

2:04 p.m.

Monday, December 12, 1994

[Chairman: Mr. Dunford]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the meeting to order, please. Now, does any member have any recommendation they'd like to read into the record? Seeing none, then I'd like to welcome today the Hon. Stockwell Day, Minister of Labour, and invite you, sir, to perhaps provide us with an opening statement, including an introduction of the guests that you have with you.

Just a bit on the process. We appreciate the fact that you're here to talk about occupational health and safety research and education, but I think we've had an opportunity here to be somewhat flexible on the questioning, and we would look for your co-operation. We have scheduled two hours, and we will take that full two hours or whenever the questions stop, whichever first occurs. Once the questioning starts, we'll begin with the loyal opposition and then a government member, and we'll revert back and forth in that manner. The questioning, we say, is a main with two supplementaries but again looking for your co-operation, what it means is that when each member is called, they really have three questions. So we would hope that you would be amenable to that. On that basis, if you would like to proceed, Mr. Minister, and then we'll get on with it.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, I'd like to introduce the ADM who is in charge of all occupational health and safety, and that is Barry Munro. I think most of you know Barry. Also serving in that division and department for us is Sandi Fedeyko. All the tough questions they'll handle. The easy ones I'll try and skate through.

For those of you who may not have been involved, in terms of looking at the occupational health and safety heritage grant program, it was established in 1981, and over the years it's supported a variety of occupational health and safety education-related items, research, conference activities. Always the goal is injury prevention and looking at the effects of occupational health and prevention of ill health resulting from different things that can arise in the workplace itself. The list actually, if you go back in history and time, is pretty significant in terms of the number of areas which have received dollars to advance that goal of prevention of injuries and also promotion of good health and prevention of ill health in the workplace. There's been a number of significant things that have happened as a result of those dollars being applied and the research being done. As you are probably aware, the fund is being scaled down to a total of zero dollars, and '95-96 will be the last year that we'll see those moneys being applied in that particular area: \$750,000 for '94 and '95 and for '95 and '96 the final installment of \$500,000.

With that particular overview and not wanting to take time but rather wanting to hear questions and get input, Mr. Chairman, unless there are some areas you feel I've left unaddressed, I'd be happy to listen to my colleagues across the way. I don't often get a chance to say that from this side of the House.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. You've done a fine job. Thank you very much.

Ken Nicol.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, Mr. Day and guests. In the program that you've got here, you're winding down the grants out of the heritage fund program in the capital projects division. The idea here was that these would support research, and the implication in your three-year plan is that

this research is going to be picked up by agencies and other appropriate groups. Is this happening well, and is it proceeding in the stepwise fashion that you're talking about so that there will be a good idea of a continued research program in the safety area?

MR. DAY: We think it is happening, Mr. Chairman, especially when you look over the last while at what's been developing in terms of safety associations. If you look at some of these suggestions and the criteria we'll be looking for in '95-96 in terms of the funding, it'll be those areas which will continue to encourage development of safety associations and the identifying of emerging issues. So when we look at where we were even five or six years ago in terms of safety associations – that's the industry themselves having been educated and in some cases induced to look at the importance of continuing this and taking this on as an association – we see some very positive development, more industry associations coming on side all the time. So the short answer to that question is: yes, it is developing. Basically employers and then industries as a whole are more and more coming to accept the very clear reality that by pursuing whether it's research for the purpose of prevention or whether it's an actual activity, they indeed are seeing results. They are seeing injuries reduced. If you look at that purely being brutally mercenary, there's a payoff to them, but they're also starting to understand the larger payoff of a more productive work force, a happier work force, if I can use that, and just the effect in the community of less injuries. So, yes, it's happening. Is it happening as fast as we would hope? We're continuing to press to bring and see more industries coming into it, but the ball is being picked up.

DR. NICOL: Thank you.

From what you just said, these safety associations are being driven by sectors of industry, like the oil industry or the forestry industry or manufacturing. Do you see any areas where there seems to be a little reluctance or a little dragging of the feet in terms of getting these safety associations started that will pick up where your department has left off?

