



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Legislative Offices

Friday, December 1, 2017
8:32 a.m.

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Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (NDP), Chair
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Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)
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Del Graff	Child and Youth Advocate
Glen Resler	Chief Electoral Officer
Marianne Ryan	Ombudsman, Public Interest Commissioner
Merwan Saher	Auditor General
Marguerite Trussler, QC	Ethics Commissioner

Office of the Auditor General Participants

Loulou Eng	Senior Financial Officer
Ruth McHugh	Chief Operating Officer

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Participants

Bonnie Russell	Director, Strategic Support
Jackie Stewart	Executive Director, Child and Youth Advocacy

Office of the Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Participants

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Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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[Mr. Shepherd in the chair]

The Chair: Well, good morning, everyone. I'd like to welcome members, staff, and guests to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices.

I'm David Shepherd, MLA for Edmonton-Centre, chair of the committee. I'd ask that members and those joining the committee at the table please just introduce themselves for the record, and then we'll hear from those on the phone.

Mr. Malkinson: Good morning, everyone. Brian Malkinson, deputy chair.

Mr. van Dijken: MLA Glenn van Dijken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mrs. Pitt: Angela Pitt, MLA, Airdrie.

Mrs. Aheer: Leela Aheer, Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. Gill: Good morning, everybody. Prab Gill, MLA, Calgary-Greenway.

Mrs. Stewart: Good morning. I'm Jackie Stewart with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. I'm the executive director of child and youth advocacy.

Mr. Graff: Good morning. I'm Del Graff, Child and Youth Advocate for the province.

Mrs. Russell: Good morning. I'm Bonnie Russell, the director of strategic support with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

Ms Woollard: Denise Woollard, MLA, Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Mr. Horne: Good morning. Trevor Horne, MLA for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mrs. Littlewood: Good morning. Jessica Littlewood, MLA representing the beautiful rural constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Good morning, folks. Jamie Kleinsteuber, MLA for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Ms Rempel: Good morning. Jody Rempel, committee clerk.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

For the record, I'd just like to note the following substitution. We have Mrs. Aheer substituting for Mr. Nixon.

Before we turn to the business at hand – oh, pardon me. On the phones?

Drever: Deborah Drever, MLA for Calgary-Bow.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Drever.

Before we turn to the business at hand, just a few quick operational items. Microphone consoles are operated by the *Hansard* staff. Please keep cellphones and BlackBerrys on silent and off the table as they can interfere with the audiofeed. Audio of the committee proceedings is streamed live on the Internet and recorded by *Alberta Hansard*. Audio access and meeting transcripts are obtained via the Legislative Assembly website.

Our first item of business. A draft agenda was distributed for consideration. Does anyone have any issues to raise or changes to

propose? If not, do we have a motion to approve the agenda? Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Just a question with regard to the information we received from office of the Ethics Commissioner. Is that to be covered in this meeting?

The Chair: Yes. The information received from the Ethics Commissioner: we will have the opportunity to discuss that at the end of the day, following all of the presentations.

Mr. van Dijken: At which line item?

Ms Rempel: Are you referencing the change to her contract?

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah, with regard to the change in contract based off the bill from the Assembly.

Ms Rempel: Yes. That will be 5(b). That's included under 5(b).

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions regarding the agenda?

If not, do we have a member that would make a motion to accept? Mrs. Littlewood. Thank you. All those in favour? Any opposed? On the phone? Did you have any objections to the agenda, Ms Drever?

Drever: No.

The Chair: All right. That motion is carried. Okay. Thank you.

All right. Adoption of the meeting minutes, then. We have the minutes from the November 28, 2017, meeting of this committee. They were posted online. Are there any concerns, errors, or omissions in those minutes? If not, do we have a member that would move approval? Mr. Kleinsteuber. All those in favour? Any opposed? On the phones? Thank you. That motion is carried.

That brings us today, then, to our review of the budget estimates for the officers of the Legislature. We're reviewing the 2018-19 budget submissions of the officers. We have a full schedule, so I hope we can keep things running efficiently and effectively.

I'd like to call on our first officer, Mr. Del Graff, Child and Youth Advocate, to begin his presentation. If you could keep your presentation to about 20 minutes, that would leave sufficient time for questions from committee members. If you could just begin by once again introducing your team, and then please go ahead.

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate

Mr. Graff: Good morning, Chairperson Shepherd and committee members. I want to thank you for the opportunity to talk with you this morning about our 2016-17 annual report, our three-year business plan, and our proposed 2018-19 budget estimates. With me on my left is Jackie Stewart, who's our executive director of child and youth advocacy, and Bonnie Russell on my right, who's our director of strategic support. Both have appeared before this committee a number of times. Today's presentation focuses on the highlights of our first five years as an independent office, on our activities in 2016-17, on the year ahead, and on our 2018-19 budget estimate.

This slide outlines the legislative authority of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, which I trust you are all familiar with now.

In our annual report we've highlighted some of the milestones over the last five years. Our mandate expanded to include advocacy for young people in the youth justice system; investigating the serious injury or death of young people; providing education, engagement, and research; being an independent advocate for

young people so their rights are upheld, their interests are considered, and their voices are heard; and identifying issues and making recommendations to improve the systems that serve young people.

The functions of our office are grouped into five areas: individual and systemic advocacy, legal representation, investigations, engagement and education, and internal organizational support. We currently employ 67 staff located in Edmonton and Calgary. With our current duties and responsibilities and with more changes to come resulting from the amendments to the Child and Youth Advocate Act, the need has arisen for us to revisit our organizational structure. Moving forward, we will be realigning our organization to take on these new initiatives and to better provide services to young people.

I'll now talk briefly about our 2016-17 annual report and the major activities of our office between the period of April 1, 2016, and March 31, 2017. Some of the key highlights of our office this past year have included participation in the review of the Child and Youth Advocate Act, directly serving over 5,000 young people through advocacy services and legal representation, issuing an investigative review report in April 2016 that examined the prevalence of suicide of indigenous youth, and issuing a special report in July 2016 addressing the overrepresentation of indigenous children in the child welfare system.

I'll now ask Jackie to speak about advocacy.

Mrs. Stewart: Thank you, Del, and good morning, Mr. Chair and committee members. I will now talk about individual advocacy, which is responsible for representing the rights, interests, and viewpoints of young people who are receiving child intervention and/or youth justice services. In the last five years we've provided advocacy services to a total of 14,200 young people and developed an advocacy practice framework that is implemented across the organization.

8:40

In 2016-2017 we served 2,991 young people. This is approximately 18 per cent higher than the number of young people served in the previous year. About 40 per cent of those young people were between 12 to 17 years of age, and the number of young people served who were 18 years of age and older increased by 45 per cent. As we look ahead, we'll be focusing on a number of areas such as reviewing and updating our internal practices relating to mandatory notifications received from Children's Services, continuing our efforts to develop community capacity for advocacy, and implementing new service standards for advocates.

I'll now talk about our systemic advocacy work. We're proud of our systemic advocacy efforts. They help to improve circumstances for young people receiving services. Over the last five years we made many recommendations to government. We also worked on several systemic issues such as children's mental health, the use of OC spray, issues facing immigrant and newcomer youth, and the use of restraints and seclusion in residential care. When our recommendations are acted on, we see positive changes for young people.

Some further highlights of our systemic advocacy work include the release of a special report, Del's appearance at the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs in February 2017 – he discussed youth suicide and the overrepresentation of indigenous young people in the child welfare systems – and Del's attendance at the round-table discussion with the federal Task Force on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation. Looking ahead, we'll focus on a special report on sexual- and gender-diverse young people, develop our systemic advocacy processes, and update our OCYA website to better report on the status of recommendations.

The legal representation for children and youth program, or LRCY as we call it, is responsible for appointing lawyers to represent young people involved under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act or the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act. We have 65 lawyers from across the province on the roster. In the last five years we made 5,887 legal appointments to represent 9,270 young people, and we increased the eligibility requirements to become a roster lawyer and to stay on the roster.

A highlight of the LRCY program this past year includes 1,261 appointments made to LRCY lawyers, involving 2,011 children. This represents a 15 per cent increase in the appointments and a 21.7 per cent increase in the number of children receiving legal services. Looking ahead, we will be reviewing the role of counsel guidelines for LRCY lawyers, providing training to roster lawyers on how to better work with indigenous communities and with sexual- and gender-diverse young people, and identifying ways to reduce costs as the demand for legal representation increases.

I'll now pass it over to Del.

Mr. Graff: Thank you, Jackie.

I'll now speak a bit about investigations. In the last five years we've received 255 notifications, of which 219 were notifications of deaths and 36 were notifications of serious injuries. We've also implemented two legislative amendments related to child intervention. One amendment was to include young people up to the age of 24, and the other amendment was to include young people who received services within two years of their death. We've issued 22 investigative review reports about 28 young people and made 69 recommendations to government and other governing bodies.

In 2016-17 we completed seven investigative review reports on the lives of 13 young people. In the seven reports released in 2016-17 we made 21 recommendations. One of the seven reports was *Toward a Better Tomorrow: Addressing the Challenge of Aboriginal Youth Suicide*. This report reviewed the lives of seven indigenous youth between the ages of 14 and 18 who died by suicide. In March of 2017 our office hosted a meeting of investigators from other provincial advocates' offices. The purpose of this meeting was to share information to improve investigative reviews.

Looking ahead, our primary focus will be on the implementation of the OCYA's expanded investigations mandate as recommended by the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention and approved by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. We expect that implementing the new legislation will take some time. We will focus on changing our policies, practices, and procedures to address the legislative changes. We will also focus on the recruitment and training of new staff to support the increased mandate. We view this added responsibility as an important opportunity to learn from these tragedies so that we do all we can to prevent them from happening in the future.

Here is a summary of the reports of serious injuries and deaths that our office has received since 2012. The 304 reports reflect 255 notifications of serious injuries and deaths from April 1, 2012, to March 31, 2017, and an additional 49 reports received in the first six months of this year. We're currently working on a five-year summary report to identify themes and lessons learned from investigative reviews, and we anticipate the release of this report early in 2018.

I now want to talk a bit about public education. An important focus of our organization is engaging with young people about their rights and how they can exercise them. Through presentations, workshops, and hosting information booths, we build awareness of children's rights and the work of our office. We have developed strong relationships with many stakeholders across the province, and for many years we've collaborated with them to participate in

events like National Child Day, National Aboriginal Day, and many other initiatives.

In 2016-17 we completed 299 engagement and education activities, which is a 24 per cent increase over the previous year. Youth engagement is a highlight of the work that we do. One of the critical ways that we do this is through our Youth Advisory Panel, a group of 10 young people and their mentors from across the province who advise us on many areas of our work. We met with indigenous young people, elders, families, and communities to hear their stories and experiences with the child welfare system in Alberta. This resulted in the creation of our special report called *Voices for Change*. We also looked at new ways of engaging with youth while at the same time providing tools to help adults advocate for young people. These efforts led to the production of creative multimedia products, including videos, booklets, and even an advocacy comic book.

As we look ahead, we'll create and deliver a self-advocacy training initiative designed for young people, their families, communities, and other stakeholders, and we will be working with Mount Royal University on a capstone project focused on youth-friendly communications and engagement in education.

I'll now ask Jackie to talk a bit about our quality assurance activities.

Mrs. Stewart: Through our quality assurance efforts we evaluate the effectiveness of our services to young people. In the past five years we've worked hard to improve the way we obtain feedback from young people who received our services and to make improvements based on their feedback. In April 2016 we entered into an agreement with an evaluation firm to assist us in reviewing our service standards, targets, and performance measures and to develop standards for new areas of work. These will be implemented in the coming year.

I'll now turn it over to Bonnie.

Mrs. Russell: Thank you, Jackie.

Good morning, Mr. Chair and committee members. I'm pleased to provide some highlights on the work of strategic support, which is responsible for the internal operations of the office, including resource planning, finance, information technology, human resources, facilities management, and administration. Over the past five years strategic support has played a key role in transitioning the OCYA to becoming independent. This included moving both our Calgary and Edmonton offices to new locations, moving our information technology operations and applications out of government, and receiving clear audit opinions from the Auditor General each year on our financial statements.

Key undertakings in 2016-17 included developing an accountability framework for OCYA's IT operations with our IT service providers, enhancing our program applications. Of significance were enhancements to the LRCY system, which automated the appointment process to reduce manual workflows. As well, we updated our applications to collect a young person's gender and pronoun as described by the young person.

Looking ahead, we will focus on developing financial and human resource plans to support the legislative changes, working with Alberta Infrastructure to secure additional space to house new staff, and facilitating the development of a memorandum of understanding with Alberta Justice and Solicitor General.

8:50

I'll talk briefly about our financial results for 2016-17 as highlighted in our annual report and the audited financial statements. This provides a summary of the OCYA's total budget and actual

operating capital expenses by program. This slide addresses the voted budget and excludes amortization and valuation adjustments. Our 2016-17 total operating budget was \$13,192,000, and our total capital investment budget was \$50,000. Our total operating expenses last year were \$13,173,000, and our total capital investment was \$27,000. Overall, we had a total unexpended voted budget at the end of 2016-17 of \$42,166, or 0.3 per cent.

I'll have Del introduce the 2018-19 budget request.

Mr. Graff: Thank you, Bonnie.

The 2018-19 voted budget estimate we are requesting for the office of the Child and Youth Advocate is \$15,425,000. This is a \$2,183,000 increase from our prior-year original budget. There are three major contributing factors to the increase in our budget. The first is a significant expansion of our mandate related to investigations, at a cost of \$1.9 million. The second is the increase in appointments for lawyers for children and youth, at a cost of \$183,000. The third is the need to begin the process of replacing our current advocacy IT system, at a cost of \$100,000.

I'll ask Bonnie to go through the budget estimate in some detail.

Mrs. Russell: Our budget is distributed over seven program areas to provide transparency on the allocation and use of funds. As Del has indicated, we are requesting an increase in our budget of \$2,183,000 from the prior year. The changes made to each program's budget represent internal reallocations as well as new budget dollars.

The 2018-19 budget estimate for the Child and Youth Advocate's office is \$1,075,000. In 2018-19 the responsibility for communication services is being moved to the advocate's office from the engagement and education program. The \$249,000 increase in this budget is for salaries and benefits of two additional positions who will support the increased public reporting required by our office.

The budget estimate for the legal representation for children and youth and intake services is \$3,935,000. We are requesting an additional \$183,000 to address the fees and disbursements paid to roster lawyers. We currently have a cost pressure of about \$400,000 in this program as appointments continue to increase. We are in the process of implementing a number of cost-containment strategies. However, we're unable to absorb the full financial impact of the continued increase in legal appointments. Therefore, we are requesting an additional \$183,000 for this program.

The budget estimate for investigations is \$2,993,000, an increase of \$1,364,000. The increase is required to meet the new legislative mandate, and \$1,270,000 is for the annualized salaries and benefits of five new investigation staff who will be hired in this fiscal year, as approved in our October 2017 supplementary estimate, and an additional five investigation staff will be hired in the 2018-19 fiscal year, as identified in this budget. In addition, we require \$100,000 to address increased travel, telecommunications, and supplies for the new staff and for contracted services related to expert resources, legal review, and the production of additional investigative review reports.

For strategic support the budget estimate is \$2,501,000, which represents an increase of \$354,000: \$314,000 relates to the annualization of the salaries and benefits for the two positions included in the supplementary estimate and an additional administrative assistant position to support the investigations division, and the remaining \$40,000 relates to additional expenditures for insurance premiums, rentals, and IT services that support the increased number of staff in the OCYA.

The changes to the other program areas relate to reallocation of funds for employer contributions, and they're minimal. We're also requesting an increase of \$100,000 in the capital budget to begin

the replacement of our advocacy information system. This system was built in 2004 on a technology platform that is becoming increasingly obsolete and difficult to support. You will note that in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 targets we have identified additional capital funding to continue the development and implementation of this new system.

I'll turn it back to Del to wrap things up.

Mr. Graff: Thanks, Bonnie.

Chairperson Shepherd and committee members, in conclusion, we are asking you to approve the OCYA's budget of \$15,425,000 to provide quality advocacy services to Alberta's most vulnerable children and youth population. The 2018-19 budget provides for an increase of \$2,183,000 over the 2017-18 budget. We have held our current budget for three years. We are unable to absorb the increases required to meet the new demands that come with the increased legislative mandate for investigations. We are also not able to continue to reallocate funds within our organization to address the increased need for legal representation for children and youth.

In addition, we have requested funding to begin the process of replacing our advocacy information system as the technology reaches the end of its useful life. We will continue to look for efficiencies in our spending and to ensure that our limited resources are used to promote the rights, interests, and viewpoints of Alberta's vulnerable children. We are committed to the young people whom we serve, we will continue to advocate on their behalf, and we will continually strive to improve our services.

Chairperson Shepherd, I want to thank you and this committee for the opportunity to talk with you about our past accomplishments, how we are moving forward, and our 2018-19 budget request. We will now respond to any questions the committee members may have.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Graff.

At this point, then, I'll open the floor to questions from committee members.

Ms Woollard: First of all, I'd really like to thank you and your team, Mr. Graff, for your hard work and for being so fiscally responsible. As we've noticed and like you said, the last three years you've held the line, and the demands continue to increase, continue to ramp up.

I've just got a few questions about what you've got in the budget projections and the submissions. On the fourth page of your budget submission you provided some budget forecasts for the next few years, until 2020-21, and these projections suggest that the spending for your office will remain relatively constant after this fiscal year. I know you've talked about that and quite clearly. Would you say that you're pretty confident in the projections? Do you think there's a good likelihood that those will be accurate numbers for the next few years coming?

Mr. Graff: I could say that we have some confidence with respect to what we know today. One of the things that we're concerned about is that there's an added responsibility for mandatory reviews in our investigations mandate, and although we've done the best we can in terms of being able to project the actual costs that we anticipate having in that area, I don't have the same level of confidence in that new program development as I do in some of the other areas of our operations.

Ms Woollard: Okay. That makes sense. I'm not asking you to be a predictor of the future. Thank you.

Page 5 of your budget request shows that your office is being forecasted to come in under what was budgeted for the engagement and education portion of operational expenses by about \$23,000. Could you just give us an idea of how those savings will be achieved or are being achieved?

Mrs. Russell: In the forecast this year we have reduced some of our contract dollars and that related to things such as supporting the youth panel. We're doing that internally as opposed to bringing someone in to do some work with the youth panel and also some reduction in our travel.

Ms Woollard: Okay. Reductions in travel and moving some of the work from externally provided to internally.

Mrs. Russell: Right, and that money is reallocated, then, to deal with some pressures in the other areas such as the legal representation program.

Ms Woollard: Okay. Thank you.

Just a few more. The variance explanations that you offer on page 7 state in note 2 that you are requesting an additional \$43,000 for travel and specifically travel for investigations. Could you just provide a little context for that travel? You've mentioned that you've reduced some travel costs, but you're looking for a different kind of travel cost. Maybe you could just explain it a bit more.

9:00

Mr. Graff: The costs for the travel outlined in note 2 are related to the obligations that we anticipate under the new legislation, and that means that the focus of this travel is on investigations and the investigations process.

Ms Woollard: As compared to, like, professional development or something, this would be specifically investigations?

Mr. Graff: That's right.

Ms Woollard: All right. Thank you.

Do you need more staff? I was noticing here a note about – I mean, when you're going to do investigations in more remote or distant areas, does that require more staffing as well?

Mr. Graff: Certainly, one of the things that we anticipate from the legislation is that we will have to go out to more communities to meet with stakeholders who are part of the investigations process, so those costs are built into our planning.

Ms Woollard: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Ms Woollard, I'll just take a moment to see if there are any other members that might have questions.

Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you. And thank you for being here. Just a question with regard to the report that we just saw with increased youth receiving advocacy services. I think the number was 2,991, an 18 per cent increase. I guess my question is: is this an increase in individuals that have come forward requesting services, or is this those that are eligible for services?

Mr. Graff: I'll ask Jackie to respond to that question.

Mrs. Stewart: The increase we've seen are young people that have either come to us and have asked for our services or someone on their behalf has come to us and has identified that a young person

could benefit from advocacy services and, consequently, we've reached out to them.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you.

An increased incidence of individuals reaching out: does it necessarily translate into more investigations?

Mr. Graff: I would suggest that it's kind of like apples and oranges. Young people who come to us for advocacy support are looking to have some issue in their lives addressed. It could be about placement in a foster home or visiting their family, but they're a young person who's involved with the Ministry of Children's Services and seeking some help from us. Investigations are about when we receive reports of a child either being seriously injured or who die and they're involved with child intervention or are in custody under the young offender system. We receive those notifications from the ministry. So one is a service provision for individual advocacy, and the other is an investigative review of a tragic circumstance that has happened. They're quite separate.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you.

If I may?

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. van Dijken: So, then, an increase in activity does not necessarily translate into increased investigations but increased assistance in whatever their issue is at the time?

Mr. Graff: Yes.

Mr. van Dijken: Then my question is: do you think that increased activity is based on awareness of the program, that you've been able to reach out so that more people are aware of your services, and that we're getting help from awareness?

