



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Service Alberta
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, March 18, 2014
7 p.m.

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The 28th Legislature
Second Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W), Deputy Chair

Bikman, Gary, Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)*
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Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC)
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VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC)

* substitution for Heather Forsyth

** substitution for Yvonne Fritz

*** substitution for Rachel Notley

Also in Attendance

Anglin, Joe, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W)
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL)
Donovan, Ian, Little Bow (W)
Rowe, Bruce, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participants

Ministry of Service Alberta

Hon. Doug Griffiths, Minister

Dale Huhtala, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Modernization

Althea Hutchinson, Senior Financial Officer/Executive Director, Strategic Planning and Financial Services

Cathryn Landreth, Assistant Deputy Minister, Open Government

Rob Phillips, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Consumer Services

Ed Ryan, Assistant Deputy Minister, Registries

Annette Trimbee, Deputy Minister

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[Ms Olesen in the chair]

Ministry of Service Alberta Consideration of Main Estimates

The Chair: Well, good evening, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting to order and say welcome to everyone here. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Service Alberta for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015.

I'd ask that we go around the table and introduce ourselves for the record. Mr. Minister, when we get to you, if you would introduce your people that are with you. I'll start. My name is Cathy Olesen, chair, MLA for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Bikman: Gary Bikman, MLA for Cardston-Taber-Warner, sitting in for Heather Forsyth, the normal vice-chair.

Dr. Brown: Neil Brown, Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill. I'm here this evening substituting for Yvonne Fritz from Calgary-Cross.

Mrs. Leskiw: Genia Leskiw, Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Sandhu: Good evening. Peter Sandhu, Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Jeneroux: Good evening. Matt Jeneroux, MLA, Edmonton-South West.

Mrs. Jablonski: Hello, everyone. Mary Anne Jablonski, Red Deer-North. I was going to say: welcome to Laurie's fabulous riding of Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. VanderBurg: George VanderBurg, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Ms Blakeman: Laurie Blakeman, and I'm not substituting for anyone. I'm not usually on this committee, but I'm here as the Liberal critic for Service Alberta. I'd like to welcome each and every one of you to my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. It's a beautiful night out there, and we're not out there.

Mr. Griffiths: As I had suggested before, if we're done in an hour, I'll buy the first round of beer. I'm just saying.

Everything is going swimmingly in Service Alberta. I'm Doug Griffiths, Minister of Service Alberta, and I am so honoured to be here with some incredible civil servants that do a great job for Albertans every day. To my left is Annette Trimbee, the deputy minister of this ministry. To my right is Althea Hutchinson, our senior financial officer. We also have – and they'll stand up when I call their names – Dean Screpnik, assistant deputy minister for shared services; Cathryn Landreth, assistant deputy minister of open government; Ed Ryan, assistant deputy minister of registries; Dale Huhtala, acting assistant deputy minister for service modernization; Rob Phillips, acting assistant deputy minister of consumer services; David Williams, executive assistant to the deputy minister; Mike Berezowsky, acting director of communications; and Sophie Yeung, acting manager, financial reporting and analysis.

Throughout this, when you ask questions – I've been the minister for just over three months – I will not be shy, as always, to call on them to provide more technical information if there's anything I don't know so that we can make sure you get the answers as promptly as possible.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Hi. I'm David Eggen. I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Calder and the Service Alberta critic for the Alberta New Democrats.

Ms Fenske: Good evening, everyone. Thank you for being here. My name is Jacquie Fenske. I'm the MLA for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms DeLong: I'm Alana Delong, MLA for Calgary-Bow.

Mr. Rowe: Bruce Rowe, MLA for the wonderful constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Pedersen: Good evening. Blake Pedersen, MLA for Medicine Hat.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have on the phone the hon. Cusanelli. Are you with us?

Ms Cusanelli: Hi, Cathy.

The Chair: Hi. Thank you for being here.

At this point I'd like to confirm for the record that pursuant to Standing Order 56(2.1) to (2.3), Dr. Brown is participating today as an official substitute for Mrs. Fritz, Mr. Eggen is substituting for Ms Notley, and Mr. Bikman will be substituting as deputy chair for Mrs. Forsyth.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, and we'd ask that BlackBerrys and iPhones and iPads, whatever, be set to silent or vibrate, and if you could keep them away from the mikes or off the table, it would be appreciated so that they don't interfere with the audiofeed.

The process will be as follows. Hon. members, as you know, the Assembly approved amendments to the standing orders that impact consideration of the main estimates. Before we proceed with consideration of the main estimates for the Ministry of Service Alberta, I would like to review briefly the standing orders governing the speaking rotation. As provided for in SO 59.01(6), the rotation is as follows. The minister may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes. For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition, Wildrose, and the minister may speak. It could be a back and forth, and it's kind of up to you to sort that out. For the next 20 minutes the members of the third party, Alberta Liberals, if any, and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes the members of the fourth party, the NDs, if any, and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent members and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes private members of the government caucus and the minister may speak, and for the time remaining we will follow the same rotation to the extent possible; however, the speaking times are reduced to five minutes.

Members may speak more than once; however, speaking times are limited to 10 minutes at any one time. A minister and a member may combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. For the final rotation, with speaking times of five minutes, once again a minister and a member may combine their speaking time for a maximum total of 10 minutes. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their speech if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time.

The chair acknowledges that this is a new procedure, and if members have any questions regarding speaking times or the

rotation, please feel free to send a note or speak directly with either the chair or the committee clerk about the process.

Three hours have been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Service Alberta. With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting.

Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate. Ministry officials may be present and, at the direction of the minister officials from the ministry may address the committee. Members' staff may be present and, space permitting, may sit at the table or behind their members along the committee room wall. Members have priority for seating at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to three hours – we get beers – the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn. Otherwise, we will adjourn at 10 p.m.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run. And we have official clocks here.

Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

Vote on the estimates is deferred until consideration of all ministry estimates has concluded and will occur in Committee of Supply on April 16, 2014.

Now I would like to invite the Minister of Service Alberta to begin his opening remarks.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Chair. I would just note that I said that if we're done within an hour, not three. But that was good. That was very subtle.

You know what? The province of Alberta is facing an incredibly exciting time in its future. It's had an amazing past, but I think we can all agree that there are some exciting times ahead for this province. We lead in so many different areas: economically, educationally, in terms of health care, in terms of environment. We do some amazing things. Service Alberta as a department is experiencing some pretty exciting times going forward, too.

I was trying to think of what the mission statement is for the department because if you can't sum up what you're doing and what your goal is in one statement, it's probably pretty tough to make sure that you stay focused on the task at hand. When we were talking about what the department does, our summary was that we are the department, we are the ministry that's going to drive modernization and innovation across the government of Alberta. We deliver the services and programs that Albertans want and expect, and we're going to be working very diligently and trying to make sure we do it using new technologies for the modern demands that Albertans have.

There isn't a single Albertan that doesn't interact with Service Alberta because we provide so many of the basic programs and so many of the – I think it's been said before that if you have to fill out a form in government, you deal with Service Alberta. So there is always some point, a milestone in everyone's life, where they deal with the department. Of course, we also deliver programs and services to the other departments. I like to think that we drive the innovation and the modernization that helps drive government to stay as responsive to Albertans' needs as possible.

If you think about it, when parents have a child, they register the birth of the child. When the child gets older, they get a driver's licence, and then they have to register the vehicle, all things that they do with Service Alberta. When that child gets married, when it grows up, and has to get a marriage certificate: dealing with

Service Alberta. I think divorce is dealt with federally, so thankfully we don't have to deal with that. They obtain the marriage licence from our agents. They register the marriage with us. When they buy a home, they use our land titles registry.

Businesses, not-for-profit groups we work with every day providing licensing and corporate registry services.

We're responsible for the legislation that provides protection to consumers, to tenants, to landlords, to condominium owners.

Our work supporting government departments isn't visible, but quite frankly, it's incredibly important to make sure that government functions properly. We provide technology support to other ministries: procurement services, interdepartmental mail and courier services, payroll, accounts payable, and records management for other ministries. These areas might be behind the scenes, but they're vital in making sure that government does their work and does it well in serving Albertans.

7:10

We recognize that our role gives us an opportunity to lead the government in finding more effective and efficient ways for the government to do business so that we can save money and still make sure that we deliver services in a better capacity to meet the requirements and demands of modern citizens.

Albertans' expectations have changed with technology. We led the country, and frankly I think we led North America when it came to SuperNet. We have more people, I believe, online than any other province in Canada, which means they use online services. They're used to doing it when they're buying goods, and now they're starting to expect that they can use the same online services when they're purchasing services from the government.

Now, Service Alberta's business plan outlines our goals and priority initiatives for the next three years, and they all link closely with the government's priorities and overall strategic plan. I'm really excited by the initiatives, especially the ones that use technology to change the way government interacts with Albertans. As I said, Albertans use technology, I think, more than any other province in Canada. We cannot as a government have a Luddite attitude that we're not going to adopt new technology and deliver services in modern ways. It's incredibly important that we make sure that we deliver services the way Albertans expect them to come. Like I said, more and more people are making their purchases online, and they're expecting to get the same sort of services in some capacity online as well. So we're working with our partners across government to expand more services online and to enhance the way that Albertans get to access them.

Among our work is the development of an online identification that Albertans can use to access services. People talk constantly about the importance of property rights. I have argued for a long time that a person's most important and precious property right is their identity, and we have the opportunity in Service Alberta to ensure that people's identity is protected when they utilize more and more services online. With a series of clicks they'll be able to renew their registration, they'll be able to book a campground, they'll be able to order school transcripts, apply for a birth certificate, all sorts of government services. Eventually we envision a system that will also let Albertans access information, perhaps even their health records, online in a secure environment.

With our success last year of reaching our goal of ensuring that at least 98 per cent of households can access high-speed Internet, Albertans have the ability to reach government services, programs, and information online, and we have the requirement to make sure that they know there is security that goes along with that.

Following our theme of modernization, Service Alberta also continues building on the momentum we had last year in consulting with Albertans on changes to the Condominium Property Act. We plan to introduce amendments this spring, which will be carried by yourself, Chair, and it will ensure consumer protection and stimulate a vibrant condo industry, which has continued to grow in this province. Among the issues being addressed, the amendments include provisions for dispute resolution, improved disclosure for buyers, and requirements for condominium managers for credentials.

Of course, we plan to drive modernization and efficiency across government, and we've led that way by example. Our land titles system, just by way of example, used outdated technology and cannot continue meeting the demands of Alberta's rapid marketplace. Even when you tour the land titles office, you see the complexity that goes along with new developments. We need a system that can meet those modern demands. Rather than just updating the software, I think it's very important, just like the other services that government delivers, that we examine how land titles services are delivered to Albertans to make sure that we do it in a modern manner as well. Those are the expectations that Albertans have.

I know there's been some talk about privatizing land titles, but I want to make it clear that it's not my intent to monetize the asset. I don't believe that's what the goal we have as a government is. In fact, our review is completely based on the principles of protecting Alberta's property rights, maintaining control of the costs, enhancing or at least maintaining the service standards, and of course encouraging innovations in our system and in the method we deliver land titles.

On another note, we recently began moving the Alberta Government Library content online and consolidated some government library locations. Our mantra has been Digital by Default, and we're applying that to every area of our business. Albertans are expecting us to move that way.

With our review of FOIP, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, we want to allow the release of more information online, as much as possible, so that it's more easily accessed and requires less cost and manpower to deliver those services so Albertans have greater access to the information than ever before. It just perfectly falls in line with the principles of open data and open government, which we are working very hard to make sure we implement and lead, in fact, across jurisdictions. Within the government technology is allowing us to streamline and standardize services we provide to other ministries. These changes are leading to better services for Albertans and help make our government more efficient by reducing costs.

