



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Executive Council

Wednesday, November 26, 2008
8:30 a.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature
First Session**

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (L), Chair
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC), Deputy Chair

Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (L)
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Denis, Jonathan, Calgary-Egmont (PC)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)
Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)
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Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
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Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)

Also in Attendance

Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (L)

Executive Council Participants

Brian Manning	Deputy Minister
Roxanna Benoit	Managing Director, Public Affairs Bureau
Peggy Hartman, QC	Assistant Deputy Minister, Agency Governance Secretariat
Steve MacDonald	Deputy Chief, Policy Co-ordination

Auditor General's Office Participants

Fred Dunn	Auditor General
Vivek Dharap	Executive Director
Brad Ireland	Principal
Ed Ryan	Executive Director

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Louise J. Kamuchik	Clerk Assistant/Director of House Services
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Erin Norton	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
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Diana Staley	Research Officer
Rachel Stein	Research Officer
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8:30 a.m.

Wednesday, November 26, 2008

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like to welcome everyone in attendance this morning on behalf of the committee members. This is the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I advise everyone at this time that we do not need to operate our microphones; *Hansard* staff will do that for us. I would also like to advise or, it may be, caution members that our comments and questions this morning are streamed live on the Internet. Perhaps we can introduce ourselves quickly. Going around the table, we'll start with the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Good morning, everyone. Cal Dallas, MLA for Red Deer-South.

Dr. Massolin: Good morning. Philip Massolin, committee research co-ordinator, Legislative Assembly Office.

Mr. Denis: Good morning. Jonathan Denis, MLA for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Naresh Bhardwaj, MLA, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Chase: Good morning. Harry Chase, Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Pastoor: Good morning. Bridget Pastoor, Lethbridge-East.

Mr. S. MacDonald: Good morning. Steve MacDonald, deputy chief, policy co-ordination office.

Ms Benoit: Roxanna Benoit, Public Affairs Bureau.

Mr. Manning: Good morning. Brian Manning, Deputy Minister of Executive Council.

Ms Hartman: Good morning. Peggy Hartman. I'm with the Agency Governance Secretariat.

Mr. Dharap: Vivek Dharap, Auditor General's Office.

Mr. Ireland: Brad Ireland, Auditor General's Office.

Mr. Ryan: Good morning. Ed Ryan, Auditor General's Office.

Mr. Dunn: Fred Dunn, Auditor General.

Mr. Sandhu: Good morning. Peter Sandhu, MLA, Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Benito: Carl Benito, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Johnson: Jeff Johnson, Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Fawcett: Kyle Fawcett, Calgary-North Hill.

Ms Rempel: Jody Rempel, committee clerk, Legislative Assembly Office.

The Chair: Hugh MacDonald, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Item 2 on our agenda. Could I have the agenda approved, please, as circulated. Moved by Mr. Bhardwaj that the agenda for the

November 26, 2008, meeting be approved as distributed. All in favour? None opposed. Thank you.

Item 3, approval of the minutes from the November 19 meeting as circulated. Moved by Harry B. Chase that the minutes for the meeting of November 19, 2008, of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed. All in favour? Opposed? Seeing none, thank you.

This, of course, brings us to item 4, our meeting with the officials from Alberta Executive Council. Again, welcome. We're dealing today with the reports of the Auditor General from October 2008; the annual report from the province of Alberta 2007-08, which includes the consolidated financial statements and the Measuring Up progress report; and the Executive Council annual report from September. I would like to remind everyone before we get started that the briefing material prepared for the committee by the LAO research staff is available, and we appreciate that.

If I could please have a brief opening comment from Mr. Manning, deputy minister, on behalf of Executive Council, we would be grateful.

Mr. Manning: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm personally pleased to have the opportunity to appear before the committee to speak on Executive Council's annual report. Before I start, I should introduce my colleagues. I'm joined by Steve MacDonald on my far left, deputy chief of the policy co-ordination office; on my immediate right Peggy Hartman, assistant deputy minister of the Agency Governance Secretariat; and Roxanna Benoit, managing director of the Public Affairs Bureau.

I'll start with a brief overview of the programs in Executive Council, and then I'll cover the budget and expenditures in fiscal 2007-2008. Following that, I'll provide some detail about Executive Council's 2007-2008 annual report.

Executive Council is comprised of two main programs, the office of the Premier and Executive Council and the Public Affairs Bureau. The first program includes the offices of the Premier both in Edmonton and at the McDougall Centre in Calgary; my office, the deputy minister, along with the cabinet co-ordination office, which provides administrative and organizational support and advice to cabinet and key committees; the policy co-ordination office, which supports long-term strategic planning and policy co-ordination and also promotes effective co-ordination of cross-ministry initiatives and other strategic priorities; a new entity, the Agency Governance Secretariat, that supports government in its efforts to improve the transparency, accountability in governance of government agencies, boards, and commissions; the protocol office, that I think everyone here is quite familiar with, which plans and co-ordinates international visits, provincial government ceremonial events, and manages Government House operations; and, lastly, staff that provide administrative and communicative support to the Alberta Order of Excellence Council and the office of the Lieutenant Governor.

The Public Affairs Bureau helps government communicate with Albertans and gives them the opportunity to interact with government. They accomplish that by assigning professional staff to communication branches across government to deliver strategic communications planning, media relations, and to develop communication materials such as speeches, news releases, brochures, and other publications and web multimedia content.

They also have an essential team that focuses on strategic communications, public communications in an emergency, internal communications for government employees, communications services provided to all ministries, and corporate services to support day-to-day operations. Some of the communications services provided to all ministries include advertising, marketing, research

advice, and help co-ordinating campaigns across government; co-ordinating the government's visual identity on all communication material, including websites; managing the Premier's website and the government of Alberta's website; technical support for major news conferences; and, lastly, distributing news releases.

Now, if I can just move into a quick overview of our budget and expenditures. In 2007-2008 the authorized budget for Executive Council was \$23.8 million. That included a supplementary estimate of \$575,000 for additional salary settlements. Spending for the year totalled \$23.3 million, and of that amount nearly \$20 million, or 86 per cent, was expended on staff salaries and benefits.

I'd like to just review Executive Council's 2007-2008 annual report, just a few brief highlights here. As outlined in the report, it was a very busy year for Executive Council. The Agency Governance Secretariat began managing the implementation of the board governance framework, including development of a database for a government agency inventory; providing support and clarifying mandates and roles of agencies, ministries, and government; and supporting improvements in agency recruiting processes.

The policy co-ordination office provided ongoing support to government. That included leading the identification of long-term strategic issues; co-leading the development of the three-year government of Alberta strategic business plan; supporting the identification, implementation, and progress tracking of government priorities; promoting a corporate cross-ministry approach to policy development, which was aligned with government priorities; and supporting the development of a report outlining options to strengthen policy capacity in the public sector.

