that this member mentioned actually includes the homeless and eviction prevention fund, which we've moved into a program that has an ongoing nature like the rent supplement program that I had mentioned.

I'll let you go back here.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman and to the minister. One of the things that I believe is that people who are able to achieve home ownership are more likely to escape from poverty, they are more likely to earn the skills that they need to be successful in society, and simply because they have a stake in the community, they are very much more likely to be active and productive and co-operative members of society. One of the ways that I think we can bridge the gap between people who are dependent on subsidized housing or lower income housing in a rental form and home ownership is through co-operative housing. The federal government years ago had a very good co-operative housing program.

8:20

I just want to talk a little bit about that. I lived for a time with my family in co-operative housing, and it was certainly affordable for us, but one of the interesting things about it, Mr. Minister, was that it really taught people a lot of skills. It taught them financial issues. It taught them maintenance issues. It taught them governance issues. I saw a lot of people come into the housing co-operative that I lived in that didn't have any of those skills, that were just low-income folks, but through their participation in co-operative housing they learned an awful lot about how to run things, how to maintain things, how to pay for things, how to work with people. All kinds of skills were learned in co-operative housing.

I really regret that governments have walked away from co-operative housing because I think it's a tremendous bridge between people who are dependent, low income, living in rental housing and people who eventually move on to home ownership and become higher level participants in the community as a whole. I saw that. People lived in co-operative housing. They learned those things. They got on their feet. They were stabilized, and they were able to purchase their own home. That was actually the pattern that we observed. So I want to know if the minister is prepared to consider whether or not the provincial government can do more to support co-operative housing even in the absence of a meaningful co-op program from CMHC or from the federal government.

Mr. Denis: I actually agree with a lot of what this member has said, and I appreciate his comments about private home ownership. In fact, just recently on the evening news I saw that the average person who owns a home, their net worth is much higher, and they are likely more independent than a person who actually is renting, so I do think we should encourage home ownership. The one caveat I have is that you don't want to wind up in a situation like in the United States where you have people who don't have enough equity in their homes and are much too vulnerable there. I won't belabour that.

I want to tell you a couple of things we are doing to encourage home ownership. There is a program in Strathmore that we have for co-operative housing. We also have a program called PEAK home ownership, which we partnered with Trico Development,

dealing with allowing people to own their own home. It's actually an interesting program because the money keeps getting recycled when somebody new moves into that particular home.

We do have an RFP every year, and we do solicit these types of applications. Though not exactly co-operative housing, we do look at attainable housing, and I do think that that's a way, really, to bridge the gap between someone being a perpetual renter and a homeowner.

I thank the member for his comments. I think he's right.

Mr. Mason: Thanks. Well, I'm going to then elaborate a little bit, Mr. Chairman, because, you know, I think that a key piece that's often missing in home ownership programs is giving the people the skills to attain that and to manage it and to be able to continue it in a successful way. Just giving them the money or a subsidized loan or something isn't enough.

I think I can cite some stuff that I've read about the Habitat for Humanity program. I was certainly involved with that when I was at city council in terms of trying to make land available and participating, helping Habitat for Humanity get the things they needed. But one of the problems that Habitat for Humanity has struggled with is that people whom they help get their own home sometimes don't have all the skills necessary to manage the finances, the maintenance, and all of those things. So it's not been as successful, I think. It would be my opinion that it has not been as successful as is generally believed because often while they get people into a home, in their own home – and it's wonderful; I was always extremely moved whenever I was at one of the openings of a house that was built for Habitat for Humanity – sometimes it fails because the people don't have all the skills that they need.

So I want to get back to co-operative housing as a way to build those skills and to create individuals who are ready to move up to home ownership, not necessarily with government help because they have got the support and the skills and the experience that they need to make that move on their own. I know that he picked on my comments about home ownership specifically to respond to, but I'd really commend a co-operative housing program to this minister as an important component of his housing strategy.

Mr. Denis: I'd first like to apologize to that member. You said, "picked on." I didn't mean to denigrate any of your earlier comments.

Mr. Mason: No. Picked out.