Now I'm going to move to the estimates. Service Alberta is a net contributor to the province's general revenue fund. The work of the department is expected to contribute \$712 million in the 2014-15 budget. The revenue is offset \$347 million in expenses, so the net contribution turns out to be \$365 million to the government's general revenue fund, bottom line.

To achieve that revenue, the ministry's estimates are noted on page 189 of the 2014-15 government estimates. Operational expenses to be voted is \$295.5 million; capital investment, \$49.4 million. Financial transactions, primarily for the inventory of postage required by the government, is \$6.4 million, and \$6 million of that is for postage alone, which should tell you why we need to modernize our services.

We'll have lots of questions about the budget, but with 20 seconds left I just want to say that we have an incredible department full of dedicated civil servants. I want to thank them

for being here tonight and for doing an incredible job. Note that over the next year Service Alberta is going to do some amazing things that are going to transform and leapfrog us through another generation of government services.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was a great presentation.

Now we'll move on to our first set of questions. We have 60 minutes for the Wildrose Party. How did you want to distribute that, and who will be asking the questions?

Mr. Rowe: I will be asking the questions, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Did you want to do a 10-minute back and forth, or how did you want to do it?

Mr. Rowe: I'd rather go back and forth if we could, like we did last year. It worked well.

The Chair: Okay. That's great. Thank you.

Mr. Rowe: I'm also new to this critic role as the minister is. We're just three months into it and still trying to absorb it all. This will be a good evening to get a lot of information out of it. I thank everyone for the opportunity to do that. It seems I am to follow the minister as we worked so well on our last year's estimates. I'm not sure if that's a good thing or a bad thing, but it was a good evening last time.

Moving right along. On page 196 of the government estimates is the operational statement. I have a question about the operational expenses. In 2004-2005 and 2005-06 the Auditor General examined the use of government aircraft. While the Minister of Finance is responsible for the government fleet, each ministry does have the authority to charter or contract its own flights. Given all the controversy around the use of government aircraft, I'd like to know if instead of using the government fleet, the Ministry of Service Alberta chartered, leased, or contracted flights in 2012-13 or 2013-14.

Mr. Griffiths: No.

Mr. Rowe: Way too fast, Doug, but good answer. Is there a budget set aside for chartering or leasing or contracting of flights?

Mr. Griffiths: No.

Mr. Rowe: You might make that beer yet.

Minister, your office budget for 2013-14 was \$610,000. It is on page 190 of the government estimates. I would think that most of this was for staffing, but I'm interested in the other costs of your office. According to the ministerial office expense report listed by Service Alberta for all ministries, the minister's office up until January 2014 spent \$18,759.39 on meals, travel, and accommodation. That works out to about \$1,563 per month. Can you give us a breakdown on what was spent where and why?

7:20

Mr. Griffiths: That's from last year. Sorry; I don't have any of that information. That would be a good Public Accounts question. But you're talking about this year's budget?

Mr. Rowe: Well, up until January of 2014.

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah. Sorry; what page are you on?

Mr. Rowe: Page 190.

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah. This fiscal year is the '14-15 budget. You're asking about '13-14. I have all the stuff from this budget that we're doing, but I don't have what happened last year.

Mr. Rowe: So what's the budget amount going forward, then, for 2014-2015?

Mr. Griffiths: For which in particular?

Mr. Rowe: The meals, accommodations, and travel expenses. In here it says . . .

Mr. Griffiths: Sorry; but all I have in our budget – we have \$590,000, which is a \$100,000 increase over the budget from last year because we have a press secretary, and that was added to the budget. Otherwise, our budget has not increased from last year. I don't have a breakdown on the \$590,000.

Mr. Rowe: You don't?

Mr. Griffiths: No. I understand we could provide it to you, but I don't have that.

Mr. Rowe: That would be helpful if you could do that.

Mr. Griffiths: Sure. Of course, we'll provide it to the chair for everyone to have access to.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you.

The government travel policy allows business class for trips over four hours. The Premier purchased first-class tickets for herself and her staff when going to South Africa. Has your office ever purchased first-class tickets while travelling?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, let's see. I've been the minister for three months and four days, and I went to British Columbia to meet with their land titles offices to see what sort of system they have as we're talking about what we're going to move to in advance. If I recall, it cost less than a thousand dollars. That's the only place I've gone.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. Are there, in fact, measures in place to make sure that those things don't happen? Is there a policy in place?

Mr. Griffiths: I believe there is a government-wide policy. I don't remember what it is, but over a certain distance if you have meetings the next day, you're expected to fly business class, whatever it is. I don't know those in particular. Besides going to B.C. a few weeks ago and probably Regina to talk to their minister about what they're doing with their land titles and perhaps to Ottawa to tell them that we deserve just as much money for northern high-speed Internet services as any other province, I don't plan on going very far, so I don't think the policy will apply much to us. But if we do travel, we'll be following whatever policy is laid out.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. Additionally, by January 2014 the minister's office spent \$16,256 on goods, supplies, services, and other expenses. I'm assuming you're going to answer the same way and say that you can't give us the details on that.

Mr. Griffiths: I don't have those details, but we can provide it to you. I'm sorry. You know, ministry office supply and services would be things like photocopying and paper and pens. I don't know what else falls under that category. I mean, personally, as a minister I focus on the larger policy issues. But we'll provide that

information through the chair to everybody so you can see what we've utilized.

The Chair: Just a reminder to encourage all members to be directing the questions to the 2014-15 documents that we have in our hands.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. On page 196 of the government estimates is the operational statement. We see the year's expenses. I have questions about your procurement cards, known as P-cards. Treasury Board has started to release information about how P-cards are used for the current year for purchases over \$10,000. In the first six months of this year your ministry had over half a million dollars in P-cards, and I wanted to ask you questions on those expenses. Can you tell me in 2013-14 how much was spent on P-cards? If you don't have any of that other information . . .

Mr. Griffiths: I don't. That's last year's budget.

The Chair: I think I really need to stress that we're looking at 2014-15 budget. The other questions are for Public Accounts or some other venue, but that's not the venue here.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. I'm going to just divert for a little bit, then. We'll go back to the goals for 2014-15, and let's do some work on that, then.

Mr. Griffiths: Sure.

Mr. Rowe: We don't have the finances to follow up on. Yeah. Goal 1.1 is to expand online delivery of government services. Can you expand on that?

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah. I could talk about that a lot. It sort of delves into my opening comments. When we talk about expanding online services, we have ministries across government that are delivering more online services. I think one of the most modern examples that people talked about the most was when you could book a campground online. We have many different departments looking at more and more online service delivery.

For us, in particular, it would be our registry agents, and we continue to try to expand the online services that we can provide. Our registry agents right now have an online portal that they deliver services through, but what we would like to do is expand that. One of the critical elements in being able to expand that and deliver more online services is moving toward a secure card and a secure identity online. Albertans know that they may not need to utilize that secure identity to book a campsite, but they may want to do it for accessing online health records so that they can see their own records.

There, frankly, is no limit to the potential of opportunity for delivering services online. We have a few specific things that we're talking about adding besides what registry agents and their online portal are already adding. We have the Minister of Education, who has asked us if we could – and I'm really excited about it – find opportunities to provide student transcripts online. Now, that is good because instead of the ministry itself trying to create its own portal, if we create one sort of portal and access point where we can have consistent services, we can save costs, find continuity in the way we're delivering services for those transcripts.

There's applying for loans. The Queen's Printer: right now, you know, when you contact the Queen's Printer, most people still do it in writing. They still fill out a form, and then they get a hard copy of it, but if there's an opportunity for us to have an online

form where you could pay for the service and have it sent to you electronically, I mean, that just seems like a natural fit. It's a very broad way in which we're trying to expand the online delivery of government programs and services.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. Go back to the business plan for a minute. Under the goals, priority initiatives, and performance measures you have three performance measures that directly relate to your goals. Can you tell me if you have internal performance measures, key performance indicators for the industry?

Mr. Griffiths: Sorry. Could you say that one more time?

Mr. Rowe: Yeah. Can you tell me if you have internal performance measures, key performance indicators for the ministry?

Mr. Griffiths: We do.

Mr. Rowe: Can you tell us what they are?

Dr. Trimbee: In the business plan there are a couple of very high-level measures. Within divisions they also have operational plans with some key performance indicators, and at the same time those can roll into performance plans for work units, performance plans for individuals. It's an area where we know we need to do a lot of work. The challenge is to show the link between how you spend the money, so inputs, how that relates to outputs and how that relates to outcomes.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. Page 191, lines 9.2 and 8.1. Can you give me a breakdown of the capital projects, specifically enterprise services, \$22.48 million?

Mr. Griffiths: Page 191?

Mr. Rowe: Lines 9.2 and 8.1.

7:30

Mr. Griffiths: Yes. Line 9.2: the \$22.5 million is attributable to the information management technology strategy. So \$12 million of it is for Alberta Supports, which is a re-engineering program under way in Human Services to redesign the front-end and integrated service delivery for vulnerable Albertans and persons in need, \$6.5 million is for the final mile broadband initiative, and \$4 million of it is for the identity management, and that supports the government's plan to support digital online identity and authentication services for citizens. That's that security I was talking about for online identity.

Mr. Rowe: And the same for procurement services? It would be line 8.1, \$13.4 million.

Mr. Griffiths: Yes, and \$12.6 million of that is to support replacing aging vehicles in the government's fleet, and \$0.9 million of it is to replace general equipment used in program delivery such as racking and forklifts in our storage units, where we store a lot of government data. We had a bit of a challenge there that required that.

Mr. Rowe: All right. Actually, when you go from 2013-14, \$14 million was budgeted, and this is \$22 million. It seems like a large difference between the two budget numbers.

Mr. Griffiths: Which line item are you referring to?

Mr. Rowe: Line 9.2 again.

Mr. Griffiths: Line 9.2, enterprise services?

Mr. Rowe: Yeah. It went from \$14,708,000 budgeted in '13-14 to \$22,480,000 in 2014-15.

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah. That was the cash-flow requirements we had for capital purchases. Which capital purchases?

Ms Hutchinson: I think the question that you're asking – just correct me if I'm wrong; I just want to rephrase your question. Are you asking why there's a difference from one year to the next in terms of the capital?

Mr. Rowe: Yes. It seems like a significant amount. It's – what? – \$8 million.

Ms Hutchinson: The way that capital budgets work is that it's depending on the projects that are actually under hand. So it's depending on the projects and the cash flows and the timing of when you are in a project. You could have significant differences from one year to the next. It isn't correlated based on, you know, ramping up a particular project or ramping down a particular project. It sort of depends on the timelines of where you are in a capital project life cycle.

Mr. Rowe: Okay.

Mr. Griffiths: I know that Human Services came online this year ready to move that \$12 million for the re-engineering program and the investment required for it – that was a significant contributor to that – and then the investment in the identity management. I don't know exactly how the breakdown was. Because I think we significantly had Human Services ready to adopt the initiative and take the capital investment in order to re-engineer their system, that's what prompted the increase.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. On page 196 of the government estimates is the operational statement, and we see the year's expenses. I have asked you about the procurement cards, but Treasury Board has started to release information on how P-cards are used in the current year for purchases over \$10,000. Well, I suppose this goes back to the last budget as well. Yeah, we're going to get the same answer for that one, I guess.

