

Title: Wednesday, March 23, 2005 Public Accounts Committee

Date: 05/03/23

Time: 8:30 a.m.

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call this meeting to order, please. I would welcome all those who have joined us this morning. The agenda was e-mailed on Thursday, March 17, for this meeting. We'll quickly go around the table and introduce ourselves, and we'll start with the vice-chair of the committee.

[The following members introduced themselves: Rev. Abbott, Ms Blakeman, Mr. Bonko, Mr. Chase, Mr. Eggen, Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Johnston, Mr. Lindsay, Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Prins, Mr. Rogers, Mr. VanderBurg, and Mr. Webber]

Mr. Hinman: Paul Hinman, MLA for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Cardinal: Mike Cardinal, MLA, Athabasca-Redwater, Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

[The following departmental support staff introduced themselves: Mr. Campbell, Mr. Currie, Ms Howe, Mr. Pheasey, and Mr. Stewart]

[The following staff of the Auditor General's office introduced themselves: Mr. Dunn and Mr. Wylie]

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Corinne Dacyshyn, committee clerk.

The Chair: The agenda was circulated. May I have approval of that agenda? Mr. Rogers. Thank you.

Mr. Rogers has given approval for the agenda for the March 23 meeting as distributed. All those in favour of that? Thank you. Opposed? None. Thank you.

I would also like at this time to welcome Mr. Rodney to the meeting. Good morning.

Mr. Rodney: Well, good morning. Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Okay. Now, we are pleased to be joined this morning by Mr. Cardinal, and we will move to this portion of the agenda. I would like to alert the minister and his staff that you have up to 15 minutes for opening comments in regard to the activities of your department, and that will be followed by questions from the members. Mr. Cardinal, please proceed.

Thank you.

Mr. Cardinal: Okay. Thank you very much, Hugh. I'm honoured to be here and do a presentation for the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment for the fiscal year of 2003-2004 and the annual report for yearly review. Of course, it includes the Department of Human Resources and Employment, the personnel administration office, the Alberta Labour Relations Board, the Appeals Commission for the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board, and the financial information of the Workers' Compensation Board.

I'd like to again introduce just for *Hansard* the staff that I have here. Ulysses Currie is our new deputy minister in the department; Shirley Howe, Public Service Commissioner; Mark Asbell, chair of the Labour Relations Board; Alex Stewart, ADM Corporate Services; Duncan Campbell, senior financial officer; Tania Janke-Kemps, strategic services; Anna Silver, manager of corporate services; and Donna Ballard, of course, my executive assistant.

Again, thank you very much. Just for housekeeping, since the assured income for the severely handicapped, which is better known

as AISH, is no longer the responsibility of this department, I will not be answering AISH-related questions. However, I will forward all AISH questions to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports for response. No doubt, they will be done in writing.

The Chair: Excuse me, hon. minister. Ms Blakeman, do you have a point you would like to make?

Ms Blakeman: Well, I do because we're examining the fiscal year of 2003-2004 public accounts, and AISH was still under this department at that time, and as the minister you're responsible for reporting back to this committee on what was happening during that fiscal year. I appreciate that you're a new minister and that it's no longer under your department, but for the time we're examining, it was, and the tradition here has been that the minister is responsible.

Mr. Cardinal: Okay. I don't have a problem with that.

Ms Blakeman: Good. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, Ms Blakeman. Please continue, Mr. Cardinal.

Mr. Cardinal: Okay. Let me turn first to the department of Alberta human resources. The department's six goals provide a framework for programs and services that support our three core businesses: providing the foundations for people in need, helping people to be their best at learning and work, and supporting workplaces to make Albertans prosperous.

Some highlights. I'd like to start by saying that the department had a very good year in '03-04, and we received a clean bill of health from the Auditor General. In fact, there were no numbered recommendations in the Auditor General's report to the Legislature, and the ministry either implemented the previous report's recommendations or was making satisfactory progress on the recommendations.

I'm also pleased to report that the department achieved or exceeded targets for the vast majority of its key performance measures. One measure we did not achieve was the target percentage of clients who had child support orders or agreements at file closure. The target was 80 per cent, and we came in at 74 per cent. While this is shy of the target, it is a significant improvement from the previous year, which was 61 per cent.

Secondly, we set an ambitious target for workplace safety under the Work Safe Alberta initiative: a lost-time claim rate of 2.5 per cent and saw an actual lost-time claim rate of 2.9 per cent injuries. That's per-person year. This is the lowest lost-time claim rate in over 10 years and means that employers saved more than \$95 million in workers' compensation claims or costs. It also means that about 6,400 fewer people were injured; that is, 6,400 more people who went home safely to their families at the end of the workday.

Our budget, of course, was a challenge due to an increasing caseload for some of our statutory and nonstatutory programs and the associated costs. The department required a supplementary estimate.

I would now like to walk you through the six goals we had in 2003-04 and outline some of our accomplishments.

Goal 1 is that "low-income Albertans can meet their basic needs." In '03-04 Alberta Human Resources and Employment spent over \$374 million helping low-income Albertans meet their needs through the department's financial assistance programs. Almost 67,000 children received premium-free health benefits through the Alberta child health benefit program.

We believe a job is the best help we can give to those who are able to work. More efforts were made to link our clients with employers who were in need of workers. As a result, our caseload for expected-to-work clientele decreased by over 500 over the year.

You will also notice that the overall income support caseload increased almost 1,100, or 4 per cent. This was primarily due to an increase in the number of people assessed as not expected to work. These were people who had substantial or severe barriers to employment primarily due to health reasons.

Last year we extended the Alberta health benefit to some people who no longer qualified for financial assistance because of increases in their Canada pension disability benefits or employment income.

Every Albertan wants to contribute to society, feels better working, and has a skill set to offer. It's up to us to tap into those skills and make the connection to the workplace possible, so we introduced Alberta Works, a blended approach to help people through job search assistance, training income support, health benefits, and child support services. People receiving income support reported that they would rather be working, and they need employers who will give them that chance. Through Alberta Works we will bring these two groups together and, at the same time, give people the opportunity for part-time and short-term skills training.

8:40

We don't have a welfare office anymore in Alberta, and it's probably one of the first jurisdictions in North America. We have employment and training centres, and employers turn to us to fill job vacancies. Almost 80 per cent of the people who visit our offices are looking for employment and training assistance and not income support. We have 56 service centres located across Alberta. Our services at these locations range from assisting with resumé writing, providing income support, and AISH intake. Seventeen of these offices are collocated with the federal government, where employment insurance intake is also provided.

Our goal 2: "Albertans have the skills and supports they need to succeed in the labour market." We released a skills investment strategy supporting the development of a skilled workforce in Alberta, which included expansion of occupational and part-time training opportunities. Over 40,000 learners participated in our training programs last year. Our staff throughout the province helped workers impacted by BSE by providing training and other employment services. Services and support were also provided for workers impacted by workforce adjustments, including closure of mines in Hinton and Crowsnest Pass.