Mr. Denis: Oh, picked out. Okay. My apologies.

This member mentioned Habitat for Humanity. I was actually on a Habitat for Humanity build a few months ago. You talked about skills. I definitely don't have the skills to build a house. Okay. I definitely do not. In furtherance of that, we've actually been funding Habitat for Humanity \$25 million over three years. I think it's a really good investment on the part of the taxpayers of this province.

In addition, the Department of Employment and Immigration has what's called a housing works pilot, which assists clients to gain a higher level of independence.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister and Mr. Mason.

The next 20 minutes will go to Mr. Taylor, please. An exchange?

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We'll continue back and forth, as has been done so far this evening, if that's okay with the minister.

Just as a comment before we get into some of the specific questions, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood's comments on co-operative housing, for instance, I think are good examples of what we're really facing here as we go forward. Your ministry has done some excellent work. The homelessness secretariat has done some excellent work. Organizations like the Calgary Homeless Foundation, and various organizations in various other cities have done some really phenomenal work in this province around ending homelessness and creating affordable housing where there was none four years ago.

We've made some real progress, but housing is just one piece of a much bigger puzzle. What we really need to get down to and get to work on in this province is a poverty reduction strategy. Just like it costs less to house a homeless person than it does to keep that person homeless, it costs less to get someone out of poverty than it does to keep them in poverty. So I'll leave that with the minister to comment on or not as we go on.

I do have some specific questions here for the minister, if I could. I want to start off by referring him to page 74 of the ministry business plans, performance measure 1(a), number of affordable housing units approved for development. I see here that you actually are listing targets for building affordable housing in 2013-2014, yet you have told me that we're on track to meet your target of constructing 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012. So how come? How come you're still building in 2013-2014? I don't have a problem with the fact that you are, but I just want to know why.

Mr. Denis: Before I begin, I just want to thank the member for his support of ending homelessness in Alberta. I know that's sincere, and I sincerely appreciate his support.

The member talked about a poverty reduction strategy. That is something that is honestly beyond the scope of this particular ministry. I would suggest you might want to ask the Minister of Employment and Immigration about that.

Moving forward, you asked about the targets of 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012. We're at just over 10,000 to date. We're on track for the 11,000. What specifically is targeted after that point? The continuing care strategy is something that we are looking at. We also will look at the construction of additional units on an ongoing basis. We also want to be mindful that we do not want to adversely affect the market itself either. We don't want to just dump a bunch of affordable housing in one particular neighbourhood. We want to scatter it throughout the major metro markets, throughout the entire province, wherever it may be specifically needed.

We are providing 8,000 units to the previously homeless. Again, moving past 2012, as this member mentioned, we are providing more units to our low-to-moderate income seniors as part of the continuing care strategy, so that's something that you can expect to see out of our department on a go-forward basis.

Does that answer your question?

8:30

Mr. Taylor: Partially. I'll ask a supplemental on that. Am I detecting here a commitment to continuing to build affordable housing in the province of Alberta just on the basis that it speaks to population growth?

Mr. Denis: I can tell you in a word. The answer is yes. I can't specifically give you an exact tie, but that's generally where we want to be. Right now we have 3.7 million Albertans. If we end up going to 4.5 million or something in the next boom, you would see more particular construction. The idea is that we anticipate where

the growth would be. There is a lag time, of course, in construction. I can't just snap my fingers and say that we're going to build a particular unit today or tomorrow. We've got a plan, and that's what we're doing.

Mr. Taylor: Excellent. That's what I wanted to hear because, of course, when you achieve your target, it doesn't necessarily mean that the job is over.

Now, on poverty reduction I heard the minister say that I should direct my questions to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Nobody here gets off the hook that easily. Just as you know, Minister, with the 10-year plan to end homelessness this poverty reduction notion will only work – I mean, there are a number of components that go into it, and I don't want to spend too much time talking about something that is not directly related to the estimates tonight – if we approach it with good cross-ministry coordination. Your ministry will need to be involved, so will Employment and Immigration, so will Seniors and Community Supports, so will Children and Youth Services, Education, Health, Justice and Solicitor General. They're all in there, and I probably left out half a dozen as well.

