



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
Second Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Community Services

Department of Culture and Community Spirit  
Consideration of Main Estimates

Monday, April 20, 2009  
6:30 p.m.

Transcript No. 27-2-1

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

**Standing Committee on Community Services**

Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC), Chair  
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL), Deputy Chair  
  
Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)  
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)  
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (AL)  
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)  
Johnston, Art, Calgary-Hays (PC)  
Lukaszuk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC)  
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND)  
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)  
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)

**Also in Attendance**

Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL)  
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)

**Department of Culture and Community Spirit Participant**

Hon. Lindsay Blackett	Minister
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6:30 p.m.

Monday, April 20, 2009

[Mr. Doerksen in the chair]

**Department of Culture and Community Spirit  
Consideration of Main Estimates**

**The Chair:** Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. It's time for our meeting to begin. It is 6:30, and we have a quorum, so we will begin.

I'd like to welcome you to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Community Services this evening. I'd ask that members introduce themselves for the record, and I would also ask that the minister introduce his officials as well, please.

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

**Ms Notley:** Rachel Notley, MLA, Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Ms Blakeman:** Good evening, everyone. Nice to see a packed house. My name is Laurie Blakeman, and I'd like to welcome you all to my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

**Mr. Blackett:** Lindsay Blackett, Minister of Culture and Community Spirit and MLA for Calgary-North West.

I'd like to introduce my officials: Lois Hawkins, my deputy minister; Mathew Steppan, my executive assistant; Pam Arnston, executive director of financial services; Sue Bohachuk, assistant deputy minister of the culture division; David Link, acting assistant deputy minister of the heritage division; Tom Thackeray, acting assistant deputy minister of the community and volunteer services division; Carl Royan, director of lottery funding programs; and Shawna Cass, director of communications.

**Mrs. Sarich:** Janice Sarich, MLA for Edmonton-Decore and parliamentary assistant to the Hon. David Hancock.

**Mr. Johnson:** Jeff Johnson, Athabasca-Redwater.

**Mr. Hehr:** Kent Hehr, Calgary-Buffalo.

**The Chair:** I am Arno Doerksen, MLA for Strathmore-Brooks and the chair of this committee. I will remind members that this meeting is being broadcast via audio link, and your microphones are live, so you don't need to adjust them to speak.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01 the main estimates of government departments stand referred to the policy field committees according to their respective mandates. Today the Standing Committee on Community Services has under consideration the estimates of the Department of Culture and Community Spirit for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

I would like to remind members that the vote on the estimates will be deferred until we are in Committee of Supply, when the consideration of all ministry estimates have been concluded. You will note from the calendar that was tabled in the Assembly on March 12 that the date for the Committee of Supply vote has been set for May 7, 2009. Should any amendments be moved during committee consideration of the estimates, the vote on these amendments will also be deferred until May 7, 2009.

On the issue of amendments I'd like to remind members that an amendment to the estimates cannot seek to increase the amount of the estimates being considered, change the destination of a grant, or change the destination or purpose of a subsidy. An amendment may

be proposed to reduce an estimate, but the amendment cannot propose to reduce the estimate by its full amount. Amendments must be in writing with sufficient copies for distribution to all committee members and support staff, that being 20 copies.

Regarding the speaking order, members are reminded that the standing orders of the Assembly governing who can speak apply. During the policy field committees' consideration of the main estimates members of the committee, the minister, and other members present may be recognized to speak. Department officials and members' staff are permitted to be present during consideration of the estimates but are not allowed to speak. This is the same process that was previously followed during Committee of Supply consideration of the main estimates.

This evening we have three hours to consider the estimates of the Department of Culture and Community Spirit. However, if prior to this time we should reach a point where members have exhausted their list of questions, the department's estimates shall be deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn.

This evening I'd like to say to the members that pursuant to the standing orders which came into effect on December 4, 2008, and in particular Standing Order 59.01, the meeting will proceed as follows. For the first 10 minutes the minister will have the opportunity to present opening remarks. For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Following that hour, the members of the third-party opposition and the minister may speak for a total of 20 minutes. I'm going to suggest that at that point we take a very brief five-minute break to allow members to get up for a few minutes but that we restrict ourselves with discipline to five minutes. At that point the clock will continue to run.

As is the practice in committee, members may speak more than once; however, speaking time is limited to 10 minutes at a time. A member and the minister may combine their speaking time for a total of 20 minutes. I would ask that members advise the chair at the beginning of their speech if they wish to combine their speaking time.

The committee clerk will operate the timers, one for the individual speaking times and the other for the overall committee meeting time. I as the chair will endeavour to alert the member and the minister speaking when their time is close to expiring.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run while these points are being dealt with.

I think we've had a few other members join us since we had introductions, so I'll just go around. Members, if you haven't introduced yourself, please do so at this point.

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you very much, Chair. Dave Rodney, Calgary-Lougheed.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thomas Lukaszuk, Edmonton-Castle Downs. Thank you.

**Mr. Benito:** Good evening. Carl Benito, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Good evening. Teresa Woo-Paw, Calgary-Mackay.

**Mr. Johnston:** Hi. Art Johnston, Calgary-Hays.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

With that, I'll invite the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit to begin his remarks. Minister, please.

**Mr. Blackett:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to present the

estimates for Culture and Community Spirit for 2009-10. Alberta Culture and Community Spirit has a broad mandate with responsibility for culture, community services, the voluntary sector, museums, and heritage sites throughout the province. Culture, community, and volunteers are the threads that when woven together create the fabric of who we are as Albertans. We provide a hand up to Albertans by managing community investment grant programs that strengthen community-based initiatives, facilities, and programs. We're also responsible for the Alberta human rights system. Over the past year I have visited more than 50 communities big and small all over the province. I can tell you from first-hand experience that the programs this ministry provides feed the heart and soul of these communities.

With your approval and support we will further the contributions Albertans make to their communities by investing in projects they have identified as priorities. This includes continued support of our strong cultural and community fundamentals by strengthening our commitment to protection of individual rights and freedoms; continuing to ensure that arts and cultures are supported in Alberta, including preserving and sharing our heritage; and improving the quality of programs and services to Alberta's volunteer and non-profit communities. Our 2009-10 consolidated program expense is \$308.8 million. These dollars directly support initiatives, programs, and services that make a difference in the lives of Albertans every day.

Strengthening our province's human rights system has been a priority of mine since my first few weeks on the job. Over the past year I've been leading a review of our human rights policies and legislative framework. The goal is to ensure that our human rights system reflects the unique circumstances, needs, and priorities of our province here in 2009. Part of this is ensuring that the appropriate resources and processes are in place to help make the human rights complaint resolution process as efficient as possible while maintaining fairness to all parties. As a result of this work, we are investing an additional \$1.7 million in our human rights system. This is an increase of 26 per cent. This investment, in addition to the recent addition of our new chief commissioner, is a great start towards helping to ensure that Alberta's Human Rights and Citizenship Commission has the capacity to meet the priorities and needs of our changing population.

This year government also continues to stand strong in our support of arts and culture at a time when creativity and innovation are needed most. This investment we'll use in a number of ways: to help increase the use of video conferencing of arts and cultural activities and programs in schools and libraries, to create virtual tours of Alberta's museums, and to find new ways to connect Albertans through technology, a key component of this year's Arts Days celebration.

#### **6:40**

Last year's Arts Days were a great success, with almost a hundred events planned in more than 30 communities. This year we're expanding Arts Days to a three-day celebration of the arts in all of its forms. Mark your calendars for September 18 through 20, and prepare to see an even larger demonstration of Alberta's community spirit than last year.

Our economic situation is different than it was six months ago. As a result, we are looking carefully at the timing of major projects such as the Royal Alberta Museum renewal. This project is still part of the government's capital plan; however, the government is still considering options for the museum. A new timeline for this project will be developed once a final decision is reached. This decision will take into account the best interest of Albertans and the museum's long-term contributions to quality of life in Alberta.

The government is also working hard to better support an industry that brings fast economic rewards, increases tourism, employs thousands of Albertans, and spotlights Alberta's culture. Government remains committed to the strategies we introduced last year to make it easier for film and television production companies to work in Alberta. Last year we increased the funding cap of the film development program from \$1.5 million to \$3 million per project and adjusted the film development program guidelines. I will continue to work closely with the film industry to ensure that we can continue to be aggressive in attracting new productions.

We are continuing to support an industry that employs more than 8,000 Albertans. It's important for me to note that the racing industry generates these dollars through slot machines located at racetracks. Horse Racing Alberta receives a portion of the net proceeds, a third of which also goes to the Alberta lottery fund, which benefits all Albertans.

Community and volunteer sector supports. Albertans are among the most generous people in the world. As part of our annual survey last year we heard that 69 per cent of Albertans indicated that they did at least one type of volunteer work over the past 12 years. My department has supported the tireless commitment and dedication of volunteers by focusing on a practical and sustainable approach to building strong communities. My department alone provides a direct benefit of \$166 million to this sector through several different programs: \$38 million through the community facility enhancement program, \$28 million through the community initiatives program, \$20 million for the new community spirit grant program, and an estimated \$80 million through the community spirit enhanced charitable tax credit. Our community spirit program is donor directed, and our community facility enhancement and community initiative programs require community support, meaning that the government investments are directed to priorities defined by Albertans.

Community investment programs do great work in our communities. However, my focus since my first day on the job was to determine whether or not we could continue to improve on that support. Over the past year I've been leading a review of our grant processes and their associated boards, agencies, and commissions. We are working to make these programs more efficient, effective, and transparent for Albertans. Our focus is centred on three key principles: accessibility, simplicity, and flexibility.

As I noted earlier, I have visited more than 50 communities across the province. During these visits I've taken a look at the impact that the government's community investment programs are making from the perspective of the volunteer organizations and the not-for-profit sector as well. Two things come out loud and clear. First, all Albertans are using these programs to provide vital support to Alberta's community. Second, there is duplication between some of the government programs. This causes unnecessary administrative work for nonprofit and voluntary organizations. In many cases organizations receiving Wild Rose Foundation grants also met the criteria for the community initiatives program and the community facility enhancement program. Therefore, grant funding for the Wild Rose Foundation is being merged with the community initiatives program and community facilities enhancement program. The maximum grant is higher for both of these programs. They will go from \$50,000 to \$75,000 in the CIP program.

The department will be changing the criteria for the community initiatives program and the CFEP and is making other process improvements to ensure that dollars are available for small, community-based projects on a nonmatching basis. All other programs and services provided by the Wild Rose Foundation will continue as ministry initiatives such as Volunteer Week activities,

the Vitalize conference, volunteer awards, and the board development program.

Every six weeks I'll be meeting with the members of the not-for-profit and volunteer sector to ensure there's a direct, ongoing line of communication between these organizations and government. This is in addition to meeting every three months with the ministers responsible for the Alberta nonprofit and voluntary sector initiative to discuss opportunities in a government-wide approach to working with this invaluable sector.

I'd like to emphasize that government as a whole has a strong focus on building strong communities. For example, government recently announced \$2.4 million to fund a three-year pilot that will cover the cost of police information checks for volunteers working with children, seniors, and people with disabilities. This program will help free up thousands of dollars for organizations so that they can redirect their money towards front-line and core services benefiting Albertans.

In addition, community libraries received a 40 per cent increase in funding as part of Budget 2009. We've also invested \$35 million to help recruit and retain staff in not-for-profit agencies contracted by government to provide services to children and families and Albertans with developmental disabilities. Also, \$74.8 million was provided in Budget 2009 to support community-based prevention and early intervention programs through family and community support services.

In addition, this year my department will maintain its annual investment of \$20 million in the community spirit donation grant program, encouraging Albertans to increase their donations to eligible nonprofit organizations and registered charities. This program, now in its second year, will receive a total of \$60 million over three years. It provides grants based on the amount of eligible donations made by Albertans and complements the estimated \$80 million enhanced charitable tax credit program. The first year of the grant program was a success, with more than 1,500 applications. More details on these grants will be made available over the coming weeks.

The major community facilities program. We have reached the end of the two-year, \$302 million major community facilities program, which supported 228 capital projects in communities across the province.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. In my introductions I did not specifically welcome the members of the public. We do have a significant number of members of the public here this evening, and we certainly welcome you to observe the proceedings this evening.

With that, we'll turn to the opposition, who is taking the floor. Ms Blakeman.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My thanks to the minister and his staff for attending today. I believe, I hope that I will get about 80 minutes' worth of exchange with the minister. Given the budget figures I have, I think we're trying to hold the government accountable for \$3.6 million a minute, so I shall get right down to it.

There are eight areas that I would like to speak to specifically this evening, starting with the NGO sector, but I'd also like to talk about the film and cultural industries, the Royal Alberta Museum, the Human Rights Commission, the community spirit program, an inventory of the cultural and artistic spaces, heritage, and the cultural policy.

Now, Mr. Minister, you cannot fail to have noticed that the galleries, such as they are in this very small committee room, are filled tonight. No one else is allowed to join us. We've hit our

maximum capacity for people who have come, and it's a fairly wide variety of people that we have here, including people from the inner-city children's project; the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation; a number of individuals that I recognize, some representing voluntary organizations and societies that work to promote volunteers; I hope there's someone here from the Volunteer Centre of Camrose and District, who sent a very good letter to me; members of the Rotary; the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton; Edmonton Hard of Hearing. And I talked about the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation.

Where I'd like to start, Mr. Minister, is with the elimination of the Wild Rose Foundation. Now, with that, we have lost the \$4.7 million that was in their quarterly grant program and the \$1.3 million in the international development program. That, as far as I can ascertain, was the only international development money that was available in any program in the province. The elimination of that has hit very hard, and I'm sure you have received a number of letters from very concerned individuals and organizations as well as myself.

6:50

On top of that, there has also been a slight reduction – it amounts to a lot of money when you're in the NGO sector – of a little over a million dollars combined between the CIP and the CFEP programs. In all, that NGO sector, the nongovernmental organization sector, is looking at about a \$7 million hit of money that they used to get through this department and are no longer getting. Now, I understand that the minister has said that they can look for funds through the CIP or the CFEP programs, but in fact, as I've just pointed out, those programs have also taken a reduction.

One of the issues that some of these groups are facing is that they may not in fact be an organization that is able to raise individual donations. For example, if they're a service organization and they serve other like-minded agencies – an umbrella organization is another way of putting it – they may not have a fundraising arm or even any way to accept revenue that's raised in that way and certainly then can't match it. In losing the support for the voluntary sector that was available through the Wild Rose, they in fact have no ability to raise money. I'll quote from the Volunteer Centre of Camrose and District: "It is not feasible that all these organizations can make up for the loss of these funds through more fundraising, even in times when the economy is strong." Then she refers to the community spirit matching grant. "Others, like ours cannot draw donations from individuals, so are excluded" from matching programs like the community spirit program.