MR. DAY: You say "dragging of the feet." Maybe harder to get to pockets, let's say. When the Construction Safety Association was being early pursued and encouraged by the construction industry to form an association, it was recognized that the residential aspect – it wasn't a case of reluctance or foot dragging. Because of the high degree of mobility of the workers in that particular area, because you're talking about some smaller oriented businesses, there was difficulty getting to that pocket within the association. But what happened, because the Construction Safety Association had some good acceptance and made some positive steps forward, they were able to identify an area that's hard to get to, being the residential end. Because of funds they were able to generate, they were able to put together a mobile training unit, which is now able to go out and get to those previously hard to get to sectors. The employers in those areas, because they typically don't have the funds that a large employer would have – it wasn't the case of them being reluctant. It was just a case of them saying: "How are we going to do this? How are we going to get this type of program?" So here's a case of a large industry being tapped into, a hard to get to sector of that being reached. Because of the success of the larger industry then the ability was able to reach out and bring in a whole other sector that was previously difficult to bring in.

Because of the success in a number of industries, we have seen previously hard to get to industries: the roofing association, areas of meat packing. As soon as you can get one or two in there,

especially the larger employers, and forming an association and having results, that then seems to be a real magnet in terms of pulling in some of these other hard to get to ones.

Have you got some that you would suggest need attention that maybe I can give attention?

DR. NICOL: Well, I was going to lead up to that in the next one. I was wondering what you were doing in conjunction with the minister of agriculture in trying to deal with agriculture and agricultural labour safety.

MR. DAY: There have actually been some things going on. Maybe, Barry, I can get you to touch on some of the initiatives there.

MR. MUNRO: In the agriculture area right now what we're doing is working with the department to define partly the roles of the two departments. They have a farm safety program, and it's actually been quite a successful program. So what we're trying to do is work in a more collaborative way with that program. That's where we're starting off at right now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.
Heather Forsyth.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, what I'd like to ask you is: how do you maintain a balance in terms of what industries or individuals are funded in order to make sure that there's a good cross section of employers and workers benefiting from the projects that you're doing?

2:14

MR. DAY: Well, there's, I think, a pretty important aspect, and that's the whole approach in terms of the review and approval process. We review past funding. You want to avoid funding similar projects that have already been done, and that can happen if you're not constantly doing that review. You've got to examine the benefits of the projects themselves. Continuing to maintain preventing injuries and maintaining good health on the work force, preventing ill health, promoting the health and well-being of Alberta workers: you keep those foremost. You keep the review process significant and intense and then make sure that the program has that variety of approaches in looking at both long-term and short-term goals, also looking at large employers, small employers, individual workers, industry groups. It's a constant part of the built-in review process to make sure it's being done that way.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you.

In the last year there were 20 applications to the program for funding, and nine of these applications were approved. Is that a typical ratio of projects approved and not approved, and could you give me some examples of why grant applications would be turned down?

MR. DAY: In terms of why some would be turned down, again when the review shows that something similar has been done, it's redundant, something else is in process, or it doesn't meet the actual goals and objectives.

In terms of the actual ratio, Barry, I'll look to you. Do you know off the top of your head, or would you have to consult the figures of those that came in? Of course, as the funding goes down, it's definitely going to have an affect on the ratio, but can

you think in terms of past years? Is that a relative balance, or has there been a higher influx of applications previously?

MR. MUNRO: Maybe I can turn that over to the administrator for the program to get a more precise answer.

MS FEDEYKO: I think that's probably reasonably consistent. I would just like to add that one of the other areas that we look at when we're reviewing the applications is the qualification of the applicants and whether or not the project, particularly on the research projects, is well based in terms of the type of research that they're undertaking. I'm not a researcher as such, but we certainly do have a reviewer guide and ask for some qualified people to review applications, and if they have concerns about the qualifications of people going into research projects particularly, that is an issue. In response to your question in terms of the balance of numbers, I would say that's probably consistent.

MRS. FORSYTH: One of the things that I find interesting with your projects is the length of stay and injury among immigrants. It would be interesting to see, when that report is finished, what results come out, because a lot of immigrants coming into this country are the ones that are doing the janitorial work. They're working in the factories. Has that got up and running yet, or is just in the initial starting stage? Where are we on that one? I know it's not finished till September of '95.

MR. DAY: Yeah, go ahead, Sandi, and then I'll make some comments.

MS FEDEYKO: As I understand it – and I've only been the grant administrator for a short number of months – it is up and running. It is under way. As you can see from our report, we're expecting the final reporting in September 1995. So we're quite hopeful that it does bring forward some good information, because there is very little information in that area.