On to my next question, though, and that has to do with the estimates specifically. I'm referring now to the fiscal plan, page 38. Under homeless support it says:

Implementation of the 10-year plan to end homelessness in Alberta continues. Nearly \$93 million in operating support is budgeted in 2011-12, an increase of \$7 million from the 2010-11 forecast. This will provide about 3,500 spaces in emergency/transitional shelters as well as outreach support services to assist an additional 500 homeless Albertans.

Then it makes note of the fact that

since 2009-10, about 3,000 Albertans who were homeless have been placed in permanent housing.

My question is about these 3,500 spaces in emergency and transitional shelters because, of course, one of the goals of any 10-year plan to end homelessness that I'm aware of is to actually get to the point where you can shut down shelters, not open more of them. Are you going the other direction here?

Mr. Denis: A couple things I wanted to mention. You know, the member is quite correct. He said to me once that our two professions aren't that dissimilar, and I knew he wouldn't let me off that easily. I want to assure him that we are working with some of the cross-ministry partners to look at a more integrated strategy. I don't know exactly where it's going to end up or what specifically it's going to be called. Actually, Mayor Nenshi did bring up to me the poverty strategy, so that is something that we can go look at as well.

The member is quite correct. The goal is to shut down a lot of shelters. It's not that we want to kick people out on their bums outside. Rather, we want to focus more on this permanent housing. We have seen shelter use go down, a decrease of about 6 per cent, as I've often mentioned, and actually we've had 96 shelter spaces retired between this year's fiscal and last year's. The number, again, depends on need.

The member quite correctly stated earlier that the numbers may seem to go up if there are more people that move here again. That's true. I think it's important that we don't shut down shelters ahead of time. We have to anticipate where it's going to be. New York operates on a very tight system. Well, guess what? We're not New York. We have a much more diverse population, a much lower population. Moving forward, we have to ensure that if we do shut down shelters, we also still have adequate emergency shelter space at all times. Let's face it. It's cold here.

Mr. Taylor: For the purposes of our weather if nothing else. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Denis: Yes.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Speak to me a little bit, if you would, about the plan as you go forward because ending homelessness doesn't truly end homelessness. What it does, ideally, is that it gets you to the point where if someone becomes homeless, they're only going to be homeless for a very brief period of time. They're only going to be sheltered for a very brief period of time, and then you'll be able to get them into housing with whatever other support they need, correct? So talk about that plan a little.

Mr. Denis: That's correct. I have to give this member a lot of credit. He's really right on the ball when it comes to our business plan. He has obviously read up on it.

The ultimate goal when we talk about ending homelessness is that what we want for an individual who presents himself or herself to a shelter through whatever means, in the broadest sense, however they end up there, is within 21 days to be in a position to take them into permanent housing. That is the ultimate goal. People say – there was a politician in Ontario a few years ago who had talked about criminalizing homelessness. I don't agree with that type of thing. It's not a crime to be poor; it's not a crime to be homeless. Rather, we will make sure that the supports are available, but we can't actually force someone to go into a particular shelter and to get help as well.

Mr. Taylor: Can you give me a quantitative indication – I'm looking for some numbers here – X number of years down the road within the context of the 10-year plan, when we get to or very near our goal of the 21-day turnover, of how many shelter spaces we'll need in the province of Alberta? You can express it in 2010 numbers, you know, or you can take into account the population growth; it's up to you. But can you give me some kind of quantitative answer there?

Mr. Denis: Member for Calgary-Currie, March 16 is the two-year anniversary of our 10-year plan. We're not specifically sure where we will end up numberwise, but that's something that we look at on a go-forward basis. I can't give you an answer to that at this point in time. I'm sorry.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. I appreciate that.