The question that I have, to begin with, for the minister today – and I'm assuming that we're combining our two 10-minute times for a 20-minute exchange. Is that agreeable to the minister?

**Mr. Blackett:** Sure.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Has the minister or the department been able to identify the consequences of eliminating the Wild Rose Foundation grants? I've outlined what the community has said to me. What are the consequences that the minister and the department have outlined with the elimination of this program and the corresponding grant money?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, thank you for the comments. Yeah, we realized; this is not something that's new to us. We've looked at the program and all our community investment programs over the last year. The economic circumstances of the last six months, however, have changed things, and I was faced with a shortfall of \$9 million. Everywhere in this department there are passionate people, well-

deserving people, well-deserving organizations that need to be taken care of. We looked at the amount of collective money that we had, and in looking at our programs, there is some duplication.

We certainly recognize the fact that Wild Rose provided some things that were unique. One was that they didn't require matching funds for those funds up to \$50,000, and we allowed for multiple year. What we are doing right now is we are looking at both the CFEP and the CIP to look at setting aside a pool of money for those two programs, hopefully, that could equal the amount of money that was provided in the Wild Rose program, but we haven't completed that yet. We'll make a pool of money available on a nonmatching basis, so for those organizations you had mentioned that weren't able to come up with funds to be matched, we would be able to do that. We have to change some of our criteria, and we're willing to do that. We will do that in conjunction with ANVSI. I think we have a meeting on May 6, so we will come up with some proposals to deal with some of those issues.

Also, the international component. We recognize that. That's unique. It's a part of Alberta's heritage and our responsibility and our image abroad in participating in those, so we will look to be able to try to provide monies for those. I know it all comes out of a smaller pot, but we've had a lot of inefficiencies in our system, and we looked at changing some of the criteria. We can do that, and I'm sure that in subsequent questions I can flesh that out for you.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, actually, I don't find inefficiencies in the programming that was being offered by the not-for-profit sector. The only inefficiencies, if I may, were in duplicate applications that organizations had to make to different groups, but I would not fault the groups for that, frankly. I think that they have been punished for it. At an easy look at this it seems to me that the department chose the most vulnerable and the ones that were least able to fight back hard and cut them. I'm looking for some justification from the minister, besides the fact that he was \$9 million short, for cutting Wild Rose. He's talked about duplication, but in fact when I look at the duplication that exists in the overlap between community spirit and CIP and CFEP, I'm seeing many of the same things that the minister seemed to be using as justification for duplication between Wild Rose and CIP itself. Maybe I can get him to expand on that.

While he's doing it, could you explain to us why the program was eliminated as of the 1st of April? Can you give us a timeline for when you will be able to give me and members of the community some hard information about when the new programs will be online and available to them? Wild Rose ran a quarterly grant program, so by June we would have been expecting some kind of rollout. Can the minister meet the same target deadline for being able to provide money to these organizations on the same schedule this year as they could have been expecting from Wild Rose?

**Mr. Blackett:** Okay. Going forward, if we can get one question, one answer, and we'll keep it flowing.

On the last point, we believe we can come up with a response after we've sat down with representatives of the sector and officials in our department in the next 30 days and explain exactly how we're going to be able to fund these programs, how we're going to be able to roll out, what the criteria will be, and that will be something done in conjunction with the sector, not without them. There has been much made of the fact that they weren't consulted on this, but as everybody who sits at this table knows, in the budget process that's not how it works. You don't get a chance to get your target and then go out and consult the people. It is what the number is, and you have to make the best of it.

You're saying that I picked on the most vulnerable sector. Well,

of 300 and some-odd million dollars, \$166 million goes to this sector. As valuable as it is, there are all those other ones. I'd love to know where you would have me cut. Would you rather have me cut from the arts programs? Would you have me cut from the film development programs? Would you have me cut from our historic resources or our museums? We have to make one, and we thought that we could actually work together.

I'm not saying that the industry or the sector had anything to do with duplication. I'm talking about ourselves. I'm talking about ourselves in government, how we have to be more efficient and effective. We've got some programs where we have given out too much money, and we've created some of our own problems, and we need to pull that back because we need to give as much money as possible to these worthy organizations.

**Ms Blakeman:** What was the justification for cutting Wild Rose over any of the other ones?

**Mr. Blackett:** Because I thought that between the CFEP and the CIP, if we pool those together, we can take money out of there and make it available on a nonmatching basis for the Wild Rose Foundation. We could cover the cost of the board development program, Volunteer Week, and the Vitalize conference. I think there's \$780,000 left to do just that. It's not really a cut of \$7 million; it's a cut of \$6.2 million technically. We think that we might be able to realize that \$6.2 million by combining some of those other programs and changing some things.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, Mr. Minister, when we're looking at money that was available to grants that went into that not-for-profit sector, they lost \$4.7 million for their regular Wild Rose program, \$1.3 million for international development, and over a million to CIP and CFEP, so that sure looks like a \$7 million hit to me. Essentially, what we have is the same pie, or a \$7 million smaller pie, and the same number of forks.

My next question to you is: what are going to be the changes that we can anticipate to the CIP program? Clearly, if you are now expecting to be funding some of those programs out of CIP that weren't there before, that's going to have a trickle-down effect. Who's going to get eliminated off the bottom? You must know that at this point.

**Mr. Blackett:** No. It's not a matter of who's going to get eliminated. Let's put a little common sense to the process. Take, for instance, an international hockey team that wants to go to Europe. Why do we have to give them \$75,000? Why can't we put a cap of a lower amount to them? Why can't we spread the money around in terms of not everybody getting \$75,000? There are many other things in there and many other groups.

7:00

I can't go into a lot of detail because I have to talk to some of my colleagues, and I have to talk to the sector. I went on one path, talking to a few people in the sector, and they said: "No, no, no. We don't want you to go that way." So we'll sit down, and responsibly we'll come up with a list of options and ask for their guidance on what they think the best path is. Hopefully, we'll get as close as we can to freeing up that amount of money. In 30 days it's my task to show you how we can do that. In 30 days if we can't do that, then I'll take that criticism, but I feel fairly confident that we can do it.

**Ms Blakeman:** And 30 days from now what is it exactly that all of these people at the back are to be expecting from the minister?

**Mr. Blackett:** They'll find out, I would imagine, that the applications that they have in now for the Wild Rose program will be reviewed and taken great consideration of. I wouldn't see any reason that they wouldn't be approved as they were before. For those that were a two-year program, we will make it a priority to make sure that we meet that obligation to fulfill the second part of that commitment. They'll find out what amount of money will be available on a nonmatching basis and then what other criteria changes are made to be able to effectively free up extra dollars.

**Ms Blakeman:** Could I ask you what's happening to the staff who were employed by the Wild Rose Foundation, please?

**Mr. Blackett:** Sure. The staff that's employed by the Wild Rose Foundation will continue to be employed by Culture and Community Spirit. Actually, they provide a level of expertise that we could utilize in some of our other community investment programs. They will be continuing to deal with the not-for-profit sector, and in many instances you may be dealing with the same person that you were dealing with before through the Wild Rose Foundation. You know, we want to take the best of what they have and utilize it. It's an unfortunate situation, but we don't need to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

**Ms Blakeman:** Now, overall there's an increased reliance on the NGO sector or the not-for-profit sector, particularly on the voluntary sector, when times are tough. Your colleagues have been very quick to point out how many more things they would like this sector to pick up. As I've said, they're now trying to do it with \$7 million less in their particular budgets. So what risks has the department identified if the minister is not able to uphold the capacity of the NGO sector to deliver not only the services they're currently delivering but to meet the expectation of he and his colleagues that they'll deliver more? What are those risks that you've identified?

**Mr. Blackett:** We haven't really identified the risk because right now, today, we believe that we'll be able to meet those obligations. I'll go one step further. For the first time about six weeks ago I sat down with seven of my ministerial colleagues or representatives from their departments to talk about how we as government work collectively for the sector.

What we've done is we've been working a lot at cross purposes. We have duplication of information that's required, applications. We haven't had a really co-ordinated approach from the government's standpoint on how to help the sector. You know, we've had an economic boom time, and we've just been able to add money and throw it out there without any concentrated effort or idea as to how that's really going to benefit in the long term.

Part of that will be assessing who of those are vulnerable, who of those are at risk by changing the programs. Obviously, any organization that was able to apply for money on a nonmatching basis because they weren't able to match the dollars themselves would be the first one that would be out there, but there are others. There are a lot of these new immigrant service organizations in the major cities and throughout Alberta. There are a lot of organizations in rural Alberta that don't have a lot of representation, maybe four or five people in an organization doing wonderful work.

There's going to be more need going forward. You're absolutely right. I hope that this time next year I can tell you that we've got more money to put towards the sector, but not today.

**Ms Blakeman:** Am I hearing from the minister that he, in fact, did not develop a business plan around this particular sector? If he

hasn't identified risks at this point, did he not develop a business plan around what he has been proposing?

**Mr. Blackett:** I developed a business plan about what we're trying to do. You asked me for risk in not having the Wild Rose Foundation in existence and going with the CIP and the CFEP, and I said that I don't believe there is a risk because I think that we're able to fund the programs that already existed.

**Ms Blakeman:** Identifying risk is part of developing a business plan.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, that's fine.

**Ms Blakeman:** So the ministry did no risk analysis based on the cuts that he proposed in the budget?

**Mr. Blackett:** I just gave you one. Of course, we're mitigating risk, but we felt that we were able to meet those organizations' requirements based on utilization of the program dollars and some changing of the criteria. That is part of it. A business plan: I will certainly be happy to submit that information to you in writing.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. I'm assuming that you have it. Identifying risk is always part of doing a business plan. You needed to have identified what the risks would be in implementing this program, but the minister is telling me he didn't because he hoped it would work out. Am I hearing him correctly? I don't want to put words in his mouth.

**Mr. Blackett:** No, you absolutely didn't hear me correctly. Maybe I'll say it once again. I've mentioned that the groups that don't have matching funds are at risk. Groups or organizations that are servicing the not-for-profit sector, with the new immigrant communities, for instance, those whose salaries on average are 19 per cent less than everybody else's in this sector: those are at risk. We certainly are looking at those, and we'll have outreach programs to actually look at those. I don't have a list of all the risks here, but there are many. There are risks to keeping things as they were, as the status quo, and not working with the sector.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. And thank you very much to everyone who attended here tonight. I'm sure your attendance was very important.

I'm going to move on, Minister, to the film and cultural industries. The ministry in the last year had an increase to its budget and a one-time funding of \$15 million that went to film and television production. This \$15 million now appears to be one-time only, although I don't think the sector knew that at the time, and it has been eliminated. I'm wondering why the ministry made that choice. This is a sector that is well proven to create ancillary dollars. It is part of a green economy. It's part of a creative economy. Can the minister – and for reference there I know that Daniel Pink and Sir Ken Robinson have been talking and linking the arts specifically . . .

**The Chair:** That's the first 20 minutes.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much. They have been linking the arts and film specifically to a knowledge-based economy, which is where we need to be going, so I'm wondering why the minister chose to cut this area over other areas which we know are actually declining in attendance and in support, like horse racing. Can the minister explain that?

**Mr. Blackett:** Absolutely. First, Member for Edmonton-Centre, you're absolutely incorrect in saying that there was a cut. There was a one-time \$14 million, not \$15 million, increase given to deal with the funding backlog, and that came out of second-quarter estimates last year. That was requested by my department from this particular minister. It wasn't money that was allocated in the budget. There was \$20 million in the budget last year. There's \$20 million in the budget this year. My eight-year-old son can see that that's not a budget cut.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Blakeman:** If that money was needed for a backlog, does the minister not anticipate another backlog creating itself? I mean, the government is not funding the film sector in the way that it has requested repeatedly to be funded. The minister referred to that in his opening remarks. Is he anticipating moving to a different way of funding a film credit program that would not result in an additional backlog, as he put it?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, we'd love to. Like I said, I've got a \$9 million shortfall in our budget, and I've been criticized for taking it away from the not-for-profit sector even though there is \$166 million that goes towards that sector. This sector gets \$20 million. I was able to maintain that. In these tough economic times most every minister had to take some sort of a hit. In terms of how we fund, if you look at the tax credit situation that is in existence in every other province and most of the United States, you'll see that it's a broken model. It's based on the fact that a provincial government or a state government will give a tax credit towards a producer who has a broadcast licence with a broadcaster. The problem is that broadcasters are dying. Canwest Global is weeks away from closing. Citytv just recorded a hundred million dollar loss. So those opportunities under the model that we had before wouldn't exist, and if we went with that tax credit model – I don't believe that's the way.

7:10

As Albertans, though, it is important, as you mentioned, in this sector to come up with a more creative way. We're looking at tweaking some of the criteria on the existing \$20 million, because that's all we have right now, and looking at ways to help next-MEDIA because people from different regions across North America identify Alberta as one of the new areas and one of the hotbeds for nextMEDIA and the utilization of the Internet. There's a real proliferation there, but there's not something that's supported. We need to have more screenwriters, we need to have better scripts, and we need to have more scripts. We need to work with the sector in doing that. I just sat down with our president from AMPIA and a few other producers last Friday to talk about how we go forward with that.

We've maintained the status quo, and I think that by being creative because of what we're all going to have to do with the budget constraints that we have, we'll get there.

**Ms Blakeman:** Are you looking at the same system that Saskatchewan has? They have certainly taken a lot of business away from us. What's your opinion of Saskatchewan's system?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, they've taken away a lot of business for now, but you'll see that they might be losing a couple of shows. We're looking at their model. We looked at the model of a couple of other different states. I've already had three conversations with the chairman of the CRTC. The way that television and film are going forward is going to change, and we'd like to be able to change with

it. I'm not sure that any tax credit model, as I'm told by many people of repute in the industry, is the way to go. To follow Saskatchewan, if the model was going to stay that way, great, but everything is changing on a month-by-month basis. We're waiting to see what's going to happen, and we'll maintain our status quo. B.C. has lost a lot of productions. Ontario has lost a lot of productions. We've been able to maintain the amount of business. We have probably the same amount of dollars and probably a little less productions, but we've been able to hold our own in tough economic times.

**Ms Blakeman:** I'm going to move to book publishing. On page 55 of the ministry business plan it mentions book publishing and says, "Providing support to the sound recording and book and magazine publishing industries" by examining "innovative means." Could the minister tell us exactly what "innovative means" means?