The 2007-2008 year saw the protocol office co-ordinating and providing expertise on more than 50 visits from international dignitaries to Alberta. Also, seven more individuals were invested in the Alberta Order of Excellence in a ceremony on June 14.

It was also a very busy year for the Public Affairs Bureau. PAB staff provided communications support to a number of government initiatives, including but not limited to public consultations on the land-use framework, climate change, licence plates, and child care; announcements and programs such as the royalty framework, safe communities, the 20-year capital plan, Alberta's cultural policy, a response to mountain pine beetle infestations, and bullying prevention, to name a few.

8:40

The PAB staff also did work on internal communications for government employees, implementing a corporate employee electronic newsletter and communications support for recruitment strategies, including a redesign of the government of Alberta's job website. Staff in the central office began the implementation of a strategic communications plan, including the creation of a long-term advertising plan. In an effort to make it easier for Albertans to find information online, all ministry websites were migrated to a common look and feel.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, these are just a few highlights of the past year, but I think it gives you a bit of an overview of what we've been up to. I can say, too, that I've been in this position for approximately three months. We're going to be covering material that sort of predates myself, so I'm going to be relying to some degree on my colleagues at the table, at least for some corporate knowledge of the last fiscal year.

With that, I'd be very pleased to conclude my remarks and entertain any questions that the committee might have.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Mr. Manning, your colleagues are welcome at any time to assist or to submit an answer.

Mr. Dunn, please.

Mr. Dunn: Mr. Ryan will read in our comments this morning.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Ryan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Here's our audit work relevant to the committee's meeting today with Executive Council. The first topic is the chief executive officer selection, evaluation, and compensation work that we did. We made two recommendations to Executive Council. On page 27 of our October 2008 report we recommended that the Agency Governance Secretariat provide guidance to agencies, boards, and commissions. On page 29 we recommended that the secretariat assess whether agencies are consistently following good practices. We believe this is how ministers can hold boards of directors accountable for their CEO selection, evaluation, and compensation decisions.

The next topic is protecting information assets. On page 53 of our October 2008 report we recommended that Executive Council ensure the immediate establishment of a central security office. We believe that a chief security officer with the mandate and authority to develop, monitor, and enforce IT security matters is key in resolving inadequate security in the province.

The third topic is recruiting, evaluating, and training boards of directors. We made two recommendations in 2005 in this regard. These are shown as outstanding in the listing on page 379 of our October 2008 report. We plan to do a follow-up audit on these recommendations and report the results in our October 2009 report.

Mr. Chairman, those are our introductory comments. My colleagues and I would be pleased to answer any questions as the morning unfolds.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will proceed now to questions. Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Denis.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. George Orwell in his novel *1984* summarized the purpose of his fictional ministry of truth: by controlling historical records, one could control future outcomes. Premier Stelmach ran on a platform of improving transparency and accountability. Why, then, does the Public Affairs Bureau remain under the direct control of the Premier's office?

Mr. Manning: Well, maybe I can respond initially, and then, Roxanna, if you wouldn't mind. I think the reason for the Public Affairs Bureau to be under the supervision of Executive Council is the fact that the PAB provides, as I mentioned in my opening comments, communications services across all of government, so from that perspective to make sure that we have co-ordination and consistency here on how we provide messaging to Albertans. From my perspective it makes sense to have it localized in a central function under the auspices of Executive Council. Roxanna, if I can come to you for maybe further background here.

Ms Benoit: Thank you. Just to follow up on what Mr. Manning said, that's exactly the reason that the bureau is situated in the central agency: so that there can be a co-ordinated, consistent corporate communications approach to the government of Alberta's communications strategy. Being situated in Executive Council allows us to be at the centre as policy decisions are being made. We can ensure that the communications strategy adopted and used with that initiative is appropriate and involves all ministries who are involved.

I don't need to explain to you, I know, that these issues are very complex. They cross ministry boundaries, so being at the centre

allows us to make sure that we are consistent in what we're doing both in application and in implementation. I think, again, as you also know, we deploy communications professionals across government. The bureau has staff situated in each department so that we can make sure that that consistency is applied across government. That's essentially the reason. It would be difficult to have that co-ordination and consistency if we weren't in a central agency. At the end of the day that's the reason.

Mr. Manning: If I could supplement, Mr. Chairman. Communications isn't the only area that we've centralized. We've done that with the internal audit function. We're moving towards doing that from an IT perspective. We're doing that through Treasury Board with budget processes and expense management. Again, communications isn't the only central discipline, if you will, that we've centralized. We've done it in other areas besides.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I would note that Alberta's Public Affairs Bureau is considerably larger than that of any other province or even the federal government.

How does the Executive Council justify the expenditure of \$24 million for an oil sands greenwashing propaganda program?

Mr. Manning: Well, again, if you look at the province of Alberta, GOA, we're a \$30 billion-plus complex corporation. One of the main components is the energy revenue that this province enjoys. The intent here overall with the \$25 million initiative is to tell the story, the initiatives, to convey the initiatives on behalf of the province here not only on energy but across the breadth of what this \$30 billion-plus corporation does do. The intent, as I say, is to make sure that the resources are in place to convey the policies, the principles, the intent of what this province is trying to deliver on behalf of all Albertans.

Now, having said that in a general sense, for the branding initiative itself I'll turn that over to Roxanna here to maybe delineate a bit of the reason for this particular initiative.

Ms Benoit: Absolutely. I'm happy to do so. It's an important initiative, and we're deeply engaged in the beginnings of it now, so it's not part of our reporting in the reports that we're dealing with today but will be over the next three years. I'm happy to address it today because it is such an important initiative. I want to address some of the perceptions that seem to have built up around what it is that we're doing with this initiative because there has been a lot of attention paid to it with respect to environmental and climate change issues.

Although those issues are the reason that a lot more attention is being paid to the province from outside the province today and is the reason we need to be telling Alberta's story, I need to emphasize with this committee, as I have been with anyone I've been speaking to about this initiative, that what this is about is telling Alberta's entire story – about the culture of this province, about the education system, the health system – and ensuring that the entire story of what happens here is told to people. We feel strongly that it's the responsibility of government to do so, and that's what we've embarked upon here.

If I can just make one other point. This is also about walking the walk, not just talking the talk. It's not an advertising campaign. It's a campaign that will establish an umbrella through our branding initiative that will allow us to tell the story of this province to people who want to hear it. Hopefully, members will see that as we roll this out and will use that umbrella to tell the positive story of this province to people outside of the province in addition to Albertans themselves.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Manning: If I could just point out quickly, Mr. Chair . . .

The Chair: Mr. Manning, we're going to move on. But before we do, Mr. Johnson.