Mr. Graff: It's very clear to us that when there is public attention on my office and the services that we provide, we do see an increase in the number of calls that we get through our intake for advocacy or for other kinds of help. So there is, we think, a pretty strong relationship between the increased awareness of who we are and what services we provide and the calls that result from that profile.

Mr. van Dijken: If I may?

The Chair: Please.

Mr. van Dijken: The increase in extra staff for investigations: do we feel that there will be significant increases in investigations that are systemic investigations and that that is the increase for the staff? I guess my question is: with the current pressures under the legal representation, are we going to be able to see some of those pressures relieved by the increased staff for investigations, or is that completely different, where we have to reach out to more legal representation because you don't have a choice, that you can't fill that void in-house?

Mr. Graff: Yeah. Again, we are talking about two distinct program areas. In legal representation for children and youth we appoint lawyers for young people who have matters before the court. For example, if a child is coming before the court for a permanent guardianship order, we appoint a lawyer from our roster to represent that child to make sure that that child's voice is heard and their interests are served by the court. That's quite distinct from investigations. So the increase in staffing and investigations really doesn't have any impact on the assignment of lawyers to children under LRCY.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members?

Mrs. Littlewood: In your business plan there are performance measures for your office, one being "percentage of youth who indicate that they received respectful, timely and responsive services" and, two, "percentage of youth who indicate that they had an opportunity to be actively involved in advocating for their rights, interests and viewpoints." I'm just wondering how you're measuring those and if you feel like you're on target, if you have any comments about that.

Mrs. Stewart: Our office has a process in place where all young people, after they've received services, if they're over the age of 10, receive a survey from an independent surveyor that we contract with our office, and we gather feedback from them about their views on the services that they received. We use that information to inform, basically, our performance measures in these two areas.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members have any further questions? Mr. van Dijken and then Ms Woollard.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you. I guess a question with regard to legal representation. We have budgeted here \$3,935,000. We're currently under pressure in the office to meet last year's budget, and it looks like it's forecast to go above. It was also above that number in 2016-17. My question, then, is: do you feel we have a realistic number being forecast for legal representation at this time?

Mrs. Russell: In the 2018-19 fiscal year we've done some reallocations from other program areas into legal representation as well as the request for the additional funds. What we are also doing is a number of other initiatives, looking at cost-containment strategies and that, that would address things such as appeals, supervision orders. We are also doing it such that we expect that lawyers will be able to support a young person within a block of so many hours, and anything over those hours are being approved on a very small hourly basis, which means that they need to come back to us regularly if they are required to have more hours, and all of those are approved individually.

Mr. Graff: One of the things I'd add with respect to the legal representation for children and youth program is that there's a pretty strong relationship between the pressures on that program and what's taking place in the child intervention system. In times when there is a reduction in the number of children involved with the child intervention system, there's less pressure on the LRCY program because there are fewer young people going through the court process. When there are greater numbers, we tend to see greater pressure on LRCY just for the very same reason.

In that respect, when there is a change, this is one of those program areas where there's a direct dollar impact. If a lawyer gets assigned, there's a dollar impact that goes straight from that child being assigned a lawyer to the pressure on this program. So there isn't any variation in terms of that capacity. As the numbers increase, the pressure increases, and as it decreases, the pressure decreases. So there's some variability in there, for sure.

9:10

Mr. van Dijken: Just a supplementary to that. You speak about when we see a spike in child intervention cases. I would have thought that that would have been a gradual increase over time or a gradual decrease over time. You might not have this information,

this understanding, but is it unusual to see a spike, or is that something that occurs over time?

Mr. Graff: Well, certainly, our experience isn't that it happens in a very short term. There is a flow to increases or to decreases. When we've come in front of this committee before and we've not asked for resources for LRCY, it's because we can make any internal adjustments that we need to because the changes are smaller. Now we're finding that given the fact that our budget has been constant over the last three years, those increases, when they happen, are harder to deal with. We have an anticipated \$400,000 overage in terms of that area, and we've been able to accommodate most of that. Our request is for what we believe we're going to very much struggle to accommodate, so that's why we've made the request that we have. But there is variability on an ongoing basis with the LRCY actual costs.

The Chair: Thank you.
We'll go to Ms Woollard.

Ms Woollard: Thank you. In your budget submission on page 6 – I keep going back to these pages – you're requesting \$105,000 for other purchased services. Could you clarify, please, what these services are and perhaps why those resources are allocated to that item?

Mrs. Russell: What is in that \$105,000 are just, basically, two things. One is a membership that we have with the CCCYA, which is the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates, and the other is for human resources. Because we do not have human resource services internally, we purchase those services, and \$100,000 of that is used for that. Previously we purchased services from Alberta Education and had access to a whole raft of resources, but it was less than the cost of one full-time employee.

Ms Woollard: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. Just going back to the variability in child intervention cases and how that has a direct correlation to legal representation expectations within your system, with the fact that we see that we're budgeting for lower than what's forecast for this current year and what was actual for the year previous, do you see that we have started to see a decrease in the cases of child intervention or not?

Mr. Graff: What we can see is that there is less of an increase this year than there was last year. In the year of our annual report I think we saw a 15 per cent increase in the demand for LRCY. This year it's been about a 2 per cent increase from there, so what we would see is a levelling out of that.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you.

The Chair: Mrs. Aheer.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Chair. Thank you so much for being here. I just have a question. You were explaining about how you were able to go through Education before, in the last question that Ms Woollard had asked you. Could you clarify that a little bit further with respect to how that worked out?

Mrs. Russell: Alberta Education provided human resource services for us up until March 31, 2017. Since then we are using that to have

consultants help us with it. They were unable to provide any services past that date.

Mrs. Aheer: If I may ask a supplemental: is there a reason why that ended up changing? If I understood correctly, you were saying that what you had access to with Education before – it seems like it was a lot better situation for you previous to what you're having to deal with right now. Would you mind clarifying a little bit further about the change and how that happened?

Mr. Graff: Certainly. We can do that.

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry. I'm a little bit behind. I apologize if everybody else knows this already.

Mr. Graff: Not at all. When we talk about an arrangement, what we're describing is a contracted agreement with Education to provide us with the full range of human resources that is part of their organization. We had that up until March 2017, and at that time the Ministry of Education said that they couldn't support us anymore because they had a shift in priorities in terms of what they were responsible for. One of the things that happens with ministries is that they have a hierarchy of priorities, and supporting an external office like ours would not be at the top of their list in terms of the areas that they would work with. So because of a change in their priorities, they provided us with notice that they couldn't provide that support anymore.

Mrs. Aheer: Chair, may I ask one . . . ?

The Chair: Please.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Chair.

Are you ever provided with information about that priority aspect? I mean, I can't imagine how difficult it would be for you to have to shift based on the understanding that you would have had with the ministry previously. I'm just curious: is there any lead-up to that, as to the changes in priorities within a ministry, so that you're able to compensate and keep up?

Mr. Graff: Oh, certainly. I wouldn't want to suggest that they weren't responsible about their communication with us. They absolutely were. But when their priorities shift, we have to accommodate that, and we did. What has been a challenge is to find additional human resources since that time. When we talk about human resources, we're not just talking about, you know, recruitment of staff; we're talking about a full suite of services that are required for human resources. That's where our arrangement with the Ministry of Education was so helpful, because they had that full suite available and accessible to us.

Mrs. Aheer: Chair, may I ask one more?

The Chair: Certainly.

Mrs. Aheer: With respect to that, is there another ministry, then, that steps in to help out with those resources? I'm not sure if I'm using the correct language here, but in terms of redundancy and sharing I would assume that in going through another ministry, being able to share those services and use them, there's a great flow of information. Given what you do and the children that you're working with, I would assume that Education would be the best place to go through. Are you able to use another ministry's resources in order to help out?

Mr. Graff: Well, certainly, we've explored that possibility, and we're still looking towards a more permanent solution. In the interim – and this has been going on for some time now – we've received support from the Ministry of Children's Services and from the Public Service Commission. Both have been able to provide us with the support that we need in the short term. We are still looking for a longer term solution, though.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Ms Woollard.

Ms Woollard: Thank you. Another question on the line of looking at manpower. I noticed that in your submission you said that you would be increasing the manpower in your office by 15 full-time equivalents. How will the new staff assist in fulfilling your strategic priorities, which you've outlined on pages 4 and 5 of your business plan?

Mr. Graff: The new staff that we've requested are primarily related to the ability to fulfill a new set of responsibilities regarding investigations. That's right from the notification, how we interact with the groups that notify us, all the way through the investigations process to reporting publicly about investigations. All of those staff are intended to be supporting that endeavour. We aren't looking for new staff to support other areas of our operations where we have existing responsibilities now.

Ms Woollard: Okay. Thank you very much.

Just one final follow-up: do you anticipate that those staffing levels, the new ones, will be sustainable, then, going forward? Is that likely?

Mr. Graff: Certainly. That's our intention, and it's what we've built our budget on. When you were asking earlier about our confidence in that, really, if there is a place of uncertainty, it is in how much of that resource will be required in the fullness of time. The legislative changes that are coming reflect a new practice. We've completed our estimates based on what we know from having done investigative reviews for five years, but we still have some uncertainty. So I wouldn't want to be held to that permanently in terms of not ever coming back to this table to say that we either need more or that we can relinquish some of our budget.

9:20

Ms Woollard: Absolutely. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Woollard.

We'll have Mr. van Dijken. Then we've run up against and past the clock. Go ahead.

Mr. van Dijken: Just one quick question with regard to the advocacy information system and undergoing an update, upgrade, hopefully. My question. The money that's being spent there: is that to improve the system? Is that to bring it back to what would be considered normal? Is it going to help in office efficiencies and help with possibly over time getting into a position where we have reduced need for increased staffing and that type of thing?

Mrs. Russell: The system that we have now for advocacy was built in 2004 on a very obsolete platform. It's very difficult to support. One of the things that we have now is that we have an interface, sort of, with the child intervention system, and as they update their systems, it breaks our links between our systems. It costs a lot of additional money to keep those links and that in place. That's

because it's on an old platform securitywise, all of those things, and as they upgrade and that, it gets harder and harder to keep our system up to date.

What we're looking for is to be able to replace the system in its entirety with a system that is more of a case management system that we can use across our organization. Not just with respect to advocacy, but as we see the increase in investigations, we also see that we will need to have a more robust investigation system. So we're looking for a platform that we'll be able to reuse and that for other areas of our office as well.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you. Good.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. van Dijken.

All right. Well, thank you, Mr. Graff and to your staff, for your presentation this morning and for responding to our questions. For your information we anticipate that the committee's decisions on the officers' budgets will be sent out early next week.

We'll just take a minute, then, to let our next officer come in and get set up.

Thank you again for coming.

Mr. Graff: Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 9:22 a.m. to 9:29 a.m.]

The Chair: All right. I would like to welcome Ms Clayton, Information and Privacy Commissioner, and her staff to the meeting. Thank you for joining us today. We've set aside up to 20 minutes for your presentation. Then, at that point, I'll open the floor to questions from committee members. If you would begin by introducing the staff that you have with you today, and then please go ahead.

Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner

Ms Clayton: Yes, of course. I'm Jill Clayton, Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta, and joining me today is LeRoy Brower. LeRoy is the Assistant Commissioner with the office. I'll get started.

First of all, I'd like to say thank you very much for the opportunity to be here today, and I appreciate those of you who have made time to be here today. I don't know if there's anyone on the phone today. Nobody on the phone? Okay.

It's always a pleasure to be able to talk a little bit about what our office has been up to and what we're proposing to do in the near future. I'll start, though, because I do see a few new faces around the table – I don't want to spend a lot of time talking about exactly what our office does but a very quick recap. I have oversight for Alberta's three access to information and privacy laws, so that would be the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act – most people know that as FOIP – the Health Information Act, which is stand-alone health information legislation that applies to health custodians and health information as defined in the act, and also PIPA, which is the Personal Information Protection Act, which applies to provincially regulated private-sector organizations in the province.

The office currently has 42 full-time equivalents, and we have offices in Edmonton and Calgary.

My mandate is set out in legislation. We're a regulatory body, and most of the work, the bulk of the work, that we do is investigating complaints about how personal information or health information is collected, used, disclosed, and safeguarded. We're also responsible for requests for review, so if parties make a request for access to information, either their own personal or health

information or records in the custody or control of a public body, then my office is responsible to review the responses received to those requests to determine if they are in compliance with the legislation. That, really, is the bulk of the work that we do.

We also do other stand-alone investigations, so I do have the ability to initiate investigations on my own motion. We have an adjudication unit, so we are a quasi-judicial administrative tribunal. The adjudication unit, the adjudicators, hear inquiries. They issue binding orders, which can be filed in court.

I also have a responsibility to inform the public about these statutes, and to that end we host various events, we provide workshops, we publish our decisions, and we publish guidance.

I also have a legislative power to comment on existing or proposed legislation and programs. One example of that is reviewing privacy impact assessments for various, usually information, systems. The bulk of those are submitted to us under the Health Information Act.

I also have the power to comment on record linkages and data matching to provide general advice and recommendations and to commission research, which is something we try to do a little bit of every year.

Moving on to what we saw in 2016-17, this has been our busiest year ever. We've seen substantial increases in the number of cases that we've opened in the office. You'll see on the slide in front of you that we opened 2,239 cases in 2016-17. That's a 37 per cent increase over the previous year. We also closed significantly more cases in 2016-17, 32 per cent more. We issued more orders than I think we ever have, 105.

The numbers in brackets on that slide: we've started to break out the number of deemed refusal orders. That's when an individual has made a request for access and does not receive a response within the legislated timeline and there is no extension that has been granted by my office. LeRoy is responsible for those. Then technically the public body or the private-sector organization is in deemed refusal. It's deemed to be a refusal to respond to the request. We have changed our processes in the last couple of years to start tracking those. We've had a number of those submitted to our office, so you'll see a 64 per cent increase in the number of orders we issued, 57 of which were deemed refusal orders.

We've also seen a very significant increase in requests for time extensions. Again, there's a legislated timeline to respond to an access request. Public bodies are able to extend that timeline on their own initiative if certain criteria are met. After that, they have to come to my office to request authorization for further extension, again, based on criteria set out in the legislation. Last year we saw 253 of those requests in the office, which represents a 150 per cent increase.

9:35

Self-reported breaches. We've actually been kind of holding the line there. It seems to have plateaued just a little bit. Some of you will know that we are the only jurisdiction in Canada that has mandatory breach reporting under the private-sector legislation, so we've always had a significant number of those breaches reported to us. In the last couple of years we've seen a significant increase in the number of voluntary breach reports under the Health Information Act, but that, again, seems to have plateaued, and we're holding fairly steady. I'm pleased to say that we've closed a lot more self-reported breaches in the last year, a 25 per cent increase over the year before. We spent some time in the last year with a concentrated effort on getting some of those out the door and shutting them down.

Days to resolve cases. Those of you who have been on the committee over the last couple of years will also know that we've

been working very hard. We've made lots of internal changes to our processes to try to resolve cases faster. I'm pleased to say that in 2016-17 we're back to our 2013-14 level. If you look at the first two columns together, we've closed 47 per cent of cases within that 180-day period, which is the same as 2013-14. That's despite the fact that we've had a 43 per cent increase in those cases since 2013-14.

I've highlighted some of these numbers already: the total of open and closed cases and self-reported breaches, time extensions. There are a couple of numbers on this page that I'd like to draw your attention to. The number of privacy impact assessments that we've opened under the Health Information Act – again, it's mandatory under the Health Information Act to submit privacy impact assessments to my office. We saw a 37 per cent increase in the number of privacy impact assessments submitted last year and also requests for review under FOIP. Again, there seems to be a continued focus on access to information in Alberta. We have seen a 69 per cent increase in the number of requests for review that we received under FOIP over last year.

Some of the trends and issues that we're seeing: I think that probably the one issue that we focused a lot on this last year is delays in responding to access requests and the issue around solicitor-client privilege. I've mentioned that we've issued 57 deemed refusal orders in 2016-17, which is a very significant increase over the year before, and the significant increase in time extension requests.

We also issued investigation reports that looked very closely at three ministries: Alberta Justice, the Public Affairs Bureau, and Executive Council. Certainly, what we found there, when looking at delays, was that the access to information world has significantly changed in the last few years. Public bodies are seeing a significant increase in the volume of access requests that are coming in. Requests are far more complex than they used to be. Where previously, I think, with a significant access request, a large volume of records might have been 500 pages, in our digital world we're now seeing requests for access to e-mails, for example, and we're seeing – LeRoy can attest to this – access requests where there are 30,000, 40,000, and more responsive records. So that is a significant increase in workload for public bodies, certainly, and we saw that through the three investigations that we did. That, of course, contributes to delay.

We also saw some issues around process. I was pleased that during our investigations some of those processes were tightened up, and I think that bodes well for the future.

Then we also saw that FOIP offices are up against resourcing issues. There aren't enough people. The volume and complexity are increasing, but the resourcing has not increased. I think that that was fairly consistent across those three investigations, that there are a lot of different factors that contribute to delay.

Another significant issue that we were focusing on in this last year is breaches and offences. Again, we have a lot of breaches, both voluntary and mandatory, reported to us. We also have a significant number of offence investigations in the office. In this last fiscal year we've seen three convictions under the Health Information Act for unauthorized access to health records – so that's snooping in health records – and if you go outside the fiscal year and look at since February 2016, just over 18 months, we've actually seen five convictions as a result of investigations that we've done under the Health Information Act.

I'm not pleased to say this, but Alberta leads other jurisdictions in terms of the number of convictions for unauthorized access, and to some extent that's because I take that very, very seriously. In the health world, in particular, individuals have a right to be reassured that their information is not going to be snooped in when they go and talk to their health care provider about very sensitive issues.

Another focus over the last year – and this will continue on into the upcoming year – is on access and privacy education for children and young people. We've engaged in quite a number of initiatives. One of them is that we support something called the eQuality project. The eQuality project is a seven-year research program. It's headed by a couple of researchers out of the University of Ottawa. It's a SSHRC-funded program, and it's all about promoting healthy relationships and respect for equality online. Actually, other ministries in Alberta also support the eQuality project, so Alberta Status of Women and the Alberta Teachers' Association. One of the things that we did this fiscal year for Data Privacy Day was cohost an event with the ATA, bringing out some of those researchers to talk to educators, to talk to teachers, privacy professionals, and school superintendents about some of these issues that the eQuality project is focused on, including cyberbullying, surveillance technologies, education technology in classrooms.

Another initiative. I was very honoured to have an opportunity to speak to Alberta's curriculum working groups to talk about the need to bring privacy education – access to information as well but certainly privacy education – into the school curriculum. Internationally data protection authorities got together in Morocco last year. I was not there. As much as I would have liked to have been there, I was not there. A resolution was passed as well as a document called the international competency framework on privacy education. It's a really valuable resource. It's on our website. We've been sending that out to various stakeholders. It's designed for teachers and based on outcomes. That's one initiative we've been involved in as well as developing a privacy lesson plan with the office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada. We present at the School at the Legislature program, and we've had a special focus in the last year on other presentations to education stakeholders, including the Alberta School Boards Association – I went to Red Deer to meet with them – and the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges of Alberta. So that's been a really big focus for us.

Another focus – and this is something I spoke to the PIPA Review Committee about over the last year – has to do with something called the General Data Protection Regulation, which is new legislation coming into force in the European Union. It's a shift from the privacy directive that has been in place over a number of years, which was voluntary. This is now a regulation that will bind the European Union community, and it may have some fairly significant impacts for Canadian businesses that collect, use, and disclose personal information of individuals in the European Union. You'd be surprised how many international businesses – I mean, information knows no borders. It flows across borders. I've talked about it in not this current annual report but the year before and in front of the PIPA Review Committee. We have some resources on our website, and I think that that's something – we're starting to get a lot of calls from Alberta organizations saying: "How does this affect us? What does this mean for us?"

A couple of other topics. I won't go into these in the interest of time, but there's also a lot of discussion around ethical assessment frameworks for the big-data initiatives. I think, you know, one of the things that we're seeing, certainly in Edmonton, is that we're getting some of these high-tech companies – Google, for example – and other companies that are involved in artificial intelligence and other kinds of big-data initiatives. There's a lot of discussion in the privacy world around: what's the appropriate kind of assessment of those initiatives? Just because, say, private-sector companies can do this kind of work, where's the assessment about whether or not they should do that kind of work?

We've talked about that in the annual report a little bit as well as the Internet of Things. There were, in particular, a number of

incidents in the last year where hackers had managed to interrupt services for connected devices, and we're seeing a proliferation of connected devices. Those last two bullets are more mid- to long-term issues, and we use the annual report to try to raise awareness and get ahead of the curve.

9:45

Challenges that the office is facing: again, volume of cases. I've already gone over some of those stats, time extensions, and deemed refusals, in particular a lot of time spent on deemed refusals. We did change our process to send deemed refusals through to the adjudication unit. In some cases these are applicants who have waited two to three years to get responses to access requests. We send them through to adjudication so that adjudicators can issue an order that says: you must respond. I'm concerned that because of that, adjudicators are not able to spend as much time on other issues, and really a deemed refusal is: "You must respond to the access request. You must respond. You're in breach of the law." I would rather not spend as much adjudication time on those kinds of issues.