**Mr. Blackett:** That was something we've just put in there because I identified those as two industries that we don't support probably as well as we might. I don't have those specifics yet, but we are going to sit down with the stakeholders and formulate that further.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. So as well as the stakeholders for the voluntary sector and the film sector we're also sitting down with the stakeholders in the film and book publishing sector. Can you give me timelines, please?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, I've sat down with representatives of those in the last couple of months. I sat down with various songwriters at the Junos and at the Cultural Olympiad and had some meetings with them in Ottawa at the Genies a couple of weeks ago.

In the book publishing industry I've got a list of people that I want to talk to. I was at the Alberta Book Publishers' awards in Calgary last spring and talked to a lot of people who brought it to my attention – and I also knew – that we're losing publishers, we're losing artists, and we're losing authors. I have an 11-year-old daughter who wants to be an author someday. I would like to make sure that she is able to ply her craft here. We've got a lot of things that we've got to work on. There are a lot of bright people in this province, and I'd like to go and talk to them about some of the solutions because, frankly, in government we don't have a lot of those.

**Ms Blakeman:** I appreciate that.

Are you able to give me timelines for the book publishers, please?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah. I would say that we would have a better idea by the end of the second quarter, the end of June.

**Ms Blakeman:** That's halfway through the year.

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah.

**Ms Blakeman:** What is the book publishing industry supposed to do while it waits for you to come up with something, these innovative means that are going to help them?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, the AFA, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, provided \$2.1 million for this industry for 2008-09, which was a 75 per cent increase. We've held that line for '09-10, so we have given them something. I mean, I will have something to say by that time, but I expect to have a meeting with them in the next 30 days.



**Ms Blakeman:** Is the minister aware of or can the minister tell me how many novels were published in Alberta last year, in the last 12 months?

**Mr. Blackett:** I do not have that.

**Ms Blakeman:** It's none.

Okay. Let's move on, then, to the Royal Alberta Museum. The capital plan on page 103 of the capital plan booklet notes that there is \$56 million to continue work to refurbish the Royal Alberta Museum. I've heard a lot of different things. We in Edmonton and in Alberta have waited a very long time and have had a number of starts and then setbacks.

We had an incredible design that everyone was very excited about. We had the Queen out to give it her blessing and her name. Her plane had hardly taken off before the funding was halted and the architects were told to go back and come back with a cheaper design. They did that. Then we hear that, no, that's not going to be completed. We're going to knock down the Terrace Building, and for \$1.3 billion to \$1.5 billion we're going to build a second Royal Alberta Museum, specializing in human sciences, on this site. Now I hear that that's not going to happen, that it's definitively back to the Glenora site again. Can the minister give us something definitive for the people in Alberta to understand what is happening to their Royal Alberta Museum?

We have experienced a significant decline in the amount that it's costing infrastructure programs to move forward. Can the minister give us some assurances that we are going to get something soon on some kind of definitive timeline that can be tracked and measured against? Can he tell us – oh, I'm sorry. You can only do one question at a time. We'll put that one out there.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, first of all, with respect to the Terrace Building and the site there was no proposal that I know of for \$1.3 to \$1.5 billion for that. When I came here and we had this discussion last year through Committee of Supply, I had mentioned that there was a look at the two-museum concept, refurbishment and expansion of the Glenora site and a potential second building on the site of the Terrace Building on the Legislature Grounds.

I can say this till I'm blue in the face, but the reality of the world has changed, and there are lots of infrastructure projects. Our Premier has said that our priority will be making sure that we build a health care system and sustain a health care system, that we build those schools that are needed, that we take care of the elderly, that we take care of the sick, that we take care of the homeless, and the Royal Alberta Museum is not in that top list of priorities.

I as minister, obviously, will advocate strongly to have its completion. I understand the need for it, I understand its place in Alberta, I understand the history, and I understand the people's frustration. But right now in these economic times we don't have the wherewithal to be able to fund everything that we want. It's a time to focus on needs, not necessarily wants. We will continue to consider the options, but they will have to come at a later date. A new timeline for this project will be developed once a final decision is reached, but that does not reside only with this minister. Obviously, it resides with some of my colleagues at the cabinet level.

**Ms Blakeman:** Fair enough, but this is the major infrastructure project in your department, is it not?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah. Absolutely, it is.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. But we have no timeline.

**Mr. Blackett:** Yes.

**Ms Blakeman:** What exactly is the \$56 million going to be spent on?

**Mr. Blackett:** The \$56 million. As far as I can tell, there's going to be \$6 million spent on design. The other \$50 million is slated for 2011-2012, and what exactly that's going to be spent on has yet to be defined. That is going to take some more discussion and collaboration with the Minister of Infrastructure and the President of the Treasury Board.

7:20

**Ms Blakeman:** I'm sorry. What's going on here? You've got \$56 million in the budget – it turns up in the capital plan – but you don't know what it's going to pay for. There's another \$50 million in the next year, but you don't know what that's for either. Do you not know these things, or are you not sharing them with the committee?

**Mr. Blackett:** I cannot share them in detail at this particular time. We're looking at facility space to house some of our artifacts, storage space. We are looking at a multitude of different things, but we haven't made that determination yet because we haven't come up with the final design. Depending on the final design and the final stages, it involves a different process. Whether you're having one facility – you're starting at the Glenora site, for example. Are you going to build it? Are you going to close it down and refurbish right away, or are you going to try to build it in sections and keep the museum open?

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, that's what I'm asking you, Mr. Minister. You've got \$56 million. What are you doing with it?

**Mr. Blackett:** We have \$56 million: \$6 million on design work now to determine what the final design will be, and the \$50 million we'll decide depending on the priority of what we need to spend that \$50 million on. Hopefully, by that time we'll have more money to actually do something because \$56 million isn't going to do a whole lot in the large scheme of things.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. You can't give me a timeline either? So we're seven weeks into the year. . .

**Mr. Blackett:** By 2011-2012.

**Ms Blakeman:** No. You've got \$56 million in this year's budget.

**Mr. Blackett:** No, I do not. I do not have \$56 million in this year's budget.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. How much money are you allocating to spend in this year's budget?

**Mr. Blackett:** Six million dollars.

**Ms Blakeman:** And that's all you're spending? That \$6 million, according to what you've said, is only design money.

**Mr. Blackett:** Correct.

**Ms Blakeman:** So there's no shovel going in the ground this year?

**Mr. Blackett:** Correct.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Will any of that money be put into moving your collection around or storing the collection in any way, shape, or form, or is the \$6 million committed to design?

**Mr. Blackett:** The \$6 million is committed to design.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you.

Okay. We're looking at page 40 of the strategic business plan, including the goal to "support sustainability of infrastructure for community public-use facilities and provincial heritage facilities, including repair or replacement." I'd like the minister to share with us how much of this money – this is supposed to include providing community grants, improving provincial heritage facilities, modernizing exhibits, and developing collections to reflect new areas of interest and ensuring the proper care of collections – that you've allocated will be directed to repairing and replacing heritage facilities?

**Mr. Blackett:** We have \$2 million for exhibit renewal, and we have nothing currently for facilities.

**Ms Blakeman:** No heritage facilities in Alberta will be receiving any infrastructure or maintenance repair money at all this year. Is that correct?

**Mr. Blackett:** If they will, they'd have to do it through the community facilities enhancement program. There is no new money. Again, a \$9 million shortfall. We can't do everything.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. The funding for the heritage infrastructure came in \$3 million under budget, and I'm wondering which projects were not completed last year if you were under budget. I think we're looking at vote 6.0.10, heritage infrastructure. From what was budgeted to what was forecast, you're \$3 million under. What happened there?

**Mr. Blackett:** We'll have to get back to you with a written response, but as far as I can tell, we're supposed to be talking about '09-10 as opposed to '08-09.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. I'm going to move on to human rights. It appears on page 37 of the government of Alberta's strategic business plan as part of goal 7 with a three-year strategic focus. It talks about reviewing human rights policy and legislative framework, accessing opportunities to participate fully in the social, cultural and economic life of the province. Develop and implement strategies that help build welcoming and inclusive communities and workplaces, particularly for immigrants and ethno-cultural and racial groups.

The minister has said a lot in the media and less so in the House in response to questions. Specifically, what has been done to date to review the human rights legislation and policy, and specifically who has been consulted?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, starting on the financial aspects since we're here to talk about budgets, \$1.7 million was allocated to the Human Rights Commission based on the review that we've had over the past year.

In terms of whom we've consulted, we have consulted with Alan Borovoy of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. I've consulted with Richard Florida. I've consulted with John Holden at the Demos think tank in London. I've consulted with commissioners of the Human Rights Commission in Ontario. I've consulted with law professors in B.C. I've consulted with Peter Lougheed. I've

consulted with Ron Ghitter. I've consulted with Janet Keeping with the Chumir foundation. I have consulted with lawyers for both complainants and respondents within the commission. I've consulted with my own commission staff, the former acting commissioner Brenda Scragg, our investigators.

I have consulted with representatives from the legal community, representatives from the faith-based community, including Bishop Fred Henry and eight faith-based leaders. I've talked to many different groups. I've had hundreds of different letters, and I have consulted with representatives from the gay and lesbian community. I have an upcoming meeting with Frank Bruseker from the ATA. I've consulted widely, and I have read the Chumir report and looked at it. My comments in the media were based on a reaction to the Chumir foundation report.

**The Chair:** That concludes the second 20-minute segment of the first hour.

Carry on, Ms Blakeman.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much. Were any of those people you just mentioned paid a fee for your consultation?

**Mr. Blackett:** Absolutely not.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. The minister has quoted the Sheldon Chumir foundation report a great deal. Is he able to share which recommendations from the report will be incorporated into the new legislation?

**Mr. Blackett:** No, I'm not. This is a discussion about budget. This is a discussion about the organization of my department. It's not about what the new human rights legislation may or may not include. That's a caucus discussion. That's caucus privilege. When we have something to bring forward, we'll bring it forward on the floor of the Legislature.

**Ms Blakeman:** So although there's money allocated here, you will not talk about how that allocation is supposed to shake down?

**Mr. Blackett:** That's not what I said. Don't put words in my mouth.

I will tell you that the money we have will be used for intake workers. We have nine investigators right now who take in 30,000 complaints. Those 30,000 complaints end up being actioned to about 2,000 ones that have potential merit, and about 900 actual cases result from that. Right now the investigators answer the phones and deal with their caseloads and more. That's why we wait 410 days for a lot of these cases to be resolved. So we're going to give them resources.

We have a new chief commissioner, but he doesn't have a lot of legal help. We need to provide more resources to him. We need to provide more resources to the director. We need to move the commission members out of the Culture and Community Spirit space, make them actually independent and arm's length. So we are looking actively now for space for people in both Edmonton and Calgary to do that.

**Ms Blakeman:** How does the minister determine the spending priorities for that additional \$1.5 million?

7:30

**Mr. Blackett:** The priorities right now are that we think that within that \$1.7 million we're able to provide the increased number of people and the dollars to cover the office space. Right now we're

working with the chief commissioner. He is reviewing those and other needs that he sees and working with my deputy minister to actually formulate that. He's been on the job about six weeks. So we're waiting to formalize that.

**Ms Blakeman:** What are the hard timelines that you're working with for this project?

**Mr. Blackett:** We don't have a hard timeline. We're trying to do it as fast as we can.

**Ms Blakeman:** Part of what we're doing here is setting out how the minister is held accountable according to the plan that he's put forward in the budget. Thus far the minister has not been able to provide very many timelines. How does the minister expect to be held responsible when he's unable to give us very much information about any of the projects that he's looking at redoing or any timelines against when this could be judged? This is pretty standard practice in Public Accounts or through the Auditor General, but so far it's pretty loose.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, it's not that loose. My timeline is that by March 31, 2010, I'll have to deliver on the things that I said I would deliver on. I don't know how long it's going to take specifically. I can't tell you it's three months or six months. I can't tell you when legislation is going to come forward because I honestly don't know. We will work with it. We work with the Auditor General. I have sought him out on more than one occasion to give guidance. I seek out the Ethics Commissioner. We'll see what we can do. We've got a lot of priorities, and we work hard, and we'll get to where we're going to be. Other than that, if you want me to give you seven months, eight months, I'm not going to be bound by that.

**Ms Blakeman:** So you have no targets that you're holding yourself to and no timelines that you're holding yourself to except that at the end of this period of time you will have spent the money. Is that what I'm hearing?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, as soon as we can, we will get those new intake workers. As soon as we can, we'll get those new resources. How long it will take corporate human resources to actually put the job description together, which we're doing right now, how long it will take to actually advertise and interview and find the acceptable candidate, I have no idea, but we're starting that immediately. All of it will start immediately.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. On page 108 of the government estimates line 4.0.8 shows the end of the funding for the two-year major community facilities grant program. This grant program is over, but the government did not complete an inventory of what's needed. I'm wondering why, when the inventory wasn't complete about what was needed in the province, the grant program was ended.

**Mr. Blackett:** Maybe you haven't realized that the world is facing a financial calamity right now and that we can't afford to actually build everything we want. As I said before, it's needs versus wants. I have a process that we have to go through. The Treasury Board decides what our budget allocation is going to be. It was a two-year program with no promise for extension. We would have if financial times had permitted, and hopefully we can bring it back.

In terms of an inventory, we have kept an official inventory. We haven't had a list, but in our department one never existed. When I

took over this department, we didn't have one. Part of our cultural policy initiative is to provide exactly that. Under the directorship of Jeffrey Anderson we have a list of that, which I would love to be able to send to you.

**Ms Blakeman:** Great. If you can just send it through the chairperson of the committee, it will get distributed to all of the members.

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah. Absolutely.

**Ms Blakeman:** My question. You've recognized and said several times that it was a two-year program, so I'm not sure why your response to my question would be: do I not understand that times are tough and that you can't afford to spend all of this money? It was a two-year program. It's over. You clearly had no expectation that it would be coming into this year, so why would you be giving me some impression that you would have been continuing it? It was a two-year program, and then it was over. It has nothing to do with whether the . . .

**Mr. Blackett:** You're asking something about a program that was one year in its inception, and you expect that somehow I would miraculously have this inventory list, that it was some sort of mandate of mine to have that inventory list. There was no such mandate. That was something that came up, and our own department decided to try to create it, so we will provide that to you.

**Ms Blakeman:** I was contacted – and I'm assuming that every MLA office was contacted – by a contractor operating out of Calgary who said that they were contracted by your office to conduct this inventory. Is that the program that you're referring to?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yes.

**Ms Blakeman:** Is there anything else to this program aside from phoning up MLAs and either talking to the MLA or the staff or whoever answered the phone? They didn't take care to identify who they were talking to.

**Mr. Blackett:** We, obviously, contact stakeholders. We contact municipalities. We contact different groups. I've done that in well over 50 communities that I've been to, and I know that they have talked to them as well. We value our MLAs, all 83 of them, as to having some input as to what we need because you're the ears and the feet on the street.