Mr. Johnson: Yeah. A question for you, Chair, for clarification. Being a new member and a new member of this committee, could we get a little clarification on the line of questioning we're to be asking here, whether it's policy/operations related. And it's supposed to be focused on last year's operations. Is that correct?

8:50

The Chair: That's correct. In our opening remarks the budget and the annual report for 2007-08 of Executive Council, which is this document, the Auditor General's documents, and the government of Alberta's documents – Mr. Chase is in order. His questions are to deal with the Executive Council. If you look at the Public Affairs Bureau in the operational overview that's outlined here, the chair would certainly rule that his questions are in order and are part of the budget. The chair in the past has been quite lenient with all members. Many members, not this member, ask questions regarding policy, and the chair has allowed them to continue. This is specific to the budget for this year. Okay?

Mr. Johnson: All right. Thank you.

The Chair: Ms Pastoor, you want to be on the list?

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Denis.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the members of the Executive Council for appearing before this committee this morning. My question deals with page 6. Figure A here talks about public satisfaction with government communications. It goes from 2003, not 1984, to 2008, and I've noticed that satisfaction is really roughly within the margin of error, hovering between 62 per cent and 66 per cent. I'd like to know what's been done in the past year to try to improve that. I'd like to know what's been done over the past year of your report to try to achieve the performance measure indicator of 75 per cent. What's been done in that respect?

Mr. Manning: Well, maybe just a point of clarification. Within the annual report the question relates to page 14, goal 2 on the performance measures. Am I correct? Public satisfaction with government communications?

Mr. Denis: That's right.

Mr. Manning: Okay. If that is the case, then maybe just a few observations. First of all, performance measures. I think the Auditor General would agree with me – we've had conversations in the past – that performance measures are critical here to measure progress within the context of our business plan.

This particular performance measure. If I'm right – and I think I am – no other province in Canada actually measures this degree of satisfaction with providing information to their public, with

government communications. So this is novel in Canada. In fact, I think that the only jurisdiction that comes close to this kind of measuring is Taiwan. It's not totally the same as this measure, but it's somewhat similar. Their current satisfaction percentage is 60 per cent. If you look at, again, the measure, if you get into it, it's broken down into six different categories. I believe the overall satisfaction is just under 72 per cent, but if you take the average of all six categories, then what we've reported here is accurate. It's 65 per cent.

The first thought is: a rather ambitious target or performance measure. It's not measured anywhere else in Canada. Our target is 75 per cent, but we are working towards over time improving the rating that we have at this point in time. We do do an annual survey. In 2007-2008 it was 800 Albertans that were surveyed to come up with this result in itself. We're going to take the feedback from those 800 Albertans and take that into consideration as we move towards trying to improve this measure.

Again, if you look at 65 per cent, 75 per cent is a stretchable target. Sixty-five per cent is not a bad result when you're looking at an overall broad perspective here of getting a rating from Albertans on overall government communications.

With that, I don't know, Roxanna, if you have anything that you would like to supplement.

Ms Benoit: Sure. If I could, just one or two other points. We are working on an ongoing basis to try to improve our communications channels and avenues and methods with Albertans. On this question we're looking specifically at better use of the Internet and ensuring that electronic information is available. We're looking at probably close to two-thirds of Albertans getting a lot of their information online, so we want to make sure that our electronic communications receive some focus and attention. So there's ongoing work to make sure that we're always improving.

With respect to the measures themselves, we want to take a look at them because we want to make sure we're asking the right question, and we want to make sure we have an opportunity to get some input as to how we can improve. We've actually already kind of flagged this very preliminarily with the OAG just to see if there's a way we can work towards making sure that what we're measuring is actually giving us the information that we need to make sure that we're measuring the right thing, that we're measuring outcome as opposed to activity because often there's a confusion there. Activity doesn't mean that you're actually accomplishing anything, so we want to be measuring outcome. We want to be able to get some input from Albertans a little more directly, a little more broadly, I suppose, in terms of what they're looking for and make sure that that's what we're providing to them.

This will be an ongoing process, and we'll have to work with the other agencies like the AG's office and Treasury Board and others to make sure that what we're measuring is right and that we can properly track from prior years so that when we change the measurement, we're not completely unable to track back success or improvement.

Mr. Denis: Just a quick supplemental. Thank you for your responses. The figure of 75 per cent: how was that arrived at? Is that an arbitrary figure, the target?

Mr. Manning: Well, that I'm going to have to defer to staff for some background.

Ms Benoit: I don't know if anyone has a specific . . .

Mr. Denis: If you want to submit a written response later, that's . . .

Ms Benoit: It's sort of a standard that is used in performance measures that, you know, you can sort of move up and down, but we can give you a specific response as a follow-up.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very kindly.

The Chair: Ms Benoit, if you could do that through the clerk to all members, we'd be grateful.

Ms Benoit: Absolutely.

The Chair: Ms Pastoor, followed by Mr. Dallas, please.

Ms Pastoor: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. This isn't at all what I had intended to ask. Roxanna, you had brought something up, so I'd like to discuss it. You said that two-thirds of Albertans are online, and you want to increase that use and to be able to get the information out. It's sort of like: how great we are. But my concern is that seniors, the vulnerable, and those that are poorer certainly are not online. Those are the ones that need to be able to talk to public servants, not government servants. I think we need somehow to be able to get the message out on "how can we help you?" and not how great we are. Could I maybe have a comment on that?

Ms Benoit: Absolutely. Actually, almost everything that we do is about providing information to Albertans about exactly that, about how they can access programs and services that they're looking for. We have a substantial informational advertising campaign that goes on through various ministries – through Seniors, through other ministries – advising Albertans on where they can get access to things. That's in weekly papers and daily papers. But we also have Alberta Connects or the 310 number that people can call in to and get their messages in and get their questions answered.

Although I absolutely acknowledge that the groups that you just outlined may not have as much access, even online with our websites and working with Seniors and Community Supports, for example, we've tried to make sure that the way that we've built those sites enables the technology for people, for example, who have a sight issue or seniors who need a larger font. All of that is available to people so that it's much easier for them to get the information.

Absolutely, a big priority for us is to make sure Albertans know where and how to access the services and programs that they're looking for, so a lot of what we do is focused exactly on that.

Ms Pastoor: Great. That's good. Thank you. I guess I'd like to suggest that it go down even deeper, down to a street level, because the street level really isn't involved with the Internet. Thanks.

Ms Benoit: If I could, Mr. Chairman. We do also try to work with agencies and boards who deliver a lot of those services, who are actually on the ground, to make sure that we're working with them and providing them with whatever materials or assistance would be helpful to them in making sure that people have the information that they're looking for.

9:00

Ms Pastoor: Yeah. And more than having it, that they actually understand it.

Ms Benoit: Fair enough.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Dallas, please.