MR. DAY: There are really a couple of key things, barriers. First of all, there's a language barrier in some cases and also a cultural barrier in that sometimes workers, depending on what part of the world they're coming from – it may not even be in their thinking to ever question an unsafe procedure or an unsafe worksite. You're right; there's a lot of interest in seeing what this shows. Those are two barriers alone that have to be addressed.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Don Massey.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Minister. I think my question stems from lack of information about the new ministry of science and research. Is their role a co-ordinating role, or would they pick up some of the research that was done by this and directly get involved in it? What happens with that ministry and the kind of research that's going on from a fund like this?

MR. DAY: I think that's a possibility, Don. As you may or may not be aware, a search of all government activity has been conducted to make sure that science and research is going to be done in a co-ordinated way, and we've indicated to them that this particular program under the Department of Labour is being phased out and there may be some liaisons there that they may want to watch for. So our approach to this point has been to let

them know what this program has been doing and that there may be some possibilities. Other than that, we don't have within the Department of Labour any other direct research-oriented elements there, but that screening of all departments has taken place in terms of what research are you doing, what are you phasing out, what may be anticipated. So there may be some requests coming to them along those lines.

DR. MASSEY: Are they going to directly fund research? Is that the intent or just co-ordinate?

MR. DAY: We're starting to get into someone else's ministry. The question's sincere, I know.

DR. MASSEY: Only as it applies to . . .

MR. DAY: That may be the case, but I don't want to presume to answer that without the minister here. I don't want to get off on an initiative that maybe they're not getting off on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'll just assure the members that if we start to spend the heritage savings trust fund dollars on the ministry of science and research, we'll have the minister in front of us next year.

MR. WHITE: Oh, lighten up, Clint.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I've got a nice, big smile on my face. I thought we were quite light.

MR. WHITE: I know that. She didn't notice that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, I see.
You have a further supplemental?

DR. MASSEY: No. That's fine. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Denis Herard.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, staff, I always like to bring back the past. I'm a little bit like the opposition that way. Last year you indicated that you were going to wipe out about \$200,000 in administrative expenses and that there would no longer be any such costs associated with these particular programs. Have you been successful in doing that?

MR. DAY: Well, I can't say that it's been easy. We have done that, but we've had to call upon existing staff to make that commitment and take on that workload. As you know, the program was done and was handled by a separate working unit, and during the last year, as we made a commitment to a year ago, that unit was eliminated. The responsibility for administration was transferred. The staff have assumed the grant program responsibilities, and they've done that in addition to their regular responsibilities. So, yes, it's been done. Yes, the administrative savings have been achieved. Yes, they are straining under a greater workload. But they have done it and they're holding up.

MR. HERARD: So do I take it to understand, then, that any of the funds that you're involved with in the heritage savings trust fund — there's no longer an administrative cost component associated with those funds?

MR. DAY: That's correct.

MR. HERARD: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.
Lance White.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Minister, with the responsibility of managing a lot of these regulatory areas that you're turning over to the DROs, such as boilers and pressure vessels and a number of other areas, what happens if one or more of these fail in their duty to public safety? What then?

MR. CHAIRMAN: We're going to need you to tie that somehow to the reason the minister is here in front of us.

MR. WHITE: Well, that's part of the funding in the research area, and surely if research is . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, Lance, we're talking about occupational health and safety research and education. The fund is winding down. I'm not following your thoughts on the DROs and how it ties together.

MR. WHITE: Well, correct me if I'm wrong, but there's a good deal of money that is spent in those areas.

MR. CHAIRMAN: By the heritage savings trust fund?

MR. WHITE: Yeah, in the research area for those particular areas. Now, if you're not going to manage those moneys in the ministry, you're going to manage them somewhere else, and if that somewhere else fails, the research money has been misspent, in my view. But I don't know. That's why I was asking the minister.

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I don't always agree with the chair, but in this case, just from a point of process, the chair is absolutely right. These dollars coming from this particular grant program out of the heritage trust fund have absolutely zero to do with DROs. I know Lance has some interest in that particular area. We can discuss that any other time, but this is not the arena for that discussion.

2:24

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do you have a supplemental that's in the report?

MR. WHITE: Then none of these funds that are in the area of Labour and safety research are in areas that DROs have taken over? They're not in the same areas?

MR. DAY: No. The only movement that we've had in Labour related to anything close to a DRO would be with our boiler and pressure vessels. The Safety Codes Council obviously is a type of DRO. But DRO funding, DRO mechanisms have nothing to do with this particular grant program. I appreciate your interest in it and would like to talk to you more about it, but I would be wrongly taking up this committee's time with that element.