That does bring up an important point, though, about the 10-year plan to end homelessness. Under goal 2, homeless Albertans have access to stable housing and the supports they need to reach their highest level of independence, 2.3 says: "Monitor and report on the implementation and success of the 10-year plan to end homelessness and its delivery through community based organizations in Alberta's seven major cities." While it's crucial to monitor and report on the success of the plan, it's also crucial to identify and remedy the issues that arise as you go forward with the plan, right? This can't be carved in stone. This needs to be a living document. As you achieve certain targets, certain timelines it's almost inevitable that there will be unforeseen consequences, and you need to be able to adjust the plan to incorporate whatever those consequences were and stay on track, correct?

Mr. Denis: The plan is adjusted, really, on a go-forward basis. It's kind of like being the first person to operate a vehicle. You don't know exactly what's going to happen with the vehicle, but you know that things unforeseen will happen. We're the only province in Canada to have such a plan. I guess when other provinces de-

cide to adopt this, they can learn from our successes and our mistakes as well. We've looked at other jurisdictions, other cities in the world, but this is the first time on a global basis as well.

The secretariat has told us that the homeless numbers would be significantly higher if we hadn't undertaken the Housing First approach. A lot of that does involve a lot of pro forma statements, but I think that would show again that we have homelessness on a downward track whereas had we done nothing, I can't imagine where we'd be today. I'm sorry that that doesn't really answer your question, Member.

Mr. Taylor: I agree with the minister. We'd be in a much, much worse place today if we did not have the Housing First program, if we did not have these 10-year plans. They are working. There's no question about that in my mind. They are working. When you look around, though, for instance, the city of Calgary's 10-year plan is – what? – about a year and a half further along. I think they're about halfway through their third year.

Mr. Denis: Not quite. It's about three years in.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. I think they've encountered now some of the issues that I was talking about in terms of going: "Oh, okay. Now we're into the third year of the plan, and we can see that some of the things that when we wrote this plan we thought would work out are working out differently than we thought they would, so now we're having to adjust." I'm sure there are jurisdictions all over the world that have embarked on 10-year plans or sometimes 15-year plans, you know, that are discovering some of the hiccups and adjusting as they go. You should be able to learn something from those examples, should you not, although you are applying it over a much bigger piece of geography, obviously.

Mr. Denis: There is always something to be learned, but what makes Alberta really unique to a lot of places that we have compared it to is, in fact, the climate. We've looked at places like Seattle, Portland – of course, much more temperate climates than we have – New York, even. That is one thing that we always have to consider. If you're out in Vancouver in January, you're probably not going to freeze to death, but you very much could've here in the last couple of weeks.

8:40

We're currently working with the secretariat to look at where we can actually go and improve. When I say the secretariat, I mean the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness. We are working with local bodies. You're correct; the city's plan with the Calgary Homeless Foundation is about three years in. The benefit, though, of having a province-wide plan is that I don't think homeless people necessarily stay in one particular place. I also think that a province-wide strategy is better off as opposed to just having seven smaller strategies.

We're also looking at some of the best practices in the United Kingdom, the U.S., and I mentioned Australia, but again the climate is a really big factor here.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. Okay. When you drive home the point of climate, that gets back to our earlier discussion on shelter spaces, among other things. I hope you understand that I'm not still on about that. I'm on about the notion that as you move forward with the 10-year plan, which incorporates everything from shelter space to getting people out of shelter space into permanent housing – getting them into permanent supportive housing, if that's what they need, getting them into their own place with the support systems around them that they need, which will evolve over time as

well and so on and so forth – to move them up the proverbial housing ladder, to get them onto rent supplements, to get them beyond that, to get them perhaps into co-operative housing and someday to the ultimate dream of homeownership, I suppose, all those things, still the 10-year plan has to move forward and adjust. If I were to ask you right now, “When issues do arise, how does the government respond to them on the 10-year plan?” would you be able to answer that question yet, or is that still a work-in-progress? There’s no wrong answer. Just tell me.

Mr. Denis: Could you repeat your question? I’m sorry.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. In relation to the Alberta 10-year plan to end homelessness, the provincial 10-year plan to end homelessness, and talking again in the context of the 10-year plan as a living document encountering some unforeseen consequences as you go, if I were to ask you, “When issues do arise, how does the government respond to them?” would you be able to answer that question tonight, or is that still a work-in-progress? Again, as I say, there’s no wrong answer to that. Just tell me where you’re at.