Mr. Dallas: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I was particularly interested in the work of the Agency Governance Secretariat, so if you could, please, a little more information in terms of the value of the investment we made or perhaps the number of personnel that are working in that particular area.

Mr. Manning: Just a point of clarification: the value as in the budget for the Agency Governance Secretariat?

Mr. Dallas: I'm sorry. "Value" is the wrong term. We're going to come to the value. The budget investment and perhaps some sense of the number of folks that are working in that area.

Mr. Manning: Okay. Peggy, if I can just come to you for an overview, please.

Ms Hartman: Yes. We have four permanent employees in that area and one seconded over for a project in that area. That's the number we have right now. Of course, our work involves a lot of collaboration with departments and agencies. On some of our work we're collaborating with corporate human resources, for instance. While we are a small group, it is our networking that really is going to help us in the implementation of the policies and concepts under the framework.

Mr. Dallas: Thanks. I note from the discussion that there's a considerable focus on the HR side of this, but one of the areas where I would expect there's great leverage would be in terms of providing supports in actual board governance training. I wonder if you could speak to what initiatives we've invested in in that area and if you've been able to develop outcome measurements to try and grasp the level of impact that you're having with that initiative.

Mr. Manning: Board governance is key and critical to the functioning of any agency, board, or commission. I've had the privilege of being a CEO for two Crown corporations in two provinces to date, and I can tell you that board governance is the foundation of the functioning of any agency, board, or commission. If you've got the board governance properly established, then it seems all other business principles and practices just naturally flow from that.

I believe that within Alberta we have 260 agencies, boards, or commissions, or thereabouts. Also, close to 60 per cent of our budget flows through agencies, boards, and commissions on an annual basis. Again, to get board governance properly aligned is key and critical. We are embarking on establishing good board governance practices and principles. I believe we're putting it onto our website. We are dialoguing with particularly the major agencies, boards, and commissions in that regard in order to establish best practices here.

With that, maybe, as opening comments, Peggy, if I can come back to you again for a bit more detail here.

Ms Hartman: Right. Just to go to the last part of your question, we have not yet developed measures and targets in that area. It's pretty early days for us. We just became established in May of this year, and our focus, our priorities, so far have been in the area of recruitment and also in the area of developing mandate and roles documents because we feel that if we can address those areas, we're 70

to 80 per cent of the way. If we can get the right people, competent and skilled people, into those positions and if there's clarity around what their responsibilities are, we're going to go quite a distance to having effective organizations.

With respect to an orientation program, that is something that we're working on right now. We are intending to provide an orientation program on governance that will be available to give to government departments and agencies, so that's a huge initiative that we'll be working on. We know that some of the agencies do have some good orientation programs relating to governance, and we want to draw on some of those. We also have networks with other jurisdictions and organizations, so we want an orientation program that will be very robust and really assist in that area.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Fawcett.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What information or justification was provided to the ministry regarding possible negative perceptions of Alberta that would necessitate a rebranding initiative?

Ms Benoit: What information was provided? I'm sorry.

Mr. Chase: Right. You've chosen a new branding strategy. Why was that felt to be necessary, to paraphrase what I was asking.

Ms Benoit: Well, I wouldn't say that there was a source of information that I could point you to as saying that that's the piece that caused a decision to be made. I think that, rather, it was just a sense of observing how things were evolving and how issues were evolving and how the perception of the province was evolving. Based on that, there was a sense of obligation in government that it was appropriate for us to move forward on a rebranding initiative that, as I said earlier, would provide us with the basis on which we could talk about Albertans and Alberta as the great place that we all know it is to live. This is about the province. I think that's another point to be clear about. It's not about the government. We're not rebranding government. We're rebranding the province. It's about the province being a great place to live, a great place to work, a great place to invest.

It really wasn't one piece of information. I don't think that we could point at one piece of information that was what caused the decision to be made. What caused the decision to be made was just a sense of how issues were evolving and the sense that there was an obligation on government to do something about that on behalf of the province.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My follow-up: what mechanisms, procedures, et cetera, were used to prioritize initiatives to spend the allocated \$25 million for this branding campaign? In other words, your top priorities for this rebranding.

Ms Benoit: Well, when you embark on a branding initiative – and I'm not sure I'm clear on the question, so if I'm not going where you want me to go, then please tell me that, and I'll start again.

When you go through an initiative like this, it's a significant initiative to brand a place, especially a place like Alberta, that is so vibrant and dynamic and changing, so really there are some essential steps that have to be taken before you decide on the strategy that you are going to take, and that is a lot of discussion, a lot of talking with Albertans and with people outside the province about their perceptions. We want to know how Albertans are feeling about themselves. So we've spoken with various stakeholder groups, with

Albertans across the province to see their sense of the perception of the province and how they would like the province to be perceived outside. We're going through those kinds of steps now to determine what the best strategy would be to ensure that we're defining what the promise of the province is about. One of the things that we've found, specifically, is that it's about the people, and I don't think I need to tell anyone around this table that it is the people who define this place.

That's just to give you a sense of what the thinking is at this point, but there are a lot of steps that have to happen in order to establish that strategy, and that's what we're working out at this point.

The Chair: Thank you. Appreciate that.

Mr. Fawcett, please, followed by Ms Pastoor.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In a novel concept I'm actually going to ask a question about the '07-08 annual report, which we're supposed to be focusing on. It has to do with the public satisfaction with government communications, page 14. I know that Ms Pastoor asked the question about what other things outside of the website are being used to communicate with the public. My question is the flip side. We know that, particularly, there's a huge generational gap in how people are getting information. What strategies are you using to reach the younger generation, that is more reliant on sort of alternative forms of communication such as social media and these sorts of things, to get your message out?

9:10

Mr. Manning: Well, maybe I'll respond first and probably indicate my lack of technology and then turn it over to Roxanna. Just as an example of the importance of IT technology, if you look at our job recruitments, somewhere in the vicinity of 80 per cent or more of our job respondents apply electronically rather than through traditional methods. Again, I think it underscores the importance here of technology and how we reach a certain part of the population, particularly the younger portion.

I guess that with that broad observation, Roxanna, can I come to you for some particulars here?

Ms Benoit: Absolutely. It is an issue that we are engaged with in terms of social media, specifically. You are absolutely right that there are a significant number of people, particularly that demographic group that you've identified, who get almost all of their information online. So it's important and, again, an obligation on the part of government to ensure that we are communicating with those Albertans just as much as we are with everybody else and communicating with them in the media that they access information from. We are putting a lot of focus on our electronic communications, and it's not just by websites but also through social media.