MR. WHITE: I have no further questions in the area then.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.
Howard Sapers.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Minister. The capital projects division has been funding research in occupational

health and safety for some 14 years, as I understand it, and it was back in '81 that the decision was made that the program would have a 15-year initial cycle. So my question is: are you as Minister of Labour satisfied that all of the research, which could be priorities of the government as distinct from priorities of industry, has been achieved and will in fact be concluded by the time this program lapses next year?

MR. DAY: To be honest, Howard, I would like it if we had all kinds of dollars to do a wide variety of research. I think sometimes a research project is started, not necessarily one of these, and it's found that there was no point in researching that area. Other times you get a real benefit from it. It just comes back to that question of: where are dollars best spent? If there hadn't been any uptake by things like industry associations, in response to Ken Nicol's question, then I would have more concern, I think, but the fact that industry is showing itself more responsible, more involved, and a little more aggressive in some of these areas does balance that off. I think all of us would safely say, if I can use the word "safely," that we'd all like more money to do more research. There are some fascinating areas, I think, that could still be pursued, but we are going to look much more to industry and to partnerships within industry for that type of initiative. So, yes, I'd always like more. It's going to have to come from a different direction, and there is a pickup that's happening.

MR. SAPERS: I think it can be largely acknowledged that industry deserves an awful lot of credit, particularly over the last decade, for identifying issues, for assuming responsibility for research, for really in many cases in some industries taking leadership roles far in advance of any government in terms of being sensitive to occupational health and safety needs. That being said, certainly from some of the reading and some of the contacts that I've had in preparation for this, it occurs to me that there are some areas of research, some priorities which would clearly be more in the interests of government than in the interests of industry. I'm wondering how you see those research areas proceeded on in the absence of any real government presence.

MR. DAY: I guess my first response would be that I'd look forward to your help in helping us identify those areas where you feel we should see more government initiative. If that was to happen, then obviously within the large walls of government there may be ways of accommodating that particular piece of research, whatever it might be, whether it's through the ministry of research or some other area. You know, whatever government decides to do and to focus on, there can be a request that funds go somewhere. All I can say is that I'd look forward to areas that you think would be more profitable for government to be involved in directly in terms of that type of research. Let's see if it's necessary, if it's not going to be done anywhere else, and how it could be picked up.

MR. SAPERS: Okay.

Given that there was an internal review committee examining research proposals and an external review process as well, and given that there was a finite amount of money that was available in any one-year funding cycle to fund that research, I think it's fair to say that there were some research projects or priorities that were left unfunded from one year to the next. Some of those may have found their way into the next year's batch; some of them may not have. Have you in fact reviewed that list of unfunded research to look at what areas of priority were not funded, and do you have any sort of a business plan to deal with that unfunded research?

MR. DAY: To be honest, Howard, I haven't looked at the ones where the decision was made not to fund, but I can ask Barry to comment, if he has recollection of any of those. I think that would be a worthwhile search, to look at those, because obviously if there had been twice the funding available, then some of those down the line would have moved in. I don't know if you'd like to make a comment on that itself, Barry. I haven't actually done that research myself.

MR. MUNRO: Well, I haven't done research specific to that question. I do know that the research areas that were not funded were turned down basically for quality reasons. We could relook those, but it was primarily quality that led to the reason, or they were not appropriate. They were asking for a funding of projects that fit better somewhere else in government.

MR. DAY: To respond to that, Mr. Chairman, I could make it available to the member to give him some idea of the types of things that came forward and possibly why they didn't wind up high on the list. That would give you an idea.

MR. SAPERS: I appreciate that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What we tend to do here, Mr. Minister, is perhaps you'd provide our office with the information, sufficient copies that we then distribute to all members.

MR. DAY: Sure, we'll provide it to you, through you to the members.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
All right. Michael Percy.

DR. PERCY: No question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.
Ken Nicol.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Minister, I'd just like to follow up a minute on what we were talking about at the end of the other question. As you put these associations in place, how broad of a perspective or definition of safety are you giving these associations in terms of keeping consistent the definition of safety as it moves out of the control of this program into the association programs?

MR. DAY: Well, I don't think anything's ruled out in terms of safety. It's all looked at from the point of view of prevention of injury, what can be done to reduce stress, what can be done to reduce and prevent occupational health hazards. We don't try to restrict it because there might be a particular area that crops up. The "crop" word keeps coming up every time I talk to you. I don't know that there are limitations that are put on. The industry is presented with the factor that as employers, as industries they are responsible for the overall care of the workers on their site, and they need to think in terms of the workers not just on the site but when they go home, when they're in the community, when they're not at work. So it's kept broad for good reasons, I think.