**Ms Blakeman:** Excellent. Is there anyone else? Can you give me a list of who's been contacted to compile this inventory? You say that the inventory is complete now. Did I get that right?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yes. The information on who's been contacted: I'm not sure if that information is in there.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. I hear that that information can be supplied as well.

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah.

**Ms Blakeman:** This inventory was just recently completed?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yes.

**Ms Blakeman:** Within the last three weeks?

**Mr. Blackett:** The last couple of months. We had it because we wanted to provide it to the Premier's Council on Arts and Culture for them to get an idea of what we're trying to do.

Part of that going forward is having regional consultations with five different regions in the province and having that as a template to work from but actually working closer with the different community and sector representatives, funders, municipalities. One thing that we have in many different regions of the province is a glaring need, but there are so many projects that are vying for the same dollars. I know that in Edmonton and in Calgary there are, you know, 30, 40 projects. Well, really, there's only funding for 10. But there's no prioritization. There had been no list, and trying to get the community members to come together and decide what it is that we need to focus on is, I think, a good way to start.

**Ms Blakeman:** So the minister is putting the onus of prioritizing the list on the community members?

**Mr. Blackett:** I will facilitate that in discussions that will start in June.

**Ms Blakeman:** What is the decision-making process that the minister will use in the end? He's consulting with people, he's asking the community to prioritize, and then he will do . . .

**Mr. Blackett:** The communities will have a list. The fact is that we don't have a major community facilities program to contribute the dollars. We have limited dollars through CFEP, but municipalities are in the same boat. Funders, corporate donors, individual donors: they're all in the same boat. But we still have to have a discussion, when the economy turns around and more money is available, about: what do we want to prioritize? What do we want here in Edmonton? The Royal Alberta Museum is one them – I get that – but what else is it that we need? I don't know that, and I don't think any one person knows that. I don't know if there's been that much of a discussion, but if there has, please enlighten me.

**Ms Blakeman:** No. I'm just trying to determine the minister's process. Aside from the community getting together and talking about what they would like to see, there's no other process that the minister is going to be following in identifying this? I'm assuming the end of this is a list and a prioritization of which projects will go forward when they're able to go forward. Am I correct in that assumption?

**Mr. Blackett:** Right. But it is not only the decision of this minister or this government. It will also involve municipalities who may be using MSI money, it will involve private funders, and it will involve other individuals. Collectively they have to decide. By the time we're going ahead with some of these projects, I may not be there, but the group in its entirety will decide how that goes ahead. We haven't had that discussion yet. It's an idea right now, and we'll see where it goes.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. On page 9 of Government of Alberta Strategic Business Plan it lists strong and vibrant communities as one of the key strategies, and this includes but is not limited to working with the Premier's Council on Arts and Culture to implement the government's cultural policy. The priorities on page 40 of the strategic business plan are "increasing accessibility to provincial heritage and art collections online," et cetera, et cetera. Which ministry agencies are being reviewed as part of this process?

7:40

**Mr. Blackett:** Really, all of our ministry's agencies are being reviewed, whether it's the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, whether it's the film development program, whether it's our community investment programs. We said at the outset last year that we would look at every part of this department because we realize that Culture and Community Spirit was part of a subset of tourism, parks, recreation, and culture, and it didn't have a lens on it for many a year. There hasn't been a culture minister, as you know, for well over 20 years. There are a lot of those things that the minister of the day didn't have the time to take a look at to make sure that the programs are relevant, that they're meeting the target sector that they're meant to deal with and assist. Are the assumptions, the outcomes what we want? Are the goals that we had maybe five, 10 years ago still relevant today, or do we need to change them?

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. At this point I am going to turn this over to my colleague, who has a motion that he wishes to put on the floor, so I will cede the rest of my time to my colleague.

**The Chair:** Mr. Hehr.

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you very much. I do have an amendment to move. I believe that if we have it in time and the clerk has this information going forward – I'll pass it around to all my colleagues so they can have a look at it.

**The Chair:** As that's being distributed, go ahead, Mr. Hehr.

**Mr. Hehr:** I'm moving this motion on behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Varsity, Mr. Chase. It goes:

To move that the estimates for the horse racing and breeding renewal program under reference 4.0.6 at page 108 of the 2009-2010 main estimates of the Department of Culture and Community Spirit be reduced by [approximately] \$33 million so that the amount to be voted at page 105 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases [which is a large number] is \$259,762,000.

That's the motion, and it is what it is. Essentially, we're moving that in these times of budgetary restraint, as the minister has been pointing out – and we understand that – this might be an excellent way to reduce expenditures from a program that I think many people will say doesn't need any support from the Culture and Community Spirit department and that this industry can stand or fail on its own four legs, I guess, if we want to use a pun. That's essentially what that is, and it will be discussed, I guess not voted on now, but it can be voted on later on.

On that note maybe we could discuss a little bit of that, Mr. Minister. How much, in essence, is being devoted from your department to Horse Racing Alberta? Is there a sum of money that comes directly from your coffers?

**Mr. Blackett:** None of the money comes directly from our coffers. It's a flow-through. The money comes from the horse racing industries themselves. Thirty-three and a third per cent of the net proceeds go to the Alberta lottery fund. Fifteen per cent of the net proceeds are allocated to the racetrack operators, and that's coming from the slot machines at those racetracks. Fifty-one and two-thirds per cent of the net proceeds are returned to the horse racing and breeding industry as a flow-through, and that's what the \$35 million is.

Right now the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security is currently undertaking a review of Horse Racing Alberta's

governance structure and operating practice to determine if there are improvements that can be made to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness in support of the operations, and since he's responsible for the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, I think that it's probably prudent that we let him go through and do that review and see where we're going with that.

I know there are a lot of times when people try to make hay and say, "Why are you spending \$35 million on horse racing?" but that's money that came from their industry. It's just a flow-through that goes back to them. It has nothing to do with actual dollars coming out of our coffers or from the taxpayers of Alberta.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, no. I will debate you on that. That does come from the taxpayer of Alberta because those monies are gambled, and they're distributed by your government.

**Mr. Blackett:** Voluntarily, yes.

**Mr. Hehr:** So, yes, they are taxpayers' dollars that could be used for, shall we say, funding cancer clinics or funding artists. Your government makes a decision on what those dollars go to.

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah.

**Mr. Hehr:** Then that's fine, but let's not say that because we choose to put slot machines at horse-racing terminals, this industry is entitled to it as a matter of fact.

**Mr. Blackett:** I'm making the distinction between lottery money, that is voluntarily derived from a bingo or a casino, versus taxpayers' dollars, that are collected in the form of taxes by the government of Alberta. That's the distinction I want to make.

**Mr. Hehr:** Fair enough.

If I could just ask a few more questions in the time allowed. I'd really like to commend you on your hiring of Mr. Blair Mason for the position of, I think, CEO of the new Alberta Human Rights Commission.

**Mr. Blackett:** Chief commissioner.

**Mr. Hehr:** Chief commissioner. I'm just wondering what, in fact, his salary is going to be. Does he have an exact salary?

**Mr. Blackett:** I think the salary that he has is in the range of that of a deputy minister.

**Mr. Hehr:** A deputy minister. So he still will be collecting his judge's pension on top of that.

**Mr. Blackett:** I believe so.

**Mr. Hehr:** I understand that. A deputy minister is roughly around . . .

**Mr. Blackett:** I think the range is \$200,000 to \$250,000, \$260,000.

**Mr. Hehr:** Okay. Will he be advising you on the drafting of the legislation?

**Mr. Blackett:** No. He will have input, but that will be done in conjunction with members of our department and input from members of our 72-person caucus.

**Mr. Hehr:** Okay. So at the end of the day it's the caucus that's going to decide one hundred per cent what goes into the new human rights legislation whenever it's revamped. So whether GBLT rights are included or anything else of that nature is all going to be a caucus decision despite the recommendations of whatever professionals you've looked to.

**Mr. Blackett:** Myself included. Correct.

**Mr. Hehr:** That's fair enough. Again, I guess your best timelines are that the end of this year, March 31, is when you expect the human rights. Or do you have a deadline on this?

**Mr. Blackett:** Human rights, the review and implementation of some of the changes that we want: we'd like to have them out by March 31. The actual legislation is only one portion of that. As I've said many a time, my biggest concern is the 96 per cent of cases that never seem to make the newspaper. They don't attract the headlines.

**The Chair:** That concludes our first hour. The next 20 minutes is allotted for an exchange between the third-party opposition and the minister, so we'll go to Ms Notley. You'll be exchanging the time, will you?

**Ms Notley:** Yes, I will.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you. I always find – this is the fourth one that I've been doing – that I run out of time way before I'm finished. I, too, have a number of issues that I want to go over. Hopefully, I'll be able to get a couple of different shots at this.

I'd like to start, I suppose, just in terms of a bit of a global conversation. You've already of course mentioned several times the sort of overarching economic scenario within which we find ourselves with this whole notion of sort of distinguishing between need versus want. But I note that your budget for your ministry is down, give or take, about 40 per cent whereas globally the government's budget is up around 3.7, 3.8 per cent. So it seems to me that your government as a whole has characterized a good portion of your budget as a want versus a need. Would you agree with that assessment?

**Mr. Blackett:** No, I certainly wouldn't. If you took out the \$140 million major community facilities program, which is a two-year program, if you take \$40 million in one-time funding for the Telus World of Science in Calgary, if you took out \$40 million that was one-time funding for the portrait gallery, in essence the reduction is \$9 million on a 330 some-odd million dollar budget. So it's not 40 per cent at all. My assertion is that our government certainly does believe in our department, certainly does believe in culture, believes in community spirit, believes in the volunteer sector. Yes, we've had to make some tough decisions, and we have to work our way through those, but it's not a 40 per cent cut.

7:50

**Ms Notley:** But it is a not-insignificant reduction even if you try and sort of characterize those things as other things.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, they are what they are.

**Ms Notley:** Right. Absolutely. But the point is that it's a reduction, even excluding those things, compared to the overall increase.

**Mr. Blackett:** Yes.

**Ms Notley:** Right. Okay. I would like to just try and spend a bit of time talking about the Wild Rose Foundation. Of course, we've had a good conversation already about that, so I'm going to try to not duplicate that as best I can, and I apologize if I do. We'll see where that ends up. We've talked about sort of the elimination of the foundation and the merger with, I believe, CIP.

**Mr. Blackett:** CIP and CFEP.

**Ms Notley:** Right. And merging those.

Now, I'm just curious as to whether there was any thought given – and let me just sort of give you some of the reasons why I would have considered this. Rather than eliminating the Wild Rose Foundation and merging it with those two programs, which are very much administered directly by government, was there any thought given to actually merging over to the Wild Rose Foundation? Part of the reason I ask that is because you yourself have indicated that the staff from the Wild Rose Foundation, who, of course, were hired under the previous board, were quite good at their jobs and will ultimately serve as a resource. It seems as though the Wild Rose Foundation wasn't necessarily doing a bad job, so why not maintain that process, which has more transparency?

Clearly, you have to cut. You know, you're merging it all altogether, and there's a net decrease. People are concerned about what's going to happen to the funding to which they're entitled, so why would you not consider enhancing the transparency of that balancing act, that assessment of needs versus wants, by keeping it with the foundation and with their staff?

Just attached to that – and then I'll let you answer – in deliberating on that matter, was there consultation? Now, you mentioned before that you couldn't consult about funding cuts before they happened, before you got your target, but clearly you knew this was coming because the Wild Rose Foundation board members weren't getting reappointed. So was there consultation with the volunteer sector, with the organizations there about the efficacy of the different programs of the Wild Rose Foundation versus the CIP program or the CFEP program in terms of how well they assess applications and that kind of thing? Certainly, I've heard that the preference would be for the foundation's skill set to be the governing mechanism if one had to choose.

**Mr. Blackett:** Right. Well, yeah, I talked about some of our programs and some of our challenges, and I've had a chance with ECVO and CCVO and ANVSI to a lesser extent. We haven't had a real in-depth discussion, and that's what this opportunity, unfortunate as it may be, affords us a chance to do now.

Rolling it into the Wild Rose Foundation program. The Wild Rose is an independent board, but they're not accountable to anybody. These are dollars that the taxpayers have generated. Who's accountable for those? When there's a problem with them – and there has been a problem in the past – who's accountable? If there's a problem with CIP or CFEP or the community spirit donor program, the responsibility is the minister's. At the end of the day I'm the minister responsible for it.

It was thought that it was easier to roll the \$7 million program into one that's \$28 million versus the \$28 million one into the \$7 million one. You know, part of our discussions will be: what kind of input, not necessarily oversight, can the sector have in how those decisions are made? In terms of transparency I think our government department workers are as transparent as most. We're working on a core review and have been for the better part of the last year to

make it more open and transparent. We're looking at an automated system called GATE which will eventually allow people to have access to their application and get a status beyond the fact that it's just in process. Where is it in that process? Is there more information required to complete their application? Is it being held for sign-off? Has a decision actually been made?

Utilizing those people from the Wild Rose who have implemented some of that system, maybe some of our systems will change to be a little bit more like that in how they deliver. I like the way that they have their outreach, and I think that's one we have to always consistently do because the situations change. Society has changed, certainly, in the last five years, and we need to be current with that.

We'll certainly have those discussions. But before this, no in-depth discussions on that were had.

**Ms Notley:** Okay. Well, I just sort of put in on the record. I'm sure that since this announcement came out, you've probably heard it yourself. Nonetheless, I have heard quite a considerable amount of concern within the nonprofit community that the process through CIP or CFEP is not as transparent, is too subject to political interference, and that the arm's-length arrangement with the Wild Rose Foundation was something that the majority of the nonprofit sector was more comfortable with. I'm just putting that on the record because, you know, it might have been helpful to have had maybe more of that before the decision went forward.

**Mr. Blackett:** Yes. I will continue to have that discussion, and we'll see where it takes us.

**Ms Notley:** Right. I mean, maybe we can be here next year and find that we've completely changed the process which currently governs CFEP and CIP. From the look on your face that appears unlikely.

**Mr. Blackett:** You know, we have to have an acknowledgement. We know from the different organizations that there has been a problem in taking too long and with some of the transparencies. Our staff is aware of that, and we're going to deal with that. We're going to have, probably for one of the first times, representatives from all of our different groups – the community spirit program and CFEP and CIP and the people that were involved in the Wild Rose – and talk about how we can take the best of each and make that work going forward.