In fact, a few departments have already done some projects where they've used social media quite effectively. Culture and Community Spirit for Alberta Arts Day had some YouTube videos up, I believe, and I think they had a Facebook page, although I'm not sure about that. SRD for the Victoria Day long weekend: if you'll recall the campaign that they had, protect our lands, because of the issues around that weekend. There were Facebook pages put up, and social media was used to engage younger people with those issues and advise them about being responsible on our public lands. I know that there are other examples, but they're not coming to mind right now.

We are working towards making use of social media in a much more effective way. There are challenges when you are a public-sector organization on how that will work, so we're working out

exactly how to make it happen and try to apply the use of social media appropriately across government. It's happening sort of one step at a time with various projects being put in place.

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Chair, my supplemental. The public satisfaction with government communications has remained relatively stable over the last, I believe, five years. Do you do any sort of looking statistic-wise into how that breaks out for certain segments of the population to give you information about how to use different types of media to reach different groups?

Ms Benoit: I don't think that we've gone into that kind of detail on the satisfaction measures or the performance measures surveys, so I don't think we have that information. It's probably something we should do. It's a matter of cost and time. Getting into that kind of detail really is an in-depth survey. That doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. I'm just saying that I think that's the reason it hasn't happened.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Pastoor, please, followed by Mr. Sandhu.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to try to put my supplemental in with the first one as well. How does the Public Affairs Bureau ensure that the government's communication policy is followed by the other government ministries? Then what input, if any, do the ministries have in developing or amending the communication policy? For any of you that know me, that would be my part; I want to be a part of it. How do you ensure that you haven't just sent the message, that other ministries are involved in the message, if in fact they are?

Ms Benoit: Yes, absolutely, all ministries are involved. The policy is just that. It's a policy setting some guidelines in terms of process, actually, not at all dealing with substance or messaging. It's really just processing how we want to ensure that there's a corporate approach. That really involves making sure the communications plans are part of all policy decision-making processes. That's the policy itself. How we make sure that ministries are involved in this is, I guess, in a couple of ways.

First of all, the bureau has staff in each department, so there's a lot of co-ordination and collaboration that happens amongst directors of communication and through the Public Affairs Bureau. It's the same with deputies. We have a deputies table, where issues are discussed, and we have a deputies communications committee, where we discuss how we're going to approach some of these issues. We try to ensure – and as I said earlier, this covers almost all issues now – that where there are cross-ministry initiatives, we have a really strongly co-ordinated effort that's led by the bureau but that all ministries are at the table for.

A good example, I think, is that recently, over the last number of months, a number of ministries, led by the ministries of Justice and Solicitor General, have worked together on announcements and communications with Albertans about the government's safe communities initiatives. That's what we try to do. The policy determines sort of the process, and then we work on substance together with ministries.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you.

The Chair: That's it? Okay.

Mr. Sandhu, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Chair. Thank you to all the executive members. My questions are on trade. With talk of the U.S.A. potentially renegotiating NAFTA, should Alberta be looking for new potential consumers of our oil or beef in Asia?

Mr. Manning: Well, I guess my first thought is that with NAFTA Alberta has benefited from that agreement. There have been some discussions coming out of the U.S. election as to whether or not President Obama would be prepared to take a look at changing part of the NAFTA agreement. I guess we'll just see how that unfolds. I think looking historically, as I mentioned, the province has benefited from free trade and the NAFTA agreement. I'm not aware of any attempt to look at changing part of or emphasizing certain commodities within the current NAFTA agreement.

Mr. Sandhu: A follow-up. If you look on page 10, are there some new international trade offices looking to be located in any parts of the Asian market?

Mr. Manning: On page 10? Do you want to just point out which paragraph we're talking about?

Mr. Sandhu: Well, on the Alberta international trade offices looking to be located. Are there any thoughts on parts of Asia, like China or India?

Mr. Manning: Yes. The Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations has and is currently reviewing our foreign offices as far as locations are concerned. There is some consideration as to expanding the international office complement at this point in time. Asia is one of the areas that's being looked at and considered at this time, but I'm not aware of any formal decision being arrived at yet.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Bhardwaj.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Referencing page 8 of the ministry's 2007-2008 report, can the ministry explain why an "advertising plan," which implies the need to sell or manipulate a message, is needed when the Public Affairs Bureau is mandated to simply provide "clear, consistent and timely communications"?

Mr. Manning: Roxanna, can I have you comment on our advertising strategy?

Ms Benoit: Sure. Well, I guess that in response to that question specifically about advertising, I'd go back to the comments made earlier about making sure that Albertans are aware of programs and services and have the information that they need to access those programs and services. That's what a significant amount of government advertising is about.

The bureau's role is to ensure that it's handled in a co-ordinated fashion. Really, our role is administrative at this point in terms of managing the advertising process and working with ministries to ensure that they are working through that process in the most efficient and effective way, that the advertising that they're doing has some purpose, which in this context means providing that information to Albertans about what's available with the government of Alberta in terms of programs and services that will help them. Our role is, as I said, to co-ordinate that process and to make sure that efficiency and effectiveness are at the bottom line of the advertising plan and program.

9:20

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My follow-up: how much funding and how many people within the Public Affairs Bureau are directed towards the implementation of the government's strategic communications plan?

Ms Benoit: I'm going to check my notes to get you the specific number of staff.

Mr. Chase: If it's easier to provide a written response on the specifics, that would be appreciated, but I'm speaking primarily about the large initiative on rebranding.

Ms Benoit: Well, the branding initiative is being managed by existing staff. There has been no additional staff complement to manage the branding initiative. In the way that the bureau is structured, there is a strategic communications component, and there is a marketing services component. The strategic communications group is the group that works with ministries on sort of day-to-day communications and on these cross-ministry initiatives. The marketing services group is the group that handles advertising. It handles anything related to marketing issues for the government of Alberta.

Between those two groups with my office – they are all my staff and report directly to me – we are managing the branding initiative, so there has been no additional complement. I have the numbers here. Eight staff are in the strategic communications section of the bureau.

Mr. Chase: If at a later point you could provide the funding for the benefit of the group, please.

The Chair: Did you have a point of order on this last question, Mr. Denis?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Chair, thank you for recognizing that. I don't have the exact verbiage of the Member for Calgary-Varsity's inquiry, but he referenced advertising, that it was to convey or compel a message. The implication, I think, was that it was some sort of mistruth. I've looked through this report, and I don't see any reference to that definition of advertising. My submission to you is that the question is out of order.

The Chair: Okay. With a point of order you have to have a citation from the standing orders.

Mr. Denis: I don't have the exact standing order, Mr. Chair, but it's common knowledge that we don't make assertions of mistruths in this business.

The Chair: Well, I don't believe there is a point of order there. Mr. Chase's question certainly was not any different than any other question that has been asked this fall in this committee, so without a citation . . .

Mr. Denis: I'll take it up with you in writing, Mr. Chair, once I get the transcript.

The Chair: Okay. We're moving on. There's no point of order there.