I'm pleased to report that 79 per cent of Albertans who needed a job and who participated in the department's training program got a job. Also, the number of learners in special categories – for example, youth, aboriginal people with developmental disabilities, or older workers – who got a job after being in one of our training programs increased over the '02-03 results.

Our goal 3 is that "Albertans have quality workplace, career and labour market information." Client satisfaction was very high in these areas. For example, customers reported a 99 per cent satisfaction rating with career and labour market information and tools in '03-04. Almost 1.8 million people visited the Alberta learning information service website, an increase of over 20 per cent over the previous year. Over 1.6 million went to the Labour Market Information Centre, and that's an increase of 18 per cent compared to the previous year.

New publications were also developed to help Albertans and employers make informed career and employment decisions, including Better Balance, Better Business: Options for work-life issues, which teaches employers how pressures at work and at home

affect the work site. Let's Talk, a guide to resolving workplace conflicts, was developed also for workers and managers who wish to learn about conflict resolution on the job. Our publication Xtreme Safety was approved for the high school curriculum by Alberta Education basically to increase students' awareness of workplace health and safety issues.

We also launched two online information sources. CERTinfo, about certification and registration requirements, is targeted at people who come from out of province and want to work in the regulated professions they are trained for. WAGEinfo provides information on wages for over 450 occupations.

Goal 4: "Alberta has a fair, safe and healthy [workplace]." As mentioned earlier, the provincial lost-time claim rate dropped to 2.9, its lowest in over 10 years. That accomplishment reflects the work of the department as well as employers and workers.

The industry-driven voluntary mentorship program was launched. It pairs good health and safety performance with employers who need help to make their workplaces safer.

Our awareness campaign Choose Safe not Sorry continues as part of the Work Safe Alberta initiatives.

We also revised the Occupational Health and Safety code, containing technical rules that will help make Alberta's workplaces safer for its workers. We have Occupational Health and Safety officers also who are making presentations throughout the province to employers, explaining the revised Occupational Health and Safety Act and code and regulations so that the companies who attend can improve their lost-time claim rate.

We introduced the Work Safe Alberta information sharing network, a made-in-Alberta clearing house that gives people safety support, health and safety information, e-tools, and best practices compiled by and shared with industry, safety associations, and labour groups.

With over 99 per cent of expired collective agreements settled without a work stoppage, Alberta was the second most stable labour relations climate in Canada, just behind Prince Edward Island.

Our fifth goal: "Alberta has a productive workforce that meets the needs of the economy today and in the future." Alberta's average unemployment rate is about 5.1 per cent in '03 and dropped from 5.3 per cent. At the same time the working age population rose by 51,500. In '03 the labour force participation rate increased to 73.4 per cent, the highest in Canada. We partnered with business, industry, chambers of commerce, and other levels of government on human resource development issues. We encouraged local industry and businesses to become involved in work experience and training or to continue with this important work. We continue to release monthly labour force surveys, data on employment growth and unemployment rates and industry and occupation growth. In October we began releasing labour force survey data for aboriginal off-reserve people.

In collaboration with other ministries we released Prepared for Growth: Building Alberta's Labour Supply year one report to Albertans, which describes accomplishments in increasing the skills and knowledge levels of Albertans, mobility of labour in Canada, and the number of skilled immigrants to Alberta.

I'd like to point out that there are processes in place for any company that wants to bring in foreign temporary workers or skilled immigrants to relocate to this province; an example, if the employer can demonstrate that no Albertan or Canadian is reasonably available to fill the position, including underrepresented groups like aboriginals, people with developmental disabilities, and other low-income Albertans, then they have two choices for processing foreign workers. One, the temporary foreign worker program will help them bring in foreign workers for limited periods of time, if the labour

shortage is cyclical. Second, if the employer labour is ongoing, they can apply through the Alberta provincial nominee program administered through Economic Development to bring the permanent landed immigrants to Alberta.

Goal six is operational and promises that “Albertans receive effective and efficient programs and services.” We launched a new contact centre for Alberta Works to provide low-income Albertans with a single point of information for programs and services. We also established the new student funding contact centre. As for our already established contact centres, people indicated that they were 97 per cent satisfied with the service they received from workplace health and safety contact centres; 99.9 per cent were satisfied with employment standards and contact centres.

We recognize that our people are the most important resource. In an effort to ensure that Albertans continue to receive high-quality service from the department, we are building the capacity of our staff through ongoing training and development opportunities. Our staff members recognize that their work needs to be co-ordinated with efforts of other government departments.

We supported that the people, prosperity, and prevention are core businesses of the government of Alberta by participating in cross-ministry initiatives on Alberta children and youth, aboriginal policy, health sustainability, and, of course, co-championing of the economic development strategy. I’m proud to say that partnering ministries gave us a 95 per cent satisfaction score for our contribution in the process.

8:50

The other area we have, of course, is the PAO, or personnel administration office. A summary of the key activities for the personnel administration office is on page 27. The government of Alberta needs to attract and retain talented staff to continue providing quality affordable service to Albertans. In ’03-04 the personnel administration office continued to lead the implementation of the corporate human resource development strategy, a cross-ministry administrative initiative. Priorities in the strategy were building leadership capacity, attracting and retaining talent, performance management and human resource planning, workplace health, classification, and collective bargaining. As a result, the strategy continued to be strong. Eighty per cent of employees reported that they were satisfied with their employment in the Alberta public service, 89 per cent of managers reported that their employees have skills to meet the current needs, and 82 per cent of their employees are prepared for future needs.

Workplace health was also an important factor. Again, we were very successful in reducing the lost-time claims in the public service, to 1.8 down from 2, and this means a 12 per cent drop over the past year or 40 fewer individuals were hurt on the job. Workplace health initiatives were put into place with support from other ministries, including online tools to address hazard assessment, workplace violence, and emergency preparedness, co-ordinating the Working Well conference and health fair, at which information was provided to employees on resources that support health, safety, and wellness within the workplace.

The Chair: Mr. Cardinal?

Mr. Cardinal: Yes.

The Chair: Excuse me. We have gone significantly over the 15 minutes in your presentation. There is quite a list developing of members who would like to ask questions, and it’s getting longer as we speak.

Mr. Cardinal: Okay. That’s not a problem.

The Chair: So if we could conclude your remarks, please.

Mr. Cardinal: Just in closing, I’d like to again thank you very much for your patience. I know a lot of us had a late night last night. We sat till 11 o’clock, and we’re here again this morning. I’d like to say that our deputy minister is new to this department, and I’m new in this department, although early in the ’90s I was part of this department when AISH was in. So I’ll expect our staff to provide some of the answers, and we will try whatever we can also.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you. We will proceed with questions.