You know, there are a lot of people that were recipients of about 300 grants through the Wild Rose, and there are 1,500 that were recipients in the community spirit donor program. I knew one of the problems that we had was that when we rolled it out and I went to some of those volunteer organizations and I said, "Well, give me the list of what we have to send them out to," I think the list ended up being 7,000. Now, there are 19,000 organizations in this province, so 12,000 were going to get left behind. To me that was the bigger issue because, you know, as part of our cultural policy the very first thing is access. Irrespective of geography, irrespective of your socioeconomic status you should be able to have access to anything in our department on that. We strive for that equality, but it was clearly not done. We had to go out and contract through Service Alberta to get the list of those 19,000 organizations to work through it.

So I respect the input from those, but I put it to some of these organizations: how could we miss that many? Now, some of them could be faith-based organizations, some 4,000, some of them are sports organizations, but some well deserving. How do we miss 12,000 organizations, and how many of those are four- and five-person operations operating in Grande Prairie or Westlock or Irma, for instance? I don't know.

**Ms Notley:** Well, just going back to sort of the equity thing, I'd like to follow up on a question that has been asked, that you started to talk about previously. There is no question. I mean, the issue when you talk about community spirit and CIP, one of the things with the Wild Rose Foundation was that there wasn't for a good portion of them the requirement for matching funds. You mentioned in response to the Member for Edmonton-Centre that you're actually talking about creating a pool within the current CIP that wouldn't require matching funds. I'd like to get a sense of the size of that pool.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, I mean, ideally I'd like to have one that was the equivalent of \$6 million. We have to see what we can do in terms of changing program criteria and limiting the amounts for some things such as playgrounds, for instance. We have now through the community facility enhancement program \$125,000 for every organization. Do we have to build \$250,000 playgrounds? I'm not sure. But we do that, and we'd do that currently even if the Wild Rose Foundation was there. That means that there's money that's not available to something else. It's a significant amount. It's well over \$10 million.

8:00

I'm not saying that we should not be funding playgrounds. I think we should. But, also, I have to work with my colleagues and say: can you take some of this burden and put it in your core funding? We fund technology upgrades for schools, almost \$5 million. I'm not the Minister of Education. I advocate strongly for the sector. I think that we should be spending more of the money in our communities and our not-for-profit organizations and not funding these other things. They're all necessary, but I will push hard on ministers to take the core responsibilities for those programs so that we can make these available to needy people.

**Ms Notley:** On the issue of the criteria as you move that money over to CIP, I received a note from somebody speaking on behalf of I'm not sure if it was the Autism Society or the Edmonton Autism Society. There I was given an example of how they use the funding that they received over the course of two or three years. It was funding for a part-time program director. While that program director was there, they then redevise and shifted the other programs that they were providing such that some of them became, where it was possible, user pay, or there was different fundraising for certain parts of it so that ultimately they had the money after two or three years to fund the program. It wasn't permanent staffing for her.

I believe it was two or three years of funding from the Wild Rose that allowed her to do the work necessary to ultimately transition to the organization being able to maintain her funding. She does things like, you know, support parent groups, work with autistic teens, provide supports to families throughout Edmonton, very substantial, worthwhile work. Obviously, that's not one-time funding; that's year-over-year funding, which has different criteria from what we see in most of the CFEP. My question is: will we see a change to ensure that the year-over-year type of funding will also be allowed in the merging of the two?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yes. We can do that. Also, right now we allow through CIP for them to be able to do that. They can use money for staff. We can't say that we're going to provide it ongoing. They're going to have to reapply each year, but they can certainly use that towards staff or program co-ordination right now if they choose. I know that many organizations do. The autism group that you

mentioned: I met with them last week, and I think I told them as well as SAGE that they can do that. We can do things.

Right now, for instance, Wild Rose provided money if you needed a new dishwasher for your facility or if you needed a new table and chairs or if you needed a laptop computer. Ronald McDonald House: when we look through, we gave them, I think, \$4 million through the community facilities enhancement program. On taking a walk through there, I said: "Do you know what? What you probably really need would be some laptops. You've got all these families that are here dealing with their loved ones, but how are they connecting with their families back home? If they had a laptop computer, they could do that." So we said that they could apply for that through the community facility enhancement program. I believe that they got that. We have that flexibility, and we will work, again, to make sure that it's more flexible to be able to meet those needs.

At the end of the day, we want to give money to those groups that need it. We need to give money to those groups that need it because they do the job better than government does, and they save us a tremendous amount of money. If it was up to me, I'd have double the budget for them because I think it's going to save us much more in health care, much more in justice costs, much more in terms of long-term costs by the preventative things that they do, in the way we treat our seniors and treat our youth through these great organizations.

**Ms Notley:** Moving on, then, to just one last follow-up question because I think I'm going to run out of time very quickly here.

**The Chair:** We're down to less than four minutes. That's right. Go ahead quickly.

**Ms Notley:** You also mentioned that there was talk of reconsidering whether funding for international aid would also be accessible through CIP. You know, I have folks here that are involved in that. Some examples of the kinds of projects they're involved with, one example that doesn't seem to be complete yet: helping some villagers in Peru fund the necessary upgrades to their water system and also providing support in growing their crops and providing a safe and healthy water and food supply in a community that had previously been subjected to a great deal of persecution by the government; they'd all been subjected to a sterilization program. Anyway, quite an awful story.

I was concerned previously to hear you distinguish between the value of that kind of support and what happens at home, but I think that there is a key part of our community here in Alberta that's deeply concerned and sees that, you know, the value of what we do in our community doesn't stop at the border. We have a responsibility across borders to improve the state of things. What I'd like to know from you is: how big of a pool would you be considering in terms of internal to the CIP? Are we looking at being able to maintain? My understanding is that this program originally had about \$20 million under Peter Lougheed. Then it was down to about \$10 million, and now we're at about \$1.7 million. So can we at least be sure that that \$1.7 million will remain in place?

**Mr. Blackett:** I want to, and I want to work with the sector and my officials to be able to do that. I did say before that the priority is definitely taking care of Albertans, but I also recognize the importance of our financial obligations internationally. I know the great work that the Rotary Clubs and lots of these organizations have done in the past. I've been involved in organizations like that, whether it's through my church or service organization or community organization, and they're all worth while. Like I said, I will fight to

make sure that I work with my colleagues to take some of the responsibility out of those programs, out of my department to free up money to be able to do that, and I'm looking to try to realize that goal of \$6 million.

**Ms Notley:** Will we get the \$1.5 million or \$1.6 million or \$1.7 million? Will it be available through CIP at this point? Will it be the same amount that groups that do international development work will still be eligible to apply for?

**Mr. Blackett:** That's my intention, but I also want to talk to the sector through ANVSI and say: if I can only come up with \$5 million or \$4 million, where would you put it? They'll have the chance to help make that determination. I can't make that commitment for them. My goal is to try to get all of it and keep all of it. I'd rather not be going backwards. I'd rather try to get the \$1.7 million and the \$4.3 million and make it available to those organizations.

**Ms Notley:** When did you say that we'd be finding out about that?

**Mr. Blackett:** Hopefully, we're striving for the next 30 days. Today is April 20, so May 20.

**Ms Notley:** Okay. Now, we've already talked a little bit about the issue of program versus continuing funding.

**The Chair:** That terminates half of our time here this evening. We'll take a five-minute break. I'll ask members at the table to be back in five minutes, and we'll resume.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 8:08 p.m. to 8:14 p.m.]

**The Chair:** Okay. We'll resume the committee. As was outlined at the beginning, we will now alternate between government members and members of the opposition. Again, members will have up to 10 minutes; combined with the minister, it can be up to 20 minutes. From the list that I have at this point, we'll begin with Mr. Johnson, then Ms Blakeman, Mr. Benito, and Mr. Hehr.

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister and your staff, for being here tonight. I just want to go back to one thing you said early on in one of your responses to questions and just emphasize that ice hockey is part of our culture and our community spirit. I know that Mr. Hehr is a former college hockey player, and he would agree with me. I've seen you play hockey, too.

**Mr. Blackett:** Then you know why I said that.

**Mr. Johnson:** Yeah, I know why you said that.

I have several questions for you. I know that the Wild Rose Foundation has been zeroed in on tonight, and rightly so. I've got constituents that are concerned and wondering about the status of that organization and the rationale behind this. Let me just ask you a couple of more questions on the Wild Rose that I don't think have been addressed. Can you elaborate on the consultation that was done ahead of this decision? Was there a consultation done with Wild Rose or those stakeholders prior to announcing this?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, Jeff, you're a government member. In the budget process the Treasury Board gives you a number, and you have to go work with your department. You're not allowed to consult with your government colleagues, whether it's cabinet

ministers or other MLAs. We're pretty much on our own. That's to protect the issues of confidentiality. So the moment you start going and consulting with those, then it gets out. Somehow it leaked out anyway.

I sat down with the Wild Rose board last November, when Krishan Joshee offered his letter of resignation, and we had a discussion. I wanted to find out from their standpoint what were the best things. What would you keep? What is really important to you? They echoed it as others did, and they said that the board development program was really important in building capacity, to train others to be better managers in their own organizations, to strengthen the organizations from within, the Vitalize conference, and helping volunteers and educating volunteers and giving them better skills to be able to do the jobs they do. Those were important. Recognizing volunteers was critically important. They also said that, you know, the international program, the money that was available now on a nonmatching basis, and the idea of an independent board were all important.

I think that other than the independent board, hopefully, we'll have some portion, if not all, that will remain international funding, and they will be able to access, I'm sure, the same amount of funding on a nonmatching basis. We are holding those applications that are currently there, and we'll give them some priority.

**Mr. Johnson:** I think that's the comfort that my constituents are looking for, you know, especially for the Rotary clubs, those international projects, the nonmatching projects, the food banks, that there'll be the flexibility in the program, that we're going to still continue to support those people, and that the criteria will be jugged in CIP so that we can continue to do that. Hopefully, I'm hearing correctly that that's going to happen. Are there timelines that we'll be able to tell people that?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, you can tell them that right now we're working on it. I said that May 20 is when we should be able to roll that out. That's a short period of time, but like I said, all of those applications will be held, and we'll try and make sure that we give priority to those. Our goal is to have everybody who was able to apply last year be able to apply this year for international or domestic.

**Mr. Johnson:** Now, one specific question I had from a constituent had to do with an apparent trust that the Wild Rose Foundation has. Is there \$8 million in trust that they use the interest from to fund staff? I'm not sure if that's accurate or not, to tell you the truth, but I did have that come at me today by a constituent, so I thought I'd ask. The question is: what will happen to that trust money if that's the case, if that's accurate? I'm seeing heads shaking in the back.

**Mr. Blackett:** Okay. In 1985 the members of the foundation directed that initial contributions from lottery funding of \$4.5 million be placed in an endowment fund, so the funds are not available for use in its operations. In 1993 a further \$2 million was transferred from the operating fund balance to the endowment fund. The purpose of this fund is to earn income to retain an ongoing funding capability. Interest earned on the endowment fund is reported as an operating revenue. If I'm not mistaken, that \$800,000 – it's actually \$780,000 – represents the interest on that, which will continue to be used for the board development program, Vitalize, and Volunteer Week, those vital aspects. So we're guaranteed that they will be able to continue on.

**Mr. Johnson:** Can you expand on Vitalize? I guess that was another question, whether Vitalize would continue.



**Mr. Blackett:** Vitalize will continue.

**Mr. Johnson:** What's our cost on that? What do we invest in that? What is that program?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, the Vitalize conference is \$729,000, and the interest income was \$475,000. So we've actually had a top-up. Part comes from that fund, and part comes from our department.

8:20

**Mr. Johnson:** Minister, do you know how those endowments are managed, then? Do they go into AIMCo with all the other kinds of endowments that we have?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yes.

**Mr. Johnson:** They do. Okay. Thank you.

Now, if I can move on to the film production, I know you topped up the cap of the grants from one and a half to \$3 million. Can you just tell us: what's the criteria around that? What do we give the \$3 million for? What's the return on that for Albertans? Is it a straight grant? How do we measure the return on our investment in the film industry?

**Mr. Blackett:** Okay. In the film industry, if I'm not mistaken, the \$3 million cap, increased from \$1.5 million, was significant in that that's the amount of money you need to attract a series, like an 18-episode series or a full-length motion picture, of which we've got a couple in negotiations. That's what was able to help us keep *Heartland*. We would've kept *Wild Roses* if CBC had decided not to cut it. That would keep *Fear Itself* coming back if they decide to go ahead with that. That is based on a mixture of using Alberta talent, using Alberta locations, Alberta scripts. It's on a sliding scale up to the \$3 million, a proportional scale.

**Mr. Johnson:** Who makes the decisions on that, then?

**Mr. Blackett:** We have a consultant that is hired to make the decision based on the criteria.

**Mr. Johnson:** I can't give up the mike without talking about something that I just spent a bit of time working on, which was the libraries review across the province. We saw a pretty great announcement by the Premier and the minister last week. One of the things that has come out in that report that was released was the big urging of the committee and the library community to see more cross-ministry work. The scope of services that libraries are delivering today is incredible. I don't think most Albertans realize it. It's a window to government and a real opportunity for a lot of culture to be delivered through libraries. I know you talk about it in your business plans. I'm just wondering: can you elaborate at all about investments and what kind of cross-ministry work you may be doing in terms of libraries specifically and what investment you might make there?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, in terms of libraries we want to be able to use them as a potential delivery mechanism as we use the K to 12 schools, the postsecondary institutions. We want every Albertan to have access to culture, and one of the easiest ways to do that is through the Internet as it becomes available. Libraries do a lot of things for us in terms of outreach. There are a lot of new immigrants that utilize that.

I spend at least one or two days a month in my library, and I didn't

realize the number of people that utilize those organizations. Especially in an economic downtown, now, if you don't own a computer, that's where you go to get information on skills upgrade or to look for a job. They've got different programs. In terms of arts and delivery of Arts Days in September, we're working, just as we did with K to 12, with libraries.

Hopefully, every library in the province will participate in housing some performing arts, some literary arts, some visual arts. I know the minister is usually supportive of that because the collaboration amongst a bunch of different ministries certainly reduces the cost. You know, we will help fund those artists through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts if they're performing at one of their venues, and we will continue to work with the minister to see what we need. I'm glad that he got his increase, which was significant. I haven't been quite so lucky, so before I go out and say what I'm going to commit to on behalf of another initiative, we'd better make sure that we take care of our own.

**Mr. Johnson:** I compliment you on your willingness to invest in that the libraries are going to be a real tool to deliver some of this stuff to our rural areas, where they don't always have the exposure that we do in the urban areas. So I appreciate that.

The other piece of that – and this also came out of the libraries tour – is that the silos are building up in terms of our databases and licences to databases and access to that for Albertans. You talk about investing in publishing. Please don't forget about digital publishing and what that could mean to Albertans. If you're getting into that, you also can be working cross-ministry with libraries and access to digital licensing for Albertans. I'm wondering: is that something you've talked about or thought about? Would that be someplace you could invest or would invest?