Breaches and offence investigations: I touched on that. I think that what I wanted to point out here is that we do have a number of offence investigations still ongoing in the office, a number of cases that are currently in front of the court, a number of offence investigations that are active, and probably another 20 cases that are flagged as potential offence investigations. These are very, very resource-intensive investigations because we have to caution individuals before interviewing them. They're concerned about evidence, chain of custody, and putting together the case that we turn over to the Crown. The Crown decides whether or not to prosecute and then takes it from there, but they are very resource intensive, and there are a number of them in the office.

We're also seeing a great many new authorized custodians. These are health custodians that will have access to the provincial electronic health record, or Netcare. That accounts for the significant increase in privacy impact assessments that we've seen over the last year, again 37 per cent up.

Then, of course, challenges with respect to solicitor-client privilege. It was a big issue in the office last year. There was a Supreme Court case where the court decided that the language in the FOIP Act right now does not give me the ability to compel the production of records where they've been claimed to be subject to solicitor-client privilege. That affects a significant number of cases in my office, and we're also starting to see that it's affecting cases in other jurisdictions across Canada. What that means, though, is that rather than having matters come to us for independent review, everything ends up in court. There are significant delays as a result of that. Right at the moment we have quite a number of judicial reviews on this issue. In some cases we're still waiting to get court dates. It's going to be at least a year to get a court date on some of these cases.

Business plan goals. We just went through an exercise in the office to consult with all of the staff and sort of revisit our business plan. It's not a lot different from what we've put forward in the last couple of years. Basically, we have a legislated mandate, and that's what we're trying to fulfill, but we try to focus on certain things. Our first goal is around enhancing access to information and protection of personal and health information by regulated stakeholders. To do that, we have a number of initiatives, including advocating for open and transparent government, modernizing laws. I know that in April of this year I did ask for an amendment to the freedom of information act to deal with the solicitor-client privilege issue. We're trying to do proactive investigations where resources allow because that would be in many cases more efficient

than opening many, many, many investigations to deal with the same issue, and we're trying to get ahead of issues, too, so that we don't end up having complaints in the office.

Another part of goal 1 is a breach strategy. We're currently updating our breach reporting guidelines and advice. We are providing workshops on how to respond to breaches, and we are of course investigating some very serious breaches. I think there have been a number in the headlines lately, and we're dealing with those in the office as well.

We're working on producing some guidance. There's discussion around producing joint guidance with our colleagues in other jurisdictions around issues like de-identification, which is very important, again, for big-data initiatives and secondary use of personal and health information. Of course, again, we provide training and workshops. We celebrate Right to Know Week, we bring in speakers, Data Privacy Day – we try to draw attention to those issues there. We provide workshops on breach response and how to complete PIAs, and we have some plans to develop workshops around redacting records.

Goal 2 is to increase awareness of access and privacy with Albertans. Some of you may know that we published survey results yesterday which showed that – we surveyed the general population – 95 per cent of individuals said that privacy is very important to them, and 90 per cent said that access to information is very important to them. I'm more concerned that only 27 per cent said that they feel more secure about the privacy of their personal information than five years ago and that only 39 per cent felt confident that they could exercise their access to information right.

Finally, our third goal is mostly around continuous improvement, looking at our processes. We've done a lot of work in the last years to improve our processes and be more efficient, but, as I said in my message in the annual report, we're not able to keep up. Over five years we've seen a 74 per cent increase in cases. We closed 56 per cent more cases. We're not able to keep up.

Moving on to the budget, in 2016-17 we returned just over \$140,000 of our budget, or around 2 per cent of our approved budget. Our personnel costs were pretty much as budgeted. The main difference in supplies and services was legal fees. With the Supreme Court case, we had applied for leave to appeal and expected that that would be heard in 2016-17, and it was, but it was heard April 1 of 2016-17, which meant that all of the work leading up to that came out of the '15-16 budget, and you might recall that we were over budget on legal fees that year. So money that we had budgeted in 2016-17 for the Supreme Court appeal was actually expensed in '15-16. That's the most significant change to supplies and services. In addition, we also purchased a network storage device capital asset that was beyond its lifespan.

Our budget request for 2018-19. We've tried very hard, as we have the last couple of years – you know, I'm aware of economic realities and budget constraints – to stay within the same budget envelope this year and previous years. This year, though, because of significant decreases that we were able to find in supplies and services, we are hoping to fill a vacant position, a position that's been vacant for three years since there were budget cuts back in the 2015-16 year. So I'm not asking for any new FTEs; I'm asking to fill a vacant position, which results in a .6 per cent increase to our budget.

As you can see, all of the supplies and services budgets have either decreased or stayed the same. In two cases they've stayed the same for rentals. That's basically our cost to photocopiers. That doesn't change. Repairs and maintenance is a minor amount that has also stayed the same. The only increase is in telephones and communications, and that is because currently we are part of the GOA contract for telephones, and I understand that the GOA is

moving to a different contract and that the new service that will be provided includes VOIP, or voice over Internet protocol. That's something that as the Privacy Commissioner I'm not necessarily comfortable moving towards, certainly without completing a privacy impact assessment and looking at all of the privacy and security issues that may or may not be associated with that. We are proposing to stay with our current service provider for the time being, at least until we can do our own assessment of that new technology.

The other significant changes to supplies and services: legal services is significantly down from what we had previously budgeted. The big change to that – it's based both on scheduled judicial reviews right now, so we know what's coming up, because there is such a delay to get a court date to hear a judicial review. We're not anticipating that any judicial reviews that come up in the near future will be heard in the next year.

And I'm almost out of time.

The Chair: Sorry, Ms Clayton. Just to note that we are past the 20-minute mark for your presentation.

Ms Clayton: Oh. Okay. I'll just wrap that up, then.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Clayton: That's probably the most significant change. We also have full-time internal legal counsel, that was a position we created a couple of years ago to try and lessen our dependence on external legal counsel.

As I said, the main change that we're asking for is just to fill that vacant position and also maintain an adjudication support position. We've got somebody in right now helping us out with our adjudication unit.

Overall, that is a \$43,200 increase, or .6 per cent of our budget. Thank you.

9:55

The Chair: Excellent. Thanks very much, Ms Clayton.

At this point, then, I will open the floor to questions from committee members. I see Mr. Horne.

Mr. Horne: Yeah. Thank you, Chair. Thank you for taking the time to present to us today and for all of your hard work ensuring that the privacy needs of Albertans are safe and ensured.

Now, looking at the budget submission, on page 1, in the letter, I suppose, specifically paragraph 4, you indicate that you're anticipating "a slight increase in costs for external adjudication over [the] 2017-18 budgeted amount," but I don't see that listed as a particular line item in the budget. I was wondering if you could explain to the committee how that's represented in the budget.

Ms Clayton: Yes. That is in contracted services. Contract services, that budget line item, includes legal, and as I said, that's probably the bulk of the decrease. In 2017-18, in our current year, we had budgeted \$80,000 for external adjudication. In the current year we are over that. That represents external counsel.

I declared a possible conflict with respect to three access to information requests that my office has been asked to review, and they all relate to records related to the awarding of the tobacco litigation contract. I declared a conflict, so we have retained, since those requests came into the office, an external adjudicator who is the former information commissioner of Nova Scotia. It's very difficult to predict where that will go, and I'm very hands-off on that because of the conflict, but I do understand that additional records were released.

Initially very few records were given to the external adjudicator for her review. A number of interim decisions were issued. Then some additional records were released, and there are new decisions out on our website relevant to that. I understand that additional records have now been released, and the review will continue on into next year. So the costs are because it's carrying on. It goes on, and as records come in in bits and pieces, I can't hear it. I can't assign it to anybody in my office, so it's been assigned to an external adjudicator.

Mr. Horne: Okay. I have one more question.

The Chair: Certainly. Go ahead.

Mr. Horne: Okay. The budget submission also notes a decrease in the technology services budget due to some IT infrastructure upgrades that were expensed during the fiscal year. You also mentioned several times in your business plan that new information-storing technology has significant impacts on the privacy of personal information. Given the importance of technological change, can you share with the committee what sorts of IT upgrades have been undertaken with that budget?

Ms Clayton: Oh, they have haven't been yet, but we will be expensing them this year because we're forecasting a surplus at this time, and we'd like to use some of that money to pay for these infrastructure upgrades.

Over the last couple of years when I have come here with IT budgets, it has been mainly for security-related items that we've planned and implemented, including things like detection systems to identify malware and keep it away from our network. The last couple of years we focused very much on security upgrades, but we haven't focused on infrastructure, so that was the plan for next year, to update the Exchange Server, the ActiveX directory, and our Lync system. We have an office in Edmonton and Calgary, and we use Lync to communicate. So we had planned upgrades for all of those, but because we do have some surplus this year, we're expecting that we'll be able to get that work done this year, which ultimately is leading to a slight decrease in our IT expenses for next year.

Mr. Horne: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Drever: Thank you so much for being here today. Just a couple of questions. One of the goals of your office is to "increase awareness of access and privacy rights through engagement with Albertans." You've also requested an additional \$1,500 for hosting working sessions. Do you have any metrics on the number of Albertans you've spoken to or how many education sessions you've held with that budget?

Ms Clayton: With the current budget?

Drever: With the \$1,500 for the working and hosting sessions.

Ms Clayton: Sorry. That's a \$1,500 decrease. The total budget that we have this year is \$10,000, and we're predicting that we'll go to \$9,200 in 2018-19, so we've actually decreased. The \$1,500 is a decrease in what we're asking for. Really, the current budget was based on – as I say, we host right-to-know events. We host them here in Edmonton and also in Calgary. We host Data Privacy Day events – January 28 is international Data Privacy Day – so we do events in Calgary and Edmonton. What we've managed to do over the last couple of years is to find venues where we don't have to pay. Frankly, this building: it's wonderful. It used to cost us a lot

more when we had to rent space to host these kinds of events. These are events that are open to everybody. I would really like to actually see members of the public come out to those events, but typically we end up with participants who are members of the access and privacy community.

One of the reasons for just completing that general population survey is, again, just to get an idea of level of awareness. Does the public know anything about access to information and privacy? Do they know about our office? But we also ask what issues are really important to them. We found that that didn't change very much from the last time we did the survey. It's hacking and malware and phishing and snooping and mobile devices and child and youth privacy. That's how we end up focusing on child and youth privacy.

What we're going to do with these survey results is to develop a strategy to reach out to the public. It's very, very hard to get the public to actually care about access and privacy issues unless they're personally affected. I'm sure you've all heard: "Well, who cares about privacy? If you have nothing to hide, then who cares?" It only matters when you yourself are affected by that – all of a sudden you're all over the front page of a paper, or you've lost your job – and there are real effects. Then all of a sudden we see people who care very deeply. So I would like to see us – and that's why it's in our business plan – direct more attention to raising awareness of the public and Albertans. They care. When we ask them, they say that they care. But I'm hoping that there's work that we can do to improve their awareness of the legislation and their rights. Again, that's part of the focus on children and youth.

One of the other initiatives we've been talking about lately is really improving the way we communicate about our processes online, if we can develop videos to help explain what our processes are, which are sometimes very convoluted, or infographics if that will help them to understand.

I would also like to see – and this is something I've long wanted to see, but it's never quite made it to be a priority. I'd like to investigate the idea of an advocate in the office because right now we are the neutral, objective decision-maker. We review the decisions that have been made, but we don't make decisions, and we can't really hold anyone's hand through our processes because we can't be taking sides. But I think there might be a way – and I'd like to research this – of having a position in the office that actually can do that, with firewalls between our operational processes.

Those are some of the things that we're thinking of to interact better with Albertans so that they understand our processes, they understand their rights under legislation, they understand how to exercise them so that this is not as overwhelming as it might seem right now.

Drever: Yeah.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Aheer.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you so much for being here. I just wanted to go back. You had mentioned about the GOA contract with the phone service. Just to clarify with respect to that, you're wanting to stay with the service that you have presently. That means that that falls into your budget now, where before that was supplied by the GOA. Am I understanding that correctly?

Ms Clayton: Yes. It will mean essentially that we have to pay for our own handsets, and there's a rental fee associated with that.

Mrs. Aheer: Right. I have a question with respect to going forward with that. Since the government is changing its service provider, you're going to have to seek and make sure that those services fall

under what you need in order to protect information. You were talking about malware and security and protection of new systems. Will the GOA's new service provider also fall under what you have to budget for with respect to all of those kinds of things? If you're going to end up going back into the GOA service, there's going to be an entire, I imagine, litany of things that you're going to have to go through in order to make sure that all works out.

10:05

Ms Clayton: Yeah. I think what you're highlighting is one of the challenges of being an independent office and, particularly, doing the kind of review work and oversight work that we do. Probably in many, many cases there are certain advantages to my office being on the same system as GOA, but if, for example, it's an information system and there is some sort of breach of that information system, then my job is to review whether or not the appropriate privacy and security controls were in place. If I'm in that system, then there's a conflict, potentially. We are on, for example, IMAGIS, the GOA IMAGIS system, and we have been for a number of years.

One of the things that I have done as commissioner is to say that we have to walk the talk. If I expect that public bodies and health custodians will be doing privacy impact assessments of these sorts of new initiatives, then we have to be doing exactly the same thing we expect of others.

But there is this dual nature. I have an enforcement role, but I'm also a public body with concerns about expenses and budget and trying to be – but with this added, I need to make sure that we are compliant with our own legislation. So as the GOA moves forward, if they move forward – I don't have a lot of details on what they're up to; I'm making this estimate based on my understanding – I'm very hopeful that a privacy impact assessment will be submitted to our office. That would be on the enforcement side. I don't believe we've seen one so far.

Privacy impact assessments are not mandatory under the public-sector legislation, under FOIP. Having said that, we do receive privacy impact assessments from public bodies often but not for everything.

It strikes me that this is the kind of system where I would really like to see a privacy impact assessment, knowing myself that as the head of a public body I'm not signing onto that contract until somebody very technical in my office has actually done that review, because basically what we're talking about – if the service provided is a VOIP service, then there are potentially various privacy and security issues, as there would be with any kind of computer-networked, IP-networked device.

Mrs. Aheer: With all of the various . . .

Ms Clayton: Everything around hacking and malware and authentication issues and general security.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. May I? Thank you so much, Chair. Do you have any idea of the implementation going forward or how that's going to happen or the awareness around, like, what was going on with regard to your body versus what's going on with the GOA? Like, how did that all work out? I imagine you would have to incur this in your budget now, where it wasn't before.

Ms Clayton: Well, it wasn't, and as I said, I'm not at this point comfortable – I don't know the details of where that contract is at, when it's going ahead, when it's going to be finalized, if there's been the privacy and security assessment yet. I need to make sure that we are carrying on, that we still have phones going into the next year. Certainly, we will do our own assessment. I'm not going to commit at this point to whether or not we would join that system.

Generally I have concerns about maintaining independence from systems that – should something go awry, should there be a breach, I need to be in the position to independently review what was done in the assessment that was made.

Mrs. Aheer: Of course.

May I do one more?

The Chair: I do have a couple more people on the list, and we are starting to run a little bit short on time, but I will add you to the list again.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Chair.

The Chair: If we could just, I guess, try to keep our questions and answers focused so we can make the best use of our time.

Member Drever.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just one final question. The business plan for your office mentions that the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner now closes 56 per cent more cases than it did in 2011 and 2012. That seems like quite a large improvement. Can you point to a particular factor that leads to increased case closures, or is it due to a number of factors?

Ms Clayton: It's due to a number of factors. That's been a real focus of the office for, certainly, the five years that I've been commissioner. When I started in the office, we did surveys, got feedback on our processes, had facilitated discussions with staff in the office to figure out what was working and what wasn't working. As a result of that, we restructured the teams in the office. We introduced a new, upgraded case management system, which allows us to monitor better what we're doing. We've introduced streamlining processes for privacy impact assessments. We've updated and upgraded our time extension request process and our self-reported breach process. We've introduced preliminary review in the mediation investigation function. We close a lot more cases based on phone calls as opposed to long letters of finding.

It's a continuous effort. Like, right at the moment we've just completed – we don't have the final report – a process review for our adjudication unit. Again, I'm constantly, constantly looking for better ways of doing what we're doing. It's very challenging. You know, it's a legislated mandate. We provide a public service. Individuals have a right to ask for a review, so it's very hard to shut down things when they come in unless they're clearly nonjurisdictional or there's absolutely no evidence that something has happened. We can make minor changes in terms of reducing the volume that comes in. It doesn't make a big difference. We can make process changes and try to be more efficient, and I'm very, very proud of the work that the office has done over the last few years to achieve that 56 per cent increase in closures.

Then the only other thing is additional staff. We are not where we need to be in terms of staff, but I understand that now is not a good time to be asking for additional staff. I would very, very much like to fill a position that's been vacant for a number of years.

Drever: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mrs. Pitt.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you. I think it's well understood that there's been a significant increase in breaches specifically listed from Alberta Justice and Solicitor General and Alberta Environment and Parks. The Supreme Court ruling that was made for solicitor-client privilege: is that the reason the government has given for these breaches?

Ms Clayton: No. They're not – well, I mean, they're technically breaches in that the legislation says that a response must be provided within 30 days, or you can extend for the extra 30 days or longer with authority from the commissioner. When there is absolutely no response after that, then we're in this deemed refusal mode. So it's a breach or contravention of the legislation. It's a failure to comply with the legislation.

Mrs. Pitt: Like, you're not even getting an answer back.

Ms Clayton: Well, not me. It's the applicants. It's applicants. In some of those cases, you know, there are very, very long delays. Up until recently these weren't brought to my office, and we've started to see them be brought to the office. We published the orders in part to shine a light on this issue. There are applicants who have waited two years, three years to get a response to an access request, which is just not on.

But does that have anything to do with solicitor-client privilege? No. The factors that tie to that are mostly outlined in the investigation reports that I mentioned that were issued in February of this year, and it really is due to a combination of factors, as I said: volume, complexity, some process issues, long sign-off periods that maybe don't need to be as long as they are, but also, very much, resourcing. We saw, I think, Exec Council and Public Affairs Bureau with a 200 per cent increase in volume over five years and no appreciable change in resources. The Justice department had, I think – don't quote me on this, but I think these were the numbers – something like an 80 per cent increase in cases and again no appreciable increase in resources. I'm very, very pleased that during those investigations, shortly after those investigations additional staff were hired.

But I think the investigations show, as I said in my message, that there's an entrenched problem here. I understand that this is my number one priority, but it's not everybody's number one priority. Having said that, you can't ignore it for years and years and years and expect that, well, you'd be able to meet legislated requirements.

Mrs. Pitt: So deemed refusals end up in court?

Ms Clayton: No. Deemed refusals come to my office, and they go to our adjudication unit. As I said, we are a quasi-judicial admin tribunal. We have the ability to issue binding orders. I can order the public body to provide a response, and if that response is not provided, then that order can be filed in court.

10:15

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. And that's a significant additional cost to the budget?

Ms Clayton: Well, if things go to court, yes, absolutely. We haven't gone to court on any of these deemed refusals so far.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. One quick question on phones, Chair, if I may. Just quickly back on the phones and the phone system, if the rest of the government doesn't actually switch phone systems, that will be savings in the budget. Is that correct?

Ms Clayton: Yeah.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. You don't have a timeline as to when this is going to switch over?

Ms Clayton: I don't, no. The folks in my office who have been having conversations with the GOA over this issue have said that this is a cost we need to budget for in this upcoming year, and we'll need to be able to unless we're going with the GOA. But, as I said,

I don't know enough about what's happening there to commit to that.

Mrs. Pitt: Yeah. Would you say that you have concerns with the privacy of the new phone system, the VOIP, is it?

Ms Clayton: I would say that there are definitely privacy and security issues with a system like that. It's very important that some sort of assessment be done to identify exactly what those risks are and to make sure that there are appropriate controls in place to mitigate those risks. I would not say that the government shouldn't go that way. I don't know if that assessment has been done. But that's why we do reviews of privacy impact assessments, to say, you know: what are you proposing to put in place, what work have you done to identify potential risks, and how are you going to mitigate those risks?

Mrs. Pitt: By law that has to be completed before . . .

Ms Clayton: No. Only under the Health Information Act. The Health Information Act is the only law where we have mandatory PIAs, which is why you see that we received 538 of them last year. It's not mandatory for government public bodies.

Mrs. Pitt: Interesting. Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Seeing no further questions, then, I would like to say thank you, Ms Clayton, to you and your staff for your presentation and for responding to our questions. For your information, the committee's decisions on the budget should be sent out early next week.

Thank you again for your work and for being with us this morning.

Ms Clayton: Thank you all very much.

The Chair: At this time, then, we had scheduled a 15-minute break. Given that we are running late this morning, I would ask that we maybe shave that down. Perhaps if we take five minutes and then return for the presentation from the Auditor General.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 10:18 a.m. to 10:25 a.m.]

The Chair: All right, then. Let's pick things back up. I'd like to begin by welcoming Mr. Saher, the Auditor General, and his colleagues to the meeting.