Mr. Denis: That’s fine. I appreciate your comments. You know, I can give you an answer tonight as well. The increase in rent supplements this year is an example of our collaborative plan. We do deal directly with the community-based organizations. I’ll give you an example of the particular rent supplement planning.

We were hearing from people in our Housing First partners or some of the management bodies that people needed just a little more of a leg up to get to a place of their own in a lot of cases, and that’s why we’ve increased the rent supplement program, to actually help them become independent. That’s an example of a collaboration. I can’t tell you specifically what’s going to happen through the next year, but I really hope we have that because that local input is what’s making the program better.

Actually, if I may, just one other thing as well. The homeless identification program, that we announced this year, is something that has come out of the collaborative approach.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. Good example.

Page 76 of the business plan and under expense. I’m looking at the line for the Alberta social housing program. There seems to be a fairly significant decline from what your spending forecast is for this past year to the estimate for the year going forward, from \$123 million down to \$74 million. Can you explain?

Mr. Denis: Absolutely. That is a good question. Last May close to this member’s residence, actually, I announced a program to retrofit seniors’ housing complexes throughout Alberta. That is a 50-50 plan that we have with the federal government. The reduction reflects the conclusion of that funding from the federal government.

Mr. Taylor: That’s interesting because your budget has actually taken quite a hit this year in terms of significant drops in federal transfer payments, right? Has any of this caught you by surprise? Has any of this, you know, thrown a real crimp in your plans in terms of the \$54 million and change less than you received from the feds last year, or was this all expected and factored in?

Mr. Denis: That’s a good question as well. Actually, the program that I mentioned regarding seniors’ housing, there was a \$45 million decrease in federal funding offset by the investment of \$40 million that we’re making in social housing. That retrofitting program was always temporary. It was part of the federal government’s stimulus plan. We never expected that to be contin-

ued. If you have a connection over there, maybe you can let me know.

Mr. Taylor: No. I’m sorry. I have no connections there.

So you don’t anticipate any problems as a result of a drying up of federal funds? You were anticipating that dry up? This is not going to have any impact on your ability on a go-forward basis to do your job, to do the job that we need you to do?

Mr. Denis: No. Again, we did anticipate it. We’re able to offset that through some of the retained earnings we have in the Alberta Social Housing Corporation. I’ll just give you a brief item here. The \$40 million in retained earnings is not listed in the budget information. The provincial reinvestment of the retained earnings is a multiyear plan to regenerate and replace Alberta’s social housing. So the \$45 million that we don’t get from the feds: we’re replacing \$40 million of that from the retained earnings we have in the Alberta Social Housing Corporation. We’re on track. It’s a bit of a shell game, and I apologize for that.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. [A timer sounded] I have no more questions apparently.

Mr. Denis: Thank you for some good questions.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr. Taylor.

The next 20 minutes will be designated – Mrs. Sarich, please. In an exchange with the minister?

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My preference would be to share the time with the minister over that period, if you don’t mind.

The Chair: Go ahead, please.

Mrs. Sarich: Let me begin, if I can, with a couple of opening comments. In discussions in communities, in particular Edmonton-Decore, which I don’t think is too unique to other constituencies across the province, there is a realization by communities of people that our province is trying its very best to respond and emerge as well as possible given the worst global recession since the 1930s. Also, the recession that our province is experiencing has been a lot deeper than expected. I find it very interesting, after a review of the Housing and Urban Affairs ministry business plan and also the documents, that given the reductions – and I believe it’s approximately \$133 million, 26.6 per cent – the ministry has still been able to respond as well as possible to preserving program services.

In particular, it was mentioned by other members this evening in their exchanges with the minister about programs such as Housing First, some of the provincial grants, in particular the housing capital initiative, which is an initiative that partners in providing some enhancements within 13 communities within the province of Alberta to really address housing needs for the most vulnerable.