**Mr. Blackett:** I think so, going forward. I don't think it's just my department; I think we all should invest in that. We had a meeting with some representatives of YPO-WPO, and one of the things I said is there's an industry there that's waiting to just start and proliferate, and that's digital media. You look at the libraries that all our postsecondary institutions have; you look at all the content that's out there. Maybe we haven't had a book published last year, but we've had a lot of books published in Alberta. There are lots of stories about Albertans. I know that when we did our cross-province, the book tour as part of Arts Days, and we promoted books written by Alberta's authors and about Alberta artists. I know I gave out many different books, and they weren't all by the same author.

The digital part is what we have. If we do it right and look at the SuperNet and that quarter of a billion dollar investment that we have and actually work to be able to connect to the smaller, rural communities, we'll be the first jurisdiction in North America that has access to 3 and a half million people, corner to corner, with a 20 gigabit pipe. That means streaming video. That means that we could take plays, we could take performances, we could take books, we could take songs, DVDs, all those kind of things and disseminate them across the province. That's what we're working towards, and we need all our partners.

I know that Advanced Education and Technology are interested in that; the Minister of Municipal Affairs; Service Alberta, obviously, who manages the SuperNet for us; and others. We work very closely with Tourism, Parks and Recreation. We'll continue to do that because we need to make sure we tell our stories and we tell the great story about Alberta and let Albertans know that those stories actually exist.

**Mr. Johnson:** I know across the province we've got many individu-

als that are getting laid off, individuals that are having to slow down their businesses. I've actually had constituents that have come up to me recently, asking: "We see layoffs all over the place in the private sector. When we are going to see some layoffs in government, see them tighten their belt in these economic times?" Obviously, we've talked about trying to stay away from that to mitigate the job losses. I'm very encouraged to hear that the Wild Rose Foundation employees are going to be still working with your ministry. Can you elaborate on how many FTEs your ministry employs? Will that be trimmed at all? As people leave due to attrition, will you be trimming back on hiring? I guess, is the money that's pulled back, whether it's from major facilities grants or whatnot, going to affect what you need in terms of bodies?

**Mr. Blackett:** Right now we have 545 FTEs, and we have no increase, but we have no decrease either. You know, we don't want to cut into bone and into muscle. I mean, we're a fairly lean organization, and those Wild Rose employees and their knowledge are valuable to us. We really can – I'm not just paying lip service – utilize them to help improve the delivery of some of our other programs. Our other programs are well intentioned, and we have the criteria. We meet that criteria, and we churn that out, but sometimes we have to look at the human aspect, look at the social aspect. It's people's lives we're dealing with, and if they can help bring a balance to that, then we're all the better for it.

**Mr. Johnson:** This cultural policy that you've got laid out, the cultural policy initiative of roughly \$5.2 million, is a significant increase over past years. I should say, first of all, that I have had quite a few compliments about that cultural policy that you've come out with, so I want to commend you on that. But can you elaborate on the \$5.2 million, where it's going, what it's for, why it's such a big increase from past years? Or did we just not have a cultural policy in the past?

**Mr. Blackett:** I mean, part of my mandate from the Premier was to establish the Premier's Council on Arts and Culture and then to support strong and safe communities and to implement the cultural policy, which was introduced January of 2008. So we had to put money towards that and then to continue with it because there are four key pillars that we want to look at.

8:30

We want to make sure that we create access, as I mentioned, irrespective of geography and socioeconomic status. We want to make sure that we build capacity in the communities to house the performing, literary, and visual arts. Sport and recreation is part of that because it's all part of building strong communities. So culture and community spirit are intertwined. Some of our not-for-profit organizations are definitely arts organizations as well.

A focus on excellence and trying to reward excellence. We have many tremendous artists here. We look at our hockey players and we look at our Olympic athletes and say that they are the best in the world. Well, our Alberta Ballet is as good as any out there. You look at our Calgary and Edmonton Philharmonic, you look at the Shumka Dancers, you look at our theatres, and you look at some of our facilities. We make such a huge thing about comparing Edmonton to Calgary and Edmonton and Calgary separately to Toronto. If we look at what Alberta has in its totality, from corner to corner, we beat Toronto hands down, and that's what we've got to show. Unfortunately, we're all Canadians, and we don't believe that we're the best until somebody else tells us.

You know, in government funding for arts and culture, for

instance, we are number three, behind Ontario and Quebec. But if you put us on a per capita basis, we're 2 to 1 compared to England. Now, they've got a huge head start, at least a thousand years ahead of us. We have to have money to do some things to identify the cultural activities that increase access to culture through the use of technology, establish baselines to help ensure that cultural resources are used strategically, enhance access to information and support Alberta's cultural communities and the nonprofit, voluntary sector through improved online services, look at ways of using technology to encourage more youth to become actively involved in their communities. So whether it's Twitter, whether it's podcasts, find a way to connect to that 12-plus generation. The whole world has changed, and most people don't understand that a 15-year-old watches a movie on their laptop. They don't want to sit there and watch their parents' 75-inch big screen. That's just the way they are, so we need to figure out how to deal with them in their medium.

Develop distance-learning educational programs and provide the ability to explore collections online to ensure that Albertans and people world-wide can access Alberta's heritage; for instance, the Royal Tyrrell Museum and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. I knew they had a lot of capabilities for distance learning and that they had a lot of technical savvy in being able to do things online, but they were always held under. They were never actually given a chance. We said: go show your stuff, do the best you can, go with it, and we'll support you. I know that the first six months they all thought: yeah, you're saying that, but you're not really going to support us. But, you know, we had that launch for the libraries at Head-Smashed-In. It was supposed to be at Royal Tyrrell, but that didn't work out, and one of our great employees drove to Head-Smashed-In to make sure that we could do that with that grade 3 class in Lac La Biche. That's the kind of stuff that we need to do.

We picked, as I said, access first because, you know, we've only got so much time to be here, and I don't want to be talking about this two years from now. I think that access through technology is probably the fastest way to deliver the first part of the implementation.

**Mr. Johnson:** Well, I certainly agree with you and applaud you on the access piece. We've got a lot of small rural communities, and they'd be very happy to hear that.

One concern I might have and a question for you as we roll the grant applications of Wild Rose into CIP. We already have constituents that say that the CIP or the CFEP programs take too long to get the grant applications through. With that extra workload and with the trimming of the budget are you going to be able to deliver the kind of timeliness that we need to turn these things around?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah. We're conducting a review of our community investment programs to make them more efficient and effective. I think I mentioned that before. We will work to improve the level of service that we provide to Albertans, and part of it is the GATE program, that we are rolling out now. We did that through the community spirit donor program. We'll roll it out into the others, and that will help speed it up a lot.

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That's the 20 minutes.

I'll defer to Ms Blakeman, please.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much. Strategy 2.9 appearing in the government business plan relates to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts grant program. Can the minister give us the details of the evaluation of that grant program?

**Mr. Blackett:** The details. It's ongoing, but one of the things that we certainly looked at is that we needed more input on the actual board from somebody younger to get a perspective from the young performers who actually apply for those grants. It was one of those things: are we meeting those needs? I looked at the board, all well-intentioned, well-meaning people, but they were definitely an older group of people, and we needed some more perspective. We are going through that, and the final recommendations will be made available later this year, but we don't have a specific timeline for that yet.

Part of that review is where we came up with the songwriting and the book publishing – we identified those as issues. In talking to the members of the board past and present, I challenged them: why don't we have more for those? I mean, if you don't have somebody here publishing your book that tells your story, which could be the next great screenplay, don't expect somebody in Toronto or somebody in Montreal or B.C. to tell our story. So we need to spend more money on that. I've asked them to come up with some recommendations for that. That's part of that review, and it will be forthcoming.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Will you be increasing the representation from professional artists on that board as well? You have a number of good community people and good amateur people but not very many professional ones.

**Mr. Blackett:** I'm not sure; I will get back to you on that. I think we have a couple left to be filled, and we still have some names that we're looking at, but that is an excellent suggestion.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Further to the professional arts, the Alberta Arts Day is essentially thus far, the way it has played out, a day that celebrates the amateur arts and community involvement in the arts. It doesn't work as well for the professional arts sector to have to essentially mount a production or pay their professional artists to be involved in a day in which, clearly, there's no funding from the department to support it. I'm wondering what the ministry's expectation of the usefulness of this day is for the professional arts sector. It certainly works for the amateur and the community-based arts, no question. What is the ministry's expectations of how successful this would be for the professional arts sector?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, if you look at last year, at the Southern Alberta Jubilee we had performances by the Alberta Ballet and the Calgary Philharmonic, which I would think would be classified as professional. We had professional musicians, and we paid them their regular rate. I think that we put out over \$300,000, some of that for production, but mostly that was to pay artists. We will increase that this year.

We are going to go from a focus on Calgary because I think it needs to be a focus on the entire province, so we will have five locations. We have Edmonton, Calgary, Fort McMurray, Olds, and Medicine Hat, and we will have a mixture of professional and amateur artists. We want to make sure that we showcase all of those, but for the professional artists we've got other plans beyond just Arts Day, which I'll elaborate on in a second.

We will have that opportunity now of three days because we want the first day to be K to 12 schools. The Ministry of Education has agreed to help us with that. So every K to 12 student in Alberta will do something for Arts Day. Whether it's draw a picture, write a story, perform in a play, perform in a musical piece, they will do that. We will have our libraries onboard.

Then Saturday and Sunday are meant for the community and

families, whether it's to go to an art gallery, to see a performance in the park, to sketch. Whatever it is, we've left it specifically for most of the communities to come up with it because there are a lot of proud communities in Alberta, great arts communities. Whether it's at Keyano College or whether you're in Olds at the new Trans-Canada Theatre, whether you're here at the Horowitz or one of the other performance venues, whether you're at Rosebud, whether you're at the old Bailey Theatre or the Empress Theatre in Fort Macleod, they're all great places. The communities have stepped forward because we couldn't fund all of them, but we can certainly count on the Alberta spirit and the communities that support it to come forward. We have one of the ladies on our Premier's advisory council who's from Hanna, and she said: you know, one of the best places to grow up is small-town Alberta because you can count on your community to support you.

8:40

**Ms Blakeman:** That's wonderful.

Is it the expectation of the minister and the department that the professional arts community would continue to offer arts programming for free and at a cost to themselves for the Arts Days?

**Mr. Blackett:** They don't offer for free. We can't have them play for free. We have to pay them.

**Ms Blakeman:** No, sir. You're saying that people would go out and go to the art gallery and enjoy all of these other things. Where those things are mounted by a professional company, it costs them money. It costs that art gallery money to have the door open and people in, as delighted as they are to have people come and see the exhibits that they have. So my question again is to the minister. Is it the expectation of the ministry that the professional arts community will continue to offer opportunities for the public during these Arts Days with no compensation to the arts organizations for the costs they incur for doing it?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, we don't have an unlimited amount of money. We will support them to the level that we can, but a lot of organizations have said that it's an opportunity for them to reach out and touch a different organization. We're going to make all our provincial facilities free for that day. I know that in talking to the mayor of Edmonton, he is interested in trying to encourage others to do that. Some of them can. If we tried to pay for all of that, it would be tens of millions of dollars, which we don't have.

There are other things that we will do for some of those professional artists, the performing artists mainly. You know, we have two Grey Cups here, in Edmonton and in Calgary, and part of the contractual agreement is that X amount of dollars has to be spent on cultural activities and content, and we have put in money for the Cultural Olympiad in Vancouver, so that will allow some of our artists to have a showcase. At many different other opportunities that we have we'll try to showcase them. But sometimes somebody is going to have to bear the cost. There's an upside to them in showing prospective new patrons what they're all about, and hopefully they can entice more. Maybe we can get more subscriptions up in our theatres and in our operas and for our orchestras.

**Ms Blakeman:** That actually hasn't been the case for the professional community. We've certainly tried this in the past, and that, in fact, has not been the case.

I'll move on. When we're looking at the community spirit program, for the almost 1,500 organizations that received matching donations, there are three pieces of information I'm looking for: how

many of the organizations that received grants had a budget of over a million dollars, how many were societies registered under the Societies Act, and how many were charities under the tax act or under Revenue Canada?

**Mr. Blackett:** We'll provide that to you in writing. What I do know is that 496 organizations, all those that I think applied for money under \$10,000, were awarded a hundred per cent of that money. But to give you specific answers, we'll have to get back to you in writing.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Through the chair of the committee, please.

I notice under strategy 3.5 in the ministry's business plan that the ministry is evaluating the community spirit donation program. I'm wondering: were there issues that were raised by the applicants or by the industry that have led the minister to evaluate the program after one year?

**Mr. Blackett:** We want to know: was it successful? Did we get to the people that we wanted? Did we make our program accessible to people across Alberta irrespective of their geography? As I mentioned before, initially correspondence was going to be provided to only 7,000 organizations, leaving 12,000 in the cold, and we thought that was wrong. Fourteen hundred and ninety-four recipients, to supplement the 300 that went through Wild Rose, another 1,000 to 1,300 that went through CIP, and about 700 through CFEP: we want to make sure we do an ongoing review on all of those to make sure that we're meeting our goals. It's just prudent.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Under vote 4.0.5, other initiatives, can you outline what projects are planned for these other initiatives?

**Mr. Blackett:** Other initiatives. Right now we have the Culinary Arts Foundation, Alpine Canada, Hockey Canada, the McMahon Stadium Society, the Alberta Junior Hockey League, the Calgary Military Museums, the Grande Prairie Montrose Centennial Centre, the Camrose Sport Development Centre, the 2007 World Triathlon, Calgary Fireworks Festival Society, Rick Hansen initiative, TrailNet initiatives, city of Edmonton Grand Prix, 2009 world curling trials, town of Lacombe gala celebration, military families fund, Regroupement artistique francophone de l'Alberta 2008, Calgary Stampeders football club for the Grey Cup in 2009, Friends of the Ukrainian Village Society, Indigenous Sports Council, Crowsnest Historical Society, Alberta Music Industry Association, Calgary Olympic Development Association, and the world biathlon championships.

**Ms Blakeman:** Has the amount of money that appears in the budget under that line, 4.0.5, \$8.5 million, been allocated?

**Mr. Blackett:** Not all of it, no.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Does this fund continue to be a discretionary fund under the control of the minister? Previously there was no application process, there was no timeline or deadlines, there was no maximum amount of money, and it could be multiyear. Are those criteria all still in play?

**Mr. Blackett:** They are.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Has the minister made the program more responsive? It's viewed often as a slush fund because it's entirely under the control and the discretion of the minister. Has it been made any more transparent?