Mr. Eggen, you have a procedural question?

Mr. Eggen: I have a question about the question order. Do we have an established procedure as to when you can start putting your name on the list for questions?

The Chair: Yes, at the start of the meeting if you just indicate to the chair that you would love to ask a question, you’re eager to ask a question.

Mr. Eggen: So starting at what time?

The Chair: As soon as the meeting starts. Anticipation was part of the chair’s duties this morning, so I’ve already put you on the list.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. That’s fine. I’m just curious. So 8:30 is when we start the list, yeah?

The Chair: Eight thirty. You bet.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you.

The Chair: You’re very welcome.

Now we will proceed with questions. Ms Blakeman.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I was intrigued by something that the minister said, and he took me off my prepared question. If I have the quote right, there was more effort to link the clients to employers in need of work, and I’m referencing particularly goal 5 appearing on page 48. What I’m interested in here is that we have apprentices in the province who want to work and can’t get workplace placement. Yet we have the unions who are interested in offering indentured service; in other words, the unions would take them on. What work has the department done working with the unions on indenturing apprentices, which would give them access to that workforce training that they’re not getting? I understand that the apprenticeship portion of education is under the Minister of Advanced Education, but the workforce part of it is under this department, so could you give me an update on what kind of workplace planning is happening around this, particularly around indenturing?

Mr. Cardinal: Okay. You know, I’ll answer some of it, but I’ll get the appropriate staff member to maybe expand on it.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, absolutely.

Mr. Cardinal: Right now I know we fund over 4,000 apprentices to go through the processes and stuff. The apprenticeship branch was

at one time coming to this department, but it's under Advanced Education, so I assume it will remain there, but we work very closely with NAIT and SAIT, for example, and of course the department that's responsible for that particular program right now.

You know, we need to boast about this, I think, because it impacts everybody. Alberta has one of the best apprenticeship programs in North America. We train over 25 per cent of all the journeymen presently, but there are some challenges in the system, and we need to improve it because the average age of a journeyman right now completing their four-year program is 26 years old. Yet when you look at the schools in, say, the north half of the province, which I'm familiar with – and it might be the same in other places – 65 per cent of students want to take technical trades.

It's really tough to access spots in the trades area, and we are working with Advanced Education right now on that because apprenticeship is probably one of the most important things we can deal with now. If you're sitting in Athabasca and you want to be an electrician, there are jobs at Al-Pac, maybe two or three electricians. If you're lucky, you know, you finish your grade 12, you go and make your application, you get a job at Al-Pac. If you're lucky, the journeyman electrician, for example, may have an opening, but the ratio of journeymen to apprentices is four journeymen to one apprentice, so the chances of finding an opening is tight. So we need to look at how we may improve that situation so that more people get their journeymen certificates.

But I'll get the department to respond.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cardinal. The chair has to monitor the time.

Mr. Cardinal: Oh, okay.

The Chair: Because, as I said earlier, there's a long list. If you can keep your answers brief and concise, the chair, through all the members, would appreciate that.

Ms Blakeman, proceed with your second question, please.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I'm going to probe a little more here, Mr. Minister, because, yes, you've identified the problem. Particularly in the building trades we have unions that are interested in indenturing people, which would get them on to the work. We have a problem with construction companies not wanting to have an apprentice when they could have a journeyman, which is exactly what you've identified. What specifically did the department do in this fiscal year . . .

Mr. Cardinal: That fiscal year.

Ms Blakeman: . . . to move that whole issue forward? What discussions were held? What businesses plans were identified? If you don't have the information now, we're happy to accept it in writing later.

Mr. Cardinal: I'll have a department rep that will answer that.

Mr. Stewart: Our primary role when we deal with apprenticeship is to provide income support to apprentices. That's the role that our department undertakes.

Ms Blakeman: But under the goal 5 you're in the workplace.

Mr. Stewart: With respect to your question, the way that we try to encourage employers to provide further opportunities for apprentices

is through information. When we work with employers in terms of matching our clients, we encourage them to provide further opportunities. Advanced Education has the primary role in working with the Alberta industry and training board in terms of expanding the number of opportunities for apprentices with employers.

9:00

Mr. VanderBurg: Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Minister. As a tradesman myself I appreciate the comments that you've made with regard to trades, but my concern deals with the Appeals Commission, and I'd like to get this through you to George. George, in the analysis of performance measures on page 129, the Appeals Commission's average timeline from appeal to decision was 202 days. Probably some of the most contentious stuff that I deal with in my office is WCB claims and appeals. It seems a bit long. I mean, I think we can do better than 202 days. Have you got a comment?

Mr. Pheasey: I agree with you. We can do better, and we're attempting to do better. Our performance over the years since this report is covered in fact indicates that we are doing much better. However, we're continuing to work toward that end.

The difficulty we experienced at this point in time was a reporting period immediately following the transitions that we made with respect to changes to the appeal system. During that period of time we were not fully staffed. Also, for this reporting period, 2003-2004, we received – and I can't tell you the exact number, but I believe it was about 1,388 appeals. Our five-year average prior to that was 1,125 appeals per year. So our appeal workload increased significantly in that year, and we were not fully resourced to cover that. We are now in a position of being fully resourced, and we're starting to make inroads on that.

Mr. VanderBurg: Again, Minister, to George as well. So you didn't have a full staff complement, but I see on page 127 that there was a \$616,000 surplus. Is this a good case for more foreign workers?

Mr. Pheasey: I won't comment on that.

Mr. VanderBurg: No. Seriously, have you hired the people yet so that we have a full complement?

Mr. Pheasey: Yes. The reason for the \$616,000 surplus is that at the beginning of the year there were vacancies. You can't go back and recover that and fill those vacancies on a retroactive basis and therefore use that money. So by the end of that year we were fully staffed.

Mr. VanderBurg: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bonko, followed by Mr. Lindsay, please.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm referring to the ministry's annual report. I'm on page 136. It says that at the time industries and employees are being affected by unanticipated events such as BSE, forest fires, and mine closures,

departmental programming must support Albertans who are facing a career change, both by supporting people financially when they can no longer support themselves, and by providing the services and training to help them return to the workforce as quickly as possible.

How does this contentious bill about bringing in foreign workers help in this particular area, when the department admits concerns on future challenges?

Mr. Stewart: As you can see in other areas of the annual report, we spend about \$280 million a year on what we call skills investment training. There are a number of components that comprise that. We spend dollars on Work Foundations, which is getting Albertans into institutions to upgrade their skills or through ESL. We spend about \$100 million on Training for Work, which is a variety of programs that upgrade skills and provide occupational training for Albertans. So we invest \$280 million in Albertans, and the goal of that \$280 million is to get them either up to a level where they can undertake further training or into the workforce directly.