Mr. Saher, if you could begin by introducing your colleagues, and then I'd just ask that you keep your presentation to no more than 20 minutes in order to ensure that we have adequate time for questions from the committee. I'll hand the floor over to you.

Office of the Auditor General

Mr. Saher: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, committee members. Good morning to you all. On my right is Ruth McHugh, the office's chief operating officer, and on my left Loulou Eng, the office's senior financial officer. With those introductions, thank you for the opportunity to make some opening comments.

Earlier this week I read some research in which an interviewee said: it's not very glamorous and interesting to go through people's budgets. I'm here today with my colleagues Ruth McHugh and Loulou Eng to ask you to increase the OAG's budget. I trust that request makes your work today interesting.

The approved budget for the current year, which will end on March 31, 2018, is \$26,754,000. Our budget request for the

following fiscal year, the year ending March 31, 2019, which we are presenting to you today and which is shown on page 35 of our business plan, is for \$27,834,000. That is an increase of \$1,080,000. If you're thinking that the AG has become tone deaf – doesn't he appreciate the fiscal challenges the province faces, and didn't he listen to the Minister of Finance earlier this week? – let me tell you, as my client, that you need the services of your legislative audit office more than ever. When economic times are difficult, the work of officers of the Legislature and especially an audit office may be even more essential, thus justifying a budget increase.

As I listened to the Minister of Finance make his comments as he presented the second-quarter update and as I listened to the comments of opposition MLAs, these comments only serve to reinforce in my mind my conviction that to come here today and ask you for a budget increase was not only appropriate but, in fact, necessary.

In my introductory message to our business plan, which supports our budget request, I stressed that our purpose is to help all Members of the Legislative Assembly "to do their job well," and our budget request is designed to allow us to continue to fully serve you all impartially. A year ago we brought you a hold-the-line budget. I explained that we would continue to deliver value to you and the public service. By value I mean using our unique professional skills to add credibility to performance reporting, to share the knowledge we gain through our access to all activities of government, to advocate for an understanding of the root causes that impede better program delivery, and to provide practical, evidence-based recommendations for improvement. My point was and still is that you as legislators are funding value, not the operating costs of the OAG.

I'm here to make a case. I am not here to make a case that a \$1 million budget increase is a drop in the bucket. On the contrary, every dollar saved counts. I'm here to tell you that we view our request as an investment in the continued delivery of value. It's not that the OAG has a spending problem. The risk is that investment to date will be wasted by not maintaining what has been achieved. Also, there's the risk of not investing in the future.

Most people think of investment in terms of physical infrastructure, but equally important is what I call soft infrastructure, the essence of which is the delivery of specialized services. For us to continue to serve you well, we need an investment that will allow for longer term, sustainable success.

I'm now going to turn it over to Ruth McHugh to tell you how we deliver value.

Ms McHugh: Thanks very much, Merwan, and thanks to all of you for this opportunity to speak with you today about our annual results report, our business plan, and our strategic plan. I'm not going to spend time walking through any of the documents. You've had them all in advance, and we don't have much time. We want to stick to that 20-minute presentation time. Instead, I'll highlight a few key things in each report that I'd like to draw your attention to and then be sure we leave lots of time for your questions and comments.

Let's start with our results report for the year ended March 31, 2017. This report was presented to the chair and vice-chair of this committee at our annual audit exit meeting in June. There are a few things I'd like to highlight for you today from that report. First of all, you'll notice the report looks different than it has in the past. We think that this new format will be more engaging for our readers. It provides better information in a more contemporary way, and it helps paint a clearer picture of who we are and what we do.

We are truly passionate about our vision, making a difference in the lives of Albertans, and the way we do that, by identifying opportunities to improve the performance of and confidence in the

public service. To do that even more effectively, we've introduced a new value for our people to live at work by, and that value is diversity of thought. We encourage open minds, innovative thinking, and constructive challenge. There is tremendous statistical evidence to show that a diverse group of competent performers will outperform a homogeneous group of star performers every time. As you know, auditing is a rules-based discipline, so this is actually a really big deal for us.

The second thing I want to highlight is that our results report integrates financial and nonfinancial performance information. In fact, our performance measures are actually in our audited financial statements. In other words, it's the full menu. You'll know what I mean by that if you've read the Auditor General's message in the report, his introductory message on page 3 of the report. If you haven't had a chance to read it, I really would encourage you to do so. It's great.

Another point to draw to your attention is the fact that we did not achieve the resource allocation goal that we had set for ourselves in our business plan, but we know why we didn't achieve it and what we need to do to achieve it this year, and we're reporting those results to Albertans. Our message is that it's okay not to achieve every goal you set as long as you follow the results management framework that we set out in our results report on page 5; that is, as long as you set clear goals, you plan what you need to do to achieve those goals, you do the work and monitor your progress, and you learn from your results. That's the most important part. Learn from your results and incorporate everything you've learned into the next business cycle, and then report publicly on your genuine results. If you do those things, you're exercising effective governance, oversight, and accountability for results, the three pillars of our results management framework. That results management framework, as many of you know because we've talked to you about it before – we encourage all government entities to use the same framework.

We didn't achieve the milestone goal we set for ourselves in the year that ended this March, but we're definitely on track to achieve it for our coming March, so all good and all based on everything we learned by not achieving it last year.

Another thing I want to spend a bit of time with you on is a tremendous new development highlighted in our results report. We engaged key stakeholders in developing a risk-based, multiyear program of performance audit work. Engaging with stakeholders who are knowledgeable and invested in improved performance of the Alberta public service helps ensure that our work stays relevant both to the government and to Albertans. We completed the first program of work in March 2017, and we shared it publicly in April.

We're really pleased to have accomplished a tremendous amount of good work building for our future. We've strengthened the organization and delivery of critical report and corporate functions to support audit delivery. We've engaged leaders for the financial statement and performance audit lines of business to increase the relevance, reliability, and cost-effectiveness of our audits. We've implemented an office-wide discipline for executing on our strategic goals in the midst of the whirlwind of our day-to-day activities. We've recruited three new executives to provide leadership and focus to the crucial organizational pillars of people and culture, stakeholder engagement, and information and related technology.

We've engaged the Public Accounts Committee, the Deputy Ministers' Council, and a panel of pre-eminent external advisers to provide insight to the development and publication of our three-year program of performance audit work, that I talked about a little bit earlier. We've transformed the presentation and format of our audit reports to make them more accessible to all Albertans. We've

created a first-of-its-kind map for the development of a legislative auditor supported by a multiyear training curriculum, and we've embarked on a five-year initiative to become a data-driven organization and deliver in-depth insights and value to our audit entities and to Albertans.

10:35

We did all of this while also completing 150 financial statement audits this year, releasing nine reports on specified financial information, 10 performance audit reports, and delivering 28 new recommendations to improve and support the performance of the Alberta public service.

I'll close this results section by asking Merwan to tell you about what is, in my view, one of the best things we've achieved, our five-year strategic plan, *Charting Our Course in a Changing World*. Over to you, Merwan.

Mr. Saher: Thank you. Committee members, our strategic plan, entitled *Charting Our Course in a Changing World*, demonstrates that we have taken a view on the environment in which the OAG has to operate. If we are to have our work acted upon – in other words, those who pay for it see value in their independent legislative audit office – we must be certain that we have the means to deal with what we know is coming down the pike, and equally important is that we have identified what is likely to happen. We cannot be complacent and assume the future will take care of itself. Complacency is the biggest risk that we face.

I want to assure you that this strategic plan has been well thought out. It should provide comfort to all interested parties, including our staff in the office of the Auditor General and those contemplating a career in legislative auditing, that the office of the Auditor General of Alberta is determined to be an agile audit office in an age of disruption.

I've told my staff, my colleagues, that I firmly believe that they are the brightest cohort of legislative auditors that I have been privileged to work with in my long career at the office, but telling people that they are bright and talented is not enough. They must be able to see themselves in an office that knows where it has to go and that each person will actively have an opportunity to grow and actually contribute to achieving our vision, but they also need to see that we have the skill to execute the strategy and that we have the resource capacity to turn words into action.

Now Ruth will tell you about our business plan for the next year, essentially how we will execute on our strategic plan.

Ms McHugh: Thanks very much, Merwan. As Merwan has told you, our strategic plan will serve as the guide for our work and how we'll continue to deliver value in the coming years. It will inform our business planning, operational planning, audit portfolio planning, and the personal plans of every team member. There's a diagram on page 22 of our business plan that kind of shows you how all of these puzzle pieces and the different planning work we do fit together.

As legislative auditors it is our duty and our responsibility to help Alberta's public service ensure value for money and long-term sustainability of the programs and services vital to Albertans. To uphold this responsibility and to stay relevant, like government itself we must challenge our traditional ways of thinking, embrace new ideas, and focus on matters of significance to the people of Alberta.

Our strategic plan sets out a clear goal, to have our work acted upon. To achieve that goal, we've developed five strategies to guide our work over the next five years. We're going to engage our people in meeting future opportunities and challenges, strengthen our

relationship with the public service, engage our stakeholders and the public in our work, improve and advance government's integrated financial and nonfinancial performance reporting, and develop capacity to identify, analyze, and respond to disruptive events.

One of the key elements we'll use to guide us is the strategy map that's pictured on page 20 of the business plan. This map outlines each of the five strategies that we'll employ to have our work acted upon, and it describes the future state that we're aiming for and the key elements of each of those strategies. Communicating clearly what success looks like in each area of our plan will help us to follow our results management framework, which is also pictured on page 10 of our business plan, so you can tell that it's just our favourite thing, our results management framework. Having that clear map will help us to set and communicate measurable results and responsibilities, plan what needs to be done to achieve those results, do the work, monitor our progress, identify and evaluate the results and provide feedback for continuous improvement, and then publicly report on the results of our work.

Our next step is to break the five strategies into discrete work streams and sequenced work steps for which responsibility can then be assigned. We'll consider our resources and create a plan of action, and we'll create performance measures so we'll know whether we're achieving what we set out to deliver to Albertans. We know we need to be flexible and willing to course correct along the way as we learn from our efforts and apply that learning.

We will embrace innovation, encouraging our people to try new approaches and even learning from the occasional failure. People and organizations can learn as much or more from failure as they can from success. Innovation is key to an agile and effective audit office. We have an opportunity here to demonstrate innovation and thereby serve as a model to government and to the private sector. The accelerating pace of change places increasing pressure on Alberta's public service to adapt and anticipate policies, programs, and services to ensure it continues to best serve its citizens.

As your Auditor we must arm ourselves with a better understanding of the challenges facing our audit entities to ensure that we stay well informed and best equipped to provide relevant, timely, and reliable information in our role as trusted advisers. The business plan outlines the specific actions that we'll undertake to achieve each of the five strategies.

We've only got 20 minutes, so we've broken it up into five chunks of four minutes so that we can be sure that we cover everything. I'm sure my four minutes are up, but I do want to leave you with just one last thought as you contemplate our business plan and the budget request to implement it. We must take on the new initiatives outlined in our strategic plan to continue to deliver top-quality audits, to provide insights to our audit entities, and to improve public engagement in the business of government and have our work acted upon. The new initiatives are over and above our day-to-day work. They're incremental and ongoing changes to the way we work, and they're necessary to keep pace in this changing environment.

A recent internal analysis of the office's capacity has demonstrated that staff across the organization have little or no capacity to take on additional work. Operating in such a manner is not an effective or sustainable way to do business, and it may result in unintended risks: risks like missing important deadlines or rushing through the work and potentially not meeting quality expectations or simply being unable to deliver on core functions.

The office requires this investment of just over \$1 million from the prior year to increase our core capacity, mainly audit staff with a small portion of the investment for necessary audit support. We understand that the fiscal situation is very difficult, and like

Merwan alluded to, once again the public service has been challenged to do more with less. Our work identifies ways in which the public service can improve its efficiency and cost-effectiveness, and it identifies waste, dollars spent that do not contribute to achieving desired results. It helps government managers to deliver value for money. In this environment the need for a strong and effective audit office cannot be disputed. Our strategic plan sets our course for transforming the way we work to enhance our impact, ensuring that our work is acted upon.

As Merwan stated in his message to Members of the Legislative Assembly in the front of the business plan and earlier today, “We must ramp up the transformation [of] our strategic plan.” It is determined to be necessary for the continued success of this office. Our greatest risk is complacency. Success is never guaranteed, but failure is a certainty without rigorous process, capacity to execute, and enthusiasm. We’ve demonstrated in our strategic plan and in our business plan that we have the rigorous process. We’re enthusiastic because we believe that our service continues to be vital to the continued success of the people of Alberta. We’re asking you to approve the budget that will give us the capacity to execute.

Thank you.

Mr. Saher: Mr. Chairman, can I have four more minutes as part of the introductory, or would you rather . . .

The Chair: We have one more minute left in the presentation time. I’m willing to give a little bit extra, but I’d just ask you to be as quick as possible.

Mr. Saher: Yes. I’ll try and be as agile as I can.

What I really wanted to do here was to give you some evidence of the value that we do deliver. I know that one of the members here is a member also of the Public Accounts Committee, and some of this would be a bit of a refresher of the materials that we’ve delivered. Our audit products, in our opinion, in the last year, in the last six months specifically, have really helped the government find economies and efficiencies with respect to government programs and spending.

10:45

I was going to talk about our work on Alberta’s infrastructure capital planning processes. I also was going to talk about the work we did on Campus Alberta and the initiative to engender collaboration. We’ve reported on that. In terms of protections and safeguards for the most vulnerable Albertans, I was going to talk about work we’d done with respect to the office of the public guardian and trustee and also work that we’ve done with respect to AISH.

I also wanted to make mention of the work we’ve done in the last year on health, drawing particular attention to the office’s work delivered last May entitled Better Healthcare for Albertans, and then follow-up work that we reported on in October of this year with specific reference to primary care networks. Also, I wanted to mention food safety because I think that that work that we have done over the past few years and brought to a conclusion in this last year was really important. After all, nothing is more essential to good public health than food safety.

I’m just near the end. In the last year 40 of our recommendations to government have been implemented, and I think that that’s very important to bring to your attention. Our October 2017 public report – that’s our last public report – includes a summary status of the 159 outstanding recommendations from past reports.

Finally, I think I’ll just summarize with these words. We’ve presented to you today our five-year strategic plan and our business plan for the coming year. We have charted a clear course to allow

us to do our job, which is working for you. What we are asking of you today is the budget to be able to do that job.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Saher.

All right, then. I’ll open the floor to questions from members. I have Mrs. Pitt, Mr. Malkinson, and Mr. van Dijken.

Mrs. Pitt: Excellent. Thank you, Mr. Chair. You have a small increase here for computer hardware and software replacement due to existing vendor support expiring in 2018-2019. Are you actually getting new equipment? Are you switching vendors? What’s happening there?

Ms McHugh: New equipment.

Mrs. Pitt: New equipment because the stuff is just old?

Ms McHugh: Exactly.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay.

Ms McHugh: Yeah, and it’s no longer being supported. That is the key.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Like, it’s really, really old?

Ms McHugh: Well, it’s at the end of its support life.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay.

Mr. Saher: It depends on your views on old. It would be perfectly fine in my own home, but for an office where technology is – every minute where, you know, an auditor experiences a problem with a computer is a minute wasted in terms of being productively engaged in delivering audit service. From a business point of view, I think I’m just supporting what Ruth has said, that, yes, we have a fleet of equipment that is past its due date.

Mrs. Pitt: Are you switching phone systems?

Ms McHugh: Phone systems? I don’t think so.

Mrs. Pitt: No? Okay.

That’s all I have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Pitt.

I have Mr. Malkinson.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. You know, I’m on Public Accounts with you, Mr. Saher, so as always I very much appreciate the work that your office does. Thank you for doing that. I also appreciate that in your last two budgets you had been holding the line, and I think you’d be as aware as anyone that definitely the public service has been asked to do the same.

With this proposed increase, I mean – like I said, we appreciate the commitment to efficiencies. You’re looking to have some increases this year, and I know they’ve been well thought out, as you had in your presentation, so I’m just wondering if it’s fair to say that these increases, from what I gather from your presentation, didn’t seem to come from any particular, you know, increase or change in the office but just seemed to come from your current staff sort of maxing out their capacity. Would that be a fair summary?

Ms McHugh: I would say that that’s a fair summary. Our staff are already working at capacity. There are two things that essentially an audit office needs to do. It needs to conduct auditing – so our people need to be front-line auditors – but it also needs to ensure

that the practice of auditing is keeping up with the changes in the auditing practice of the world and the changes in the business of government. It isn't feasible for our people to be front-line auditors and provide sufficient time to moving the practice forward. We're recognizing that as we're embarking on our strategic plan, we're not going to be able to do it all unless we increase our capacity.

Mr. Malkinson: Okay. With that, you're asking for an additional \$1.08 million for additional audit staff. It looks like it's about six FTEs. I'm just wondering how that cost breaks down. How are these staff going to sort of alleviate the pressures that you're seeing in the office?

Ms McHugh: Sure. I'm happy to do that. Just before I tell you how the costs break down – I'll definitely do that – I'd like to give you a little bit of context.

As I was mentioning before, we have to ensure that our audit practice keeps pace with changes in the auditing profession and in the evolving complexity in the business of government. An example of the former is the increasing use of data analytics in auditing. Audits have traditionally focused on looking back, analyzing transactions and other data from past activities. While audits provide confidence that financial statements comply with standards governing their preparation, they do little to take further advantage of the data collected.

Using data analytics can make the analysis of the past more insightful. Rather than sampling transactions to test a snapshot of activities, audit organizations can now analyze all transactions, allowing them to identify anomalies and drill down on the items that show the greatest potential for being high risk. Auditors can create industry-specific testing models so that the routines can be run based on the particular characteristics of a company's business and, in our case, a government entity's business.

As government transforms its business processes and technology, including new business software and enterprise-wide data analytics, we must also transform how we audit to leverage the government's huge investment in these areas. We need advanced technology, data analytics, and knowledge of the government's new software and business processes in order to understand and audit the risks associated with those new processes. Incorporating technology, data analytics, and that specialized knowledge will also, of course, make our audits more efficient, but to accomplish this, we need resources.

So the cost estimates that you see are for new base salaries, employee benefits, professional dues and training, user-based IT licences, accommodation and supplies for approximately six senior audit positions, so all of those things combined for six senior audit positions.

Mr. Malkinson: Okay. You're expecting those to be senior auditors. These aren't mid-level or entry-level positions?

Ms McHugh: Right. Senior audit positions. Our audit team consists of engagement leaders, senior audit managers, front-line auditors. We've got a professional practices team. We have business leaders. So, yes, senior audit positions.

Mr. Saher: If I could just supplement there and give you some good news to illustrate the point that this is for senior auditors. I received word earlier this morning that we have eight new chartered – well, they haven't gotten their designations yet, but they have passed the professional examination, which will allow them to proceed to the designation. I mean, your investment in the office has actually generated eight new professionals. Our business model is that of a training office, that those individuals will grow within

the office, and we hope that most of them will stay. But the input that we need in terms of the thinking to move the practice forward requires more senior people.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I have one more question.

The Chair: A quick follow-up?

10:55

Mr. Malkinson: Yes. Just on that topic of staff, on page 33 you say that, you know, one of the strategic changes at the office of the Auditor General included "recruiting three new executives to provide leadership and focus to the critical organizational pillars of People and Culture, Stakeholder Engagement, and Information and Related Technology." I'm just wondering: were these executives filling vacant positions, or were they created positions?

Ms McHugh: Those were created positions. Those were in our business plan last year and were hired under that business plan. We did a reorganization to provide the best, I guess, backroom support, if you will, for running the most effective audit office. When I talked today about some of our results such as the new look of our reports to make them more accessible to Albertans, et cetera, that's our stakeholder engagement piece coming into action there. That was done in the prior year with no budget increase. We found efficiencies to bring those people in.

Mr. Malkinson: That was the question I was getting at, and that is good to hear.

Mr. Saher: Mr. Chairman, if I could just make one supplementary comment in relation to the deputy chair's questions?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Saher: Yes, we break down the request for increased resources. I mean, we are a people organization, so we're asking for the funds to finance skills. I can't state with certainty, but I believe that of the six individuals – I'll be bold – 50 per cent of them already work in the public sector. You know, if we are granted the funds to make this investment, I'm going to ask that we try very hard to source that from within the public service.

In my interaction with those that we audit, people will often come up to me and say: do you think that there might be an opportunity for me to work in the audit office? They're not expressing dissatisfaction necessarily with where they are in the public service. I think many are saying to themselves that this would be a career enhancement for them to be able to put on their resumes, that not only have they worked in front-line public service delivery, but they've also seen government through the eyes of an external audit office looking in.

I just make this point, that I believe that some of the skills that the office requires are, in fact, potentially available to us within the public service. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for being with us today. And thank you for your years of service to Albertans, and good wishes on the next stage in life for you, Auditor General.

On the strategic value investment that I believe the office is asking for at this time, through the presentation it appears to me that we're looking at a slight change in the focus of the office and the original intent of the establishment of the office. Where the intent was to – and this is not bad – provide accountability so that you

could provide assurance to Albertans that government is not hiding stuff and is being very transparent, this investment is to move the office further into being an internal auditor that would assist in the strategic management decisions going forward.