So back to page 196. The government estimates show on the operational statement that revenue for land titles is expected to be \$87.5 million. You're also expecting the cost of operating it to decline to \$12.6 million. This would mean a profit of about \$75 million. We all know that we need an update to the land titles system, but I don't see any land titles projects in the capital plan. Can you confirm that the system won't be privatized?

Mr. Griffiths: Yes. It's a fair comment. We're finding efficiencies right now in land titles in some of the modernization of the system that we have, which has meant that – what's the correct term? – we've lowered the amount of human resources required because of the automation. We are exploring, even more than that, for land titles on how we can modernize the technology and the operating system but also manage modernization of the delivery to the people that utilize the system.

As I said in my opening remarks, I don't believe that privatization and monetizing the assets are of interest there. What we need to focus on is protecting the guarantee of title to make sure that we still utilize the Torrens system because, frankly, other jurisdictions are moving to adopt the Torrens system. It works so effectively. We need to modernize the technology and see if we can't enhance the service delivery or at least keep it the same.

Under those principles that's what we're doing with exploring what we're going to do for changing the system. There are other examples in British Columbia and Saskatchewan that are equally compelling, and we're exploring what they've done.

I'm a big fan of the people who know the answers. Just answer.

Ms Hutchinson: On page 196, under the registry information services, there is a budget number there of \$9.8 million, and \$7.5 million of that has been set aside to deal with modernizing the land titles application. That's the capital amount in the budget.

Mr. Griffiths: It goes into improving – what's the system called? – ALTA 2; from ALTA 1 to ALTA 2 and modernizing the system.

Mr. Rowe: Just for a minute we'll go back to some easy questions. If we can't refer back to the existing budget, it's thrown us for a loop here, but we'll get organized.

Goal 1.4 is: "Expand the Open Government initiative to modernize the way the government serves, reports to and partners with citizens and businesses." Can you expand on that?

Mr. Griffiths: Sorry. Which one was that?

Mr. Rowe: Goal 1, initiative 1.4.

Mr. Griffiths: Initiative 1.4. Okay. Open government and open data is the entire concept that the data that we collect, the information that we have, as long as we meet the criteria that are outlined by FOIP, because it's incredibly important for us to make sure that they complement each other and we're not battling one or the other – to put that data out to the public, not just to put it out but also to put it out in the form where the public can analyze it, sort through it, and help us perhaps identify opportunities, challenges, solutions to different things. That's the whole concept with open government and open data.

I know that there are cities that have incorporated in a manner where they have an app on an iPhone or some other device where citizens can import information about what traffic lights aren't working or what street lights aren't working. There are provincial jurisdictions that are finding ways to use it. For us, some of the most popular data sets that are being utilized are licensed businesses, charities and fundraisers; petroleum and natural gas public offerings and sales results; operators' licences by age, gender, and operating class; agricultural processing industry directory; and oil sands public offering results. Those are data sets that are very popular across jurisdictions, and the public has the opportunity, then, to manipulate that data to make applications that can help us and then make better decisions.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. On page 190, business services, line 8, we see that millions have been cut from procurement and from financial and employee services. What has been cut?

Mr. Griffiths: Page 90?

Mr. Rowe: Page 190. Sorry. Line 8, business services.

7:40

Mr. Griffiths: You're referring to the \$4.1 million decrease.

Mr. Rowe: Yeah. Exactly.

Mr. Griffiths: So \$3.3 million of that is from leveraging attrition rates resulting from internal processing changes: like I mentioned before, tightening controls over discretionary contracts because of the investment in technology. The \$0.8 million remaining is related to internal reallocation to address increases in contractual

obligations in other programs. Collectively it becomes a \$4.1 million decrease.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. Then the same question can be asked for technology services. About \$6 million has been cut from the program area. Again, what has been cut?

Mr. Griffiths: The \$5.9 million decrease: \$4.3 million of it is a decrease from, same thing, leveraging the attrition rates that are possible because of changing our internal processes and controls, and \$1.6 million of the decrease is related to internal reallocations to address our contractual obligations. It's the exact same. It's for modernizing the system and realizing we don't need quite as many personnel and then being able to reallocate contracts based on that.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. What was the total cost to set up the government's salary disclosure system?

Dr. Trimbee: Would you like me to answer that?

Mr. Griffiths: Please do.

Dr. Trimbee: We have a large enterprise resource planning system that stores all of that information. So we had all of that information, and we leveraged the platform that was built for expense disclosure. That was in the ballpark of a hundred thousand. The short answer is that not a lot of money was required to do that because we've done it once before, and we had the information.

Mr. Rowe: Do you have an estimated cost to maintain it on an annual basis?

Dr. Trimbee: We already have the ERP system, so it's really quite simple: \$25,000.

Mr. Griffiths: It's really just about resources to transfer and move the data that we already have.

Mr. Rowe: All right. We're bouncing all over here because it threw us for a loop, not being able to access that 2013-14 stuff.

The registry information systems, again on page 190, line item 5: the budget increased by a little over \$2 million. Can you explain what that cost involved?

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah. It's almost entirely due to the department's strategy to modernize and maintain the registry application systems. It's, again, updating and modernizing the technology that we utilize.

Mr. Rowe: While we're on that, I'll just go to the proposal to do away with the mailing system for notifications with the registry system. We talked about this. I can see some value with the cost of postage certainly, but it does create other problems. Like, we can e-mail this information, but not everybody has an e-mail address, and not everybody has an iPhone. What will we do with the seniors, for example? Is there much of a plan built around making that change?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, because we are Service Alberta, our entire focus and every single one of these brilliant people behind me and beside me focuses on making sure that we deliver services in the best manner and most appropriate manner and the most affordable manner to Albertans. I'll tell you that they're some of the most considerate folks I've ever met. They talk about modern methods to do it. Whether it's via e-mail or whether it's via a government

application on your phone where you can check and it will send you a reminder, there are so many different electronic tools we could utilize. But it's very important that people who don't adapt to the new technologies also have a method of finding out when their registration is due, having the same respect for those people based on the method that they utilize.

We're very sensitively trying to work out how that transition is going to take place, and I know that because everyone is considerate about this, it means that we won't get any questions that say, "Why aren't you doing this fast enough?" or "How come it's taking so long?" Everyone wants us to make sure we get it right and serve Albertans. We're working out that strategy right now, whether it gets incorporated into our Alberta ID as we go forward, you know, that one sort of ID that we've got, or whether it comes through some sort of app contest where people can utilize the data and the notices can go out through an app.

The AMA right now utilizes phone reminders. The cost of stamps is now at a dollar – isn't it? – or it will be shortly. We talked about how many millions that already costs the government and the idea about how much more it may cost for stamps. So utilizing, perhaps, AMA as a partner or as the person that delivers the service because they already utilize phone reminders for people over 75 that require medicals.

There are other avenues that we might be able to utilize. I know that the brilliant people we have around this table will find the solution.

Mr. Rowe: That would raise a question, then, on the effect that that would have on the registry offices. If you bring in other partners, that means less revenue for the registry offices. I have talked with some of the smaller ones, as you know, and some of them are concerned about viability now, and losing any revenue stream from some of these smaller ones is going to be critical.

Mr. Griffiths: You're right. It becomes a big debate. AMA are registry offices, just so you know. But you're right. That becomes a big philosophical debate. Do you ensure that Albertans get the best possible service, or do you still necessitate that they have to go into an office? Do you ensure that the fees and revenues that average Albertans have to pay are there to keep a business going that is only viable if the government ensures that they get to charge whatever they need to to stay viable, or do you talk about perhaps blending it together so that you have multiple businesses together?

There are so many questions we need to answer, and the focus has to be on ensuring that we have consistent policies and exceptional service delivery to meet what Albertans are demanding. That's where we're going to start, and that's where we're going to finish, and what we develop in between is going to be done through an extensive amount of consultation with registry agents, with Albertans, and with leaders around the table.

Mr. Rowe: In your overall plan is there a timeline on achieving this?

Mr. Griffiths: I promise you that the timeline is that we will implement the solution as soon as we find it. You know, it's such a complex issue, and I've been here three months and three days. You were at the registry social night. We have met with them several times and started to discuss what some of the challenges are and what the potential solutions are. They want to be partners in it going forward, and I know Albertans who utilize the service

want to be partners in helping to deliver the solution going forward.

I would like to see something developed this year. I believe that we can develop something this year, but I'm not going to set out a timeline to meet if we can't get to the right solution. That's what's most important.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. I was going to go to 2.1 under goal 2, that last mile initiative regarding the strategic vision and direction for the SuperNet. How close are we to that goal, and what are your intentions to get it there?

Mr. Griffiths: To which goal in particular?

Mr. Rowe: To completing that last mile. You mentioned earlier that you're at 98 per cent of it now.

Mr. Griffiths: Yes.

Mr. Rowe: What's the plan to get to the rest, and how much is that going to cost us?

7:50

Mr. Griffiths: Well, that's stuff that, I have to admit, we haven't worked out. I think we're national leaders and probably leaders across North America right now in ensuring 98 per cent access to high-speed Internet, so we've done an incredible job.

We're going to have to sit down and look at the last 2 per cent and look at the economics of it, the technology required to deliver it. There are a lot of questions that we're going to need to answer. I mentioned that one of the first things I plan on doing is ensuring that our federal counterparts, with the new money that they have said they want to put into broadband services in northern remote communities, don't presume that Alberta is ahead of everybody else and that we don't need resources. We're going to be pushing for our fair share of those resources, which I think could go a long way to help us address the next phase as we address whether or not it's economically viable and whether or not the technology even exists to reach the last 2 per cent.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. Under the same goal in 2.5 you've got: "adopt innovative procurement practices and methods." What does that mean exactly?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, I get pretty excited about this because from my former capacity I know that municipalities are being faced with challenges with procurement, just like everybody else is, and are aware of the benefits and advantages to group procurement. With our P-cards now, because of the volume that gets purchased, we get quite a significant discount back.

Is it a rebate?

Dr. Trimbee: Yeah. We get about \$800,000.

Mr. Griffiths: So we get quite a rebate.

I just met with AUMA last week – time always rolls together – about the opportunity to leverage municipal procurement in the same manner. Then they could get larger rebates, and so could we, because of the volumes that go along with it. So that's one innovative way, the notion of perhaps finding vendors when we're doing procurement that could not only find us great value but also highlight some of the products produced here in Alberta that could reach into new markets.

There are a lot of very incredible and creative things that we can do with procurement, and those are just a couple of ideas.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. Are there any specific programs involved at this time yet on that initiative?

Mr. Griffiths: Specific programs? No. It really comes into the negotiations on the use of the cards and right now is focused on what sort of partners we could utilize both in helping to showcase Alberta's products more but also to make sure that because of our larger partners, the larger group involved, we wind up with larger rebates.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. Moving to goal 3, under 3.1 you've got: "ensure relevance of legislation for which the ministry is responsible including (but not limited to) the Fair Trading Act." What's the plan there?

Mr. Griffiths: Specific to the Fair Trading Act?

Mr. Rowe: Yeah.

Mr. Griffiths: I've been focused on the Condominium Property Act.

Rob will come up and talk about that.

Mr. Phillips: My name is Rob Phillips. I'm the acting assistant deputy minister of the consumer branch. In the last year we've increased the fines under the Fair Trading Act from \$100,000 to \$300,000. We've also introduced administrative monetary penalties that can deal with a business quickly. Future changes that are being proposed for the Fair Trading Act include streamlining some of the regulations where businesses have to comply with direct selling, prepaid contracting. Some businesses offering the same service have to comply with multiple regulations. We'd like to combine those into one and streamline that.