**Mr. Blackett:** Transparent in that, you know, groups that want to apply can. We've published a list of who is eligible and how much money they're getting. In terms of more transparent in the process, what are you asking for?

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, generally by accepted principles a grant process that was entirely under the discretion of a minister, had no application process, had no timeline or deadline, had no maximum amount of money, and could be basically decided entirely at the discretion of the minister would be considered nontransparent. You're saying that none of those have changed, or perhaps I got that wrong. Please correct me.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, right now none of that has changed, but, you know, there has to be money to be able to do things that are for the better good of Albertans. For instance, if the city of Edmonton needed money for the Indy, or Northlands, specifically, needed money for the Indy, we were able to do that. When the Calgary Grey Cup committee said that they needed money to help put on the Grey Cup, we were able to do that, also Edmonton. We have organizations such as the Calgary Military Museums. Because some of these organizations can't meet the matching fund criteria, we have created some flexibility to be able to give them that.

**Ms Blakeman:** But don't the other programs that have matching fund criteria all have an ability to have that waived? Is that not true?

**Mr. Blackett:** I don't think they can all have it waived right now. I mean, for instance, with the CIP I can waive the matching criteria up to \$10,000, but I can't waive it beyond that. We'd have to change the criteria as it sits now.

**Ms Blakeman:** Would any of the organizations that you've just listed qualify under other existing grant programs?

**Mr. Blackett:** Most of them would not.

**Ms Blakeman:** Is it still available for multiyear funding?

**Mr. Blackett:** It can be. Some are one year, some are three years, some are five years, depending on the organization and depending on the need.

**Ms Blakeman:** I'm sorry. You were going to supply a list of those?

**Mr. Blackett:** If you require a list. It's on our website, but we'll certainly supply you a list, yes, as we did last year.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Thank you very much. What I'm looking for is how many of those are in for multiyear funding.

**Mr. Blackett:** Okay.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. The new Premier's Council on Arts and Culture: can the minister provide details of the work of the council to date? For example, how many times have they met?

**Mr. Blackett:** They've met twice. The first time was on December 9, when we had our first announcement, and then we met last February, and I know they're scheduled to meet April 24, so that would be this week. The original mandate was to meet twice. The individuals suggested that they would like to meet at least four times, and they continue to work together electronically if they can't

do so in person. The first thing they've recommended is that I talk to the Minister of Education and look at having arts involved more in the curriculum of our K to 12 schools, so we're working on that. They're just trying to get their bearings and trying to understand all the different parts of our department, understand what the cultural policy is, and they're out in their communities, active, to come back with ideas and feedback on what we need to do to go forward.

8:50

**Ms Blakeman:** Have they created any partnerships, facilitated any partnerships? I understand that that was part of their mandate.

**Mr. Blackett:** They haven't got there yet.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Can the minister explain the difference between his job and the job of this council? It strikes me that the minister, or the ministry, the department, shares an identical job description with this council. Can the minister separate that out, please?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, first of all, I'm the ultimate decision-maker with respect to policy in the department. They don't make recommendations with respect to funding. They are there to make suggestions on policy. They're to be eyes and ears. I'm a tireless worker, but I can't get to every different part of the province and to every different sector on a daily basis, so having another 11 sets of eyes and ears helps us do that. We have representatives from sports, recreation, performers in the arts, people with varying backgrounds and from various geographic areas of the province, and they're out there to help supplement the information because after our first year I think that's what's most important. We just haven't had a lot of information, and we're continually gathering. They will get out there and speak on behalf of the government about the cultural policy and its goals and educate people on the cultural policy. But they do not speak on behalf of the government, so they aren't quite me. They talk about the cultural policy, they gather information, and they provide advice on policy.

**Ms Blakeman:** Don't the ministry and the minister consult with people and gather information and talk about policy?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah, but like I said, I'm one person. How can I get out and cover the entire province 365 days a year? They are able to gather more information and meet more people than I am by myself.

**The Chair:** You have about two minutes, Ms Blakeman.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much.

How will the department or the government increase volunteerism, and what specific steps are being taken towards that? As part of that, has the department identified risks to this goal given the number of changes that have been taken, particularly the elimination of Wild Rose, which was specifically formatted to assist and uphold and support volunteerism? What risks have been identified towards achieving that, and what steps are being taken to increase volunteerism?

**Mr. Blackett:** Steps taken towards volunteerism. Most of it has been working through the Alberta not-for-profit, voluntary sector initiative, of which my deputy minister is co-chair. There are representatives from various government departments and representatives from the sector working together on a lot of different issues.

Volunteerism and risks. I mean, there are risks in terms of the

organizations themselves having to deal with increasing costs even now in terms of rent or mortgages, insurance costs. There's burnout of the core workers because they're asked to do more with less. There's the wage gap. We lose people to other sectors, especially the oil and gas sector, because the not-for-profit sector just can't afford to pay the baseline workers.

We have an aging sector as volunteers, where a large proportion of the people who volunteer are our seniors or are well over 50. We have a lot of young families in this province. How do we get parents, that are busy with their families and their kids, and how do we get families involved in volunteerism? One of the questions at Vitalize was: how do we do that? Vitalize is one of those instruments for us to be able to gather that kind of information.

In terms of risks those are some of them, but I don't think we have formalized a complete risk assessment yet. We're still working through ANVSI to work on some of these solutions. I'm asking them to suggest some solutions that we can try to implement on our end.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Benito, followed by Mr. Hehr, please.

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the people in the gallery, thank you for coming tonight. It's appreciated.

Regarding the Wild Rose Foundation, Mr. Minister, in Edmonton-Mill Woods, being a diverse and multicultural constituency, I have many calls about this organization. I understand that our government is streamlining its grant application processes to reduce the administrative burden on nonprofit and voluntary groups. Grant funding for the Wild Rose Foundation, CIP, and CFEP is being combined as these programs have similar criteria and serve many of the same program needs. Any layoffs as a result of this process?

**Mr. Blackett:** I already answered that question. There are no layoffs.

**Mr. Benito:** No layoffs. Okay. Thank you very much. Can you clarify again and elaborate the reason for its international and nonmatching grant components, please?

**Mr. Blackett:** Why the Wild Rose has international and nonmatching grants?

**Mr. Benito:** That's the question.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, that was the decision that the board had made, I believe, in years past. That's why. They felt that there are organizations that can't come up with the matching funds but still have worthy work that they need to do, and they need assistance with that. They wouldn't be able to meet that criteria under CIP or CFEP or one of the other programs, so they had to have an amount of money available to be able to do that on a nonmatching basis, whether it was an international effort or whether that was something here in Alberta.

**Mr. Benito:** Can we say to the public, specifically to my constituents, that the budget that the Wild Rose is supposed to have either actually increased, decreased, or is the same in this process of combining it with CFEP and CIP?

**Mr. Blackett:** No. Right now we're going to work to have a decision on that on the 20th of May and be able to tell you how much money will be available on a nonmatching basis for interna-

tional development programs and how much will be available on a nonmatching basis for those programs in Alberta, which is roughly \$4.7 million and \$1.3 million for the international development program.

**Mr. Benito:** My next question is about the budget reduction. The 2008-2009 forecast was \$519 million. The 2009-10 budget for the ministry is \$309 million. My question is: why has the overall 2009-2010 budget of \$309 million for the ministry been decreased from that 2008-09 forecast of \$519 million?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, as I mentioned earlier, if you take out the major community facilities program, which is \$140 million a year, and you add the \$40 million one-time for the Telus World of Science in Calgary and \$40 million one-time that was to go to the national portrait gallery, which the federal government cancelled, that's \$220 million. If you subtract that from the \$550 million, you're roughly around the same minus \$9 million. So the actual reduction in operational is \$9 million. The loss of \$220 million is because the program was a two-year program that was discontinued, and the other ones were one-time funding that was provided for specific projects.

**Mr. Benito:** One of my favourite foundations in Alberta is the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. It helps many organizations in the community itself, at the end of the day. Given that most of the ministry's funding programs have been reduced, what was the basis and why has there been no reduction to the funding provided to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts? I realize that you have a \$9 million shortfall in your budget.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, because I fervently believe arts and culture are one of the most important things here in Alberta to demonstrate our quality of life. They are the fabric of what we are as a society. They showcase what we are, our diverse nature, our different geographical areas across the province. I know that the not-for-profit sector, especially the social service sector, are passionate, well-meaning, hard-working people. Our arts communities are that. If I was to try to cut any of their funding – we've got an outcry now; I think the outcry would even be louder, and rightly so.

You know, other provinces and other jurisdictions around the world are looking to Alberta and saying: "Oh, yeah. I expect you guys really don't care about culture. You'll cut it." Well, we didn't, and I'm proud of that.

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you for that, Mr. Minister. In our 2009-10 budget the government will maintain its annual investment of \$20 million in the community spirit program. What has been the impact of the community spirit program, then?

9:00

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, I think it's been tremendous. We were able to reach a lot of organizations that wouldn't have been able to get funding otherwise. Sometimes there just wasn't enough money to go around in the CIP or CFEP. Like I said, 1,496 organizations were able to. Whether it was the 4-H club or Big Brothers Big Sisters in Red Deer or it was the Cancer Society or Dogs with Wings here in Edmonton, it was widespread. A lot of volunteer organizations, a lot of not-for-profits, a lot of community-based organizations were able to take part, and it was a good hand up.

Now, when it was launched back in May of last year, we didn't see the economic downturn happening, but I'm thankful that we had

an extra \$19 million in programming that was added last year, 2008-09, in new dollars for the sector in these tough economic times.

**Mr. Benito:** On the topic of tax credits, Mr. Minister, the donor-directed program benefits nonprofit and charitable organizations across the province. It provides grants based on the amount of eligible donations made by Albertans and complements the estimated \$80 million annual enhanced charitable tax credit. What has been the impact of that tax credit?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, we don't know it yet because the program was launched in the fall of 2007, so we'll get a better idea from the tax returns that are filed for the 2008 tax year. We'll be able to assess, you know, probably in the summertime as to how many people have accessed that. I know that there are organizations that have come forward from across the province and said, "You know, if we're creative and we utilize that" – because you get a 50 per cent tax credit for any donations over \$200. So you go and tell somebody: you can donate a hundred dollars and get a \$20 tax credit, so in essence you're paying \$80, or you can give a contribution of \$200, for which, in essence, you get a hundred-dollar tax credit, so you're only really paying \$20 more, and that's twice the amount going to that organization. I know that organizations have been able to double the amount of contributions they're getting just by being creative with that.

**Mr. Benito:** My last question, Mr. Minister. I know you have a very busy job schedule and that you've been working very hard. How do you like your job so far?

**Mr. Blackett:** I love my job. I think it's the best job in Alberta because you get to represent from Culture and Community Spirit 3 and a half million Albertans and the best that they have. You know, getting around to those different communities is not just about photo ops and presenting cheques. Every time we go there, we have a goal of meeting with the not-for-profit sector, community leaders, looking at an arts or cultural facility, and getting an idea of what's actually going on. Briefing notes from here in Edmonton don't really mean anything because it's real people out there, and that's how you get a better understanding of what you need to do and who the great people are that you're trying to help.

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Benito.

We'll go to Mr. Hehr, followed by Mrs. Sarich, please.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I just have a couple of questions, actually, from the minister's comments, that sort of jog my memory on this. Approximately how many schools are taking part in lottery grant programs and the like?

**Mr. Blackett:** I'd have to give you the details in writing. I can tell you in terms of dollars how much they're getting. For instance, out of that \$28 million in CIP \$4.8 million went just to technology upgrades for schools – that's just in CIP – and \$10 million went to playgrounds for schools. There are some other things. That doesn't include band equipment and other programs, whether it's an interpretive garden or whatever else it went to. But we'll get you that exact information.

Thank you.

**Mr. Hehr:** The process is that – you can correct me if I'm wrong –

individual schools apply under various programs or go work at a casino, try and organize volunteers to go get the money. Which one of them are most of these applications coming through?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, they're two separate things. Casinos don't really fall under ours, but we do match their casino dollars. So if they've gone out and spent the volunteer time to raise the money, we do match some of those dollars for those programs. That's how they're able to get the technology upgrades in many instances because some organizations just don't have the manpower to be able to do that. Also, in part of our programs I must tell you, too, that we match volunteer dollars and donations in kind, and we add that as part of the mix as well.

**Mr. Hehr:** I guess on your comments earlier regarding the Education department carrying their own weight and the health care department their weight, just one of my own personal pet peeves is in certain areas schools that have different fundraising escapades and then access technology and better computers, and then certain other areas who can't organize their parents as well fall behind. It's my fundamental belief that that should be better taken care of through the Education budget. If you guys are needing funds from the casino program, well, give them over to the Minister of Education, and everyone gets them equitably. At least, that's my philosophy. Hearing your comments earlier, do you have some vision of that or maybe even of sort of rescinding school applications to the lottery program or something of that nature to distribute funds necessary to schools?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, I think that in a perfect world all those core ministries would take that on tomorrow, and then I'd have a lot more money to actually utilize for the great people that are behind me. What we can do is just try to put some common sense to it going forward right now and say: "Okay, I understand, Jeff, how much you like hockey. I love hockey. But really, if there's \$75,000 there, do I have to give \$75,000 to a team to go to Austria? Can I not split that up? Can I not have a couple of other not-for-profits take a share in that money?" I think we can rationalize some of that and have some discussions. But trust me, this is a paradigm shift. You and I are new. I tell you, trying to convince people around my table sometimes – change is difficult.

Change in the sectors is difficult, but I think we have to go there, and I think we have to get there together. I think that one of the great parts for the sector when we had ANVSI was when they sat down with funders, independent of government but the actual funders out there, and they were echoing what I was saying for six months, that you have to be more collaborating and you have to work together. I'm saying: we have to do that on the government's side, but we need your help; we need your input. Before it was really separate worlds. We weren't working together – we're not against each other; we all want the same thing – and we have to. But your point is well taken. I mean, I'm one minister, and I'm not the minister of health or education. They've got much bigger budgets. I mean I'm, you know, a two-minute blip on the radar for that \$9 million for either of those two guys.

**Mr. Hehr:** I understand that the question I asked – and I got kind of an answer.

**Mr. Blackett:** Sorry?

**Mr. Hehr:** It felt like you were sort of with me. I guess, would it be your commitment to end lottery grant applications for schools, and

let's just move this to the Education budget? Say, let's devote so much of our casino revenues to better funding our education system: would you be willing to advocate that or take that to your other ministers?