The next question, please. Mr. Bhardwaj, followed by Ms Pastoor.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My question is regarding the surveys. In looking at the '07-08 government client survey with communications support, how was the sample really chosen? That is my question. Of the 931 clients who were invited, is there a specific procedure which is used for picking the sample?

Mr. Manning: Well, number one, I believe it was a random sample. I don't think it was anything other than that. I'm looking to staff for detail. Can you supplement?

Ms Benoit: Yes. There are two different things here. One is internal communications within government, and that measure, I think, is the one that you've just referred to because that is our client groups within each department, and then the other measures are with the public. The measures with public satisfaction are just a public opinion survey, so it's a random selection of people.

On the internal communications measures we go to the ministries and ask directors of communications to identify where they provided services throughout the year in terms of providing communications support to program and policy areas, and then we talk to those people about the service that they were provided.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you. My only supplemental, then. Of all the invitees, 55 per cent of them probably didn't participate. Is there anything being done to get answers from them, or is it just whoever participates? Is it all voluntary, or are there any follow-ups to that?

Ms Benoit: Well, a few things. First of all, yes, that is voluntary, but that's just one point in time. We are constantly speaking with ministries. I speak with deputies, and my other staff speak with other people within the departments to ensure – and we do this on a regular basis – that they're getting served the way that their department needs to be served by their communications branches. That's an ongoing exercise.

The other thing that we do is with the people who respond to those questions. We follow up with them and ask them and have conversations with them about the comments that they provided if they want to have that discussion with us. Obviously, we can't force them to, but we do try to follow up so that we can get clarity about what it is that is involved in the comments that they've made through that process.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Ms Pastoor, please, followed by Mr. Johnson.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. On page 25 there was a supplemental amount of \$200,000 to the office of the Premier and \$375,000 to Public Affairs. I'm wondering how those funds were allocated. However, on page 26 the office of the Premier was underexpended by \$354,000, and Public Affairs was underexpended by \$200,000. Given that these supplemental amounts were allocated but then seemed to be underexpended, I'm just wondering: has any action been taken to improve this interesting budgeting practice?

Mr. Manning: Well, let me try, and then, I think, Elaine, I may have to come to you for the detail. As I mentioned in my opening comments, our overall budget was \$23.8 million. Then we had a supplementary estimate of \$575,000, but at the end of the year we expended \$23.2 million, so we came under by just right around the amount of our supplemental estimate. On the supplementary estimate that we had requested in November of 2007-2008, the thinking was at that time that there were some salary adjustments

that were made across the public service, so in essence this was to accommodate those contract negotiations.

Then at the end of the year we came under, and the main reason was because at that time we had the agency governance task force review that was going on, and that at the end of the year came in under budget from what we had projected, both the task force cost itself plus the start-up implementation cost to create the Agency Governance Secretariat. Broadly, that's why we had requested a supplementary estimate at the time, and then at the end of the year we came under.

I don't know if there's anything else you want to add to that, Elaine.

Ms Pastoor: It's just that it was interesting. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Johnson, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Chair. Just a couple of quick questions, one on the financial statements. I think you show liabilities of about 3 and a half million. I'm just wondering if you can elaborate on what's within that. What is that? I think it's on page 19, your statement of financial position. Under accounts payable and accrued liabilities we have about 3 and a half million, in net liabilities about 3 and a half million.

Mr. Manning: I think most of the liability – and again I may have to turn to my SFO here – a majority of that, would be vacation liability that's accrued to date. Is there anything else? And overtime.

9:30

Mr. Johnson: Thank you. My second is on the Auditor General's report from October on page 53, where they have the recommendation of a central security office. I'm wondering if you can elaborate on that and respond to that on what's being done. In a more general sense, I guess, from almost a knowledge management perspective security, especially information management and electronic security, is really records management or knowledge management, and potentially that should be under Service Alberta. But what kinds of investments have we been making in kind of a broader knowledge management strategy? Just respond to this recommendation, please.

Mr. Manning: Well, as I mentioned earlier, if you look at the GOA, we're a very complicated, sophisticated organization, an operating budget of \$30 billion or more here. Within the context of that organization the amount of data that we have is broad and deep, so the protection overall of that data is imperative here.

Mr. Ryan referenced in his opening comments the audit that was recently done by the office of the Auditor General. First of all, personally I'm very appreciative of that audit, and we are working closely with the Auditor General and his staff to implement the recommendations, but it did identify some issues, some areas that needed to be improved upon. The immediate areas that showed some discrepancies have been addressed quite quickly.

The recommendation from the Auditor General was to establish a security office here immediately, I think was the way it was described. I'm not quite sure that we established that office immediately but pretty close to that. It's housed in Service Alberta. I think, much like most jurisdictions, the chief security office and officer are usually embedded in the ministry that has the overall IT responsibility, so in Alberta we have done the same.

We've put together a cross-ministry committee that will oversee the development of improved security policies, building again on the

recommendations that come from the Auditor General, and I have a member of Executive Council on that overall committee.

I've asked for progress reports on the implementation, as you mentioned, of the overall information management and technology strategy that has just recently been put in place. I have a personal interest in the IMT strategy because in Treasury Board I did work with staff and along with the deputy of Service Alberta to put the IMT strategy in place here. It has taken about a year to put that strategy in place. I have a personal interest here to make sure that as it's being implemented, it's being implemented properly, so I've asked for progress reports to come to me in that regard.

I've instructed the chief internal auditor to conduct periodic audits on our overall information security systems and protocols just to make sure that they continue to be adequate and that they're being implemented properly here.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please.

Mr. Chase: How much were the agencies Calder Bateman Communications/Identica paid to develop Alberta's new brand?

Ms Benoit: The brand has not been developed yet, so this is a work in progress, and it will be a continuing effort, as members know, I think, over the next couple of years. We're working within our budget allocation for this fiscal year with respect to the branding initiative. Calder Bateman and Identica joined together and won the RFP process for this whole exercise, so they are working with us on managing the entire process, and we're working within that budget.

Mr. Chase: Is there anywhere within the 2007-08 report that I could find that information and what competition mechanisms were used to select these agencies?

Ms Benoit: It won't be in the 2007-08 annual report because it is in the 2008-09 budget. So the first reporting on this will be in that annual report. The process that was undergone is the process that we use through the Alberta purchasing system and is the same process that we use for awarding our service contracts at the bureau. It was a competitive process with a number of agencies competing, and at the end of the day an Alberta-based agency won the competition.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we get to Mr. Fawcett, Mr. Manning, could you clarify for the committee, please: each department makes a contribution to the budget for the chief internal auditor office, correct?

Mr. Manning: The budget for the chief internal auditor and her staff – we have 25 FTEs in that unit – is located within the ministry of Treasury Board.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

Mr. Fawcett, please, followed by Ms Pastoor.