We also have businesses who hold funds in trust for consumers, and we'd like to replace the security or bonds that they provide to the department with a single compensation fund. We believe we can save businesses thousands of dollars and actually increase consumer protection by doing that rather than them paying insurance premiums year after year when they haven't had a claim against a business.

There are a whole series of small things proposed. Some of the larger ones already went forward this year in a statutes amendment act.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. Thank you.

On that same point, we know the Condominium Property Act is coming forward. Can you give us any idea what will be involved there?

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah. Well, I mentioned a few things that we're doing with the Condominium Property Act. In the relationship between the condo boards and the owners, the developers, and the potential buyers we're clarifying a bunch of the rules. It's been 17 years since the amendments came along.

Things have evolved incredibly. I was mentioning going to the land titles office and seeing the way that condominium plans have been registered, the degree of complexity that they're coming forward with now. They're starting to register strata, not just the land itself, the bare land, but the actual strata through it. The complexity is incredible. So modernizing those relationships.

We've got condominiums now that have commercial condominium property blended with residential property. We've got strictly pure commercial condominium property, which people

didn't forecast when you go back 17 years. We need to modernize it and make it relevant to today's circumstances and situations.

I think that probably one of the things I would identify as one of the most important is some sort of dispute resolution mechanism that takes it out of the courts, a faster, more economical resolution to some disputes that then doesn't tie up court time with it.

We've got a lot of pretty great initiatives, I think, that we'll be able to undertake. Some of them are complex and are still going to take a bit of time, but I look forward to introducing the legislation yet this spring.

Mr. Rowe: This spring?

Mr. Griffiths: That's my anticipation, yes.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. We'll look forward to that.

Mr. Griffiths: Our incredible chair has done an outstanding amount of work in helping with some of the consultations, and she'll be introducing it and carrying it. I'm really impressed by the incredible work the department has done and the working groups with condo owners, with renters, with developers, and with board representatives so that you get all the different groups associated trying to work out some of the challenges that have arisen since the last amendments were done.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. Under goal 3, 3.2 says: "foster citizen awareness of marketplace risks." It sounds good. Can you describe exactly what the initiative is there?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, consumer protection services is a very important role that Service Alberta has. I don't even know how many different organizations I've met with so far that protect consumers and ensure either that the sellers, on one side, are ensuring that they're monitoring themselves through fair practice or that they're protecting consumers and have mechanisms in place to educate them, train them, and make them aware in a proactive manner. A key function of ours is to protect consumers and put the bodies in place and legislation in place. We are constantly trying to be vigilant because there are always new challenges when it comes to consumer protection.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. Results-based budgeting: what program areas have undergone this process?

Mr. Griffiths: I think it's easier to list the ones that haven't.

Enterprise and ministry support services were what was reviewed through this department in the RBB process, so it was financial management systems and processes; governance; human resource management; information management and information technology infrastructure even when it comes to the capital investment in the hardware for technology systems; legal services; and procurement logistics. So a very significant part of the enterprise and ministry support services was Service Alberta, and that was all reviewed.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. What savings have been realized to date on that? Do you know?

8:00

Mr. Griffiths: What have we got? They had recommendations for consolidating contracted and internal print operations, which would save \$11 million over five years; consolidating mail/courier stops at government offices to reflect declines in mail volume and encourage greater use of electronic communications, where ongoing savings were anticipated to be \$770,000 per year when it

was fully implemented; modernizing the fleet management information system; reducing fleet card administrative costs by 9 per cent; transforming our library services from an internal service to a citizen-facing digital by default service, which would save tremendous costs and probably enhance services, which would also, then, increase transparency and open information, for a savings of \$1.3 million in the process; and launch the Alberta online auction system. If anyone ever has gone on to see it, it's quite interesting, actually. It went online in December of 2013. We sell to bidders at the highest price our surplus items. That shows a savings of approximately \$7,000 a month in comparison to auction fees, just by doing it online.

One of the most interesting things about the RBB process was the recommendations coming forward about not just our systems, but they had some, I think, interesting conceptual – they really supported us moving to more online services, co-ordination of those services, better use of our data centres and co-ordination of our data centres. They identified a lot of new opportunities that the department had already identified and encouraged us to continue to move towards those, utilizing the cloud or data centre systems, huge opportunities for savings and better service delivery for the government.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. Going back to the operational revenue on page 196, under land titles there's an increase there of about 3 and a half million dollars. Will any of these fees be increasing?

Mr. Griffiths: No.

Mr. Rowe: So what accounts for the increase in revenue?

Mr. Griffiths: A \$5.6 million increase is primarily due to the anticipated strength of the economy and higher transaction volumes, and a \$3 million increase is largely attributed to conservative estimates of the consumer price index affecting the prediction of land titles' revenue stream. So it's increased volume. I mean, with that many people moving to this province, more properties move and more revenue.

Mr. Rowe: I'm going to assume that the motor vehicles increase is just that. Just volume, is it?

Mr. Griffiths: Yes. We have 700,000 plates per year renewed, and then that, of course, is going to continue to grow with 100,000 new people here every year. So it's volume as well.

Mr. Rowe: Will any of these compete with existing businesses, like the land titles and those kinds of things? Is there any feeling that that'll happen?

Mr. Griffiths: No. You know, I remember – sorry for this. I know that when I say anecdotal things, especially in social media, people take them however they want. I remember my grandpa telling me that he had a sign up in his office at the farm, and it had: the definition of capital punishment is when the government taxes you to raise capital so they can go into business against you, thereby putting you out of business. That's capital punishment.

I have no intention of doing anything like that, which is why it's so critical that we're going to work with registry agents to make sure that we don't have competing systems because I don't want to put them out of business. But I don't want the government to come up with something that just props them up even if they're not economically viable. I want to make sure that the business model that they adopt is value for money for taxpayers' dollars

and for the services for the people that utilize them. But I don't want to compete against them. I have no intention of that.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. In that same vein of question, then, when we talked earlier, I mentioned the registries not having an increase in seven years in their fees and so on, and you made a comment. I'm not asking for specific registries, but I would like to know the number of those registries. You said that some of them are very viable and doing quite well. Compared to the ones that are just hanging on and barely viable, what's that percentage rate? How many of them are operating on that fine line of closing their doors, and how many of them are doing, as your term was, quite well?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, I should maybe clarify, I guess, the context: some of them are doing very, very well; some of them are doing very well; and some of them are just doing well. None of them are going broke, and none of them have the prospect of going broke. It's very important that we work very closely with all the registry agents. Because they have such secure data, it's very important to us, on behalf of Albertans, to make sure that they are viable and that there's no threat or risk to that business closing. So we work very closely with them. Some of them make a tremendous profit, and some of them make a decent profit, which is why I had mentioned to you when we discussed this before that simply raising the fees isn't necessarily the best answer.

It's a deeper question, and it won't necessarily be one-size-fits-all, raise the rate that they get to charge, because some of them don't need it and some of them don't need it very badly but they could probably use it. It's a bigger question about what the future of the registries is going to be, which is why we have to have a more intricate discussion about what registries are going to do in the future, whether it's online services or front-counter services, whether it's complementing us or helping deliver the service for identity security. There is a much bigger discussion that needs to take place.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. Under 3.4 the goal is to implement recommendations from the Retail Market Review Committee report. How much will this cost, and how long will it take you to implement it?

Dr. Trimbee: I can start. The committee recommended that we do more education, and they also recommended a different governance structure. So that is being reviewed by another MLA task force, which will get their report to the Minister of Energy. Service Alberta right now is the ministry responsible for the Utilities Consumer Advocate. So until government has landed on a final plan, I think it's a little hard to comment on what that cost will be. But I think we have some good stats that talk about the level of activity and the money that they have saved consumers. What we hear from everybody we talk to is that they do play a very valuable role.

The Chair: I'd like to remind you that you've got 10 minutes left.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. That's a good one. Under 3.3 you've got, "Ensure the integrity and security of Alberta's registry information, which spans the lives of Albertans, from birth to death," as you mentioned in your opening comments. After the medicentre laptop theft have any of your practices changed regarding the integrity of that information?

Dr. Trimbee: We do have a number of users that access that system, and we do monitor carefully what they are using it for. We have invested in an addition to our MOVES system that will

allow us to use a more analytical approach to see if somebody is looking at somebody's information without a proper business reason. So we do have auditors that go out. We do have electronic tools to help us. We haven't had any incidents that are on par with the medicentre, but we do on occasion have to talk to somebody and remind them of the rules, that it's not allowed for you to look unless you have a legitimate reason for looking.

Mr. Rowe: I don't know why any of that information would be on a laptop that's carried around in a car or a briefcase anywhere, why it would be there anyway.

Mr. Griffiths: We don't have that circumstance.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. I think we have a couple more here. Under 2.4 of your goals you've got: "Migrate ministries into the shared technology infrastructure and standardized technology services." So who is in on that, and who is out?

Dr. Trimbee: Let's have Dale talk about migration to the GOA domain.

Mr. Griffiths: You had asked the question earlier, and I mentioned about Human Services moving on now. That was part of the cost of the increased capital because they were ready to move on to the GOA domain. We have a timeline as we're moving ministries on, where we find new efficiencies and better co-ordination, and of course then we can enhance security across the entire GOA domain.

8:10

Mr. Huhtala: Dale Huhtala. I'm the acting ADM for service modernization. We are currently talking to all ministries about moving into our corporate GOA domain environment. We have 13 different projects going on right now, where we've talked to all the ministries that have already migrated some of their services over. We're continuing looping back to make sure that we get the rest of the utility services and plan to have that done in this next 2014-15 year. The next large ministries we're working with are Human Services and Energy, and we plan to have Education, Advanced Education, and administrative portions of court services by 2017.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. In your performance measures, your goal – I would assume it's a goal – for percentage of invoices paid electronically last year was 82 per cent, and your target for this year is 90 per cent. Any specific plans on how you expect to get there?

Mr. Griffiths: More use of P-cards. No, seriously. The more use of P-cards, the more you've got more electronic services already done and online, online transactions. That's why we're working towards better partnerships so that we can enhance the amount of use.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. My other questions have to do with the 2013-14 budget, I guess, so if you can't bring that information forward, I think I'm good for now. We may come back to it when we come back.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

At this time I'd like to also welcome those who have joined us: MLA Ian Donovan from . . .

Mr. Donovan: Little Bow.

The Chair: . . . the Little Bow constituency, and Joe Anglin has also joined us from . . .

Mr. Donovan: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

The Chair: Thank you.

At this point did anybody else from your party have any more questions? You've still got another two minutes. You're good? Wildrose is good to go?

Mr. Donovan: Actually, if you've got two seconds, just on the final mile, Minister Griffiths, I'll just put a little plug in for the Vauxhall library, which is changing. They're putting in a new location. Just the cost to tie up the fibre optics because it is a public place where people access: I'm sure they'd be more than happy if there's any kind of extra funding around to help with that. So just to add that in there.

Thank you.

Mr. Griffiths: We'll check into that.

The Chair: Thank you.

At this time we'll move on to the Alberta Liberals, and you're allocated 20 minutes. Did you want to go back and forth, or how did you want to proceed?

Ms Blakeman: I think I'll just take that 10 and 10.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, and thanks very much to the minister and particularly to the staff. This is – don't tell anybody – one of my favourite ministries, and I always covet it. So when Darshan Kang was not able to come, I asked to be able to do the questions tonight because I just think it's such a cool ministry.

Having said that, I do have a couple of questions, starting with: isn't there an associate minister of freedom of information and protection of privacy, and where is he?