Mr. Bonko: A supplemental with regard to the importation of foreign workers. It talks about:

Partners will include industry, municipalities, Aboriginal governments and organizations, training providers, clients . . . Also, the Department [should] build on its success in working with industry to develop Alberta's labour force.

Again, this is with regard to: does one have to read between the lines to find that foreign workers are a type of partnership that this government is looking for?

Mr. Stewart: When you look at labour shortages, there are a number of ways to fill them: firstly with Albertans through the kind of programming that I just talked about to train Albertans – and we train probably 40,000 Albertans a year; secondly, looking to increased mobility from other parts of Canada; and thirdly, there may be some opportunities to use foreign workers. The foreign worker component of the overall solution is a very, very small component when you look at the overall numbers.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lindsay, followed by Mr. Eggen.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the hon. minister. On page 44 under Skills Investments, I consider aboriginal people to be an untapped resource in this province, and it's great to see that you had some success with employment initiatives. But on reviewing your department's '03-04 results and considering the skills shortage in the province, how can these results be improved upon?

Mr. Stewart: There is another section of the report, which I don't have in front of me at this point, where we talk about First Nations' employment to training. This is an initiative that the ministry invests dollars in, and the objective is to partner with aboriginal, First Nations, groups, with employers, with technical institutions to upgrade the skills of aboriginals and increase the number of aboriginals, as you say, to take greater advantage of that untapped resource. We invested about \$5 million to \$6 million in that. We have a number of different partnerships going on between institutions like SAIT and NAIT and First Nations and employers where we're preparing aboriginals to take on jobs that are currently in a labour shortage situation.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you. My second question is in regard to the temporary foreign workers initiative. I'm a little confused. In regard to the criteria that employers need to qualify, you mentioned that they need to do a province-wide search, but I've also seen it written where they talk about a regional search. I just want clarification on that. Are they required to do a province-wide search for skilled workers or just in their region?

Mr. Cardinal: Local, provincial, and regional.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rodney, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Minister. As a former employee of employment and immigration Canada for a few stints I'm particularly interested in your ministry here. I look on page 63. My comments and question really refer to goal 3, "Albertans have quality workplace, career and labour market information." Frankly, I'm blown away with 1.7 million visits to the Alberta learning information service. That's 3.1.1 on page 63. The number of partners: I'm a big fan of that because, let's face it, we can't be everything to everybody all the time, but if we work together on things, we can do amazing things.

It's mentioned about safety on the next page and the key performance measures after that on page 65. I'm really quite amazed. I see numbers in the high 80s and 90s in terms of satisfaction. I guess my question, Mr. Minister, is: where do we go from here? If we're seeming to do so well, what else can be done that isn't being done, if anything?

Mr. Stewart: Thank you. Yes, we do think that we're doing fairly well in this area. However, we have an ongoing process in determining what types of products that we would provide through the Alberta learning information service or through other mechanisms. We have advisory groups which comprise employers, workers, teachers, all the proponents and people who are interested in using labour market information and other information to help them. They identify on an ongoing basis how we could enhance existing products or perhaps consider providing new products. So we have an ongoing annual planning cycle that we go through and attempt to further enhance what we already think is a pretty good performance.

Mr. Rodney: Just as a quick supplemental. So it's fair to say that it's an evolutionary process. I'm wondering: is it visionary in that aspect? Like you said, you have the advisory committees, so are we just reflecting what's happening in the marketplace, or are we actually envisioning what may be coming next as well?

Mr. Stewart: Well, we try to do both. Through our advisory processes we attempt to identify things that are evolutionary and don't currently exist and also use different mechanisms to get at students because the kinds of things that will help students today are very different than what would have helped somebody five years ago and will be even more different five years from now. So we don't just have older people like us sitting around trying to decide what it is. We actually involve students and people like that, as well, to try to get at things that are more evolutionary rather than just staying with what we already think is a good product.

9:10

Mr. Rodney: Great to hear. Thank you very much, both.

The Chair: Thank you.

The chair at this time would like to apologize to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. I overlooked your name on the list. Please proceed, and you will be followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, okay. Do you want me to go now?

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mr. Eggen: Based on the sort of anecdotal evidence that I've been

receiving from my own constituency office – and I think that many of the MLAs around this table here would concur – the WCB claims process seems to be dysfunctional at best. So, you know, my questions are based on some of the remuneration and focusing resources on this area.

First of all, looking on page 251 of the report, the remuneration for the WCB CEO has been and I think is still seen as being quite excessive, and my question is: isn't there another pay scale that could be used so that the salary of this position is more in keeping with other senior civil service positions and perhaps better reflective of the job that's being done there?

Mr. Stewart: We don't have the CEO of the board here today, Mr. Chair, so we would submit that we will take that question under advisement and provide it to the chair of the board and provide an answer to the hon. member.

The Chair: Thank you. If you could do that through the clerk of the committee to all members, we will be anxious to receive that information.

Mr. Eggen: A supplemental to that as well. Again in regard to remuneration my understanding is that agents who are workers for the WCB are being paid bonuses based on how efficiently, quote, unquote, they handle the cases. But, you know, those bonuses are based on sort of a cost savings to the board. My question is: is this an effective way to deal with cases in a timely manner? It seems to me that these bonuses in fact impede the proper payment of monies to claimants.

Mr. Cardinal: Again, we'll answer that in writing, but for the people that are here, although the Workers' Compensation Board falls under my department, it's an arm's-length operation. All we have is generally the legislation. The money that is used to administer that whole program, including the appeals process, is a hundred per cent funded by the industry, and they operate the process.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Do I have one more supplemental?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, that's right. Two. Yes, that's right.

Mr. Chase: Just to give you a reference line, I'm talking about line 2.2.3 on page 172 of the annual report. Despite the primarily middle-class makeup of Calgary-Varsity I have a number of AISH recipients and many who have been denied AISH allowances. The report shows that \$2.8 million designated for assured income for the severely handicapped, AISH, was unexpended. My first question is: why did \$2.8 million of budgeted spending not go to AISH recipients?

Mr. Stewart: Could you give me that reference again, please?

Mr. Chase: Sorry. It's on page 172 of your annual report, and it's line 2.2.3. It states that \$2.8 million designated for assured income for the severely handicapped was not expended. Sorry. Did I have the wrong line reference?

Mr. Stewart: Yes. I think it's 2.3.3.

Mr. Chase: Line 2.3.3. Sorry. Thank you. I couldn't read my writing.

Mr. Stewart: Okay. If you look at the same line, 2.3.3, you'll see that the 2003-04 estimate, which is the left column, is \$357 million. So that was what we had originally put in the budget, \$357 million, to provide support to AISH recipients. During the year we identified that we would require further dollars to support AISH recipients, so we added in the second column the authorized supplementary, \$17 million for AISH. So the final budget was \$374 million, which was \$17 million above what we had begun the year with.