Mr. Fawcett: On page 13 of the annual report it indicates that the satisfaction level of government clients increased slightly from the previous year, and then it goes on to say, "A number of staff in communications branches were reassigned as part of the government-wide reorganization and were working with new

clients." I know that in that paragraph it says that even with the increase this year, you remain below the target of 95 per cent satisfaction. Was the reorganization done to try to improve that level, and are we hoping that that will result in us coming closer to meeting the target in the next several years?

Mr. Manning: Well, I'll have to ask you to supplement, Roxanna, but the corporate reorganization wasn't done for communications purposes; it was to reflect the reorganization coming out of the last election. We now have 24 ministries and deputy ministers versus less than that prior. I believe Roxanna mentioned earlier that communications staff are assigned to respective ministries here, so you had some reassignment going on at the same time as ministries were being reorganized or created, if you will. So I don't think reorganization of staff was anything to do with the survey results.

Ms Benoit: Absolutely correct. The reorganization referred to there was the government reorganization, which resulted in new ministries, which meant the bureau had to build new communications branches for those ministries. We had to build them with the existing FTE complement, so that meant that people had to move from where they were into a new position and a new department, as did other public servants. There was a significant amount of change for communications professionals just because we had to build four new branches. When you go through that kind of an exercise, I think it's understandable that you need to re-establish relationships. The communications service is really that: it's providing a service. So a lot of it is relationship building as well. When you go through that kind of change, it just takes a little bit of time. That may have impacted the satisfaction number.

I just also would like to make the point that 95 per cent is a pretty high satisfaction rate to shoot for. You know, I don't think there are very many things that would reach 95 per cent. It really is a stretch getting to 88 per cent. We're pretty happy with that, especially at a time when there's been significant change.

That is just to supplement what Brian said.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you. Mr. Chair, my supplemental question, actually, is along that line. Why 95 per cent, particularly when some of our targets for the general public are lower? Do you look at readjusting the target? Maybe it's a little bit too high. I don't know. I mean, if we want to set really lofty goals, we could say a hundred per cent. Why 95 per cent? What is being done to ensure that we're maybe closing that gap if 95 per cent is a realistic target?

9:40

Mr. Manning: Well, we had an earlier question on the 75 per cent target for general public satisfaction and the reason for establishing that level. I would suggest, Mr. Chair, that we can come back, again in writing, and we'll cover off both. The 95 per cent target, as Roxanna mentioned, is a stretch goal. They both are stretch goals here. I just don't have the background as to why in the past we've picked that number other than that it's a very lofty number to strive for and achieve. A hundred per cent: I don't know if we can ever accomplish that on anything here. But as to why we picked that number in the past, I'd be pleased to come back to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you. We appreciate that.

Ms Pastoor, please.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Another little interesting note. On page 23 there's a deficiency reported in the management employees' pension plan and the public service pension plan, but

why did the supplementary retirement plan for the public service managers report a surplus?

Mr. Manning: I think that's going to be a question that we'll have to table and then come back with in writing because I don't have the answer to that. It's the overall government fiscal position of our pension plans, but we can come back. We'll seek that information and come back in writing.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. That's page 23.

Mr. Manning: Thank you.

The Chair: Is that it, Ms Pastoor?

Ms Pastoor: Yes. I managed to put it all together into one question.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.
Mr. Chase, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Referencing page 27 of the ministry's 2007-2008 report, what specific roles does the executive director, strategic communications, economic play within the Public Affairs Bureau?

Ms Benoit: There are two executive directors of strategic communications at the bureau. They are direct reports to me. One, the economic portfolio, is responsible for managing issues related to ministries within a kind of loosely defined economic envelope. The social executive director is responsible for co-ordinating and managing issues related to ministries under that envelope. It's just how we've divided responsibilities internally to allocate issues. They're sort of common issue sets to individuals who work directly with ministries.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Given that the salary for this position almost doubled from the previous year, how is the performance of this individual measured to justify such a large salary increase?

Ms Benoit: Well, it was not a salary increase for an individual. This was because that position was occupied for seven months in '06-07 and for the full year in '07-08, so the difference made that percentage increase. There were five months where no one was paid in the previous year, which meant the number increased by a significant percentage year over year.

Mr. Chase: So that five-month salary was never paid out? It didn't become a bonus for the new person?

Ms Benoit: No. There was no person there, so there was no salary paid.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fawcett, please, followed by Ms Pastoor.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't know, I guess we're stretching for questions at this point, but I do want to go back to my first line of questioning. It actually ties into an article that I'm just reading here on my computer by a Canadian. It has to do, actually, with something that happened in Ontario. The Premier of Ontario stated today that he's thinking of going back on some legislation they were thinking of bringing in on putting some restriction on young drivers, the reason being that he went to

Facebook and saw that a group of young people got engaged in this, 116,000 people that are very much opposed to this. Not only that, but the government did put in a ban on all government employees utilizing Facebook, including the Premier himself. I guess that the essence of this article is that he has kind of gone back and rethought, that this is a great tool for the government to be able to use to reach out to people, and this is how they're communicating.

You might not be able to answer this, but I would like to know, particularly when we use Facebook as an example, what advertising, if any, utilizing Facebook, did the government of Alberta use in this fiscal year that we're talking about to reach out to young people? I don't know if that will be able to be answered right here but even just to provide it in writing.

Mr. Manning: Well, Facebook and other vehicles are new, emerging technologies. Roxanna and I have had discussions recently in the context of this fiscal year of the need to recognize where technology is going. Again, what we talked about earlier, a certain part of society here being very IT literate, we do have to recognize that and make sure that as we try to convey information to that group, we're using the current advances in technology.

I'm going to come back to Roxanna here. I don't even know if Facebook existed a year ago, but I did admit earlier my IT limitations. Assuming it did exist, that technology, emerging as it is, whether or not we utilized that in 2007-2008, I'd have to defer here to Roxanna.

Ms Benoit: I would just go back to what I mentioned earlier in terms of a few ministries using it from time to time for specific projects as appropriate, recognizing the audience that they're trying to reach and, particularly, using it when they're trying to reach that demographic that you've identified. Whether we can identify across government at this point what exact initiatives are happening in each ministry, I don't have that because we've just been working on it project by project.

Just to add to that, we absolutely recognize that that is a place where government needs to be because of the fact that a significant number of people go online to get their information and go to specific places. The appropriateness of government being everywhere: that's an issue that we've got to talk about internally and make some internal decisions about how we do that. I hadn't heard about the Ontario legislation, the questions being raised, but certainly we've seen it before. Several months ago a similar thing happened in Ottawa with the privacy legislation that Industry Canada was trying to put through Parliament. A number of people formed an online community that forced the Minister of Industry – at least this is one interpretation of what happened – to revise his legislation.