Mr. Griffiths: Otherwise disposed, but I'm happy to answer any questions you may have about it.

Ms Blakeman: Otherwise disposed. Okay.

Well, all right. My questions to him are – and I can reference page 91, goal 3, which references that citizens' interests are protected. Item 3.1 talks about the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, although surprisingly FOIP is not mentioned anywhere in your budget that I can find, which is really surprising because that's a key part of what you do. I'm wondering exactly what the associate minister does. I know that he did a FOIP review, and I'm wondering what the status of the FOIP review is. The June 2012 mandate letter was instructing him to develop transparency legislation, so I'm wondering what's happened with that, what progress has happened with that, and when I could expect to see something on that transparency legislation. That's that section.

Expense disclosures – and I'm sorry if I'm in the wrong department for this, but I thought it was under this department. The new expense disclosure policy I think is under here, but nothing tells me that, so if I'm wrong, please correct me. But if I'm correct, there was a request to the Privacy Commissioner to review the new expense disclosure policy. I've gone through, and I can't find anything on the Privacy Commissioner's website. So, you know, although the minister couldn't command the Privacy Commissioner to deliver on something, I wonder if the review was ever done and if it's public and where I could find it. Additionally,

the expense disclosure policy allowed MLAs to ask for an exemption from having to disclose it, and they were to go to the Treasury Board. I'm wondering how many times the exemption has been sought and how many times the exemption has been granted.

Vote 5, which is the registry information systems – I hope I'm in the right place because I'm looking for marriage commissioner licences. I know that in the application for appointment as a marriage commissioner it asks questions that are obviously trying to get at, you know, a commissioner's willingness to perform all kinds of marriage ceremonies. I'm wondering what happens if they say: "No. No, I'm not willing to perform all kinds of ceremonies." If that's the case, then, is there an obligation on behalf of the ministry to refer people to someone else in that area, or does the marriage commissioner get pulled off doing any kind of marriage ceremony, or are they allowed to do . . .

The Chair: If I could interject and remind that we're looking at budget estimates for 2014-15 and not really policy discussions. I would offer this to the minister.

Ms Blakeman: Well, they're paying for this. There are fees that show that somebody's paying for it, and it's registry services. I think I'm close enough.

I'm also wondering what the management-to-staff ratio is in this ministry. The FTEs were in another book. Just a minute. There they are. They're in the fiscal plan. Like, there are a lot of people: 1,372 in the year we're in and next year 1,370, so you're getting rid of two. I'm wondering what the management-to-staff ratio is on that.

I'm wondering how many of the areas – I'm having trouble figuring out where you actually find things in this budget. How many of the program areas have undergone the – what's that thing called? – results-based budgeting process, and how that's working out?

Under vote 8.1 – I think I'm in the right place here – procurement and administration services for the fleets, what is the percentage now of hybrid or electric cars in the fleet?

The land titles. Oh, the minister was saying – now, maybe I got this wrong; maybe it's registries – that he didn't want to compete, and he didn't want to prop them up. So what are you going to do? I don't understand what you're moving ahead with. That was registries. Okay. So I'm wondering what you're moving ahead with, then, on the registries side.

I'm also very curious about what's being planned for under vote 2, the land titles. There's a lot of information out there that land titles is going to get changed. I think I heard you say that you weren't going to allow privatization of the land titles system, but what are you going to allow? It's, again, essentially, secure land ownership, so it's personal information. I'm wondering how you, well, not balance but protect someone's personal information going out to a private corporation that is trying to make money for its shareholders. How's that all going to work? I'm just interested in that because they want a high return on what they're doing, and you are, supposedly, trying to make sure that people have access to a service that they can afford to do. So how's the change on the land titles going to work?

8:20

I'm also interested in how many people are left in the FOIP area and where that would turn up in your budget. I'm assuming it's under the ministry support services. There used to be a small but very competent number of staff who were in that section, and there doesn't appear to be anyone left. I'm just wondering how

many staff there actually are that are directly working with FOIP, especially when, if I heard that right, someone has to occasionally remind people not to look at personal information. That wasn't FOIP? Okay. Good. That makes me a little nervous that that would have to be said.

On the digital identity, which is turning up in the goals under goal 1.3, what's being contemplated here? I know you're trying to give everybody a password or a way of getting access to their personal information being held by the department. Is this another password, password protected? How do you control the deliberate human contravention of the rules not to access this information? It's another portal into people's personal information, which although they get to access it, I have great concerns about other people being able to access it as well.

The Chair: Ms Blakeman, you're down to one minute left.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. On page 91 of the business plan, under priority 2.4, it says, "Migrate ministries into the shared technology infrastructure and standardized technology services." My understanding, when this department was created, was that was the purpose of this department. So I'm a little curious to see many, many years later that that is still a priority initiative. Why are you still trying to work ministries together? I'm particularly interested in whether we are still working with many different computer systems and this department being responsible for trying to get those computer systems to talk to each other.

Finally, on page 91, under priority initiative 3.4: "Implement recommendations from the Retail Market Review Committee." I'm wondering who was on the committee and who is now on the new MLA committee that Dr. Trimbee mentioned that is now going to review this again.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you. Now we'll have 10 minutes for the minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much.

Number 1, the associate minister: why isn't FOIP mentioned in the budget? That was the question. Page 190, element 6.

Number 2, expense disclosure policy.

Dr. Trimbee: The Privacy Commissioner is going to do the review. She has let us know that she is going to review the expense disclosure policy. She said that she would do it after a year. She is doing it.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you.

Number 3, the marriage commissioner. That's a policy question. I don't know what – does someone know the policy around that? We've never had an issue where somebody refused to do it, but frankly if you're going to be a marriage commissioner, I would think that you're supposed to be a marriage commissioner and not be selective because, well, we don't think conscience rights are a valid excuse or explanation. That hasn't been an issue, but if it ever did arise, I'm sure we would all hear about it.

Number 4, management-to-staff ratio. Out of the 1,372 employees we have 192 managers. We are one ministry that has a lot of front-end staff delivering programs, so we have a very low management proportion of the employees.

Ms Hutchinson: Of our 1,372 FTEs there are 192 managers, there are 993 bargaining units, and there are 185 opted-out employees included in that number. In terms of the bargaining unit we're

talking about 578 administrative and support staff, 372 program services staff, and 43 technical and field services staff.

Mr. Griffiths: The programs area on the RBB process was question 5, and I read that off before for Bruce. Under enterprise and ministry support services, RBB process, financial management systems and processes, governance, human resource management, information management, information technology, infrastructure, legal services, and procurement and logistics services, a very significant section of this ministry.

Dr. Trimbee: In the third round we're also looking at consumer protection services and other things we do to protect Albertans as part of another line of business other than enterprise and ministry support services.

Mr. Griffiths: Question 6, the percentage of hybrid cars in the fleet. There are about 80 hybrids in a fleet of about 3,200. We leverage hybrids to the best of our ability, but hybrids don't always work in certain areas – for environment or SRD, you need four-wheel drive when you're out in the country – so right now we have 80.

Number 7 was: what am I going to do with registries since I don't want to compete with them but I don't want to prop them up either? I understand your question. The point, I guess, I was trying to make was that there's not one simple solution to what to do – just raise the fees, and now they're all viable, and everything will work fine – because some of them don't necessarily need a fee increase. As a bigger context in discussion about other services that they could deliver beyond Service Alberta, other government departments, what they could do through partnership with online technology: for all the work that we're doing in delivering services online and moving to that, I want to make sure as we sit down with registries and figure out what we're doing that our services that we can offer online don't necessarily compete with registry services. There might be a way that we complement and they deliver more services for us, and that's better than just a straight fee increase on how many driver's licences, on each driver's licence or each licence plate.

I want to find a successful business model for them. I don't want to compete with them in online services, and I don't just think that a straight fee increases makes sure that all the problems go away. I think we're moving to a new generation of service delivery that incorporates more online services, and those demands are coming directly from Albertans, so we need to find, perhaps, a new model of doing business with them to make sure that they're effective and efficient and successful going forward.

Number 8: what if you don't privatize land titles? Well, I'm not going to privatize land titles. I said that before. I don't think it's about commoditizing the asset. But land titles has a very old technology system, an operating system, that needs to be modernized. While we're doing that – and we're looking at how we can modernize that system just like we're doing with registry agents and we're doing with the online identification and allowing Albertans to access more services online – there might be new methods of delivering services that land titles does or other complementary services they can offer that modernize the way we deliver services. So it's a bigger question, not just whether or not we're going to invest in the operating system to ensure it's viable. It's about making sure that it leapfrogs it through the next generation.

I had mentioned before that we're exploring what they did in B.C., which wasn't a privatization. We're exploring what they did in Saskatchewan, which wasn't a privatization although they have

sold some shares in a corporate-owned entity. We're looking at a diversity of solutions to make sure that we can, frankly, leapfrog ahead of what other jurisdictions are doing.

How many staff in the FOIP area? In Service Alberta we have seven FOIP people. We're expanding by three. Every department has FOIP people as well, so that's how many we have in our service.

Next one, digital identity. What is it? I understand your questions and your concerns about digital identity and your fear about somebody being able to abuse it. We've seen incredible technologies developed at the private sector, where people aren't nearly as afraid as they used to be about utilizing their credit card online. My phone has an app where I can go onto Servus Credit Union and check my bank account and move around money.

8:30

There is technology, and we have no intention of reinventing the wheel and trying to come up with something nobody has ever done before and investing hundreds of millions of dollars to try and develop something from scratch. There's very secure technology already available. If we can improve the access that Albertans have to their information and improve the services that they can get and improve their access to programs and to their own secure information by having that digital identity that is secure – and we'll make sure it's secure; that's, I think, our number one job – it's very important. I know we can do it.

Now, I know that when it comes to . . .

Ms Blakeman: Sorry, Minister. It's not the technology; it's the human contravention of it. That's where most of the contraventions and breaches of privacy are.

Mr. Griffiths: I know. If we feared the one potential human contravention that could happen out of a hundred million cases, then we'd never move forward. It didn't stop progress in developing the technology for banks. Albertans and customers all across Canada and North America are used to utilizing online technology, and they have digital identities that are already set up at banks. So there is that potential and I know there could be the potential for human error, but if we waited until we had perfection, we would never take a step. I think we can do an incredible job of enhancing services to Albertans and providing security of their digital identity.

I'm sorry. Before you interrupted, there was something else I was going to add to that. I can't remember what it was.

Okay. You asked about the previous committee. This is the new one. Everett McDonald, Ron Casey, Matt Jeneroux, Maureen Kubinec, and Cathy Olesen are on the new committee, who are working on that.

I believe that's all the questions I had. Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Shared technology.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay. Shared technology. It's a constant challenge working forward because technology advances as fast as you can start to share the technology. I don't know. I have no answer except that it doesn't matter to me what happened before I took over this ministry. We're going to continue to advance, working on shared technology going forward, because I can't do anything about the past.

The Chair: Twenty seconds if you want to let her rip.

Ms Blakeman: No. Actually, I think that without launching a whole other topic, I'm going to leave it at that.

The Chair: All righty. Okay. Thank you.

Actually, this is probably a good time to take a five-minute break. Let's be very brief and be back happy, with our smiles on, and in our chairs within four minutes. That would be great.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 8:33 p.m. to 8:39 p.m.]

The Chair: If we could all please take our seats, we'll get this meeting back to order. At this time I am anticipating that some amendments will be put forward this evening, so I do want to read a little piece that addresses amendments.