At the end of the year we ended up expending \$371.3 million, so the \$2.8 million is the difference. We added on \$17 million, so we overestimated slightly the additional requirement we thought we needed, but we still spent about \$15 million more than we had originally budgeted for. So actually we spent \$15 million more on AISH recipients than we had originally budgeted.

Mr. Chase: In that case I'll skip my supplemental and indicate that I'm pleased that that's the way you're headed. Increases in AISH are absolutely essential.

The Chair: Thank you.

Reverend Abbott, followed by Mr. Hinman.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, minister and staff, for being here today.

In your opening comments you mentioned reducing the lost-time claims rate quite significantly. I want to, first of all, just commend the previous minister and the department on the workplace safety initiatives. I know myself as the former chair of the Council on Workplace Safety that it's something we worked hard on. To send workers home safe and sound at night is just an awesome goal to be achieving, and I hope that you'll continue on with that.

My questions, though, this morning are more along a constituency line, and they are with regard to your goal 1: "Low-income Albertans can meet their basic needs." That's on page 24 of your '03-04 annual report. My question is this, and it really does come from my constituents: did Human Resources and Employment consult with First Nations prior to the Income and Employment Supports Act being proclaimed?

Mr. Cardinal: I'll try and answer that. This was addressed through the MLA low-income review committee. It went out, and we responded, of course, to the recommendations. Over 250 organizations were visited throughout Alberta. Included in that, of course, were about 43 aboriginal groups. Now, generally, because we do provide services only off reserve, these groups that we visited would be off reserve. That may include some First Nations with treaty status. But we did consult.

Of the groups that were consulted, just some examples would be the Alberta friendship centre association, Métis Nation of Alberta, which represents all Métis off settlements, and, of course, the eight Métis settlements, and Native Counselling Services, and possibly others maybe the department would know of that I wouldn't know.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you. My supplemental I guess then would be: how do the province and the federal government sort of work together when it comes to income supports for First Nations? I guess I'm just wondering: is the province sort of a flow through, or do we look after that, or is that a federal responsibility? How does that all work out?

Mr. Stewart: Generally speaking, the federal government is responsible for income support for First Nations aboriginals. In terms of how we co-ordinate with our training programs, if a First Nation aboriginal is living on reserve, we still provide through our own programs tuition and books to that aboriginal to facilitate his or her attendance at training, and we would expect the First Nation to pick up the living allowance. If an aboriginal is living off reserve, then we will provide both the tuition and books and the living allowance. That's how we try to co-ordinate the efforts of the two orders of government.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hinman, please. Before we get to your question, I would like to remind all hon. members of this committee of Standing Orders, specifically Standing Order 53(5), and I'm quoting: "At any meeting of a standing or special committee, a member who is not a member of that committee is entitled to attend and participate in the meeting, but may not vote." So you can certainly ask questions that are part of the 2003-04 annual report for this respective department or the Auditor General's comments on this department or the consolidated financial statements or the annual report. So please proceed, and welcome to the committee.

9:20

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll tie my hands but not my tongue.

The common problem that we seem to face in the workforce is that we see many companies and businesses searching for employees, and they say that they can't find people. The common advertisement is looking for second- or third-year apprentices. The wall that we seem to be facing is the hurdle of getting people into the workforce, not retaining them there.

For hundreds if not thousands of years the trades have been handed down from one master to the next, and years ago the government used to actually subsidize employers to bring people in and train them. My question is: has the ministry or its offices considered going back to that method of actually subsidizing and helping people that would bring in first-year and green, inexperienced people to train them? Realizing that it costs extra to bring those in that aren't as productive for those companies, but thereby really opening the doors to the workforce and letting people truly get in that don't have an opportunity because they can't get into schools, they haven't had experiences when they're young.

I'm just wondering if they've considered going back to one of those old ways of passing down the trades instead of having to get into a school and getting into the force by having to get training first before employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Just very briefly, just for information and *Hansard*, and I'll get the department to expand on this, but there are programs also out there right now, pre-apprentice programs that are working very well. One is, of course, careers: the next generation, where it involves students from the regular K to 12 school and also the employers to start working towards apprenticeship programs. There is the youth apprenticeship program, which is a pilot project in about five northern communities, which, again, starts the apprenticeship program at about grade 8 level – it does not involve the employer in that case; it involves postsecondary institutions – and by the time you finish grade 12, you may have a two-year credited program towards a journeyman certificate.

Of course, there are two or three other programs that are out there. Maybe the department might want to expand.

Mr. Stewart: Just to answer your question directly, we haven't really moved in the direction of subsidizing employers to take on apprentices. One of the reasons for that I think is that if you look at the apprenticeship model, there already is a lot of government support embedded in the apprenticeship model. First of all, an employer will get a first- or second- or third-year apprentice at a relatively low wage level. The training costs for the apprentices, the eight weeks typical training classroom, the operating costs are covered by Advanced Education. The income support costs are covered by us in conjunction with the federal government, which allows the apprentice to continue receiving their EI part 1 benefits.

So there already is a lot of government support for the apprenticeship program, and we haven't yet considered whether we need to provide a further incentive. We've typically shied away from the subsidization of employers as a government because that's one of the things that we've felt could create an unlevel playing field, so we've shied away from that.

Mr. Cardinal: Again, you know, because of the challenges that we have out there today in the labour market and the lack of tradespeople or a shortage of tradespeople, we need to look at all options in order to get more journeymen out in the field. So those are good comments. I think the deputy has a comment maybe.

Mr. Currie: One of the challenges that we're facing as well – I think the advertisements are second- and third-year apprentices – is keeping the people in their apprentice programs after the first year. The challenge we're facing, of course, is when you get unskilled positions – for example, up in the oil fields – that pay in excess of \$90,000 a year for unskilled trade, to keep the apprentices in school is a challenge for us and something we're trying to work on as well.

Mr. Hinman: A supplemental question to that?

The Chair: Yes, but be brief and concise, please. No preamble.

Mr. Hinman: Would the government, I guess, consider, then, to get a better bang for its buck, to put more money into those early programs to retain people? We have a huge budget here, and I just think that an ounce of prevention is better than this late training, and specifically to go into the high schools and to work with those younger kids.

Mr. Cardinal: We do that now on an ongoing basis, and we'll continue expanding in that area because there is a definite need.

[Mr. VanderBurg in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Webber.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question to the hon. minister relates to goal 4, on page 68: "Alberta has a fair, safe and healthy work environment." That's in the annual report, of course. As you know, amendments were made to the occupational health and safety code and became law in November. According to here: "This was the last of the steps meant to strengthen OHS legislation under the Work Safe Alberta initiative." Now, my question is: what significant health and safety changes occurred as a result of the new occupational health and safety code?