In other jurisdictions, like the U.K., they're using wikis, actually, to draft legislation. In New Zealand some of these things are happening. There are jurisdictions where they're really trying to move beyond the traditional way of doing things and are engaging using online consultation. We do online consultation but in a much more traditional way. There are all kinds of opportunities for the information that people need to be put out there, but from our perspective we've got to plan through how we're going to do this and make sure that we're taking the right steps.

Mr. Fawcett: I don't know if I really have a supplemental, just to indicate that it would be interesting to know the cost-benefit analysis on these different types of media and if that's effective because, certainly, reaching out utilizing these certain media is a lot cheaper than buying advertisements in newspapers and that sort of thing.

Ms Benoit: If I could, Mr. Chairman, just to that point. That is one of the issues that we've got to address when we're looking at using these new technologies and new mediums of communication because if you're online in a social media forum, you've got to be there. You know, it's not sort of a 9-to-5 kind of conversation. So that has implications for how we manage that. We've got to look at all of those issues, and that's what we're trying to do at this point.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fawcett, personally, I believe that you're on to something. Social media, as you call it, if we were to increase the focus of that in this province, I think we could encourage a number of younger people like yourself to vote.

Ms Pastoor, please.

9:50

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I hope the newspaper industry doesn't read this *Hansard*.

On page 23, there was a defendant, and I'm just wondering if that legal claim has been settled, what it was, and did it go over the \$76,000?

Mr. Manning: This was a contingent liability that carried over into fiscal 2007-2008. I'm not aware of the status of that claim.

Ms Pastoor: Well, we could probably get that in writing as well, then, if you wouldn't mind. Thank you.

Mr. Manning: Yes. We can check, Mr. Chairman, with the Ministry of Justice and get the status of that claim.

Ms Pastoor: And what it is, yeah. Thank you.

Mr. Manning: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chase, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Referencing page 13 of the ministry's 2007-2008 report, why was an increase of more than \$2 million necessary to help government ministries communicate with Albertans?

Ms Benoit: Sorry?

Mr. Chase: I'm trying to get money for full-day kindergarten, and the ministry got \$2 million that I'd love to have seen reallocated.

Mr. Manning: Oh, you're looking at the line "Help government ministries communicate with Albertans" and looking at the actual for 2006-07 versus the actual for 2007-2008, and the difference there is a little bit more than \$2 million.

Ms Benoit: Well, I believe that the entire amount was for salary adjustments as per contractual obligations. There were no other significant budget increases, no additional FTEs, nothing else that would cause that other than the obligations through contracts.

Mr. Chase: All right. It sounds like there was probably a very nice Christmas bonus that occurred in the 2007-2008 year.

How was the increase of more than \$2 million to support strategic planning and policy development allocated? I gather from your previous answer that it was primarily salary upgrading.

Mr. Manning: Again, if you look at the 2006-07 actual, it was \$6.3 million versus the 2007-08 actual of \$8.7 million. Steve, maybe I'm going to come to you and Peggy. My first thought was the Agency Governance Secretariat, its creation. Did that have impact on those numbers? Yes? Okay. So that's part of the adjustment, the creation of the new Agency Governance Secretariat.

Other than normal salary adjustments for the policy co-ordination office, there wasn't anything else there.

Mr. S. MacDonald: No. That's correct.

Mr. Manning: Again, mainly the creation of the Agency Governance Secretariat.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: For the record, schedule 4 on page 27, Mr. Manning, there were no achievement bonuses paid out in the Executive Council for this fiscal year, correct?

Mr. Manning: For the year 2007-2008?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Manning: There should have been achievement bonuses paid to senior officials in that fiscal year.

The Chair: Okay. I just don't see it noted here like in other departments.

Mr. Manning: It would be in the second column, under Other Cash Benefits. So it would be a component of those numbers.

The Chair: Okay. Yeah. Excuse me. In other departments that come before us there is a footnote regarding achievement bonuses. I was just, in regard to Mr. Chase's question, clarifying whether or not the staff in this department received an achievement bonus in this year.

Mr. Manning: The answer, Mr. Chair, is yes. It would be consistent, the achievement bonuses, with the methodology across all ministries here. If the committee is interested in that being broken out, we're prepared to do that.

The Chair: I think that's fine. Thank you.

Mr. Manning: Okay.

The Chair: To conclude, Mr. Chase.

Mr. Chase: For the record and reporting back to the group. Referencing page 28, why did the cost for accommodation almost double from the previous year? And the follow-up: what steps have been taken to ensure that this cost increase is limited in the future?

Mr. Manning: Well, I'll look to see whether or not my financial staff want to supplement, but the increase from \$369,000 to \$628,000 was primarily for two reasons. One was the office space for the Public Affairs Bureau. That lease became available, I believe, and that was renegotiated, so there were, I'm assuming, some additional costs in that regard.

Then with the creation of, again, the Agency Governance Secretariat there was some renovation work done within this building on the 11th floor, and that was captured in that number.

The renovations will be a one-time cost, so that won't be recurring. I believe the lease arrangements will be for several years, so that won't be an item until that lease expires.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Any more questions?
Ms Pastoor, please. Quickly.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'm sorry. I thought I was on the list. Back to my favourite subject of seniors. Referencing page 9, I did speak about this, actually, in my first questions. What measurements are used to determine that seniors had better access to information partly through the seniors' information line, and how much funding actually went toward that initiative?

Ms Benoit: We'll have to get back to you with that information. I don't have it.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. That's fine.

The Chair: We'd appreciate that. Through the clerk to all members again.

Ms Pastoor: If I might clarify what you're calling a senior in that particular measurement, if that's what you're doing.

The Chair: Okay. Seeing no more questions that we could get on the record at this time, that concludes this part of our meeting this morning with the Public Accounts Committee. On behalf of all members, Mr. Manning and your delegation this morning, thank you very much. Good luck in all your endeavours.

Mr. Manning: Thank you.

The Chair: You're free to go, if you would like, while we conclude the rest of our agenda.

Is there any other business at this time that we need to deal with?

We'll move on to item 5, the date of our next meeting. I would like to remind all hon. members that we will meet next week with Sustainable Resource Development on Wednesday, December 3, 2008, at the usual time. If the session ends for some reason on Monday or Tuesday, then there will be no meeting on Wednesday morning. Okay? Our schedule will not provide for that. So if there's no session, if session ends Tuesday or Monday or even tomorrow, there will be no meeting. I am told that we will be going through till next week until at least Wednesday. Okay?

Item 6, adjournment. Mr. Bhardwaj. Thank you. Moved by Mr. Bhardwaj that the meeting be adjourned. All in favour? Seeing none opposed, thank you very much, and have a good week.

[The committee adjourned at 9:59 a.m.]