Ruth, you're looking very confused by the statement, but when we look at your answer just previously, it was to allow information data to be collected to allow decision-makers to be able to make a decision based on the information. This is very critical, that we have information and that we're able to have the data-driven ability to measure to provide information to make good decisions, management decisions, to provide confidence to Albertans that the public sector is making a wise decision.

I see that the evolution of the office is starting to change. We've seen it over the last number of years, where we're focusing on and trying to focus more on and be driven towards performance auditing and the like, and that's to assist in good decisions. The office is now asking for an investment, an increased investment, and it's showing to me that it's focused on trying to inform better and more informed decisions. I guess I've got lots of questions, but would that be an accurate assessment of how we're seeing an evolution continue to happen here?

Mr. Saher: Yes. I believe you've done a very good job of précising, if you will, the intent of our strategy. Let me just use data, for example. One of the strategies is to deal with disruption, and that disruption is both in the world that we audit and very prominent in our world as auditors. The way that we audit – and Ruth alluded to this earlier – is changing. We are being encouraged as auditors to look in at, if you will, complete data sets. We now have the technology to examine a transaction stream one hundred per cent. Rather than the old-fashioned way of picking a sample and, depending on the results of the sample, then extrapolating that and taking a view on the whole, you know, are we reasonably certain that this whole data set portrays what it purports to?

We now have the tools – and this is not something new; we've had these tools – and we have been using them as best we can. Those tools are developing such that we, really, now can look in at complete data sets, not samples, identify anomalies, and focus our audit efforts on those anomalies. The way we look at data sets may not be the same way that management should be looking at them. So the added value to us is that we can gain the evidence to give us the support we need to give our audit opinion, but also we can add value by bringing to management's attention: "As we look at your data, this is what we see. Is this how you see it? Have you thought about it this way?"

Without a doubt, the expectations of auditors are changing. As far as data is concerned, I believe that we have to be advocates, we have to be leaders in encouraging government departments and agencies to use their own data in a different way. This is definitely happening. I can tell you that I'm the auditor of ATB Financial. ATB Financial is using its knowledge of the data that it has on the customers it deals with to drive its business forward, but what's happening in banking really needs to happen, in my opinion, more vigorously in other areas.

Just in summary, on the Auditor General Act, the fact that it has not had a major change in 40 years I think is evidence of how well it was articulated back in the late '70s. It tells the audit office what to report. It does not tell us how to do that work, and I think it's for that reason that it allows for a natural evolution of the way in which the office should do its work.

Quite frankly, we are in a world – the evidence is there both internationally and within the Canadian context – where those who pay for the services of auditors are entitled to expect more than they have ever received in the past. That really is what our strategic plan

is about. We know what the expectations are, and we want to be certain that we can meet those expectations ahead of the curve rather than being an organization that's playing catch-up, if I can put it that way.

The Chair: Your follow-up, Mr. van Dijken.

11:05

Mr. van Dijken: Yes. Thank you. I do believe that you've already touched on what my next question was going to be. My question was on whether or not the legislation had to be revisited in order to expand the scope of the office and if that's the best angle to use. When we look at departments that are very large – Health, Education, that type of thing – is it incumbent on those individual ministries to be establishing internal audit within their ministries as opposed to the Auditor General being the oversight of all ministries?

Mr. Saher: Internal audit is crucially important in any organization. The decision as to the amount of it and the skill brought should be a decision of the management group and those who have oversight. In all of the significant agencies for which the office of the Auditor General is the auditor – ATB Financial, AIMCo, AGLC – all of these Crown corporations have vigorous internal audit departments, and I'd include in that the large postsecondary institutions. Central government is served by corporate internal audit services, which is the government's internal audit service. Without a doubt, those who have oversight have to decide how they get assurance that financial systems and business systems are both well designed and operating effectively. It's our job as an external auditor to draw attention to those oversight groups if we feel that they're not getting sufficient evidence internally.

It should never be the external auditor's job to do the work of internal audit. When I go back to the start of my career, there was much too much of that going on. The audit office sort of became a de facto supplement or a way that government could in fact get the information it needed. But now internal audit is there, and it's understood what it should be doing. As external auditors our business approach is to identify it, satisfy ourselves that it is working well, and then rely on it, to the extent possible, without simply saying that it exists and therefore everything it did must be okay. I mean, if we can satisfy ourselves that the work of internal audit is well planned, well executed, then we will rely on it because there's only one person paying for internal and external audit, and we believe they deserve to have internal and external audit collaborating. There's only one funder.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll go to Mr. Kleinsteuber, and we can come back to you, Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Chair. Just back on the business plan there, Mapping Our Journey, on page 36 of the budget submission you are requesting an additional \$15,000 for advisory services. I'm wondering what sort of services fall in this category and why you might anticipate this item being more costly in the next fiscal year.

Ms McHugh: Advisory services are the way we term subject matter expertise. If we are doing an audit on infection prevention and control in the Alberta health system, for example, we would have doctors, probably, on our adviser panel. We use external expertise. Depending on what our program of work tells us the audit work needs to be each year, that's how we budget what our advisory

services will need to be. So it's dependent on the audit work that we need to do.

Does that help answer?

Mr. Kleinsteuber: I think so, yeah. It sounds good.

One more if I may. Also on page 36, the combined strategic plan there, the estimates show a 54 per cent increase under furniture and equipment. I was wondering if you could explain why that increase has been requested.

Ms McHugh: Loulou, do you remember what that's for?

Mr. Saher: Actually, there isn't an increase.

Ms Eng: There's no increase. It's just the funding available for furniture, equipment.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: I see it here now. Okay. It's consistent, then. I see where that came from.

The Chair: Excellent. Do you have anything further, Mr. Kleinsteuber?

Mr. Kleinsteuber: No. That's fine. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. van Dijken, you had a further question?

Mr. van Dijken: Yes. Thank you. Just going back to the era that you spoke about and crossing the line, this is the first that I've heard the term "corporate internal audit service." It's interesting to me that I've learned something today that helps me to understand that that level of internal audit is occurring. It begs the question, then: is the investment in the Auditor General's office to expand the scope of what would be possibly increased performance, data driven, helping management to make informed decisions? Is that the right spot to make the investment?

I do believe that the office of the Auditor General is highly regarded in being able to assure Albertans that the information is being brought forward in an independent manner and one that gives Albertans confidence. I see that that's a part of the strategic plan, to engage with the public, engage with the public sector. Help me to understand that this is the right space to actually do the investment as opposed to the investment in internal corporate services.

Mr. Saher: I'll do my best to try to make the case that this is the right place to make the investment. I don't have the data to say whether the internal should have more or should have less. The point that I make is that with internal and external audit, although it's professionals looking in at similar business activities, it's really: to whom do they report? Corporate internal audit services is an internal audit department. Its work is made available to us, but it's not made available to the public. The fundamental difference here is that we are asking for an investment in the external audit which is designed to enable us to be well positioned to give our client, which is the members of the Assembly and, through you, Albertans, the assurance that you need.

Essentially, we would never compromise on our standards. I mean, if we don't have the resources to execute our program of work, the only option we have is to cut back on that program of work, because we will not compromise on quality.

In the end, I think we're saying that as we move forward into an increasingly challenging era for the public service – nothing is static – it's more and more difficult to deliver quality programs, to understand whether or not you are in fact being successful, which is really one of the things that we advocate through our performance

reporting. Ruth has made the point that performance reporting is not so that you can beat yourself up or have other people beat you up; it's to learn. We believe that we can be of huge assistance to the public service in that critical function of measuring performance.

In summary, I think we are asking for this investment, and I do believe that you would be directing it correctly on the grounds that you are directing it to the external, independent voice that will provide you with assurance that, to the extent that matters can be improved, they are being identified and that recommendations are being made.

The Chair: Anything further, Mr. van Dijken?

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. Just a follow-up to that, two questions in one. One of the strategic goals is: "strengthen our working relationship with the public service." So the question needs to be asked. The current working relationship with public sector: is that acceptable at this time?

The other question that I do believe needs to be asked of the external auditor is: are you able to do your work without any undue government interference in your work?

11:15

Mr. Saher: Okay. I'll take the last bit first. Absolutely. If I ever felt that anyone was deliberately seeking to interfere in the office's ability to do its work, I would bring that to the attention of this committee and the Assembly as a whole. I want to assure you that there is no interference in our ability to do our work.

With respect to relationships I believe we have a very good professional relationship with the public service of Alberta. I'm making an assertion. That's my belief. You would have to test that elsewhere. One might be thinking: well, if it's good, that's fine, isn't it? We believe that, like anything in life, it could be better in the sense that – really, in our strategic plan we're saying that we would like to build a relationship in which the public service would feel that it could come to us.

In fact, the Auditor General Act, in one of its latter sections, has a section that says that government departments can in fact consult with, discuss with the audit office an intended course of action. It's a section that is not often used, but actually it has huge potential for government managers to consult with us early in a process, you know, a big endeavour: "We're thinking of going about it this way. If you were to audit this, what are the criteria you would be using to audit?" It's much more effective, much more economical to seek out an auditor's views earlier.

But over time there's been a sort of general sense, often too much on the auditor's side, that conversations of that nature somehow put an auditor into a conflict situation. If you've provided advice, can you be a good auditor of your own advice? When we get involved in those situations, we're absolutely certain that we are not overstepping the mark, that we're not compromising ourselves. I mean, we do it and do want more of those conversations for the benefit of Albertans so that, in fact, money can be saved.

The Chair: All right. We are a bit over time. I know I do have at least one additional questioner left. I realize that it's always a good opportunity to speak with Mr. Saher and learn more about his office, but if we can keep our focus on issues that would pertain directly to our vote later today on the budgeted business plan, I think that would help to focus and make best use of our time as well.

I have Mrs. Aheer.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much. I just have a question with regard to the performance audit delivery process. You have in here, I think, on page 16, where you talk about qualification, like, with respect to

how that qualification goes, that sometimes it goes beyond a fiscal year based on whatever group it is that you happen to be auditing at the time. My question is actually around where you speak about: “Potential audits may not progress to an actual audit.” I’m just a little – I don’t know if “concerned” is the right word. But based on the impact that that can have on any particular group, especially when it looks like dollars are being directed that way, why would it be that you would decide not to fully audit or potentially go down that road?

Mr. Saher: The decision is always made in terms of scarce resources. We are always assessing which audit would have the most impact at a particular point in time. It’s not that we have conceived of an audit and invested time in satisfying ourselves that we could audit it, that we could create the criteria to audit it, and then suddenly said: gosh, we were completely wrong. It’s not that. What we’re saying in this program of work – in refreshing the program of work, we are constantly making a fresh decision. Given the state of the economy today, given the state of skills within our office we use our professional judgment. Although it seemed like a good audit, we will put it back into the hopper, if you will, because there’s something that is manifestly more important to do.

Mrs. Aheer: With your strategic plan, then, are you hoping to have different outcomes with regard to engagement with people and the deputy ministers and all of those people to help expand that scope within those?

Mr. Saher: Yes. I mean, to be honest . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Because that’s sort of the return on investment with respect to how you report back, right?

Mr. Saher: Well, to be honest, one of the key inputs to that decision-making that we’re talking about, the notion of qualifying audits to be launched and actually started and front-line auditors out there doing work: we have engaged with the Deputy Ministers’ Council . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Right. You had mentioned that.

Mr. Saher: Yeah.

. . . a subset of it, and we listen very carefully. In point of fact, I know of input I’ve heard which has actually shaped – I mean, in fact, deputies have said: we don’t think this is the most useful use of your time. That’s not our auditee shaping our minds. That’s us saying: guys, you know best where your problems are, where you feel the audit office could be helpful to you. So that input is very useful as well.

Mrs. Aheer: My last follow-up on that is just with respect to what Mr. van Dijken has said in terms of government oversight of the decisions that you’re making and how you go forward with that qualification. So many of these are obviously needing an audit in terms of understanding budgets and all of these other kinds of things and efficiencies within each of these. That’s why I’m asking, because of that return on investment to the public, which you’re trying to satisfy, right?

Mr. Saher: Well, I think that the proof is in the fact that we have committed to make our program of work public. We have requested Albertans to engage with us, to give us their point of view if they think our priorities are not correct. We’ve engaged with the Public Accounts Committee for the first time this year. We are asking all external parties to look in at our program of work. They will see shifts in it. We’re wholly amenable to, you know, our clients’ point

of view: we don’t understand why you decided in your professional judgment to take this audit and shunt it back. We will always be able to explain and are happy to explain why we will have made that choice. So I think that there is correct oversight, those looking in at what we choose to do. We exercise our judgment, but as we preach to others, we expect to be challenged and are happy to be challenged.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you for that.

Ms McHugh: If I could just add to the chair’s point about, you know, the vote that you’ll need to do later on today or whenever you do it. It really is about capacity. There is so much good work. I had some examples I had hoped we had time to share with you of some of the audits in the hopper for qualification right now. I mean, they’re amazing and will do amazing things for this province.

But it’s about capacity. We recognize that the time you really need your audit office is when everyone else is struggling. We know that this is an awkward time to be asking for more. We know it’s awkward for you to consider that, but if we don’t ask and later we have to say, “We couldn’t do this one or we couldn’t do that one because we’re lacking capacity,” then you could rightly say, “Why didn’t you tell us you were short of capacity?” Although we’re in these really tight financial times – and the context of that is clearly understood by this office – our job is to give you the best advice we can, and this business plan and budget request is our best advice to you.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much. I appreciate it.
Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: All right. Well, we are running a bit over time, but I always appreciate hearing from Mr. Saher and your office and your staff. Thank you for your time today, your presentation. For your information, the committee’s decisions on the office’s budget should be sent out early next week.

Mr. Saher: Thank you very much, everyone. Thank you for your time.

Ms McHugh: Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. We’ll take a brief moment while Ms Ryan and her staff come in, but I’d ask that members please remain in the room so that we can move forward as quickly as possible.

[The committee adjourned from 11:25 a.m. to 11:27 a.m.]

The Chair: All right. Thank you, everyone.

I’d like to welcome Ms Ryan and her staff from the offices of the Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner. Again, my apologies. The committee is running a bit long this morning, but of course we want to be sure that we’re having the opportunity to have good, fulsome conversation. If you could keep your presentation to about 20 minutes for each office, that would leave the best amount of time for questions from committee members. I was thinking that perhaps we could begin, then, with the office of the Ombudsman.

Office of the Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner

Ms Ryan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It’s a pleasure to be with you here today for what will be my first presentation to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices as Alberta’s Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner. I’m joined here by Ted Miles, Acting Deputy Ombudsman and office of the Public Interest Commissioner, and Suzanne Richford, director of corporate services. Both will

have an opportunity to present today and answer any questions that you have. We will present each office's annual report, business plan, and budget estimates separately. I would expect that, excluding questions, our presentations for the two offices will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes total.

By way of an introduction, let me tell you a little bit about our offices. On September 1, 1967, the office of the Alberta Ombudsman opened its doors, with George McClellan serving as the first Alberta Ombudsman; 2017 marks 50 years in operation, and the office hasn't stopped working towards improving government services. Today the Alberta Ombudsman provides oversight of the provincial government to ensure fair treatment through independent investigations, recommendations, and education.

The office of the Public Interest Commissioner opened June 1, 2013, and provides oversight of disclosures and investigations where complaints of wrongdoing or reprisal are identified.

The Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner offices are located together in Edmonton and Calgary. As separate and independent offices of the Alberta Legislature the only crossover that exists relates to shared administrative services such as finance, human resources, legal counsel, communications, and IT. Currently there are 27 Ombudsman positions, with 20 in Edmonton and seven in Calgary. There are six Public Interest Commissioner positions, with four in Edmonton and two in Calgary.

Common messages we intend to make clear in both presentations are how seriously we approach our investigative work and how we continue to seek opportunities to do more with less. For example, recently we saw an opportunity to leverage existing resources within senior management. In mid-August we began a pilot program to assess the feasibility of a joint role, a merge between the positions of director of Public Interest Commissioner and the Deputy Ombudsman. This opportunity presented itself with the retirement in July of Joe Loran, who served as Deputy Ombudsman prior to his retirement. In a similar fashion to the joint roles I hold, my colleague Ted Miles has expanded his prior role as the director of the Public Interest Commissioner's office to now include the duties of the Deputy Ombudsman.

On that note I will now speak to the annual report for my office as Ombudsman. The 2016-2017 annual report for the office of the Alberta Ombudsman describes a productive year and one of significant change. Over the past year our office has put significant focus into preparing for the expansion of our jurisdiction to include Alberta's municipalities. Late in 2016, with the passage of Bill 21, the Modernized Municipal Government Act, it was confirmed that the Ombudsman Act would be amended to include municipalities within our jurisdiction.

Significant work was undertaken by a committee in our office dedicated to preparing for municipal oversight. All areas of the operation were considered for improvement. The leadership and committee looked at investigative procedures, the organization's structure, job descriptions, training, improvement to information management, case management technology, outreach, communications to municipalities, and more. We consulted with other provincial ombudsmen to identify best practices and methods that we can employ as a proactive approach. Ombudsmen investigators have attended events organized by municipal associations and travelled with staff from Municipal Affairs to present at regional meetings. These activities support the purpose of enhancing our role and how we anticipate the changes to the Ombudsman Act will affect municipalities.

On June 26, 2017, the final amendments to the Municipal Government Act were proclaimed into law, confirming municipal governments are subject to our oversight as of April 1, 2018.

Because the Alberta Ombudsman is an impartial and neutral independent office of the Legislative Assembly, we are uniquely positioned to accept complaints related to municipalities. We look forward to approaching this work in a collaborative manner and, when possible, pursuing early resolution that considers both the complainant and the municipal authority. In the coming months we will continue to prioritize outreach to enhance the understanding of the Ombudsman, both with municipal authorities and the public.

Of note: given the expanded jurisdiction, we expect complaints to increase next year by a minimum of 30 per cent.

In parallel to this work we continue to promote fair administrative decisions and work collaboratively with complainants and provincial government departments, boards, and commissions, just as we have done for 50 years.

Our annual report includes a statistical overview of our workload over the previous fiscal year. We received 4,554 complaints that resulted in 132 new investigations being initiated. The most common complaints received were from the following organizations: correctional services, maintenance enforcement program, Community and Social Services, AISH, Alberta Works complaints and Appeals Secretariat, and the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board. We have also provided examples of the cases our office investigated through 2016-2017. These case summaries provide a snapshot of the types of complaints our office received as well as our findings and responses.

With that, I will now invite Ted Miles to speak to the Ombudsman business plan.

Mr. Miles: Thank you, Marianne.

As Marianne and I are new to our roles of Ombudsman and deputy, it was critical to draw upon the experience of the existing staff in developing this business plan for our office. It was important to examine and understand past goals and achievements, determine successes, and identify new approaches to advance efficiencies. We tempered the drive to improve while remaining mindful not to diminish the great ongoing and effective work of the office.

In a moment I'll share with you the business plan and key strategies which will lead our work over the next fiscal year, but before doing so, I'd like to elaborate on some of the preparations Marianne described regarding municipalities and the increased workload we expect.

11:35

We do see our greatest challenge in the 2018-19 fiscal year being the growth of our jurisdiction from approximately 220 authorities to now include Alberta's 354 municipalities. Although the net effect this will have on the workload of the office is not entirely known, we are confident in the actions we have taken to prepare. Some of the research and analysis we have completed includes a jurisdictional scan across the country with provincial ombudsmen who have already seen this change. We've conducted in-person interviews with ombudsman offices in Saskatchewan and Ontario. We've been identifying training requirements both internally for our own investigators as well as for municipal chief administrative officers, or CAOs, as to the Ombudsman's role and functions.

We developed a survey to municipalities to expand our understanding of their needs and concerns. We've conducted research to collect information regarding contacts and relevant local accountability officers; the development of an early resolution process, which we see as streamlining our initial complaint intake and analysis functions; and further, we've examined our existing investigative capacity and have restructured our operational teams to better front-end load our intake process, paving the way for an

enhanced early resolution process and reducing the need for more formal investigations.

However, these changes do not take into consideration the expected demands and pressures we will encounter as a consequence of the expansion of our jurisdiction. According to our analysis and the data we've collected, we anticipate at minimum a 30 per cent increase in our caseload in the first year. As a result, we will require additional funding to meet this challenge, and this is reflected in our business plan and budget. With the changes we've already made, plus an increase in required funding, we see ourselves better positioned to more effectively respond wherever our demands and priorities are the greatest.

At this point I will direct your attention to the business plan, where we have identified three outcomes, each guided by several key strategies to lead our work over the next fiscal year. They are: the Ombudsman will conduct timely and thorough investigations of decisions and actions of authorities to ensure Albertans are being treated fairly; secondly, fairness is promoted to Albertans and authorities through education and outreach; and finally, the Ombudsman provides effective oversight of public services through continued growth and development of best practices.

This first outcome focuses on providing an excellent service to Albertans. Some of the key strategies include constantly assessing our investigative practices to ensure our effectiveness and efficiency, attempting to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity, and identifying issues of a systemic nature and initiate investigations where required.