Mr. Stewart: A number of things happened. As you may know, the prior code included 11 different regulations, which was quite

cumbersome. Some of the language that was used wasn't very clear. We combined 11 regulations into one code. We also cleaned up some of the language. We generally focus on hazard assessment and planning with a high emphasis on communicating with workers within the code.

There also are a number of newer workplace issues that weren't issues when the previous code was put in place, issues like workplace violence, which has become a bigger issue than it was in the past; biochemical hazards, which are becoming an increasing issue. So those types of issues were included in the code as well.

Mr. Webber: Okay.

A supplemental question?

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Webber: In this new code one is the requirement of a hazard assessment and control document being contained on each work site. Now, is this a significant change?

Mr. Stewart: Yes, it is. What we're asking or what we're demanding under the code is that employers are now required to develop a health and safety management system, and that includes a hazard assessment and control. The important point to emphasize here is that it has to be done in conjunction with the workers so that workers are aware of what the hazards are and are in a position to take the sufficient precautions to ensure that accidents don't occur in the workplace. So it is a significant change. It's a documented process, and it's a big part of our efforts to achieve the kind of results that the minister spoke about with Work Safe Alberta in reducing the lost-time claim rate and reducing the payout of WCB benefits.

The Deputy Chair: Ms Blakeman, followed by George Rogers.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I note on page 17 of the Auditor General's report that there is a series of cross-ministry recommendations; one of them, a key recommendation on succession management guidance and two unnumbered recommendations on corporate succession management and developmental opportunities. I note that the last time the minister for this department was here was during the fiscal year we're now examining, and at that time they indicated that there were a number of initiatives under way to help retain employees and, I would hope, recruit new employees. I'm wondering: how did the department measure whether these initiatives were successful?

Mr. Cardinal: I'll get Shirley to expand on that.

Ms Howe: We continue to see these as ongoing initiatives, recognizing that in dealing with issues of succession management, you are tracking the demographics over a longer period of time. So seeing incremental, significant change over a one-year period is something that we're hopeful for, but what we're continuing to do is to work on developing individuals through our corporate executive development program, through a number of other training and development programs through the partnership with the University of Alberta. We are working on both attracting and retaining employees through using our ambassador program, which has employees going to career fairs and targeting professional groups and so on to encourage people to come and work in the public service. On the retention side we are also looking at ensuring that we have positive and healthy, productive work environments.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. During this fiscal year funding was increased to the department, and I'm wondering what the demonstrated impact was on the results overall, both for succession planning but also the wider question. This department had more money. It must have affected the recruiting efforts here, but wider than that how did you measure the success of getting more money?

9:30

Ms Howe: With respect to looking at it from the budget of the personnel administration office, it pretty much stayed the same, or it wasn't increased significantly. What we measure is our employee satisfaction rate, and overall 80 per cent of our employees indicated that they continue to be satisfied with their employment in the Alberta public service. We also look at our turnover rate, which has continued to be fairly stable at about 5 per cent. So those are the kinds of things that we would be tracking from an ability to retain, if that's the question you were asking.

Ms Blakeman: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: George Rogers, followed by Bill Bonko.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, thank you for your presentation. My question is around the area of skills investments and particularly page 45, goal 2, "Albertans have the skills and supports they need to succeed in the labour market." I note at the top of page 45 that in the area of group workshops for career services, your participation rate is quite significantly down, about 10 per cent. I'm just wondering: are you cutting back in this area, or are you doing more individual counselling?

Mr. Stewart: Would you provide the page reference for me, please, sir?

Mr. Rogers: Page 45, and it's at the top of the page. It's some of your supplemental information regarding group workshop participations. I notice that you're down about 10 per cent in that area.

Mr. Stewart: We've actually increased there, sir.

Mr. Rogers: Then I'll flip my question around. Is this, then, at the expense of more individual opportunities? How do you assess the benefits of one versus the other, more individual versus these group-type sessions?

Mr. Stewart: First of all, we have a follow-up survey that we do with all of our participants, and we ask them questions around how satisfied they were with the service, how much it helped them in terms of their career search or finding a job. So we follow up with them to get a sense of how helpful they found the service.

The reason we've moved towards more group workshops is that we find them a more efficient way to provide service. It's very resource intensive to do individual counselling, where we have a counsellor sit down with a person. One-on-one is very resource intensive. If you sit down in a group setting with eight or 10 people with one counsellor, you can reach more people with fewer staff resources. We're always trying to find more efficient ways of delivering service. There are also other benefits of doing it in a group setting. Participants can benefit from individual experiences when they do it in a group setting.

So we've gone to more group workshops to increase the number of people that we can reach with the same number of staff and also gain the benefits of doing it in a group setting.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Bill Bonko, followed by Ray Prins.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This question actually comes out of two readings here. You can either go to 213 with regard to a fraud question or future challenges. The one on 213, section 4.1.5 said that there was an alleged fraud. But there's always a concern with regard to employees as well as employers. With regard to this particular piece how does the minister tighten up the controls? In fact, it alluded to the fact that there was a good process in place, but there's still that question that does linger out there in the minds of people who watch from a distance as to what sort of controls and the ongoing monitoring of such practice.

Mr. Stewart: I'm sorry. Again, the reference? Are you on 213 of the annual report, sir, or the Auditor General's report?

Mr. Bonko: The Auditor General's report.

Mr. Stewart: Okay. So you're referencing the WCB situation? Is that the reference?

Mr. Bonko: Page 213 with regard to section 4.1.5. There was an alleged fraud at the WCB.

Mr. Stewart: The only comment we can make regarding the alleged fraud is that it is currently with Alberta Justice, with the prosecutor. That is the status. If there was a further question around controls, as you mentioned, we'll have to take that under advisement, sir, and provide a written response via the Workers' Compensation Board.

Mr. Bonko: Okay. Thank you. Then a supplemental altogether different with regard to occupational health and safety and the implementation of. I realize that there was a large financial burden placed on the industry to meet compliance with regard to this. An example is school boards having to put out an extra \$7 million that they did not anticipate to meet codes. Is the ministry going to compensate or looking at ways of compensating those industries that are in fact meeting financial burdens to be able to continue to operate on a day-to-day basis?

Mr. Stewart: First of all, sir, in terms of the dollar figure you referenced, I think it was the Edmonton public school board that you may be speaking of. We spent time with the board, and when we looked at the itemization of what they had identified in terms of costs, the bulk of the costs were actually associated with adjustments that should have been in place prior to the new occupational health and safety code. They weren't even associated with the new occupational health and safety code. So the level of financial burden associated with the implementation of the new occupational health and safety code was nowhere near as high as the \$7 million figure.