Also, I believe the Member for Calgary-Currie raised the issue of a poverty reduction strategy. Having looked at this particular issue, I’d like to just make a brief comment because, Mr. Chair, there is a linkage to what the minister has indicated this evening. Seven provinces across Canada have something called a poverty reduction strategy, and I’m proud to say that in the province of Alberta many ministries that would be akin to other ministries across those seven provinces in Canada have a lot of very good foundational activities that would contribute to something like a

poverty reduction strategy for our province although it is not called specifically that.

8:50

I'm very happy and pleased to hear this evening that the minister did mention the cross-ministerial work that is going on actively within his ministry to have further enhancements and programs and services that may be of interest to people who are struggling in our communities such as families, also young children or people with mental illness or seniors, for that matter, that would fall specifically under Housing and Urban Affairs. So one should take a closer look at those activities in comparison to other provinces and note that Alberta is participating in a very active way and has a lot of proud things to contribute to strategies that help vulnerable Albertans.

My questions this evening – and I know that it was touched upon by other members in a kind of way. Given the big reduction in the budget for this year I think it would be germane for the minister to revisit the issue of that reduction and provide some more insight as to the support required to vulnerable citizens given the reduction within the department and try to draw out some specifics that may be helpful. In my opinion, there is a realization by Albertans that government departments have had to do reductions this year. It is something that perhaps Albertans are not quite used to. But given the measured resources that have been allocated to departments and specifically to Housing and Urban Affairs, I think it would be of interest for the minister to explore this in a little bit more depth so that we can clearly understand the impact of the reduction of about \$133 million and what people can expect, you know, at the community level.

Mr. Denis: I want to thank the member for her questions. On many occasions she has expressed to me her support of the 10-year plan to end homelessness, and I appreciate that on behalf of your constituents and all people who are receiving assistance through this particular program.

Earlier some questions were brought up about, you know, whether this minister is proud of his budgetary performance. I am pretty proud of our budgetary performance because through our partnerships with the private sector and other nongovernmental organizations we've been able to work better for the taxpayer and for the homeless person. We brought our cost per unit down to under \$100,000. At the same time this again is through an open and competitive tendering process. We just don't pick things out of a hat as to what may be the particular project.

The member had talked earlier about the budget as well. We did have a reduction of \$100 million for the development and operation. This is due to the success, again, that we've had in making progress towards meeting our goal of 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012. We chose that goal. It's not just a goal that's lofty;

it's a goal that we actually intend to meet. We're at just over 10,000 this year, so we'll easily be able to meet that next year. As I had mentioned earlier to the Member for Calgary-Currie, on an ongoing basis we will look at further construction as required as well as part of our continuing care strategy.

Homeless support and land development did not receive a reduction of \$100 million. In fact, it's been an overall decrease of about \$2 million, which is the difference between the reduction of the carry-forward funding for Parsons Creek in Fort McMurray and an increase of about \$9 million for outreach and community services as a part of the 10-year plan.

I've often said that the measure of our success isn't how much money we spend; it's actually the outcomes. We're seeing some formerly homeless people reach independence. Just last week I was down in Calgary at the Calgary Dream Centre with the Premier, the Member for Foothills-Rocky View as well as the Member for Calgary-Currie, celebrating the second anniversary of the 10-year plan to end homelessness. I met a gentleman named George who had, unfortunately, a problem with alcoholism, the bad news. The good news is that he's getting back on his feet. That is the success of this program.

This member talked about a poverty reduction strategy. I am meeting with some people from other ministries, cross-ministerial working groups. I don't know exactly what we'll be dealing with there, but I can tell you that that is something that we are going to look at based on the premise of this program.

We're moving away from government housing. We're moving towards actually ending the problem of homelessness within the 10-year period. We have eight more years left to go. We're ahead of the budget. We've got some fantastic staff working here. But the success of my job is the people that I meet who we are actually assisting. I'm very proud of the record on both ends of the ledger in this department, and we're going to continue forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Further questions?

Mrs. Sarich: No, Mr. Chair, not at this time. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, pursuant to Government Motion 5 the estimates of the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule.

I would like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet next on March 15 to consider the estimates of the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

With that, I'd like to thank everyone for their participation this evening. This meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 8:56 p.m.]