An amendment to the estimates cannot seek to increase the amount of the estimates being considered, 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. Vote on amendments is deferred until Committee of Supply on April 16, 2014. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. Twenty copies of amendments must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff.

At this time we will move on to the NDs. They have 20 minutes. Would you like to go back and forth?

Mr. Eggen: If that's okay with the minister, sure. Is that okay? Okay. Great.

The Chair: Great. Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you so much for this presentation, a little late at night, but that's okay. I'm still getting my head around this ministry as well to some degree although I'm very pleased to deal with a ministry that is a net generator of funds, right? You said \$712 million last year, of which you put \$365 million into general revenues, which is great. Again, I was dealing with a lot of your workers in land titles that were very concerned about, you know, how they were generating quite a lot of money, too. There seems to be a more solid message that we can send back to them, and I'm very grateful for that, too.

I guess my angle on it is slightly different. I'm curious to know first of all: what are your sort of top five generators of income for that very large sum? Which fees are coming in, and what areas are those in? You can just kind of jot those down while I ask you the second part of my question.

Is there sort of a set percentage of money, on top of the administrative costs or the service costs or the licence plate costs or whatever it happens to be, that is set to each of these different services, or does it vary according to whether it's a marriage licence or an automobile licence and so forth? The point that I'm getting at here is: considering that you do make pretty good money off these things, can we find a way to make these services more affordable somehow, to take it another way and look for, as you've realized, efficiencies through electronic exchanges and so forth? I think there is room right there to pass on savings to Albertans.

I mean, a lot of these things really are essential services. We say, you know, drivers' licences or whatever, but people really need a lot of these services, whether they're birth, registration, marriages, identification, and so forth. I would venture to ask if there's a mechanism in this budget by which we can actually reduce some of these fees for Albertans and make it more affordable for them to interact and do the registration services that they require for themselves and their families.

Mr. Griffiths: We don't have a specific breakdown.

Mr. Eggen: I mean, you could always shake it out in the due course of time.

Mr. Griffiths: We do have on page 196 of our operational statement that motor vehicles are obviously the largest generator we're looking at, \$514 million. Land titles is second, then other premiums, fees, and licences, then shared services, then the Utilities Consumer Advocate, but that's on a cost-neutral basis, I believe. It's primarily motor vehicles and land titles.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I guess I can take it as a bit of a philosophical question rather than an actual one. Certainly, Albertans would appreciate a reduction in the fees that they pay for certain essential services, and I think you might be creating an opportunity by having more digital interaction with those services. Again, I'm advocating for affordability. I think we can keep that top of mind as we move forward through this '14-15 budget.

Mr. Griffiths: We have some brilliant folks here that will correct me if I'm wrong or if I don't quite hit the mark, but for things like paying fines, they can go into registry offices to pay fines, right? But they have to pay a fee for every fine they pay.

Mr. Eggen: I've heard about this. I haven't done it myself, but I've heard rumours about these things, yes.

Mr. Griffiths: You've never gotten a fine, yeah.

You can drive them to cost savings to where they go online, where there is less cost, and they could pay, if they have several fines, one cost. Then this is what I mean about not competing with the registry agents because you draw business away from them and make them uncompetitive. That's something we want to make sure that we're not deliberately doing to stifle their opportunity for success, which is why it's a little complex. There are definitely opportunities for savings for the clients.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. So you are keeping top of mind the affordability for individuals to access your services.

Mr. Griffiths: Yes.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you.

The second question I had was in regard to the condo amendments and protection. Have you built some contingencies within this '14-15 budget that would help to facilitate these amendments to consumer protection for condo owners, renters, and landlords?

8:45

Mr. Griffiths: Of course, any costs to us that may be associated with delivering services that would be associated with the condominium act amendments, we have forecast. But we do know that even when the legislation is introduced this year – I don't want to anticipate, but I hope that it's passed because people are very excited about it – there will be regulations that will have to come along with it, too, and they may take a bit more time. Some of those costs may be deferred until next year's budget, especially when we look at, you know, a dispute resolution mechanism. It probably wouldn't take effect until next year's budget.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. That's great. I mean, certainly, we anticipate the actual paper that comes with these new amendments, but from what I've heard, it sounds an awful lot like the amendments that I put forward in the fall in regard to the condos. So that's great.

However the evolution of these things goes, there are thousands of Albertans that would appreciate the protection that some condo legislation would afford.

The third thing that I have here is in regard to goal 5 of your ministry business plan, which talks about living within the means and talks about amending transparency legislation to enhance access to and availability of government information. Certainly, the Alberta New Democrats are very, very interested in extending the transparency legislation and availability of government information. It's very important for democracy. My question is: does this include investing in data sharing and open-data repositories? How is the ministry and the government going to commit to providing more transparency in these actions as stated within your business plan?

Mr. Griffiths: I'm going to ask for some help. There are so many different departments with so much different information that has to be run through the process to make sure that we're not contravening FOIP. Then after we generate the appropriate policies on what information can be put out there, it's very important to also have a discussion about how the information gets put out there because if it's strictly raw data that's unusable by people – we're talking about what sort of format. But if you overformat it, people may say that it's not in a structure that they can manipulate themselves. We're trying to make sure that we build the policies in place to get as much useful data – useful data – out there as possible.

I don't know if that's exactly answering your question.

Mr. Eggen: No. I guess what I was focusing towards, again, is the open-source concept and the open-source movement, right? The more we can use that as a guiding principle, then moving forward, people will have an amazing capacity to interpret data. We'll take it raw, you know.

Mr. Griffiths: The beautiful thing about it is that you can call on Genius all over the place, all over the province, that can do some amazing things and help us be a better government. Under the performance measures it would be goal 1, performance measure 1(c), the number of government data sets available online. The target for 2014-15 is 600 data sets, and then for '15-16 it's 1,000 data sets. We have very aggressive targets for how we're going to reach that, and I think we will. The expense disclosure is a good example of an open-data set.

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely. It's fascinating. It's like it generates full-time job equivalencies.

Mr. Griffiths: That we don't have to pay for.

Mr. Eggen: Lord knows. Yes, indeed.

That being said, Chair, I would like to just distribute an amendment, then, to one part of the budget here. It adheres to the rules that the Legislature sets out in regard to this committee. I'll just pass the appropriate number of copies around. Do you want to wait until it's passed around, or can I read it?

The Chair: Whatever is your pleasure.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. This is an amendment that follows the news conference that the Alberta New Democrats did this morning in regard to all associate ministers, so don't take it personally that yours just happens to be the first one that comes through. We're

going to have a whole bunch of them. I'm going to read the amendment now. I move that

the estimates for the associate minister's office under reference 1.2 at page 190 of the 2014-15 main estimates of Service Alberta be reduced by \$260,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 189 for operational is \$295,223,000.

That's dated today.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: So that's my amendment. Do you want me to speak to that now?

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. The idea here is to look at all of the associate ministers in the government. We feel that by having this very large government and very large cabinet that it's certainly not using money necessarily in the most expedient way. I know that it's just about \$3 million and only \$260,000 for this ministry, but I think it is a way by which we can show that we do live within our means and are not spending money on these ministries.

Certainly, by all means, we as Alberta New Democrats and all of us around this table understand the importance of transparency and of the concept of these things, but we just believe that this very capable ministry and its members and its minister as well are fully able to deal with this without another layer of bureaucracy.

Mr. VanderBurg: Are there any questions to the amendments?

The Chair: I don't know. I'm not sure. You can address it in the allotment of time to speak when it's your turn.

Mr. VanderBurg: No, just to the mover.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Oh, sure. You can speak on the amendment. Sure.

The Chair: As long as it's okay with you because he's taking your time.

Mr. Eggen: No, that's fine. I'm done with my other questions.

Mr. VanderBurg: I know the mover is a champion for government jobs. So you're saying that the support staff that support this ministry should be fired?

Mr. Eggen: Well, no. Just the budget line of \$260,000 in this budget.

Mr. VanderBurg: That includes the support staff.

Mr. Eggen: Well, it does include the people that are working there, I suppose.

Mr. VanderBurg: So you're saying that government workers, full-time workers, should be reduced, that these support staff should be reduced?

Mr. Eggen: We should reduce this ministry by \$260,000. That's right. That's what I'm putting forward here right now.

Thank you.

Mr. VanderBurg: The staff will appreciate that one.

The Chair: Thank you.

Anything further? You have seven minutes left.

Mr. Eggen: No. That's good.

The Chair: You're good?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

The Chair: All righty. Okay. Thank you.

Having said that, we will move on to our next rotation. We have no independent here in the room unless one has arrived that I didn't see.

I see none, so we will now move on to the PC allotment of time. We have 20 minutes. I have noticed that there are two people who would like to ask questions and share the time.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, just quickly, on page 90 of the business plan you spoke to the online services and expanding them, and a couple of speakers before me talked about it. Minister, like your riding, my riding has some small registries. They are by far not abundant with customers in through their doors, and every time that we would do an online service, it could take away from the revenue for those registries and make them so that they're not viable businesses. I have a solution to that, though. I'm wondering if you would be willing to, by postal code or by community – and I'll talk about Mayerthorpe, where I have my constituency office, a community of 2,000 people, the registry there. Would you share the revenue that would be taken online, by postal code or by community?

Further to that, I just bought a 10-year passport, and if you know me, for the last 20 years my face hasn't changed. So what about the opportunity for saving postage and buying longer term products like a driver's licence from registries? My loans on my vehicles are always four or five years, and I've had the same licence plate now for, I'll bet you, 15 years. How about buying a licence plate for a longer period of time, saving some postage?

I know the staff in your department quite well. They're pretty bright people. I'm sure we could come up with a long list of ways to save you postage and for me as an Albertan an opportunity to save some time, whether it be corporate registries or drivers' licences. I'd like to hear some of your thoughts on that.

8:55

Mr. Griffiths: You know, I go into the department's office, and I see your picture up there. It's always nicely shined up with flowers underneath it. They loved you. It looks exactly the same.

Actually, we have had discussions about creative ways to adapt some of those things. It has been suggested by some of the registry agents that giving consideration to – and one of the ways we could prevent competing with registries is if we offer online services and they get a share of it. I don't know that I've directly heard someone talk about doing it by postal code but breaking it down somewhat so that you have the user's money – he would normally go into the registry office – returned to that registry office if you're pulling front-door service away. This is part of the process of finding the most creative, elaborate ways to ensure that we have competitive registries that are enhancing the services they provide.

As far as the longer drivers' licences I didn't know you could – I apologize. I was completely ignorant that you could get a 10-year passport.

Mr. VanderBurg: The staff told me when I went online that 50 per cent of applicants were now going to a 10-year passport.

Mr. Griffiths: I would do it. That's good. I have to admit that I hadn't personally considered it, but I know that the staff in the department have some brilliant ideas. I'm sure that they had

already started to consider some of that and just hadn't had the chance to brief me on it when we got to talk about some of those long-term solutions. But that's a great idea, especially if we're moving towards that digital identification that could be more permanent. I don't know how else we're going to secure identity without that face-to-face contact, and the registry agents are going to be critical in delivering that. I'll add that to the list, and we'll discuss that in the department.

The extension, potentially, of licence plates. You know, we've discussed for a number of years about updating the licence plates. We're the only jurisdiction in North America now that doesn't have reflective licence plates. We haven't updated them in 29 years. For 29 years we've had the exact same licence plates, so we're looking at what new technologies other jurisdictions have adapted to their licence plates, and it may be very appropriate to have a longer registration for a licence plate. That's something we can check, but we want to make sure that it doesn't also compromise the technology.