In direct response to your question – is the government going to provide financial support to employers to abide by the occupational health and safety code? – no, we don't intend to do that. We provide other types of support. We provide assistance in terms of meeting their obligations. We provide awareness and education in terms of how to implement it in the most efficient manner, but we don't intend to provide financial support to abide by the legislation.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I have four speakers: Ray Prins, Dave Eggen, Fred Lindsay, Harry Chase. That's it. [interjection] Well, we may have to get yours in writing afterwards.

Mr. Prins: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Turning to page 110, the personnel administration office, there are a few charts on that page. The first one indicates that the average age of long-term wage employees is about 46 years old. I don't know how this compares to the private sector. What are we doing to address the issue of an aging workforce? I'll wait for my next question.

Mr. Cardinal: Shirley, do you want to do that? Go ahead.

Ms Howe: You're right. The average age is 46, and this is an issue for us as a public sector and other public-sector organizations. It links into the earlier question about the importance to us of succession management and leadership development. We are continuing to see this as a priority for us, and we are working with our ministries to ensure that we have good corporate executive development programs, that there is access to university programs with regard to leadership development, that we're looking at job rotations and executive mobility as well as providing other information sessions for our management group.

Mr. Prins: Thank you. I would have another question. Looking at the next chart, an average salary of \$54,000 for these types of jobs: how does that compare to the private sector, and are we competing with the private sector for these types of people?

Ms Howe: On average we are competitive, but our policy is not to lead the private sector. So we look at all of our jobs. We do surveys to make sure that we are able to attract the kind of talent that's important to be able to do the work that we have in government, but we are by no means leading the private sector with our salaries.

Mr. Cardinal: Just another very important point here that we are looking at presently, and that's in relation to new employees, actually, of the provincial civil service. What's been used in the past is wage positions, both type 4 and just regular wage positions. Each department could hire, say, in an office setting two or three young people to work at various jobs in the department. As time went on, if jobs became open in the department, then a lot of those wage people applied for those jobs, and that was one way of getting more employees at the ground level of the various departments. We're looking at that right now and may encourage departments in the future to have some wage money to do stuff like that because it works well.

The Deputy Chair: Dave Eggen.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'm referring to, I think, page 211 of the Auditor General's report, specifically to the skills development program compliance. I noticed that a consultant was hired to deal with some deficiencies, and I just wanted to know what the progress of this program is in regard to what the consultant was suggesting.

9:40

Mr. Stewart: As you know, we have hired a consultant to do a follow-up on the skills development program. We provide dollars to institutions. We have a delegated agreement with institutions, primarily the public-sector institutions across the province whereby we provide some tuition dollars to them so that they can work with Albertans and identify their current needs and put them into programs. One of the things that we've asked the consultant to look at is issues around things like absenteeism and if the institutions are making the appropriate choices, because it is public money. So

we've really beefed up our monitoring efforts. I can't remember the exact number, but we're doing significantly more institutions on an annual basis than we were in the past. This is in response to an observation that the Auditor General had made a couple of years ago.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Thank you. And just in relation to that are you identifying now any broader issues in regard to compliance, besides the ones you just mentioned, that need to be identified or rectified in the future?

Mr. Stewart: Actually, we were pleased to see that there weren't any broader issues. There were a couple of isolated issues with individual institutions. We identified through the monitoring efforts that there were some individual institutions where there were some administrative weaknesses in their processes, which we identified through the monitoring, that we've taken steps to address. But broader issues? No.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Fred Lindsay.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On page 40 you talk about mediation services. I guess my question is regarding the disputes inquiry board. I'm just curious: is a mediator only appointed at the request of a party directly involved in a collective bargaining dispute?

Mr. Cardinal: That's the process. We have mediators available.

Mr. Lindsay: How many disputes has this process been used in? Do we know that offhand?

Mr. Stewart: I don't know that offhand. We'll have to take that question under advisement and provide a written response.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Harry Chase.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Will the minister submit to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts copies of all receipts for expenses that the minister or anyone else acting on his behalf incurred during official government, out-of-province trips in the 2003-2004 fiscal year?

Mr. Cardinal: I think, Mr. Chairman, that this is best answered in another forum. There are written questions and motions for returns currently on the Order Paper dealing with this particular issue. So it would be probably more efficient to do that, because it'll no doubt involve a number of departments rather than just one department separately.

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

Mr. Chase: Just a quick comment based on the heaviness of FOIP requests and the amount of money for one portion of the government and waiting to get information from the current government. We're hitting the taxpayers unnecessarily.

My second question: will the minister provide the Standing Committee on Public Accounts copies of itineraries and manifests of all out-of-province trips that were taken during the 2003-2004 fiscal year?

Mr. Cardinal: I think that's another issue that should be dealt with through the previous process.

Mr. Chase: Well, this is the whole point of the Public Accounts Committee: we're asking the various ministers to be publicly accountable. I'm disappointed with that answer.

The Chair: We have two more people on the list at this time: Ms Blakeman and Dr. Morton.

Dr. Morton, please.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm not familiar with the ALIS website, so my question comes from an uninformed perspective perhaps. My question is this: how does the department use website technology to match people looking for jobs to people looking for employees both within the public service and more generally across the province? There are quite a few private-sector examples now that have proved extremely effective, sites like eBay or a company that my daughter works for called Rent.com, that matches people looking for something with people offering something. They have fairly interesting systems of bonuses, both for people providing a service and people purchasing a service, for using the service. Are you using that type of technology either within the public service or, more broadly, to match employers and employees in the province?

Mr. Stewart: Within the public service I think the figure I saw was that 75 per cent of the current positions are now applied for electronically. We are using increasingly *The Bulletin*. The Alberta public service *Bulletin* is online. An increasing percentage of our applications now, up to 75 per cent, are done in an online manner. That's not really sophisticated technology; that's just providing an opportunity for individuals who are interested in public service employment to apply online.

With respect to the second part of your question, we have an agreement with the federal government whereby they provide dollars to us under the labour market development agreement to operate a service called the job order or job bank service. That is a service where employers can list vacancies and where prospective employees, Albertans, can check the vacancies and apply for them.

Again, it's not very sophisticated. It doesn't have the kind of functionality that you were describing with the other private-sector applications, but we do it primarily because we have an agreement with the federal government. If there are private-sector applications out there that are successfully matching, I don't think we would see fit for us to compete with that when we already have successful applications that are being used. So our own internal is done on an agreement with the federal government.

Dr. Morton: Could I ask a supplementary question?

The Chair: Certainly. Please.

Dr. Morton: Who manages and operates the two websites or the two electronic bulletin boards that you just described? Is that the Alberta government?

Mr. Stewart: Yes. The internal one is managed by PAO, I believe. The second one, which is the external one, is managed by our department, Alberta Human Resources and Employment.