The second outcome is directed at education and awareness of our office. This objective will be achieved by increasing our meetings with provincial administrative heads and CAOs of municipalities; increasing the number of presentations, mobile intake tours, and educational seminars; and finally, modifying our website and social media content to ensure our most relevant information is available.

Our third outcome relates to best practices to effectively perform our mandate. We will achieve this through continued assessment and revision of our corporate structure, adaptation of business processes to incorporate municipal jurisdictions, ensuring personnel have or receive appropriate training to effectively perform the responsibilities of their positions, and review and revise internal policies to ensure scope and relevance. We've also established performance measures to assess our achievement for each of the intended outcomes identified.

In conclusion, we view the 2018-19 fiscal year as the most significant year of growth to our jurisdiction in the history of the Alberta Ombudsman office. We are approaching this with careful and measured planning, seeking opportunities to promote efficiencies while maintaining an acceptable level of service.

With that, thank you. I'll turn it over to Suzanne to speak to the budget for the office.

Ms Richford: Thank you, Ted.

The two-page budget document contains a lot of information pertaining to three fiscal years: actual expenses compared to budget for last year, which is 2016-17; the current year, 2017-18, forecasted expenses compared to budget; and our budget request for 2018-19. As such, I'd like to provide you with a very high-level summary of these budget documents.

For 2016-17 our office's actual expenses were less than the budget by \$128,000. This surplus was primarily due to our office requiring fewer contracted services than anticipated in the budget. For the current fiscal year, 2017-18, we are forecasting a surplus of

\$131,000. This forecasted surplus is a result of unplanned personnel vacancies that we have been able to manage for in the short term.

I'll now comment on our 2018-19 budget estimate. Each year the Ombudsman's budget estimate is developed based on the following parameters: zero-based budgeting, all expenses must be justified on an annual basis; results-based budgeting, reviewing program delivery to enhance or eliminate deliverables; reviewing the current fiscal year's actual expenditure forecast; and consideration of Alberta's economic and fiscal climate.

Due to the operational efficiencies, as previously described by Marianne and Ted, we will not require an increase to our 2018-19 budget for our current operations. However, we will require an additional \$625,000 in 2018-19 to fund operations related to our expanded jurisdiction. It is important to note that in our discussions with the executive management of Municipal Affairs it is our understanding that Municipal Affairs will be reducing their 2018-19 spending target by the \$625,000, which will indeed offset our budget increase. As a result, the provision of Ombudsman services to municipalities will be a net neutral cost to Albertans.

Our request for an additional \$625,000 will fund our assessed requirement to hire five new entry-level investigators; furniture, equipment, and computers for these staff; additional requirements for some technical services; printing services for new promotional material; increased travel to educate municipalities regarding Ombudsman services; and municipality-related training for all staff. Now, despite a minimum increase of 30 per cent to our workload, we believe we will be able to manage with the \$625,000, which really represents an increase of 17 per cent.

As all Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner employees are non-unionized, we have been subject to a salary freeze since April 1, 2016. As announced on Monday, this freeze will now extend to September 30, 2019. There are no salary increases in the 2018-19 budget.

The offices of the Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner in June of 2013 signed a formal agreement to recognize the services provided by Ombudsman employees to the Public Interest Commissioner. This shared services concept has allowed the Public Interest Commissioner's office to provide core services without hiring additional staff or duplicating services. The cost of the services provided to the Public Interest Commissioner are included in their operating vote in their operating expenses budget and are treated as a cost recovery for the Ombudsman. Therefore, cash is not exchanged, and the general revenue fund is not affected.

In 2018-19 the Ombudsman's cost recovery will increase as the newly combined position that Marianne was referring to of the Deputy Ombudsman, Deputy Public Interest Commissioner – his services will be provided, some of them, to the Public Interest Commissioner, and that will be a cost recovery to our office.

That's it for the Ombudsman's budget.

Marianne.

[Mr. Malkinson in the chair]

Ms Ryan: Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: That's me.

Ms Ryan: Okay. I'm wondering if you would like to have questions now addressed to the Ombudsman or if you would like us to proceed to the Public Interest report and then have questions for both at the end.

11:45

The Deputy Chair: I will test the room, but I think, generally speaking, it would make sense to go through both your reports and

then have questions from there. Looking at the nodding in the room, I think that's the way to go.

Thank you.

Ms Ryan: Okay. Then I'll proceed with the annual report of the Public Interest Commissioner. This year marks the fourth fiscal year of operation for the Public Interest Commissioner's office. Our jurisdiction includes approximately 285 entities. This includes government of Alberta departments, agencies, boards, and commissions as well as postsecondary institutions, health-sector agencies, including AHS, and school authorities.

Our objective as an independent office of the Legislature is to provide employees of the public sector an avenue for safe external disclosure, professional, unbiased investigations, and to deliver strong but reasonable recommendations for improvement to entities when wrongdoing occurs. In parallel with this objective, we are striving to cultivate a culture within the overall public sector that encourages public servants to report a wrongdoing in their workplace and for managers and supervisors to take appropriate action and preventative steps concerning wrongdoing, ensuring that the whistle-blower does not suffer a reprisal.

Our annual report provides information and articles about how our office works, including the benefits of an effective whistle-blower protection policy and how the gaps in employee protection will be addressed by forthcoming amendments. The report also shares statistical results, provides a strategic plan update, offers perspective on the fairness and effectiveness of anonymous disclosures, and several case summaries from the previous year's work.

Our case summaries are presented in a way that demonstrates our commitment to balancing the confidentiality of whistle-blowers and public interest. Cases range from allegations of noncertified use of teachers in a private school to allegations of gross mismanagement of public funds to allegations of improper distribution of income support benefits to alleged interference in a procurement process. During this reporting period the office of the Public Interest Commissioner opened 213 files. We identified 15 disclosures of wrongdoing and six complaints of reprisal. All were fully investigated. These statistics were similar to the previous year's.

Of the investigations concluded this year, there were no findings of wrongdoing or reprisal as identified under the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act. We found many instances where things went wrong within organizations. However, none were deemed to have reached the high threshold of wrongdoing as defined in the act.

I'd like to further note that even in cases where a finding of wrongdoing or reprisal as defined under the act does not occur and official recommendations by the Public Interest Commissioner are not made, observations regarding breaches of policy, mismanagement, or code of conduct issues are highlighted for the entities. In this way, we have observed that many positive improvements can be made.

I have been briefed on the proposed recommendations and amendments to the act by the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee this past year. The committee's work resulted in a total of 21 recommendations and suggested amendments. Although these amendments have received royal assent, they have not yet been proclaimed. Our office continues to assist in the development of regulations in consultation with the Department of Justice.

We are uncertain as to the impact these changes will have on our workload when the amendments come into force early in 2018. Although all of the amendments will impact the office in some manner, there are a few which give me more concern than others as they have the potential to dramatically affect our performance capacity. They are the expansion of the definition of gross

mismanagement or wrongdoing under the act to include systemic bullying and harassment in the definition.

[Mr. Shepherd in the chair]

The amendments have added a new category of entities subject to our jurisdiction, which are referred to as prescribed service providers. Based on our work with Justice, we expect that these entities will include organizations that provide services relating to a client's health or physiological well-being; for example, seniors' residences, group homes, or mental health facilities. Also, our jurisdiction will be expanded to include Members of the Legislative Assembly and their offices.

In advance of the changes, we have commenced a number of initiatives, including educating chief and designated officers regarding the amendments. However, significant work will be required once the amendments are proclaimed.

With that, I'll invite Ted to present the plan for the office of the Public Interest Commissioner.

Mr. Miles: Thanks, Marianne. Similar to the Ombudsman plan, the plan for the office of the Public Interest Commissioner also identifies high-level outcomes, strategies, and performance measures. The outcomes we're striving to achieve for this office are that all public-sector employees recognize the office of the commissioner as an avenue for reporting wrongdoing in the public service and are aware of the protections afforded to them under the act; that government departments, public entities, offices of the Legislature, and prescribed service providers are aware of the legislation and take steps to ensure its internal whistle-blower protection policies conform to the amended legislation; and that the office of the commissioner remains consistent in service improvements.

The first outcome focuses on education and awareness, a significant cornerstone of our program in that it is critical that all public-sector employees have an awareness of our office and that they have the confidence to raise concerns of wrongdoing. Initiatives identified for this outcome include maintaining an outreach strategy to heighten employee awareness and understanding, working with chief and designated officers to promote a supportive culture for whistle-blowers and ensuring information concerning the act is widely communicated to their staff, and enhancing the commissioner's online presence through website optimization and social media.

The second outcome relates to working with our current jurisdictional entities to ensure they understand and comply with the forthcoming amendments to the act. Some of the initiatives we will be undertaking are providing information and education sessions for managers and senior executives, providing tools and resources to chief and designated officers to assist in redesigning procedures for reporting wrongdoing, and providing educational sessions directly to employees around the province.

Our third outcome relates to providing excellent service. Our primary objective in this regard will be on improving investigative efficiencies to meet timelines, providing professional development opportunities, and expanding our networking and relationship-building to improve collaboration and reduce roadblocks. As mentioned earlier, we anticipate the amendments to the act and associated regulations to be proclaimed sometime early in 2018. The amendments may have significant impact on this program due to the expansion of the jurisdiction and mandate, but because we're unclear as to the full impact of the amendments, we're not seeking any additional funding or resources at this time.

Thank you. I'll turn it over to Suzanne, who will provide you with more information concerning the budget.

Ms Richford: Thank you, Ted. Consistent with the Ombudsman's budget planning process, we do apply the same principles in developing the budget of the Public Interest Commissioner's office. For this year we are forecasting a surplus of approximately \$116,000, and with the merging of the director's position with that of the Deputy Ombudsman's, we will realize a \$115,000 reduction in our 2018-19 budget. This also results in a reduction for the Public Interest Commissioner, where full-time employees will be reduced from six to five. All other costs remain at the 2017-18 forecasted level.

Thank you. I'll now turn it over to Marianne.

Ms Ryan: Just some concluding remarks. Although we are asking for a 17 per cent increase to the 2017-2018 Ombudsman budget, we will continue to assess and look for efficiencies in our operations. It's an exciting and uncertain time for both offices, and I look forward to continuing our work serving Albertans.

In conclusion, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the chair and members of the standing committee for your time and consideration of the information we have shared here today.

The Chair: Thank you to Ms Ryan and her staff for the presentations and the information.

At this point, then, I'd like to open the floor to questions from members. At present I have Mrs. Littlewood.

11:55

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Chair, and thank you very much for joining us today in your new role. I'll apologize on behalf of the committee for the lateness in our start. We do have a lot of offices that are presenting budgets today, so we will be as helpful with time as we can.

On the subject of the business plan and budget for the Ombudsman office – I know it's funny to have, you know, two hats, and I don't know if you can particularly switch them off totally one way or the other – of course, the changes will add 350 municipalities, as you were saying, to the workload of the office, with a 30 per cent increase in the workload. I'm just wondering if you can elaborate on how you'll maintain timely investigations with the increased work.

Ms Ryan: We commenced a work project several months ago to look at how we could provide greater efficiencies in our investigations, and we formed a committee to do that. We were pretty cognizant of the timeline with the changes to the legislation and municipalities possibly coming onboard, so we dedicated a lot of work to making sure that if and when the municipalities were added to our jurisdiction, we would be ready to go. It included a lot of consultation with other provinces. Most of the other provinces, I should add, already have the municipalities as part of the Ombudsman jurisdiction, so we consulted with them to get a sense of what we could expect, and then, based on that, we reorganized our team structure within the Ombudsman office.

Our plan is to front-end load, so to speak, the complaints when we receive them from the municipalities so that we can quickly decide or quickly determine how much work is required. If it's something that can be resolved fairly quickly, you know, it will be processed as quickly as possible, but if it is something that requires longer term investigations, we have a process in place with our analysts and seasoned investigators, again, to try to handle those investigations in as timely a manner as possible.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you.

Just to follow up on that, talking about how you can have different sorts of strategies for different investigations and that

some might take longer, when you were talking about the early resolution strategy to resolve some of these complaints, can you just explain a bit what that strategy involves?

Ms Ryan: Yeah. It's something that we've been taking a look at for the past, you know, six, eight months. Previously we operated on a process where we would have intake, and then we would do an analysis to see if it fit our jurisdiction, and then we would determine if it would go to a formal investigation. As I mentioned, now what we are doing: once we process the initial complaint, we're sort of front-end loading that complaint. In the past it would normally go to one investigator if it advanced to an investigation; now we're putting a team of investigators on that complaint.

It serves multiple purposes because, first of all, it's done much quicker, and that serves the complainant much better. It also serves the authority; we're not continually going back to them. But internally in our office it also provides developmental opportunities for new investigators to learn in very close proximity to more seasoned investigators, in a mentoring and leadership development type environment. It also provides the opportunity for more senior and seasoned investigators to take on some of those management and leadership roles and develop more of a succession plan for us for, you know, future managers. If I could describe it, it is sort of that all-hands-on-deck approach when the complaint comes in and it looks like it's something that is going to require a bit of work versus sort of handing it off to one investigator at a time.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Ms Ryan.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Do we have any other members with a question? Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. Thank you, and thank you for being with us today. I'm going to highlight or ask questions with regard to note 1 on page 2 of the Ombudsman budget, where it's highlighted that your role is expanding into 354 municipalities and requiring an additional \$625,000. "In 2018-19, Municipal Affairs will reduce their spending target by \$625,000 to ensure cost neutrality to the general revenue fund." My question is: was Municipal Affairs providing Ombudsman services to the municipalities prior to this new mandate?

Ms Ryan: Technically, yes. I believe they had the capacity – I shouldn't say the capacity. I believe they had the ability to look at complaints but not to the extent that we will have the processes in place to do that.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. Thank you.

We see this as a note in this budget, but, I guess, how can we be confident that this will occur? That's the question I would have. It's nice to have it here, but I need to have some kind of confidence that that will occur. It makes it easier for me to move forward. If they did not have the same scope of ability to operate as Ombudsman through Municipal Affairs, it's not as if they're transferring their knowledge and their capacity and their resources to the Ombudsman's office. That would lead me to believe that they have the ability to reduce their budget by that amount without committing to that being reduced because we're passing the work over to your office. I need to try and get some kind of understanding. How can we be confident that that will actually occur?

Ms Ryan: Well, I guess I want to make sure I understand your question. We have met with Municipal Affairs during the course of this process to get an understanding of what they feel is the work

that will be coming our way. We've also talked to other provincial ombudsmen to get sense of, you know, what the municipality workload could be coming our way. I guess it's probably more a question for Municipal Affairs, to ask how they managed it. We just know from talking to our provincial counterparts in other provinces that we can expect at least a 30 per cent increase to our workload given the number that are coming our way.

And I should add that, you know, we're going to watch that. We expect that there may be this influx at the beginning, but perhaps over time that number might not remain as high. So, again, we will constantly be reassessing and looking for efficiencies as we go forward in the years to come, whether we still need the resources dedicated to this.

Ms Richford: Can I add? I also believe your question was: how do we assure you that Municipal Affairs is going to relinquish \$625,000? The previous Ombudsman and Deputy Ombudsman were involved right from the ground up when this idea came to be during the discussions with the Modernized Municipal Government Act, and upon meeting with them, Marianne has also talked to the deputy minister there. We have an e-mail that says that they have approved our \$625,000.

During this budget process I did talk to the budget person, the director, at Treasury Board and Finance to find out what he felt about this, and because it isn't, as you indicated, a direct transfer of their program and their people to us, it isn't a transfer of funds for administration, but the same can be accomplished by Treasury Board and Finance making sure that that \$625,000 is reduced for Municipal Affairs' overall spend for 2018-19.

12:05

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Mrs. Littlewood.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much. This is just a question regarding the business plans for both of the offices. You note that there's a shared services agreement to contribute to some of these cost savings. I'm just wondering how exactly that cost-sharing arrangement is going to be working, sharing resources between the two offices.

Ms Richford: Well, again, it's been going on for four years. What happens is that there are approximately nine employees in the Ombudsman's office who do provide services to the Public Interest Commissioner's office, and every year we take a look and see. People track their time, and we determine what the percentage is of time that's spent providing those services. For the most part we're providing 20 to 25 per cent. Marianne, of course, is providing oftentimes 50 per cent. We anticipate that the new position created is going to be housed – it's not a new creation; it's a merging of two – in the Alberta Ombudsman's office, so that Deputy Public Interest Commissioner portion will be charged back from the Public Interest Commissioner's office.

Mrs. Littlewood: Just a follow-up question. Do you have any concern about maintaining core business functions with that sharing?

Ms Richford: No.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members have any questions for Ms Ryan or her staff? Mrs. Littlewood.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Chair. In regard to the Public Interest Commissioner's part of the office I'm just wondering how, when in outcomes you're talking about ensuring that the public sector becomes more aware and is currently somewhat unaware of the act – I'm just wondering what feedback you've gotten to lend to that question of how you can create more awareness within the public sector, you know, to combat this lack of awareness. We've seen funds that are dedicated to education and engagement from other offices, so I'm wondering where those resources are in your office that would be dedicated to doing that work.

Mr. Miles: I'll take that question. The responsibility of widely communicating the details of the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act to employees is actually written into the legislation to be the responsibility of the chief officer of the entity. That would be in the case of a government department the deputy minister, as an example. Our plan has been over the past year and will continue to be in the future that we do provide presentations directly to employees, but our focus last year and this year will be to provide more information to those chief officers and the designated officers of entities to assist them in completing their responsibility to communicate details of the act to their employees. We see that as a cost-beneficial way of us spreading the word regarding the act, and it does not take as much time for us to have a meeting and to identify this to those senior executives than it does to perhaps entertain, you know, the thought of how we would communicate to 110,000 employees in Alberta Health Services alone, as an example. That's sort of our focus on how we're going to do that.

Mrs. Littlewood: That's great. Thank you very much.

Mr. Miles: You're welcome.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. I just want a question for clarification with regard to travel cost and video conferencing capabilities. There's an increase to the travel costs. I think you addressed this earlier, but just for clarification, we see just about a doubling of travel costs going forward even with the video conferencing capabilities that are being added.

Ms Richford: One of the reasons for that increase, of course, is all related to the municipalities. We have found that attending the municipalities' conferences, conventions, and educating them on our services is the best way to get a group of people together. So our budget is actually based on eight meetings between the AUMA and local municipality associations, et cetera, and we have two people attending, spending two nights wherever those conventions are. That's really the reason. There's a little bit of travel in there for the new hires to be able to attend a training course, and that's really why there is that increase in the travel.

Mr. Miles: Perhaps I'll add to that, too, Suzanne, if I could. From an operational, from our investigative perspective as well, we anticipate that this being the first year the municipalities fall under us, we will have to get in the vehicles and travel out to a number of these municipalities to conduct our investigations. I think over time on the provincial side, where we've had jurisdiction for a long period of time, people are comfortable when they get a phone call or an e-mail message from the Ombudsman's office saying: we need all of these records. We're not anticipating that sort of level of co-operation over the first year. I think it may take a little education,

a little bit of collaborative relationship building, and just extending some of the understanding to our stakeholders in the municipalities around Alberta. With 354 of them we are planning for some travel out for our investigators from an investigative perspective to those communities.

Ms Ryan: And if I could add one more thing just to that, you know, I think it would be reasonable to state that we see some apprehension on behalf of the municipalities with another layer of oversight coming their way. So we see great benefit, again, in using the term “front-end loading,” in getting out in person and speaking to the municipalities, addressing their questions face to face, and also getting a sense from my office about how we will approach the investigations and how we will try to be fair in all our dealings with them as well as the complainants.

Mr. van Dijken: Just a little follow-up. This is a new direction the office is going in, so to have engagement with the municipalities is important. Do we see that number possibly going down once they're becoming more fully aware?

Ms Ryan: I would say yes. I think that's a fair assessment and, again, something that we see as an investment now that will pay off as we go down this road with the municipalities.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Any further questions from members?

Seeing none, thank you, Ms Ryan, to you and your staff for your presentations this morning. For your information the committee's decisions on the budget should be sent out early next week.

Ms Ryan: Thank you very much.

The Chair: With that, we are largely back on time, which is great. We'll take the opportunity to break for lunch, then, and we'll be back on the record with the office of the Chief Electoral Officer at 1 p.m.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 12:13 p.m. to 1 p.m.]

The Chair: All right. If we can bring everyone back to the table. I'd like to welcome Mr. Resler, Chief Electoral Officer, and his staff to our meeting. Thank you for joining us today. We have set aside 20 minutes for your presentation, and then I'll open up the floor to questions from committee members. If you would begin by introducing your staff, and then please go ahead with your presentation.

Office of the Chief Electoral Officer

Mr. Resler: Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to be here today to present our budget estimates for the fiscal year 2018-19. Assisting me today, on my left, is Kevin Lee, director of election finances, and Fiona Vance, our general counsel.

I would also like to give a shout-out to my staff in Calgary-Lougheed who are providing an information session today to the political parties, candidates, and media on the new technologies that were approved by this committee for testing in the by-election. They are performing that today.

As you can see from our budget documents, there isn't one year that is comparable to the next. We operate on a four-year election cycle in which differing electoral events take place during each year, which can make budget comparisons difficult. Each subsequent year the activities increase, and the budget progressively grows as we approach the next provincial election in the spring of 2019.