Those are some great ideas, and if you have any more . . .

Mr. VanderBurg: I'm full of stuff.

Mr. Griffiths: I know you are, and you know that we've got the most amazing people who can help make these things happen.

Thank you for that.

The Chair: Thank you.

On the PC rotation we've got Mrs. Leskiw, then Mr. Sandhu, and Matt Jeneroux. You have 15 minutes left.

Mrs. Leskiw: I'm going to go from a little different perspective. I had the pleasure of being on the committee for the results-based budgeting that went through your budget. The area that was very interesting to me was the open government initiatives, yet when I go through the budget, I can't seem to find this fabulous department that takes care of your data centre and is in charge of your warehouses, that house thousands and thousands of boxes of files that are taking up space and are not very cost efficient. One of the things that the results-based budgeting was dealing with was transforming all this paper product into an electronic mode. It would be interesting to have the person in charge of this open government initiative – exactly what is happening since we discussed this at the results-based budgeting and in what direction is it going? Where can I find it in this budget?

Dr. Trimbee: Can I start? You've talked about records management, digital by default. Cathryn Landreth: you spent a little bit of time with her on that challenge panel. I did get to see the warehouse myself.

You know, one of the things that hit me is that you think about not using paper and you think of the xerox costs and you think of the trees that are cut down, but the real big cost is when you actually print that paper and store that paper and put it in a warehouse and keep it there for many years. So Cathryn can talk about records management and the warehouse, and then when you talk about data centres, that would be Dale Huhtala, who can talk a little bit about the data centres in government and what we're doing to consolidate them.

How about we start with Cathryn?

Ms Landreth: Thank you. I'm the assistant deputy minister of open government. We had a lot of fun at the RBB process talking about open government, information management. I will provide you with a little bit of input on some of the things that we have done in the past year and are moving forward with in the coming

year. Because of the budget structure my division isn't identified by division, so we're hiding in there.

The work that we've done on libraries over the past year: we've gone from four library sites down to one. We're moving from physical libraries to digital libraries. That will become effective on the 1st of April. There is a saving of \$1.3 million associated with that. We are looking at our paper management processes. I am responsible for the Alberta Records Centre. There is 600,000 cubic feet of paper in boxes 24 feet high and 50 rows and 50 bays long. It's kind of like the closing scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, only more organized, I want you to know. They're not falling open and all that.

It's a bit unnerving, but when you see it, you recognize what the potential information holdings in the government of Alberta are, how much value is contained there. That represents one-third of the paper holdings for the government and doesn't get anywhere close to the digital information that we hold. We're moving towards a process that allows us to manage our information more effectively digitally so that we understand what we have, so that we understand where it is and how to find it.

We are clear about what it is that we will share and make available opportunities to make it available online. We have created an open data portal in the last year; 373 data sets are there. We have an agreement with GeoDiscover Alberta for 1,200 more data sets, so we will meet and exceed our target this year. That is based on open-source technology, and we are going to build a parallel open information portal, that's identical to the open data portal, that will allow us to put published information there, both information the government creates as well as publications and materials which frequently appear on websites and then are gone. You can't find them again. They will all be in that repository as part of the library.

Those are just a few of the things that we're doing, have done in this year, and are planning to do, moving ahead sort of full steam with them in the coming year. Additionally, we're intending to get rid of some of that paper at the Records Centre appropriately.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you. I needed you to get up and say that because the work that you're doing is very, very important, and I know it's under Service Alberta. I needed everyone else to hear what I heard when I was at the results-based budgeting, so thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.
Now we'll move on to Mr. Sandhu.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Minister, for all your hard work. Your ministry is my favourite one. I want to ask you a question that you already answered one time, but I'd like to strongly ask about land titles privatizing. A lot of people are nervous when they hear that word. Please tell us: do you have anything in mind?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, when we sat down in the department and talked about the challenges that are there with land titles, there are some things that became very clear. That guarantee of title is one of the most important things that people have, and to give anyone doubt of the security and guarantee that goes along with that land title I think would be a mistake. I do emphasize that the land title is very important, the signatures on the title are incredibly important, and our property rights are incredibly important, which is why we're moving to the digital identity so that we can secure somebody's identity.

Your property is very important, but the most important piece of property you have is your identity. Anyone who has had their identity stolen or compromised knows just how challenging that is

because then you could actually have somebody use that identity to go change land titles. It's so dangerous. So protecting the personal property, whether it's your digital identity or that guarantee of title, is critically important.

9:05

We have other jurisdictions moving to use the Torrens system, that we have in the province of Alberta, so we don't want to compromise that. Ultimately, what we want to do is make sure that the services remain the same or are enhanced for the clients that utilize the land titles system, and somehow we've got to make sure that that operating system we have gets updated. There are always challenges with investing in technology when it comes to governments, frankly.

I had a town councillor stop me the other day and laugh and say: "You know, when you're doing the budget and you have a bit of a budget crunch, the last thing you do is pave the road. You patch it up as best you can." Well, you do the same thing many times with technology because it's easy to forget and put it along to the side. But that system, that operating system, has been patched together and pieced together, and it's been incredible, and it's being updated.

I'm concerned if we don't upgrade it fast enough and leapfrog to the next generation of complexity of titles that we're seeing in the land titles office, which I talked about earlier. People realize just how critical that system is if it goes down for a day or it goes down for a weekend or it goes down for a couple of weeks. We can't afford to let that happen, so we've got to find a way to modernize that delivery mechanism, enhance the services, if possible, to clientele while securing title, and ensure that we keep the Torrens system.

In my mind, privatization is not the most effective method to get to that and not the real issue. We're exploring other opportunities that other jurisdictions have followed. I'd mentioned B.C. and Saskatchewan. I have no intention of pursuing privatization at this time unless someone can demonstrate to me it matches all those criteria without compromising people's sense of security and guarantee of title, and I haven't found that yet.

Mr. Sandhu: That's all. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Jeneroux.

Mr. Jeneroux: Perfect. How much time?

The Chair: You have six minutes.

Mr. Jeneroux: Okay. I probably won't use all six. I just have two kind of quick questions. I don't pick favourites, Minister. Sorry; they're all my favourites.

On page 192 of the estimates there's a budgetary item for specialty licence plates, and there's been a lot of discussion about expanding this program. It's something that I know a lot of different nonprofits and other groups are interested in participating in if there's a benefit to them. I guess my question is: are you planning on expanding it beyond the Canadian Forces?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, we're anticipating that it could be possible. We have a political process that we would need to go through if we move on that. Right now we have had the proposed Support Our Troops plate, and funds generated from that would go to support Canada's servicemen and -women. What we're identifying is that perhaps of the \$75 additional cost for that Support Our Troops plate, \$20 of it would go to cover the cost of

the printing of the plate and all the shipping and the actual making of the first plate, you know. That's the most expensive one to make: the mould, the cast, the die, whatever they're going to make. The other \$55 could go to the charitable organization, to Support Our Troops, to the servicemen and -women. That means there are opportunities, if we wanted to assure that we created the policy appropriately, where other charitable and not-for-profit organizations could do the same thing. We'll be looking at exploring that and discussing that in the future.

Mr. Jeneroux: Okay. Just another quick one. There's a move to move a lot of the services online, possibly resulting in fewer registry agencies. Could you clear that up? Will that mean that we'll see fewer agents out in the communities? My constituency in particular has for the amount of our population just two registries, and I have about 10 people lined up in my constituency that want to get in on the ground floor of getting a new registry. If you can comment just a bit on your plans for the year with that.

Mr. Griffiths: It's so complex. It's not a clear answer except that I can say: no, there is absolutely no intention of reducing the number of registry agents. There may be other opportunities to increase the number of registry agents, especially when we move to digital identity, and we need them so imperatively in communities to help secure that digital identity going forward.

What is it going to look like going forward, though? This is, I think, probably a fairly interesting transition about how we're going to move from a service delivery model that worked very well 20 years ago to one that we want to make sure works very well still 20 years from now, which is what I mean when I say that we're going to leapfrog a generation.

Service Alberta is considering and working on a new expansion policy, actually, but we want to make sure that any expansion policy ensures registries are still viable going forward, that having a new one doesn't make the other ones unviable but somehow still enhances the competition in the service delivery. Frankly, I see, in all likelihood, more registry services, not less.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have two minutes and 36 seconds.

Dr. Brown: You partially answered the question that I was going to ask. I was going to ask, more or less, the opposite one of Mr. Jeneroux, and that is: given the fact that you have not added any registry agents in our large urban centres for umpteen years and the population has grown so tremendously, why haven't you expanded the number? I understand that the business model of those existing registries has to be safeguarded. I mean, there's a considerable investment in many of them, but I don't see why we haven't expanded into some of the newer areas, the newer parts of the city, particularly in Calgary and Edmonton.

Mr. Griffiths: That's why I think there are some incredible opportunities for an expansion of those services. We don't want to move ahead with an expansion policy that just says, "More is better, and we're just going to open it up," but there are two new ones that are coming. I know that there would be concern from other registry agents about competition or whether or not they're viable anymore. We have discussions about online services and what we're going to do in partnering with them.

We are working on our expansion policy, but it's more now than just an expansion policy. It's about making sure that the registry agents meet the services that Albertans are going to be demanding 20 years from now. It's what citizens want. I anticipate that you're going to see something this year so that we can move

ahead. I mean, in 20 years I don't know how many new registry agents we've added, but there's no doubt that it has not kept pace with the million... [interjection] Zero? Except for the two that are coming, right?

We're about to add two, and in 20 years we've had over a million people move to this province, so there's no doubt that we're going to need more and have an expansion. An expansion will be required. We just want to make sure we're going to do it in a way that's sustainable.

The Chair: Ms Fenske, 47 seconds.

Ms Fenske: Well, I want to continue on on that. It's very different in the rural areas when you have a stand-alone registry. Sometimes, I guess, the service area may be within the magic number of kilometres or just outside the magic number of kilometres, and it's not the reality of where people travel. So we add competition when we shouldn't be adding competition. We're going to kill two businesses in our small towns. I appreciate that you're looking at it with a much more discerning eye.

The Chair: Thank you. That was good timing. Thank you very much.

Now we will move on to our five-minute rotation, and it goes back in the same order. Wildrose, did you have a question?

Mr. Rowe: Yes. I have a couple of things that I'd like to mention.

The Chair: Do you want to go back and forth?

Mr. Rowe: Yeah, we'll just go back and forth if you're okay with that.

I'll go back to the operational expense. This is going to sound a little weird coming from a fiscal conservative, but just as an example, your minister's office: you've decreased it by \$30,000. Oops. Sorry. That was discovery math. It's only \$20,000. [interjections] You can't use up my time like that. Come on. The associate minister's office has increased by \$5,000.

Before I finish on the operational expense, we go to item 7. The Utilities Consumer Advocate is allocated \$9.18 million for this fiscal year, and some of the recent allegations involving price-fixing in electricity generation are concerning. Can you please explain some of the activities of the Utilities Consumer Advocate regarding these types of allegations?

9:15

Mr. Griffiths: I will probably have someone, an expert in the portfolio, answer, but I can tell you that the consumers' advocate does an exceptional job. If I recall, they get hundreds of hearings to defend consumers, and I think it was \$50 million they saved consumers in their advocacy at those hearings.

Rob will give us more detail.

Mr. Phillips: The allegations you're speaking to are actually the responsibility of the Market Surveillance Administrator to investigate, not the Utilities Consumer Advocate. However, if the company is found to be guilty of the allegations, the Utilities Consumer Advocate intends to make representations on behalf of consumers in Alberta in terms of what an appropriate punishment or sanction will be.