Dr. Morton: I would in a friendly manner just encourage maybe some people in your ministry to take a look at Rent.com or eBay and

see the technology they use and also to consider the possibility of contracting out that type of service to the private sector. I suspect that over time you'd get a more efficient use of technology and greater efficiency than running it through the government itself. I say that as someone who has worked in the public sector for my entire adult life.

The Chair: In the time remaining, Ms Blakeman. Then the chair has to excuse the minister and his staff before time because they have to go, I understand, to a meeting shortly after 10. Then we have a few business items to discuss ourselves.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. My question is arising out of note 10 on page 165 of the ministry annual report, which is noting that "the Ministry is a defendant in fourteen legal claims," 13 of them totalling \$12.8 million as at the fiscal year end. But I note that the previous fiscal year it was \$213.1 million, so obviously there was a great deal of settlement activity that happened during that year. I would like some details provided, please, on the settlements that happened there moving those claims from \$213 million down to \$12.8 million.

I would also like a further breakdown on the \$12.8 million of what programs these legal claims are directed towards. From what area covered by the ministry are these claims springing?

Mr. Cardinal: Duncan will answer that one.

Mr. Campbell: In answer to your first question, I believe there was one case in there that made that year sort of not normal. I'm not sure whether it was withdrawn or settled. I'm not sure. We'll get that for you.

Ms Blakeman: In writing through the clerk, please.

Mr. Campbell: Yeah.

The second. There are probably about 12 cases here. Some of them are people who are claiming benefits under our LTDI program. There's a claim where they think they may be eligible. There are some around occupational health and safety kinds of issues. There are some harassment claims with the Workers' Compensation Board, and there's one around appealing to the Court of Appeal on a Queen's Bench decision holding the Widows' Pension Act in contravention of Alberta human rights legislation. So it's those types of questions.

9:50

The Chair: Thank you. That concludes this portion of the meeting. On behalf of all committee members I would like to thank Mr. Cardinal and his staff and Mr. Pheasey and Mr. Mark Asbell for their attendance today. You're free to go, and the very best to each and every one of you. Thank you.

I'm going to proceed with item 4 on the agenda, Other Business, at this time. I would like to note that the transcripts from last week's meeting with the Auditor General will be completed next week. There were six legislative committee meetings last week, so I apologize for the delay.

Also, we have been in contact with the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation, which is known as the CCAF, and it is exploring accountability and governance relationships among parliamentary committees, legislative auditors, and senior government managers. A component of the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation's research program in the area of accountability in audit pertains to parliamentary oversight. Initially the focus of

this research was on public accounts committees, including identification and analysis of best practices related to public accounts committees.

The CCAF sent a research questionnaire to Public Accounts Committee clerks last year and also conducted preliminary interviews with Public Accounts Committee chairs, Auditors General, and senior management in preparation for its more detailed interview/round-table/research component. The research group is studying the public accounts committees in Alberta, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan for this research and would therefore like to meet with members of this committee the week of April 4.

Some topics for discussion could be a framework of powers and practices; exercising leadership; relationships between legislators, legislative auditors, and senior government managers; achieving and demonstrating results; building and sustaining capacity; best practices in each jurisdiction; and committee self-assessment/evaluation. Ideally the research group would like to meet with the chair and the vice-chair and several members of our Public Accounts Committee. It's been suggested that a dinner meeting be held in the committee room from 5:45 to 7:45 on Tuesday, April 5, Wednesday, April 6, or Thursday, April 7.

If each member, if they're interested, could indicate their availability for this meeting through the committee clerk, we would be grateful. I understand that this is on fairly short notice, and if it cannot be accomplished, that is quite understandable. Perhaps we could do it at a later date, but we would be very grateful for your input into this.

Mr. Dunn, you've been quiet today. Your teeny-weeny little report on Human Resources and Employment didn't attract much attention this morning, but do you have anything to add to this?

Mr. Dunn: With that introduction I'll be very brief again. I strongly support what is being conducted by the CCAF group, and I did mention that in our orientation. I'm one of 18 people from across Canada who sit on the advisory board for that organization. It at one time was looking for a representative province, and I suggested that it would be unfair to have just one province. They were going to suggest Alberta on its own, and it was at my suggestion that they went to both Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

They have conducted meetings with both B.C. and Saskatchewan with virtually full attendance by the Public Accounts Committee. In B.C., as you know, they have really looked at governance seriously over the last couple of years. They also had representatives from their Crown corporations. They have a Crown corporation oversight committee there, who is also represented there.

So I would strongly encourage that this meeting take place. They will then combine the results that they have from the three jurisdictions. They're also looking at federal and other jurisdictions' legislation, and they'll produce a comprehensive report looking for the best guidance for Public Accounts on the conduct of your business and affairs. That report would be produced, they hope, by August of this coming year.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dunn. So if we're interested, please contact the clerk or myself or Mr. VanderBurg. Is that fair enough?

Dr. Morton: What are the three possibilities again?

The Chair: Tuesday, April 5, Wednesday, April 6, or Thursday, April 7. This, Dr. Morton, is not written in stone. Perhaps we could make other arrangements as well.

Rev. Abbott: Tuesday is the only day for government members.

The Chair: Tuesday?

Rev. Abbott: Yeah. Why don't they just sit in on our Wednesday Public Accounts? They can learn a lot.

Mrs. Dacyshyn: It's not the same. They have questions to ask. It's a different kind of a meeting.

The Chair: We'll try to work something out. I know this is on short notice. She just contacted us here this week, so we will report back.

Rev. Abbott: We could meet at 6:30 on the Wednesday for bacon and eggs.

The Chair: We'll see what we can work out.

Okay. There's one more item on the agenda that I would like to quickly discuss, and that is that the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors and Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees are having their meeting this year in August, from the 21st to the 23rd, at Niagara-on-the-Lake, and there will be two members of this committee plus the clerk attending. The chair – and this is not reflective of the committee; it's the chair's view – will not be going. If any member would like to go, let the chair know, and we will put the names in a hat and we will draw out someone, if that's fair, and

maybe an alternate as well in case the person has a family illness or a conflicting schedule.

The Speaker is controlling this, and the Speaker has indicated that he would like the names as quickly as possible. So between now and the next meeting, on April 6, let us know. If you could do that through Corinne Dacyshyn, the committee clerk, it would be terrific, and we'll just draw a name out of the hat, and away we go.

Mr. VanderBurg: We'll do that next week.

The Chair: We can do that at the next meeting. Okay. Is that fair enough? At the conclusion of the next meeting?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: The next meeting, again, is Wednesday, April 6, with the Hon. Iris Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness.

If there are no other items of discussion, could I please have a motion that the meeting be adjourned? Reverend Abbott. All in favour? Thank you very much, and thank you again for your time and patience.

[The committee adjourned at 9:58 a.m.]