Today we'll review our overall budget requests for 2018-19, provide a breakdown of the numbers, and discuss the variances to comparable prior-year amounts. To assist members with today's discussion, we have provided our four-year business plan and our 2018-19 budget submission. As you will recall, the 2016-17 annual report under the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act was submitted and reviewed by this committee on November 7, 2017.

In our business plan we provided several key assumptions along with timelines that impact our deliverables. Our budget figures are based on our core services that we provide annually in addition to the following assumptions that have a direct impact on our activities.

First, the Electoral Boundaries Commission issued their report to the Speaker in October of this year. The Electoral Divisions Act establishes the 87 electoral divisions and contains a transitional clause allowing me to appoint returning officers under the new electoral division boundaries. As you are aware, returning officers are to reside in the electoral divisions in which they work. Therefore, we have to wait until the boundaries are finalized and accepted before the transitional provisions allow me to start hiring.

We have initiated recruitment province-wide, and advertising for the recruitment of returning officers has started. That commenced at the end of October. Some applications have been received, but we're still experiencing several electoral divisions without any applicants. Another round of advertising will need to take place in January 2018. In the fall of 2018 we'll advertise, interview, and hire an additional 87 election clerks, and the remainder of the returning officer office staff will be hired by January 2019.

All returning officers will receive an orientation session and training on election map and list review processes. We'll have the 87 returning officers review and redraw approximately 7,000 polling subdivisions across the province. The revised boundaries will be incorporated into our mapping software, and the 2.8 million electors will be reassigned to their new polling subdivisions and electoral divisions through that map and list review process. This process needs to be completed prior to the province-wide enumeration, which is scheduled for the fall of 2018, with all data entry completed by the end of the calendar year.

Planning and preparations for the spring 2019 provincial general election continue throughout the 2018-19 fiscal year, with specific training for returning officers and their staff in the months immediately preceding the election campaign period. We will be looking at establishing returning officer offices on February 1, 2019, which is the start of the next provincial campaign period.

Those are the main activities and timelines that we used in formulating our budget estimates and targets for the subsequent two years.

I will start on page 1 of my submission, which provides a consolidated multiyear budget comparative. Looking at the first two columns, the budget-to-actual comparison for 2016-17, we are under budget by approximately \$1.3 million. As there were no by-elections called during the fiscal year, this resulted in approximately \$1 million being unexpended, and that is the primary source for that surplus.

The next two columns illustrate the budget and forecast for the current year, 2017-18. Our base budget for each year includes the cost of our permanent staff in office, referred to as corporate services, and additionally budgets up to three by-elections annually. We continue to forecast the expenditure of the three by-elections in the current year. Should Calgary-Lougheed be the only by-election prior to March 31, we will have the other two by-election expenses left unexpended. Overall, we are forecasting to be under budget in the current fiscal year for 2017-18.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh columns lay out our expected expenditures for the next three years.

Turning to page 2 of our submission, the committee is provided with a comparison of the current year's budget and our estimates for 2018-19. The budget increase of \$31.5 million is a result of the enumeration and electoral activities taking place within the same budget year. Because these two years do not provide a basis for comparison, we did not provide any variance analysis for this page.

As we proceed through the remaining discussion, I'll break down each of our three program areas – corporate services, enumerations, and elections – and I'll provide you with comparatives from the most recent year that applies.

If you could turn to pages 3 and 4, I will discuss our corporate services budget. The corporate services program is the only area that remains constant over the four-year election cycle and which we can directly compare from year to year. Corporate services provides for all permanent staffing at Elections Alberta. We have 26 full-time positions responsible for general administration; operations; finance; information technology; GIS, or mapping; and maintenance of our register of electors.

For the 2017-18 period we're projecting an increase of \$44,000 to corporate services. Under manpower there are no changes from last year. Staff are hired under the Alberta Public Service Act, and all office staff fall under the salary freeze in place until September 2019. There are no cost-of-living or merit increases included.

Under supplies and services we're looking at a 1 per cent decrease. There are decreases in both advertising and travel directly related to office recruitment. We advertise our positions on the government of Alberta job board, which is picked up by various free online recruitment sites, thereby eliminating our print advertising costs. Postage, rentals, and telecom are adjusted based on actual usage, and under contract services we reduced outside contractor and consultant fees as a result of hiring a permanent in-house investigator.

Capital costs are up by \$60,000, which is directly related to an expansion of our training room, which will also allow us to increase the size of our provincial call centre, that is used for the enumeration and election periods. Alberta Infrastructure is scheduled to have the construction completed during this fiscal year.

To summarize, our total increase for corporate services is \$44,000, for a total of \$5,899,000.

If you could turn to pages 5 and 6, I will discuss our enumeration program. Columns A and B provide the committee with the cost of the last provincial enumeration, in 2011, in which we went door to door across the province, and what it would cost seven years later, in 2018. The cost of a full door-to-door enumeration would be approximately \$11 million.

As detailed in our 2014 budget submission, door-to-door enumeration is no longer effective in updating the register of electors. As previously reported by the former Chief Electoral Officer in his enumeration report, returning officers have expressed difficulty in recruiting staff. Fifteen per cent of the staff hired quit during the enumeration process. There were 336 polling subdivisions that went unenumerated. We experienced the loss of electors' personal information. There were three polling subdivisions where elector information was lost while in the custody of the enumerators.

We had a high volume of Workers' Compensation Board claims, so slip-and-fall accidents, dog bites, and physical threats from electors at the door. There are also a high number of Albertans who refuse to open the door or are not home. Albertans are concerned about their safety, and this concern has grown over the last seven years. We've listened to discussions in the Legislature this week

specifically about the safety in rural Alberta, and I share similar concerns about the safety of sending enumerators across the province.

1:10

No jurisdiction in Canada performs a full door-to-door enumeration because of the concerns mentioned in the previous slide and due to the establishment of a permanent register of electors that is updated on a monthly basis from public data sources. The last two jurisdictions to do full enumerations were Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Manitoba's last enumeration was in 2016, so five years after our last door to door, and the Chief Electoral Officer from Manitoba has stated in her report that 60 per cent of returning officers experienced difficulty in recruiting enumerators, that 39 per cent of enumerators found it difficult or very difficult to perform the task, and that 42 per cent experienced high no contact, unco-operative, or refusal to provide information. She noted a 50 per cent increase in refusals compared to the previous enumeration in 2011.

Saskatchewan and B.C. performed a provincial mail-out voter registration complemented with advertising and public education campaigns that directed eligible electors to register or update their information through a secure website or through a provincial call centre. This was supplemented by targeted door-to-door enumeration that was carried out in areas of high voter mobility or new residential construction and included outreach groups such as homeless shelters, residential care facilities, and First Nation communities.

The B.C. experience, directly applicable to the door-to-door enumeration portion, resulted in only 24 per cent of the householders opening their doors, and of those 24 per cent, 70 per cent of the voters already had accurate information as maintained by their permanent register of electors. In Saskatchewan completion of the 2016 mail-based and targeted enumeration resulted in the highest percentage of eligible voters registered since 1982, a significant increase over the 2011 general enumeration, which was solely completed door to door.

The experiences exemplified by Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and B.C. confirm our analysis that a mail-based provincial enumeration supplemented with targeted door-to-door visits to high-mobility and new construction areas is the most efficient and effective means to enumerate and to minimize risk associated with the safety of our enumerators. We continuously update the register of electors from data sources such as Alberta Health, Alberta Municipal Affairs, Canada Post, Elections Canada, motor vehicles, vital statistics, and directly from electors.

Looking at columns C and D on page 5, it illustrates the 2015 provincial mail-based enumeration budget in comparison to the estimate for the 2018 mail-based provincial enumeration along with the targeted door to door. Column D is the budget that is included in the consolidated estimates before you today.

In looking at the variances between the two budgets, for the first one, any staff member working 35 hours or more must have payroll taxes applied, so there's a \$74,000 increase in salaries attributed to the employer costs for CPP and unemployment insurance. We have a \$30,000 increase for rural travel and an increase of \$313,000 in the advertising and public education campaigns for radio and social media across the province. Our postage has decreased by \$196,000. Electors would be directed to Elections Alberta's website to update their information or to call our provincial call centre for assistance, and no return, postage-paid envelopes will be provided.

Under contract services an increase of \$530,000 is attributed to the minimum wage increase for enumerators and adding capacity for enumerators to travel in pairs where safety concerns exist and

an increase of \$725,000 to staff the enumeration call centre and data entry staff postenumeration. This is based on B.C.'s enumeration experience and ours from the 2015 election. B.C. has advised that there was a need to stagger the enumeration mail-out over a longer period to accommodate the volume of telephone calls from electors; hence, we increased our timelines as far as the enumeration process.

After the 2015 general election there was a considerable amount of time cleaning up household records when electors moved. What we experienced was that in prior elections electors would move into the household and the previous electors weren't being deleted or reallocated to their new residential addresses. So that took several months to clean up postelection 2015, and we added additional time to enable us to ensure that our register of electors is as accurate as possible.

Finally, number 6 is an increase of \$40,000 for enumeration-related materials. The total cost for a provincial mail-based enumeration with targeted door-to-door visits is \$4,968,000, which is less than half the cost of a full door-to-door enumeration.

If you could turn to pages 7 and 8 of your package. We have budgeted for a provincial general election to take place in the 2018-19 fiscal year estimates. If an election is not called during the fiscal year, a significant amount of the budget will be left unexpended and utilized in the 2019-20 fiscal year budget. However, we will be recruiting and training approximately 350 returning officer staff prior to leasing office space on February 1, 2019, in anticipation of the election. So there will be expenditures related to the general election even if the call does not happen until after March 2019 because we have a fixed election period and not a fixed election date. For every month of delay in the writ of election, it'll impact my budget by over \$600,000 for office lease payments, not including staffing.

For the 2018-19 election budget, we have provided a comparison to the 2015 provincial general election budget. We have, under Manpower, an increase of \$58,000 for temporary administrative staff to help answer phones, provide information, and help with the daily intake of mail during the election period; an increase of \$60,000 in the CPP and employment insurance employer contributions directly related to additional advance poll staff.

Supplies and services are increasing in nearly all categories, including the increase in travel of \$178,000, which is based on the actual costs expended in the 2015 provincial election, which were just over \$400,000. We are looking to increase that amount by \$70,000 to accommodate additional work required by returning officers as a result of the Electoral Boundaries Commission and the expanded boundaries.

Our advertising contractor has advised us for budgeting purposes that the industry costs are up about 6 per cent from 2015, and this will translate to an increase of \$165,000.

Under the insurance line item, advance poll workers and staff hired for the election as employees will cause an increase to our WCB premiums, and that increase is approximately \$13,000.

Postage rate increases from 2015 to 2017 are 15 cents for addressed mail and 3 and a half cents for bulk mail, which may not sound like much, but when we do a mail-out, we mail to 1.9 million addresses. That adds up, and we'll see an impact of over \$560,000 for a single mail-out. We're also facing increased costs for shipping the returning officers' office supplies and equipment. The quantity of those supplies being shipped out is increasing also. The total amount that we are looking at for increases in freight and postage is \$1,049,000.

The actual cost of leasing space and furniture for returning officers' offices is higher than anticipated. In the 2015 budget that increase was \$100,000, actual cost. We're expecting also to have an increase in polling place rentals as a result of the increased number of electors in Alberta since the last general election. More

electors equates to increased polling subdivisions; more polling subdivisions equates to more voting locations. Poll rent is based on the number of polling subdivisions at a particular location.

Telephone equipment for our election call centre is expected to be around \$23,000, and we anticipate the cost of the phone lines and activation fees to slightly increase over 2015 costs, for a total increase in telecom of \$52,000.

Item 9. Our primary source for polling places is schools, and school boards no longer provide janitorial staff during the evenings. Renters are made responsible for covering staff and overtime costs associated with these services. Based on 2015 expenses, we anticipate cleaning costs for approximately 1,800 polling locations at \$183,000.

Contract services is the category where we pay our one-day election workers. With the increase to the minimum wage, we are needing to increase the fees we pay the election workers in order to be compliant with employment standards. The impact of the minimum wage on the election component, at \$15 per hour, is \$835,000.

1:20

We'll also require additional election workers to work at the increased number of polls resulting from the population increases. These additional staffing and associated training costs are anticipated to be \$595,000 as well as \$435,000 to increase the staffing needed at advance polls due to the anticipated increased volume of voters during that period.

We're also including in the budget again this year ballot-counting tabulators for advance polls, and the increased costs of these are about \$195,000 over the 2015 numbers, primarily the result of the increase in the number of units required and the higher rental charges.

We also bring in temporary warehouse support workers during the election period to help pack and unpack the 900 pallets of supplies sent to and received back, after the election, from the returning offices. The total increase in contract services is \$2,140,000.

Materials and supplies are also forecast to increase by \$666,000, and it's broken down into the following: \$100,000 for the purchase of high-speed printers for the returning offices to print the election day poll books; \$95,000 for ballot printers at the advance poll sites to enable a vote anywhere ballot on demand; tabulator result software and readers will be \$100,000; an additional \$80,000 for the automation at advance polls with Chromebooks, laptops, bar-code readers; and the costs of general supplies for the returning offices and polling places will increase by \$290,000.

Overall, we're projecting an increase to our election budget of \$4.5 million from the 2015 election budget. When we consolidate our corporate services, enumerations, and election programs, the total budget request for 2018-19 is \$39,594,000.

We'd be pleased to answer any questions that you may now have.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you, Mr. Resler.

At this point, then, I'll open the floor to questions from committee members. Mr. Gill.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much for being here with us. My question. You're requesting almost \$600,000 for additional staff and training for the population increase. Can you please explain? Like, what is the formula used? What's the matrix? How did you arrive at that number, please?

Thanks.

Mr. Resler: We start with the population. We're comparing a number from 2015 to what may exist in 2019, a four-year difference

as far as population. Alberta's population was just over 4 million in 2015. We're looking at about a 55,000 increase each year, so we're looking at, in 2019, just over 4.5 million as a population in Alberta. That's an increase of 345,000 Albertans. We project that two-thirds of the population would be eligible electors: over 18 years of age, Canadian citizen. The increase works out, then, to 230,000 electors.

By legislation I have to provide a polling subdivision for every 450 electors. You divide that. Then you're ending up with 511 new polling subdivisions across the province. For every polling subdivision, by legislation I have to hire a poll clerk and a deputy returning officer to staff it. Right there we're at over 1,000 staff for just those stations. Then if it's additional polling places, on average a polling place would have about 10 staff, whether you have a supervisor, you have multiple polls, you have registration officers, you have information officers and other staff that may exist. So when we look at the number of staff, that's how quickly it can grow.

Mr. Gill: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

Mr. Resler: Yeah.

Mr. Gill: That's quite the . . .

Mr. Resler: It's not just grabbed out of space.

Mr. Gill: I thought you were just, like: ah, \$600,000 sounds okay.

The Chair: Did you have any follow-up, Mr. Gill?

Mr. Gill: No. I'm good. Thank you very much, sir.

The Chair: All right. Mr. Kleinsteuber.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, all, for joining us today and for the presentation. I found it very complete and informative. Just right off the bat, I guess, you mentioned, too, that because of the irregular kind of pattern of planning for elections, with some peaks and troughs, of course, it's a little bit hard to estimate exactly what it is from election to election. I'm just wondering: overall, would you say that the 2012, 2015, and 2019 elections are kind of on the same trend line for expenses, or are there significant differences?

Mr. Resler: There are significant differences. The main difference with 2015: it was an early election call, so there wouldn't have been an enumeration. Because the writ was dropped right away, the office wouldn't have been established as quickly, so you're only paying for a month and a half to two months of office time. There's probably an \$800,000 saving just in office space because of the early call. So there are considerable differences from '15; 2012 and 2019 would be more comparable, but obviously there's a difference as far as population increases. Between 2012 and '15 there was significant growth in Alberta whereas between '15 and '19 that slowed down quite a bit. There are comparables and not comparables in there.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Okay. That's great. Thanks a lot.

The Chair: Mrs. Aheer.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much. Thank you so much for being here. I just have a question, actually, with respect to what you were just talking about. You had mentioned that it's \$600,000 every month, approximately, for the office?

Mr. Resler: For office space and utilities, yeah.

Mrs. Aheer: For office space. That's once the writ is dropped?

Mr. Resler: No. Under the legislation the campaign period starts February 1. Our returning officers have to be available to the candidates as far as the registration process, the nomination process, so our offices would open February 1, and we would wait, in a sense, for the election call. If it is called in May, we're going to have, you know, February, March, April. You have several months before the actual election call. It also makes it more difficult as far as planning because you are unable to secure any polling places. You have no idea of polling places.

For the federal election, right now they're preparing in the spring to book their polling places 18 months in advance. Then there isn't any conflict. You have the space reserved. You know what your cost is. You're able to tender contracts because there is that finite date.

Mrs. Aheer: So this is an expense that is at the mercy of the decisions within . . .

Mr. Resler: Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much for explaining that. I appreciate it.

Ms Woollard: Thank you for your presentation. One of the areas where you've budgeted to spend less in the 2019 cycle is technology services, where you've budgeted a 33 per cent decrease. The note for that item says that this is because of the elimination of Service Alberta costs. What were those costs exactly? I don't recall hearing them covered. If you wouldn't mind explaining that – that would be good – and just explaining maybe why they were removed.

Mr. Resler: We've removed ourselves from services from Service Alberta. They hosted our servers. In the Neil Crawford centre our servers were hosted by Service Alberta. They also provided us additional resources during election periods and such, where we ramp up and the volume of hits on our servers is increased dramatically. We have found that our service levels were negatively impacted working with the department. We also felt that the costs were significantly higher than what we could get from the private sector. So that was outsourced. We have it. It's independently contracted, and we facilitate it that way.

Ms Woollard: All right. Good. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Do we have any other members that had any questions for Mr. Resler or his staff? Mr. Gill.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I mean, it's kind of: how do you anticipate? Do you see the same level of voter turnout in the upcoming election, or have you seen any trend, like, in your research you have collected so far?

Mr. Resler: Voter turnout is uncontrollable in that sense. I feel that we have a role in addition to a role that candidates and the political parties play. I think everyone has a role in engaging electors, in engaging Albertans to get out to the polls. I think that administratively I should be providing accessibility to electors, in essence bringing the vote to them. You know, why are we providing roadblocks or more difficulty in them getting to the polls?

1:30

An example could be establishing a polling place in postsecondary institutions. Currently, if I was to do that, I would be turning away pretty much every student because they don't reside in that polling subdivision. If we provide technology where they can vote

anywhere, I can provide them a ballot on demand, and they can vote for the candidate of their electoral division. So it doesn't matter where in the province they deem their ordinary residence to be. I am able to bring that ballot to them, and it's more likely that they will vote in consideration if their polling place was at home in Lac La Biche instead of at the University of Alberta.

I think we could do more to enable electors to vote and provide that convenience and accessibility to them.

Mr. Gill: Okay. Mr. Chair, can I go again, sir?

The Chair: Please go ahead.

Mr. Gill: Second question, sir. The repairs and maintenance are going up by 366 per cent. Can you please explain why so much?

Mr. Resler: As I explained, that's the janitorial cost, so for school boards and community halls, the janitorial service portion of it, which, on average, like, over 1,800 polling places is less than \$100 per location. We're being charged the overtime costs for janitorial and just the manpower even if it isn't overtime, the straight time costs on that, in addition to our rental amounts.

Mr. Gill: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mrs. Littlewood.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Chair. You were discussing the door-to-door enumeration in your presentation and the changes you are moving forward with, correct?

Mr. Resler: That's what was budgeted and approved in 2015 and also included in . . .

Mrs. Littlewood: Was this changed to targeted door-to-door?

Mr. Resler: Yes. Targeted door-to-door enumeration plus a provincial mail-based. You first do the sweep with the mail-based, and you see that pretty much in every jurisdiction now. You see it in the cities with their census work. You also see it with Statistics Canada. You have that online component in which the self-service part people can do at their convenience, and then you follow up with targeted enumeration.

Mrs. Littlewood: I guess also what I'm asking is: what are the effects, what are the budget changes, then, for labour costs, I guess, for your door-to-door? They're reduced, I'm assuming, then?

Mr. Resler: Absolutely. On page 5 of the package a full door-to-door enumeration is in column B, which is approximately \$11 million, and by doing a provincial mail-based followed by the targeted, it's \$4.9 million, so it's less than half the cost.

Mrs. Littlewood: Okay. I think that answers my question. Thank you.

The Chair: Ms Drever.

Drever: Thank you. Thanks for being here today. I just have one question for you. I notice under salaries and wages you are requesting an additional \$138,000 and a total increase of \$611,000 in manpower. Can you please explain why this is when there's no increase in full-time equivalent employees, if that makes sense?

Mr. Resler: That's the combination of all program areas, the \$611,000, correct? Is that what you're looking at, on page 2?

Drever: I don't have a copy in front of me. Sorry.