**Mr. Blackett:** I have, and I will. But, you know, it's funny because I've mentioned that to some of the people in this sector, and they said: oh, oh, oh, we don't want to be responsible for, you know, those schools not being able to access that. So that's why I say that I have to sit down with our representatives and say: "Okay, guys, we have some tough decisions to make. I had to make the one decision without you. I can mitigate a lot of that, but you've got to tell me, you've got to give me input as to where you think we should be going with this thing." I would want to push hard for that, but I'm not sure everybody is with me on that.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, I appreciate the candidness of your comments here. I for one would hope that that gets removed from our education funding formula. It's not in the formula, but you know what I'm saying. It adds to the education funding mix.

Just turning over to sort of a different topic, I've heard you discuss from time to time that we do have 19,000 charitable groups in this province. That's an awful lot. You know the breakdown better than I do, 4,500 hockey teams, whatever you have, and all worthy. Nonetheless, I've also heard you speak on sort of the synergies that exist. For instance, I come to the disabled nonprofit community, where every disability organization has an affordable housing strategy. Let's face it, we don't need it. Are you getting some traction on reducing that in the industry? How are you able, then, to let people know that you're no longer going to fund these things if that is the ministry's goal and to give them time to actually merge their organizations or better to complement each other's organization or just hear more how that's going and how, I guess, the nonprofits are accepting this eventuality of where we're seemingly going?

9:10

**Mr. Blackett:** I think that working through ANVSI, when the funders start to say, "You know, we're not going to continue to keep on giving you money like this" – we've got 19,000 organizations, registered not-for-profits or charities; Canada-wide, 80,000. Just to put it in perspective, almost a quarter reside in Alberta. In Calgary, for instance, we have 140 organizations that deal with the homeless. Well, how many homeless members is that per organization, when you think about it? Think about how many of those organizations are having a person answering phones. How many of them have somebody doing their books? Nineteen thousand of them.

There are examples. You were at the same luncheon I was with the Cerebral Palsy Association. They're looking at collaborating on a building and collaborating on resources. You know, I'd love to try to get some of the surplus school space – and I thought it might have been a little easier than it has been – in Edmonton and Calgary and saying: hey, let's refurbish that. I know the United Way has talked about doing something like that. Let's house a bunch of different organizations in there because an affordable space is a huge deal. Unfortunately, this doesn't help move things along right away. We had an excellent discussion through ANVSI just, like, six weeks ago moving towards that. Hopefully, we can get back there fairly quickly again because the last thing we want is organizations failing because of the economic situation.

I know that taking \$9 million out doesn't hurt, but if we can take some of those other things and realize those dollars again, we can start – the real goal is to try to realize more dollars, not less dollars.

**Mr. Hehr:** I understand. Those are my questions.

**Mr. Blackett:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Hehr.

From here we'll go to Mrs. Sarich, followed by Ms Notley.

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to thank the members of the public that have taken their time and their energy to come and listen to this very important presentation. It's very valued and appreciated.

I'd like to cycle back to a couple of things for clarity and understanding. One of them would be that we've learned that the grant funding for the Wild Rose Foundation was eliminated. I know that in the constituency of Edmonton-Decore there's a lot of concern that has been raised. The not-for-profit organizations that are in that sector are now looking to the CIP program, and they're just wondering – I believe that this is around the adequacy of funding. If there was a different approach before and now everybody is pooled into this larger area, how are you going to tackle that adequacy of funding to kind of stretch the dollars a little bit wider?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, we have to go and deal with that criteria. One of the things we'll be doing, too, is talking to the MLAs and asking for input. I mean, if there are organizations out there that you know should absolutely be getting funding, I'd welcome those names to be passed on to us because it's a huge undertaking. It's a huge paradigm shift. I'm not going to lie to you. But I think it's one that we definitely will take on, we have to take on, and we have to try to figure that out. I don't have the specifics for you yet, but that's something that we have to come up with in the next 30 days.

**Mrs. Sarich:** Well, I'd like to say a thank you to the sensitivity of that. I've heard a number of questions raised this evening from mostly everyone here in this particular area. I thank you for your consideration for gathering input into that because there's a lot of nervousness around this new approach and how it's going to be sorted out given that there have been reductions. I think that we're also battling a little bit of expectation, too, in how we're going to balance that all around for the not-for-profits and others that would be in that CIP program.

I'm also wondering about the status of your long-term plan for the cultural capital infrastructure. Any comments on that?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, even though we don't have money in the budget right now for major community facilities, we've got CFEP. I know the Member for Edmonton-Centre had mentioned Varscona. It's a great organization, and we want to do things to help them. If they're arts organizations, I've got a certain affinity for them and try to do that. I think what we have to do is take the list that we have now and its existing infrastructure. So how many theatres do we have in Fort McMurray? How many galleries do we have? That sort of thing. What it doesn't address is: what do we need? That's where you're going to have to have a collective discussion with many different people in those regions. You know, there are people in Edmonton and Calgary who say that we need an opera house or we need a bigger performing arts centre or we need more rehearsal space, that kind of stuff that we have. Now that we know what we have, which we didn't know before, we can decide and look at what we need to have going forward and how to prioritize that. I think that will help all of us because I don't think those discussions have been had before.

**Mrs. Sarich:** One of the comments that you made a little bit earlier was in the area where you mentioned some investment of dollars that has gone into things that would have fallen very appropriately into Education or perhaps Health and other ministries and that to tackle that, you're going to have extra dialogue, you know, with colleagues and the ministries and other stakeholder groups, too, to try to sort that out. How confident are you that you'll be able to manage what you're driving at in that particular area? You mentioned, for example, \$4.8 million in technology upgrades that were themselves attached in the education sector. Traditionally there have been applications that came through, for example, CIP for that, and now you're looking at perhaps a different approach. What could people expect?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, I'm confident that we'll get, you know, the \$6 million we're trying to realize. If we, for instance, took technology upgrades and said that we'll only allow funding at half, capped it at \$25,000 or \$35,000 per school, or if we took playgrounds and said that we'll cap that at only \$50,000, I mean, we would start realizing millions of dollars in savings. It's not that hard to come up with \$6 million. Hopefully, I can come up with more than that because that would be good.

I will push hard. I mean, the first thing is to go and talk to the minister and ask nicely; the second is to start to lever. As much as everybody in this sector will fight and has fought government and said, "Hey, you have got to do this," I've got to fight equally as hard on their behalf to go and get what I believe we should be doing. I think I've got some colleagues around this table – I know I've got some around our caucuses, certainly, in the Legislature – that agree with that. So I'm fairly confident, and my officials have told me I have no reason not to be.

**Mrs. Sarich:** I would like to also cycle back. I believe that there was a question or two in the area of human rights. Why are you increasing the government financial support for human rights? How will this additional investment in that area improve service to Albertans? Could you provide a little bit more clarity around that?

**Mr. Blackett:** Sure. Well, one of the things that the Sheldon Chumir foundation had said and a lot of criticism that we've received and other provinces have received is that the human rights commissions are chronically underfunded. Now, they had consultation for three years all around the province. The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs through this human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund over the last two years has met with different groups all around the province. A lot of them are saying the same things.

Just in the operation of it we've got some cases, some of them five years old, that haven't been resolved. We've seen cases in the paper, you know, of 400 days, 300 days, and that's just not an acceptable time to expect resolution on an issue. It just costs more money in the end. So we're looking to try to deal with the backlog of cases that are there and then deal with the current 900 or so that come in and try to take some of the administrative burden off some of the people we have and spread it around.

**Mrs. Sarich:** I would like to go to the major community facilities program and note that there was a backlog of applications in this particular area for the community infrastructure needs. Why wasn't the two-year program extended given that there was a definite backlog in there? With that, what have you done to measure the impact of the investment that the department had made in this particular area?



9:20

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, the decision wasn't mine to make. You know, I've taken this through the entire process, but that was back seven or eight months ago. Overwhelming caucus support, cabinet support, all those different things had to finally go to Treasury Board. Then the bottom fell out of the economy, and the infrastructure that we as a government decided to prioritize was hospitals, schools, and roads. Other public infrastructure, unfortunately, was a casualty.

In terms of measurement if you look at the amount of projects that actually have gone forward that were approved, I probably said in the House six, seven months ago that for every project we approve, at least four will be denied because the amount of ask was astronomical. We had \$140 million that was available. We had \$480 million being asked for, projects worth about \$1.96 billion. You know, if you just look at Edmonton and you look at the Go centre and Snow Valley and the Humane Society and Citadel Theatre and Ronald McDonald House – and there are others – I mean, they have been across the different sectors and different groups, like most of our other programs have. All around the province, whether its rural or urban, they've been great.

I mean, I recognize the fact that if you have an arena that burns down, like in Mayerthorpe, you know, the amount of money that we have in the CFEP is not going to repair the roof.

There are just lots of great things. We have got to build some infrastructure in the arts communities. We have a lot of multiplexes that we open, whether it's in Athabasca, whether it is in Cold Lake, in Calgary, and Red Deer. I mean, lots of those things are community facilities and community places that were desperately needed. I just know from the communities what they have.

The Auditor General probably gave the ultimate performance measure when he said: "You know, the one mistake you make is not putting this information on the website, not putting more pictures. Community organizations are always going to have to band together to create a rec centre or a rink. It's just really a daunting task to come up with the resources to do all of that, the volunteer resources and the plans and the professional fees and all of that. Maybe if you put that on the website, more organizations would be able to see how they have done that. It's more of a template for them, so they don't have to re-create the wheel each time." And he says: "You know, it's a good program. It has done a great job. People should know about it and learn from it."

**Mrs. Sarich:** My last question would be going back to the cultural capital infrastructure. There's lots of dialogue about co-locating of capital planning. Have you explored that? What I mean by that is that for education, health, libraries we look at co-location of physical structures or try to have other means of really servicing the community in a multidimensional purpose. I would appreciate your comments on that.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, I'm a big advocate for it. I have it personally in my own community. We have a new high school that we're building in my constituency. We have a need for a rec centre. The city has put aside \$70 million in MSI, and there's a new library scheduled to be built. I look at south Fish Creek and south Calgary or I look at Cold Lake, where they have a high school and the college and the rec centre all co-located in the same facility. If the government is going to put its money in, why would you create three separate buildings? Why would you not put them together?

We're trying to do that. It's just sometimes tougher, but we've got to work smarter. You know, I keep on hearkening back to the not-for-profit sector. They have to try to come up with things with baling wire and duct tape every day and be creative just to survive

to the next month. We've got to start using some disciplines and some creativity to be able to get the things we have, especially now. We don't have as much money, but there's money out there. We've just got to be a little smarter about how we utilize that.

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. I really appreciate your presentation and information this evening. And thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Sarich.

Ms Notley, I think you have the opportunity to run out the clock. You have about five minutes. Go ahead, please.

**Ms Notley:** Whoo-hoo. What to do. Five whole minutes. Keep it brief is all I have to say, both of us. Of course, it's probably a bigger challenge for me.

Really quickly, just to follow up on a question that has been asked now several times. Item 4.0.5, whatever that is.

**Ms Blakeman:** Other initiatives.

**Ms Notley:** Other initiatives. You mentioned that it was on the website. I went to the website to find it and then was referred to the lotteries website, which then sent me to a 45-page document, which doesn't actually break it out on the basis of that particular program. So I was unable to actually in any – I spent about 15 minutes on it and then got bored. There must have been a shiny thing or something. I was distracted and so stopped trying to figure out exactly how much has been allocated. I guess, first of all, is there a more user-friendly place to find what has been allocated through the other initiatives program? Then, secondly, you said that not all of it has been allocated, so my question is: how much is remaining unallocated at this point?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, I'll find out about the website because I was under the impression that that was there. I'll find out why and make that correction. But there is \$3.2 million that's unallocated.

**Ms Notley:** Okay. I, of course, would urge you to put that into your CIP and use it for what we were just talking about, just a little bit of advocacy there.

**Mr. Blackett:** Fair enough.

**Ms Notley:** Okay. I'd like to touch briefly on the human rights issue, and I know it's mostly a budget discussion. I'll try to limit my remaining four minutes to that. Just a couple of points. I appreciate that you have increased the Human Rights Commission budget somewhat. I suspect that it could probably be tripled before the commission could actually do the work it needs. So while the increase is good, it needs much, much more.

I note that the most recent annual report notes that once resolutions and investigations and all that kind of thing were finished, there were actually only 10 matters that went to hearing. Now, I understand that we had about 15 to 20 matters filed last week, almost all of which, I suspect, will go to hearing. Has there been some consideration to the fact that there is going to be a need to increase the budget simply on that issue? Yeah, I guess I'll just leave that right there.

No, actually, another really quick question. I asked you this last year, and I'll ask you again: has there been any reconsideration about moving the Human Rights Commission over to the Attorney General's ministry?

**Mr. Blackett:** There has been a discussion about it, a very short discussion. The reason that we don't have it sitting in Justice like every other jurisdiction is the fact that it was supposed to be an arm's-length, quasi-judicial body. If you had that and you were a Justice employee, then what do you do? And if you are a government employee, is there not an inherent conflict of interest? I don't see that there is any difference in how we run ours from an impartiality standpoint or a capability standpoint because it's not in Justice. I mean, Justice will be the appellant mechanism anyway. That's why we went out to find someone of the stature of Blair Mason, a retired judge, to be able to put that discipline and that ability and accountability into the system.

**Ms Notley:** Okay. I'll let you ponder the potential increase to your budget vis-à-vis the 20 matters that are probably going to end up going to hearing with respect to the gender reassignment surgery.

I'm just going to use the last couple of seconds to do a bit of advocacy. On the issue which, of course, is to be discussed by all of the Tory caucus, you mentioned you had conferred with a number of people. I suspect that you're going to have a lot of difficulties and a lot of complications and cost increases with the rumoured plan to move ahead with the changes with respect to allowing through the human rights code the ability for parents to pull their kids on the basis of religious exemption from certain programs within the school. I don't think that that's the kind of right which actually

belongs in a human rights code, in terms of whether it's reactive or a right you assert. I also think that it's deeply complicating vis-à-vis how it could be actually administered within the school system, and you're probably going to hear that from teachers. I also think that it sets up an inherent conflict within the code itself. Frankly, I don't think we need to go to the point of starting to compromise or qualify our human rights.

9:30

**The Chair:** I must advise the committee that that concludes the allotted time for this item of business this evening.

We have a good group of people out from the public that have attended this evening. Thank you very much for your interest in this subject matter. Given the interest in this subject matter across the province, I expect we've had public who have listened to the audio broadcast this evening, and we thank you for your participation. To the minister and his staff, thank you very much for your participation. To our support staff and the members at the table this evening, thank you.

I will advise the members of the committee that we are scheduled to have our next meeting on Tuesday, April 21, tomorrow evening, to consider the estimates of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(2)(a) this meeting is adjourned. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 9:31 p.m.]