Aside from that sort of conduct, which, fortunately, is rare, the Utilities Consumer Advocate has three main functions. They intervene in regulatory hearings on behalf of consumers, and they are arguing cases right now right up to the Supreme Court of Canada on behalf of consumers. They mediate disputes on an individual level. They've mediated a number. If you have a

problem with your meter or your bill, they mediate on your behalf with your utility, and they provide consumer education on behalf of consumers. So those are their three main functions. This year alone they estimate savings in the range of \$50 million as a result of the cases that they have intervened in on behalf of.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. Just further to that, this latest allegation that is going before the AUC regarding the price fixing: if they're found to be guilty of that, will the savings for those that they've overcharged come back to the consumer?

Mr. Griffiths: Yes. We don't know the forum, but if it's meant to be a punishment, the intent is for it to go back to consumers. We're still working on that.

Mr. Rowe: All right. Thank you.

Just one more question, and then I'll turn it over to my colleagues if they want to pick it up. We've discussed our registry offices' financial records. Is there a method for us to get access to those records so that we can see – and I'm talking strictly financial data, not the names of the registries or the principals involved in them. Is there some mechanism that we can use so that we can look at these financial records? I'm not doubting your word. It's just that it would be very reassuring for us to see that these things are viable and can continue.

Ms Hutchinson: Those are independent businesses. We have no capacity to go in and ask them to report to us in terms of their revenues that are generated or the costs that they incur because they are independent businesses, and they operate as such. So we don't have that data, and we don't have the authority to ask for that data.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. If you don't have access to that data, how do you, in fact, know that some of them are doing very, very well, and some are doing very well?

Ms Hutchinson: There was a study that was completed – I forget the name of the accounting firm – where they actually came in and they worked with the registry agents themselves. They did not work with us or the department. There's a report that was done and tabled with us, shared with us, that said that on the whole they were viable. That's the data that we were referring to. In terms of individual businesses, we didn't have that.

Mr. Griffiths: I'm going to ask Ed to supplement that, too, because he can give some answers.

Mr. Ryan: At the current time we are actually undertaking an audit in the field and getting that sort of information on a voluntary basis. With respect to the consultant's report it was by Deloitte. It was not information that we audited or had a hand in producing. We did use some of the material. However, we are in a good position to understand the revenues that are flowing through these organizations by knowing the number of transactions that are completed and the amount of revenue per transaction that is generated on an agency-by-agency basis.

Mr. Griffiths: So we can do very accurate projections about what they're doing. I've said before that people have asserted that they're just not viable. We've asked, "Well, show us," and no one has ever shown one that isn't viable.

Mr. Rowe: Okay. I'll defer to my colleagues, then. I think Mr. Bikman wants to speak.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you. Thank you for being so open and candid with us this evening. It's appreciated. You indicated 98 per cent coverage for high-speed Internet. What percentage of the population is, in fact, actually online, though?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, I don't know that we even have the capacity to track exactly who's online and what sort of data usage they have.

Mr. Bikman: I accept that answer, but of course it speaks to the issue of making the services available online. So 98 per cent is very impressive, but none of us should conclude that that means 98 per cent of the people are wired, right?

Mr. Griffiths: No. That's true. It's access. What people do with it and whether they utilize the opportunity is up to them. When we talk about offering online solutions, we're still very conscious that some people don't have access to online systems or they're not ready to use that technology for those purposes or they don't feel comfortable with it, which is why we're always exploring what we're going to do in a transition so we don't forget those folks.

Mr. Bikman: Yeah. You've made that clear. I just wanted to make sure that everybody knew that 98 per cent is great, but it doesn't mean everybody is online.

Mr. Griffiths: No. That's right.

Mr. Bikman: Good.

I'm pleased to hear that you're not going to monetize the land titles or at least that that's not on the books right now. I think that's a good idea, to not provide a monopoly like that when it's obviously generating revenue.

Recognizing the trend of online shopping for goods and services, do you have any estimate of the percentage of current transactions that may go online each year? Like, have you projected this going forward?

Mr. Griffiths: That's a good question. Right now what we're doing is identifying what sort of services could be provided online, how quickly they could be provided online based on their complexity and the amount of data required. So booking a campsite gets done now. You don't need personal data to book a campsite except, you know, like a name and address, and then you pay for it. But then we identify what sort of services can be provided. We can figure out which ones can move quickly, which ones will take more data, what sort of security of data that we'll need for that to be online, and we'll have, I think, a better timeline on what sort of progress we can make going forward. It'll also correspond with how well our adoption is of the digital online identity and the security that goes along with it and the technologies and moving departments all onto the GOA domains so that we can help co-ordinate, so that when a ministry wants to provide some sort of new service online, it's easy to co-ordinate across a government database. We have a lot of work to do, and I don't know that we're quite ready to . . .

Mr. Bikman: Of course, we have other jurisdictions that have gone online, right? So you could find out what percentage of the transactions in those other jurisdictions are going in. That will help you project. That's important, obviously, to the existing registries, too, to know that – right? – because their business model is based upon what they're currently doing.

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah.

Mr. Bikman: Since providing online services should theoretically be cheaper, will any of those savings be passed on to the users with reduced fees or anything else? You were talking about rebating some of that back to different postal codes, that idea. Is that going to be pursued?

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah. If it's something that would actually draw business away from registry agents, we would consider that sort of thing. Really, a lot of the services that we're talking about are fee-based, right? They're not taxes; they're fees, and there's a very clear delineation on what the difference is. Fees must cover the cost, so if we manage to reduce the cost by going online, we would pass that on, naturally, to the consumer.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

On the rotation now we have Alberta Liberals. Did you want to go back and forth or five and five?

Ms Blakeman: I don't think I can actually do this because I'm losing my voice, so I'm going to pass. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

I think our New Democrat member has left, and we don't have an independent. Are there PC members who want to ask further questions?

Then we come back to Wildrose. Yes.

Mr. Bikman: Actually, Blake, if you don't mind, I have one more question.

Mr. Pedersen: Yes. Go ahead.

9:25

Mr. Bikman: It's about the role and place of registries in rural Alberta. We know that they play a significant role for all Albertans currently because we don't have total online access yet. At least, everything hasn't been made available online. But registries in small towns play a significant role. They're vital to the community itself, not just because of the access that they represent, but the fact that people in rural Alberta – small towns are dying, and when we make a business less competitive as an unintended consequence of making online services available, I think there needs to be some consideration of that fact. Say, Cardston, Alberta. You know, whatever the postal code is there – I should know it, I suppose; I'm their representative – there are maybe 3,000 to 4,000 people in the community. The surrounding people that come in to do business there: that business is important to the community. I hope that it's part of your mandate, and I hope you'll answer this. Is it, in fact, part of your mandate to see that those businesses, without being subsidized but nevertheless recognizing that past fee increases have gone mostly to the government itself, to Service Alberta – little of it actually has remained with the agency.

Mr. Griffiths: Well, thank you for the question. This is my fourth term. I'm sure you probably know what I'm going to say because if you've ever heard me speak, you've heard me say it a thousand times. I already see some colleagues rolling their eyes that they're going to hear it again.

Mr. Bikman: But you say it so well.

Mr. Griffiths: The reason why I got into this four terms ago was because I was concerned about our small communities and their fate and their fortune and their future. I have worked every single day of all of those terms towards ensuring that every one of our 349 municipalities and all of our 422 communities that are hooked up to SuperNet are going to have an opportunity to be viable as long as that's what they desire to do going forward. So I evaluate, just like you said, those small enterprises, those small businesses in that context.

It's no fault of the government, but we see businesses lost in small communities, moving to larger centres and more stuff moving online. Then the question for a lot of communities becomes: how are you going to keep your school open and your hospital open and your community centre open when more and more people leave town because more and more businesses close? It's a very real challenge that communities face. So we will discuss it in that context, with an eye to that, because every single one of our communities should be afforded the opportunity.

It's not just a very simple, straightforward challenge, though. There's a community that I know of that has one full-time registry agent business, and the people that are employed by the business and the services it offers are very important to its viability. But I know a community of a very similar size where there is one registry agent that's not a full-time business. It's actually with another business within that. There are two of those businesses in that community offering the same service, but one has the registry agent, so it has a competitive advantage while it's offering the same service, a complementary service to the registry. That wouldn't be fair either, and it's not fair for the government to give an advantage to one business over another.

We do have some complexities we need to address, but I will always keep in mind and in sight the fortune and opportunities for successful communities going forward.

Mr. Bikman: Well, I appreciate that perspective. I know that the registry agents in the small towns in the Cardston-Taber-Warner riding will be pleased to know that they've got a minister that sort of understands the challenges of small-town Alberta.

Thank you.

Mr. Griffiths: Absolutely.

The Chair: Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you Minister Griffiths and your staff for coming in tonight. I think you've represented your department very, very well. I'm very impressed. You being new to this portfolio, I give you great accolades. It's kind of a curiosity question that I have, and I apologize if somebody else has already asked it. It ties into the bill that was passed last session on the organ donation and transplant system. I'm wondering: will Service Alberta take the lead on the registry, and have you had those discussions with anybody else?

Mr. Griffiths: That's an excellent question. I really appreciate that because that initiative, undertaken by Len Webber, was a fantastic initiative, and we'd like to see it through. We're working with Health on how we're going to accomplish that because, of course, the driver's licence is a great place to register that and share it.

I personally think that it could very well be time for us to work on moving our health care cards themselves, instead of being a piece of paper, onto our drivers' licences. The opportunity for more of that data information to be at one access point provides an amazing opportunity for us to offer better services and make sure that they're

co-ordinated. Yeah. We'll be working with Health hand in glove to make sure we address that.

Mr. Pedersen: Great. So, is there any time frame involved, Minister? Where's the process at, I guess?

Mr. Griffiths: I think that this year, this calendar year, is a very important year to get a lot of very strategic things done. The opportunity is there. Again, I went to B.C. because there are other jurisdictions that have already taken that step and that initiative when it comes to co-ordinating drivers' licences and health care cards. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. There's the opportunity to adapt some technology and make some incredible progress and then incorporate things like the organ donor registry right into whatever new technology we adopt. So right now we're doing an inventory of what we could do, and then we'll see what we should do over the next year.

Mr. Pedersen: That's fantastic. I appreciate that. That's all I had.

The Chair: Great. Thank you. Wildrose still have three minutes and 43 seconds if there's anything further.

I would just ask if there are any other members wishing to speak.

Okay. Seeing none, then pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(8) the estimates of the Ministry of Service Alberta are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule.

Mr. Griffiths: Do I get to make a closing, please?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Griffiths: It'll just take a minute. I want to say thank you to everyone around this table because it's been a great discussion. I got to learn some things. This is a huge department with a lot of staff that work very hard to deliver important services. I even got to learn a few things that I hadn't mastered yet in a few short months. This has been a great discussion. I want to thank all of the folks here from the department because, you know, sometimes it's very easy for us to use bureaucrats or civil servants in a disparaging remark, but I have yet to meet a single person that works in any ministry I've been involved with that doesn't do their best every single day to try and make sure Albertans' lives are better. If I did a good job today, it's just because they are capable of training monkeys to do some amazing things. They're brilliant.

So I assume I've addressed all of the questions, and I just want to say thank you very much again. Everyone, have a safe night.

The Chair: Thank you very much. A job very well done.

I just need to remind committee members that we're scheduled to meet next on March 19, 2014, to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Health.

Thank you, Minister and all of your great staff.

[The committee adjourned at 9:32 p.m.]