DR. NICOL: Just a final, then, if I might change the scope a little bit. How are these associations going to be funded in terms of the approach that they get to support this kind of research if the dollars for actual applied research are being taken out as this program disappears?

MR. DAY: Well, there's a levy on all members in the program itself. Whether some of it's going to go to research or not, or whether it's going to awareness or injury reduction programs, it's incumbent upon them to show their members where the levy goes, why they're being assessed, and what is going to be the result and the consequence. So it's a levy back to the members themselves of the association largely.

DR. NICOL: Have you had any feedback from these associations and the industries that they represent in terms of the added cost that they're now going to have to bear? We've heard a lot of discussion by industry that the enforced standards that they have to deal with in Canada are increasing their indirect costs in disproportion to what it is being increased in internationally competing countries. Have you had any feedback on their concerns in that area?

2:34

MR. DAY: We get the feedback, Ken, on an individual basis. From time to time an employer will just approach us and say that a particular aspect, whatever it might be, is unreasonable. "We can't see the reason for this. We can't see that we're going to have any costs savings. We can't see that it's going to help the employee." So in those particular cases two things happen. Our own OHS people look at the type of complaint, because that's what it is, and if that business is involved in an association, it's also given to that industry association saying: "Look, we're hearing this. Do you want to re-evaluate this? Do you need to re-evaluate it? Is the requirement reasonable, or in fact does a particular employee have a point?" So it is assessed from that point of view. It's a good question also because it reflects back on what we're trying to do in creating the Alberta advantage. Part of the Alberta advantage means a less regulatory regime, but you don't create an advantage if workers are getting hurt, because then your WCB costs are going up and you're losing your advantage. So there's always that balance.

On an industry basis we've heard – and this wouldn't be directly related to the grant, Mr. Chairman – for instance, from the Petroleum Tank Management Association in regards to regulations for underground tanks. Some of that applies to Labour. Other of that applies to the department of the environment. We're hearing some concerns there, and that's a good case, then, of where that association as an industry association represents those concerns, looks at them. If they fall under Labour or they fall under environment, they present those as a concern. So we hear it more on an individual business basis.

There are representatives of all the various industries and technical areas on the Safety Codes Council, so they are constantly bringing the concerns. They'll hold up a regulation and say: "Why? What is this doing? What's it achieving?" Through that Safety Codes Council they get a cross section of people looking at it, trying to demonstrate again that balance: yes, it's required for safety reasons, or no, it's excessive and it's becoming excessively regulatory.

So we get the complaints on an individual basis, not so much on an industrywide basis, because we're asking them all the time: review this, review that. The review of the Building Code is coming up again. All industry is involved in that. So we try and stay ahead, stay proactive with them in terms of doing the analysis.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.

Howard Sapers.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. The funding last year, I think, was in the order of some \$400,000 and funded 10 projects. The projects were for research, education, and conferences. I'm wondering if you could let me know what the breakdown was between research, education, and conferences. How many of those 10 projects and then the dollar amounts were for research, education, and conferences? What specifically would be the process that would lead to a decision to fund, let's say, a conference ahead of a research project, given that all three of those are sort of thrown in the same hopper?

MR. DAY: The exact breakdown I'll get to you, Mr. Chairman, in terms of the dollar breakdown of those three areas. Dollars that were being asked for in terms of a conference: again, if it met the demands of what's being reviewed. Is it actually going to be directed towards and are we going to see some results in terms of increased safety, increased injury prevention, reduced occupational risks? With conferences the type of things that are being looked at and the type of literature that's being brought forward can actually lead to a conference ending with something being achieved: here are some results; this should now move into industry.

The criteria. I would say that if it's a conference request, that automatically is so many points. If it's a research request or education request, that automatically is so many points. They're all assessed under that same criteria, and you may have in fact a conference which leads to greater results than a particular research request. So it's the same criteria across the board for the three, and we'll try and get to you the dollar breakdown of how that shook out for that year.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Not seeing any further questions, does any member wish to read a recommendation into the record at this point?

Seeing none, thank you, Mr. Minister. This is a nice example of brevity, candidness, and directness, and we appreciate it very much. Thank you to you and your staff.

I'll now entertain a motion for adjournment. All in favour? Carried.

[The committee adjourned at 2:40 p.m.]