Mr. Resler: The increases in staffing: most of the increases are under employer contributions, so that's the CPP and EI deductions. If we look at enumerations, for example, it was informally stated that everyone worked under 35 hours. The reality of it is that they work in excess of 35 hours, so Canada Revenue Agency requires us to deduct employer contributions, so EI and CPP. You know, \$473,000 is strictly allocated to those employer contributions, which we have no control of, so it's directly related to the staffing component of those election officers who work in excess of 35 hours.

Other increases stated as far as support. Our office is staffed by 25 people. On election day we will have over 18,000 people plus the calls from Albertans, so there's \$58,000 directly related to additional support staff to assist us in our office.

Drever: Okay. One more question. In terms of the number of staff you have, has that increased over the years, or has that stayed the same?

Mr. Resler: There has been an increase. With Bill 35 we did have an increase of three staff that we added in the office. Otherwise, we're a pretty lean office. I think the most direct comparison across the country would be B.C., as far as an election office, which has a close population. They have less than a million more in population. They have 55 staff compared to our 26, so I think we have pretty lean staffing as far as an office is considered.

Drever: Is there a reason for that?

Mr. Resler: One reason: 10 people would be attributed to municipal election support, but otherwise, even with that, that's 45 to 26. They have several staff that do communications. I have a director that has that on their desk as part of other duties that are required. So we try to do more with less in that sense.

Drever: Okay. Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any remaining questions for Mr. Resler and his staff?

Seeing none, Mr. Resler, we thank you for your time. We thank your staff for attending with you and thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Resler: Thank you very much.

The Chair: For your information the committee's decisions on the officers' budgets will be sent out early next week.

Mr. Resler: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: All right. Well, why don't we take five minutes, then. We'll give Mr. Resler and his staff a chance to pull together their things, and then we'll come back to discuss our decisions.

[The committee adjourned from 1:37 p.m. to 1:48 p.m.]

The Chair: All right. If we can bring everyone back to the table. Thank you, everyone.

We've reached the next item, then, on our agenda, decisions on the officers' 2018-19 budget submissions. I've asked the committee clerk to provide some draft motions for the committee's use during its deliberations to ensure that we have the correct wording and numbers for each budget estimate under consideration as these are binding motions. The draft motions are in a separate document, which has been distributed. Everyone at the table should have a copy.

My suggestion, then, was that we would begin with the estimates in the order that they were received.

The first we would have would be for the office of the Ethics Commissioner. Do we have any questions, discussion regarding the budget for the office of the Ethics Commissioner?

Seeing and hearing none, do we have a member that wishes to move a motion in regard to the budget of the Ethics Commissioner? Mr. Kleinsteuber.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: I should read it out, I assume?

The Chair: Yes. Read it for the record, please.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2018-19 budget estimates for the office of the Ethics Commissioner in the amount of \$970,000 as submitted.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kleinsteuber.

We have a motion on the floor. We have a motion to approve the budget estimate for the office of the Ethics Commissioner in the amount that she proposed in the budget she presented to the committee. Is there any discussion on the motion?

Mr. van Dijken: I guess the question remains with regard to the letter we received, dated November 29, from the Ethics Commissioner to “formally request approval of the amendment to my employment contract and for it to be effective the date of the proclamation of Bill 27 for a six month period.” Do we have to have a line in here that allows us to recognize that if Bill 27 were to fail, the budget would be adjusted accordingly?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. van Dijken. So we have the question before us, then.

Counsel, can you provide any insight on that? The budget was created on . . .

Mr. van Dijken: Apparently, Bill 27 has passed.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. So Bill 27 has passed though it has not yet been proclaimed?

Ms Dean: I’m just checking that.

The Chair: Okay. We’ll take a moment and just confirm.

It’s passed third reading. Is there any necessity, then, to provide any caveat regarding the legislation and the effect should it not be proclaimed?

Ms Dean: Not in my view, Mr. Chair. I mean, I think the request stems from the fact that the commissioner needs to have full-time hours right now in preparation for the proclamation. I think that the motion would be fine as is.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Dean.

Okay. Any further discussion, questions, then, regarding the motion on the floor?

If not, then I will call the question. All those in favour of the motion? Any opposed? That motion carries.

Secondly, then, we have the budget and business plan of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. Is there any discussion or questions regarding that budget?

If not, do we have a member that wishes to move a motion?

Ms Woollard: I’ll move that

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2018-19 budget estimates for the office of the Child and Youth Advocate in the amount of \$15,425,000 as submitted.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Woollard.

We have a motion on the floor. Is there any discussion on the motion?

Seeing and hearing none, shall I call the question? All those in favour of the motion? Any opposed? That motion is carried.

Next we have the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Is there any discussion regarding that budget?

If not, is there a member that would care to move a motion?

Mr. Horne: Seeing no discussion, I’d be more than happy to move that motion. Do I have to read it?

The Chair: Please go ahead.

Mr. Horne: Okay. I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2018-19 budget estimates for the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner in the amount of \$6,916,491 as submitted. That’s a very specific amount.

The Chair: Indeed. Quite exact.

All right. Do we have any discussion on the motion?

Seeing and hearing none, shall I call the question? All those in favour of the motion? Any opposed? That motion is carried.

Next, then, we have the office of the Auditor General. We did have an increase in this budget, and there was some discussion at the time. Do we have any further discussion now?

Seeing and hearing none, do we have a member that would move the motion?

Mr. Malkinson: Again, seeing no discussion on this one currently, I would like to move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2018-19 budget estimates for the office of the Auditor General in the amount of \$27,834,000 as submitted.

I:55

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Malkinson.

We have the motion on the floor. Is there any discussion?

Seeing and hearing none, I will call the question. All those in favour of the motion? Any against? That motion is carried.

Next we have the office of the Ombudsman. Is there any discussion regarding that budget?

If not, is there a member that would move the motion?

Drever: I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2018-19 budget estimates for the office of the Ombudsman in the amount of \$4,291,000 as submitted.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

Is there any discussion on that motion? Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Chair. When I take a look at the budget that’s been put before us and the notes included in that budget, we have a note to give us confidence with regard to ensuring cost neutrality within the general revenue fund. I would like to investigate ways to possibly ensure that this is able to actually be quantified. I’m not sure what avenues we have to allow us to make possible amendments or statements with regard to this. I’m not sure if a mover would be willing to consider . . .

The Chair: Sorry. Which note are you referring to, Mr. van Dijken?

Mr. van Dijken: Note 1 in the Ombudsman’s report: “In 2018-19, Municipal Affairs will reduce their spending target by \$625,000 to ensure cost neutrality to the general revenue fund.” The budget is prepared and put before us, and this line is supposed to give us the confidence that they’re not really asking for an increase that would come out of general revenue but that we would see that Municipal Affairs will in actuality be able to ensure cost neutrality and give Albertans confidence that that will be taken care of. I believe it’s an important aspect towards whether or not we should be approving this budget, so that’s why I’m bringing up the discussion.

The Chair: Just to be sure that I’m understanding you correctly, Mr. van Dijken, your concern is that on this \$625,000, which they say will be coming to them from Municipal Affairs, you want some means of . . .

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. It won’t be coming to them from Municipal Affairs . . .

The Chair: Okay. Sorry.

Mr. van Dijken: . . . but it will ensure cost neutrality in that we can have the confidence that this will actually transpire. When I take a look at this, we have essentially a \$4.3 million budget that we’re voting on, but recognizing that there’s a need to control costs within the entire system, I would like some assurance that we will see that kind of cost neutrality going forward. I’m just not sure how we can quantify that.

The Chair: So you’re asking if within the motion it’s possible to have a contingency regarding that?

Mr. van Dijken: Correct.

The Chair: Okay. Counsel, can you provide any insight on that?

Ms Dean: I’m sorry, Mr. Chair. I was just asking Philip to pull up the materials because I’m just coming in late in the game here.

The Chair: Absolutely. Of course. You’ll be getting a better, more fulsome understanding.

Ms Dean: My initial response is that this is a transfer. My understanding is that this is a transfer. [interjection] It’s not? Not directly? Okay. Well, I’m sorry. I feel that . . .

The Chair: You need a bit more context. Certainly. We’ll give you a moment to have a look.

In the meantime, Mr. Horne, I believe you had a comment.

Mr. Horne: Yeah. I suspect that the table officers are currently trying to dig into what my thoughts were. It seems to me that as this is coming out of general revenue, there are no mechanisms for this committee to do that. It seems to me like that would be a decision of the Legislature and nothing that this committee could actually ensure, and we couldn’t delay voting on this until the budget is introduced in the spring.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Horne.
Mrs. Aheer or Mrs. Pitt?

Mrs. Pitt: I think she was first. Go ahead.

The Chair: Okay. Mrs. Aheer.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I don’t think we’re suggesting a delay. I don’t mean to speak on your behalf. I don’t think we’re suggesting

a delay. I think that more what we’re wanting to make sure is that it says in the statement that there’s cost neutrality. I don’t believe it’s a direct transfer by any stretch of the imagination. It may be salaries or however that works out. I think what we’re wanting to clarify is that if it’s not a direct transfer of \$625,000 to \$625,000, it will be somewhere within the budget of Municipal Affairs in different aspects, so we’re just looking to have clarification as to how those dollars will neutrally be transferred from one to another, however that ends up being. Obviously, we can’t stop voting for it, but we just need to understand how it is that we can prove the formula, I guess, of what they’re trying to do.

The Chair: Understood. Thank you.

Counsel, do we have any clarification?

Ms Dean: Well, if the committee wants some degree of assurance, perhaps you could direct the chair to pose that question to the ministry.

The Chair: Okay. My understanding is, basically, that what we have the ability to do as a committee is to approve a budget, so we can choose to approve the budget at the number that is set, or we can choose to approve that budget at a different amount.

Ms Dean: Correct.

The Chair: We can’t direct, particularly, where any specific spending goes, but we can alter the total amount of the budget being allotted. Is that correct?

Ms Dean: Sure. But if you have a question about a note that references a particular ministry, it’s certainly acceptable for the committee to inquire further to get that assurance if that’s the issue.

The Chair: Of course. Thank you.

Mrs. Pitt: I think two questions within that, the first being: can we adjust the budget amount by that \$625,000, I believe, vote on it, and then get the information that we need and come back and add that in, or can we delay the vote today, get that information, and come – like, I don’t know what our time frame is here. I don’t know if we can do that. I would be uncomfortable at this point purely from the fact that it was written into the budget that this would end up being sort of revenue neutral to the big picture at the end of the day. However, we’re not quite sure how the reduction from the Municipal Affairs budget looks and if that, in fact, is what is going to offset the cost in this budget at the end of the day.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mrs. Pitt.

My understanding would be that we as a committee would have the ability to exercise either of those options – is that correct? – to either reduce the amount of the budget or delay a vote on the budget.

Ms Dean: I don’t think it’s the best approach to have two votes on the same budget. I think that if you have questions and you’re not ready to vote on the budget . . .

The Chair: Best to delay. Understood. Thank you, Ms Dean.
We have the recommendation from counsel.

Mr. Malkinson: I think I was going to go to the exact same place you were. Perhaps what we could do, then, is propose that you send a letter to Municipal Affairs asking for the clarification that I believe the opposition members – I’m seeing nodding of heads – were looking for on just this particular budget item, and then we move on to voting on the other ones. I’d ask the hon. members if

that would seem to make sense. It seems to me that that might be the best course of action.

The Chair: All right. Well, if there's general agreement with that direction, we do currently have a motion on the floor, so I would need a member to move that
that motion be adjourned.

Mrs. Pitt: I'll move that.

The Chair: Mrs. Pitt moves that we adjourn the motion that was under consideration to approve the budget as presented. Is there any discussion on that motion? No discussion; just straight to a vote. Thank you for that clarification.

Then I will call the question. All those in favour of the motion to adjourn? Any opposed? That motion is adjourned. Thank you.

We will move on, then, to the office of the Public Interest Commissioner. Do we have any discussion regarding that budget, or is there a member that would like to move a motion? Ms Woollard.

2:05

Ms Woollard: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2018-2019 budget estimates for the office of the Public Interest Commissioner in the amount of \$1,149,000 as submitted.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Woollard. We have the motion on the floor. Do we have any discussion?

All right. Then I will call the question. All those in favour of the motion to approve the budget of the Public Interest Commissioner? Any opposed? That motion is carried.

We have the last remaining, then, that being the budget for the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. Is there any discussion regarding that budget? If not, is there a member that would move a motion? A member that would move a motion in regard to the budget of the Chief Electoral Officer? We have before us the budget of the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. I just need a member who would move a motion in that regard. Are members prepared to proceed on this budget item?

I'm seeing some discussion. Members of the opposition, are you prepared to move forward on this? If we're not prepared to move a motion on the budget, we do have the opportunity for discussion if there are questions or anything else that we wish to bring forward or address.

Mrs. Aheer: We're in discussion, then, Chair?

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Chair. I would just like to bring to the floor something that the electoral officer had mentioned with respect to the advance polls and with respect to the budget as it is standing right now. When you have staff working in the advance polls, there is a definite underutilization of staff after the advance polls, and the suggestion is that we could probably double the number of people per poll. Right now, presently, it's about 450 people per poll to grow a poll. Because of advance polls, if we could double the number of people at that poll, it would cut that budget in half. I'm not quite sure how to present that. It's just something that I think of in terms of efficiencies and budgets and going forward. I don't know if it's appropriate to present it here, but I thought I should at least bring it forward for discussion.

The Chair: I appreciate the thought, Mrs. Aheer. Again, what I would note is that the committee has the ability to approve or to

alter the amount of a budget. That is the extent of the power that we have as a committee. We can't make specific recommendations in terms of how that budget is apportioned or spent and certainly not in terms of how they would make particular hiring decisions.

Mrs. Aheer: Sure. Yeah. No, not hiring decisions, but within the scope of the budget, if we are able to decrease that budget by half based on those polls, if we were able to implement that decrease, would that be something that we could discuss?

The Chair: Again, we as a committee would have the power to reduce the amount that's apportioned for the budget, but that is as far as we could go. Again, it would be at the discretion of the Chief Electoral Officer how he chose to spend within that budget. We simply approve the total amount.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much for the discussion, Chair. I appreciate it.

The Chair: Certainly, Mrs. Aheer.

That being the case, do we have any further discussion, or is there a member that would wish to make a motion in regard to the budget? Would members wish to take a brief recess?

Mrs. Aheer: May I ask a question?

The Chair: Yes, certainly, Mrs. Aheer.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Chair. We have the total amount here of \$38 million. What's the increase?

The Chair: So taking a look at . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry. I just want to clarify what the actual increase, what the ask is.

The Chair: I'll pull up the budget here for the Chief Electoral Officer.

Mrs. Aheer: I think that will help. Is it \$5,899,000? Is that correct? I just think you need to know what you're voting on. None of us knows what the increase is. That's funny. Isn't it \$5,899,000?

The Chair: On page 2 of the budget submission we have the explanation of changes from the 2017-18 budget to the 2018-19 estimates.

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, but not a specific number of the request for the increase to this budget. So that's what I'm asking: not the overall budget but the increase. I have several numbers here, and I'm not sure if it's the total of those numbers or if it's one of those numbers. It'd be nice to know what the actual increase that's being asked for is within this budget.

The Chair: Well, may I suggest, then, perhaps, that the committee take a brief recess? It seems that members may need an opportunity to consult with their staff and run over some of the numbers. Why don't we take a 10-minute recess, give all members an opportunity to clarify any questions they may have in regard to this budget, and then we'll return to discussion.

[The committee adjourned from 2:12 p.m. to 2:16 p.m.]

The Chair: All right. We are back to discussing the budget for the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. Is there further discussion, or are members prepared to make a motion? Again, the floor is open if any members have any further questions or discussion regarding

the budget or to make a motion to accept or alter the budget of the Chief Electoral Officer.

If no members are prepared to make a motion in regard to the budget, do we want to set that aside, move on to other business, and return to that item? Mr. Malkinson.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. There seems to be a lot of discussion at the opposition table there. I'm wondering if the members of the opposition are ready to go on this item. I saw a yes there. Would you be willing to make a motion?

Mr. van Dijken: I would suggest that if the members of the governing party are not prepared to make a motion at this time and the members of the opposition are not prepared to make a motion at this time, then we move on to the next item.

The Chair: Having had all motions thus far moved by members of the government, which I have appreciated – we've been able to move forward – at this time members of the government do not appear to be prepared to make a motion, and neither do members of the opposition. So at this point, then, let's move on to the next item of business.

Mr. Malkinson, did you have further comment?

Mr. Malkinson: Just as a procedural clarification, are we coming back to this later in this meeting, or is it being deferred? I'm curious about this item. You know, I think we did hear a lot from the commissioner today, and I'm just wondering if there are any particular concerns. If there aren't, perhaps we should get this item dealt with. If there is no one with concerns, I've noticed that most members of the government side have been making motions on this, and I'm wondering if the opposition has any concerns with the budget as proposed. I'm just asking the question.

Mr. van Dijken: No concerns at this time. I guess it's at the call of the chair how he wants to proceed from this point on. Seeing no motions in front of us, I would suggest that it's time to move on to the next item on the agenda.

The Chair: Well, as chair, of course, I must remain neutral. I cannot personally make a motion. If there are no motions to be made by members on this particular item, then we will move on with the agenda.

We are moving on, then, to item 5, other business. Under other business, reappointment of an officer. Our final anticipated items of business will involve discussing contracts of officers of the Legislature, so I would recommend that the committee, including the Law Clerk and director of House services; the director of human resources, information, technology, and broadcast services; and the manager of research and committee services consider moving in camera for our discussions. Is there a member willing to move such a motion?

Ms Woollard has moved that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices move in camera. I will now call the question. All those in favour? Any opposed? The committee will move in camera.

[The committee met in camera from 2:21 p.m. to 2:53 p.m.]

The Chair: Thank you. Now that we are back on the record, I believe we have members who wish to propose motions. Perhaps we should begin, then, by returning to the outstanding item of the office of the Chief Electoral Officer's budget. Does a member wish to make a motion in regard to that budget? Mr. Malkinson.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Chair. Seeing as there doesn't seem to be any opposition to the Chief Electoral Officer's budget, I would like to make a motion that

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2018-19 budget estimates for the office of the Chief Electoral Officer in the amount of \$38,949,000 as submitted.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Malkinson.

Is there any discussion regarding the motion on the floor? Mrs. Littlewood.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Chair. I just wanted to say that I appreciate all of the work that the Chief Electoral Officer and all of his team put into their presentation and their budget and identifying how they can better utilize resources going forward to make sure that they're capturing voters and preparing for different by-elections and other things that their office is tasked with. I appreciate their work, and I look forward to supporting their budget.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Littlewood.

Any further discussion on the motion on the floor?

Seeing and hearing none, I will call the question. All those in favour of the motion? Any opposed? The motion is carried.

Mr. Horne: Can we get a recorded vote on that?

The Chair: Mr. Horne has requested a recorded vote. We'll start to my right.

Mr. Malkinson: Yes.

Mr. van Dijken: In favour.

Mrs. Pitt: In favour.

Mrs. Aheer: In favour.

Mr. Gill: In favour.

Drever: Yes.

Ms Woollard: In favour.

Mr. Horne: In favour.

Mrs. Littlewood: In favour.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: In favour.

The Chair: Thank you. That motion is carried.

Next, do we have a member that wishes to move a motion regarding the appointment of the Child and Youth Advocate? Ms Woollard.

Ms Woollard: Unless anybody else wants the privilege, I would like to move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices – that Del Graff, the Child and Youth Advocate, be reappointed to his position until March 31, 2020.

The Chair: Certainly.

Clerk, did you wish to clarify anything on that?

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to make sure that I have that correctly here. I believe Ms Woollard has moved that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices recommend to the Legislative Assembly that Mr. Del Graff be reappointed Child and Youth Advocate for a term to expire on March 31, 2020.

Ms Woollard: Thank you. That is very nicely read.

The Chair: Excellent. We have the motion on the floor. Is there any discussion?

Seeing and hearing none, I will call the question. All those in favour? Any opposed? That motion is carried.

We have one remaining motion to consider, then, regarding the designated hours of the Ethics Commissioner. Do we have a member that wishes to make a motion in that regard? Mrs. Littlewood.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you. If I could get some help drafting that from the clerk.

The Chair: The clerk.

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Are you wishing to recommend the six months of full-time?

Mrs. Littlewood: Yes, please.

Ms Rempel: Okay. Then I believe you may wish to move that

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices temporarily designate the position of Ethics Commissioner as full-time from January 1, 2018, through June 30, 2018.

Mrs. Littlewood: That sounds perfect.

The Chair: Excellent. We have the motion on the floor. Is there any discussion?

Seeing and hearing none, I will call the question. All those in favour? Any opposed? That motion is carried. Excellent.

As discussed earlier, I will write to the Minister of Municipal Affairs to request clarity regarding the budget of the office of the Ombudsman and the question of the \$625,000, and then we'll advise the committee once we have received a response.

The next meeting date, then, will be at the call of the chair.

Is there any other business?

If not, do we have a member that would wish to move a motion to adjourn? Ms Drever. We have the motion to adjourn. All those in favour? Any opposed? That motion is carried.

Have a good weekend.

[The committee adjourned at 2:59 p.m.]

