



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Service Alberta
Consideration of Main Estimates

Monday, March 7, 2022
7 p.m.

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Third Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP), Deputy Chair
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP),* Acting Deputy Chair

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participant

Ministry of Service Alberta
Hon. Nate Glubish, Minister

7 p.m.

Monday, March 7, 2022

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

**Ministry of Service Alberta
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: We'll get started here. I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Service Alberta for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials who are joining you at the table.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you. My name is Nate Glubish, Minister of Service Alberta. I have joining me today David James, deputy minister; Richard Isaak, Service Alberta senior financial officer; Dominique Bohn, assistant deputy minister of digital delivery innovation; Stephen Bull, assistant deputy minister of technology support and operations; Martin Dinel, assistant deputy minister of cybersecurity services; Ronda Goulden, assistant deputy minister, consumer, registry and strategic services; and Maureen Towle, assistant deputy minister of data information and privacy services.

The Chair: Thank you.

My name is Jackie Lovely. I'm the MLA for the Camrose constituency and the chair of this committee. We will be starting to my right for introductions.

Mr. Dach: Lorne Dach, MLA, Edmonton-McClung, deputy chair.

Mr. Hunter: Grant Hunter, MLA for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Smith: Good evening. Mark Smith, Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mrs. Frey: Michaela Frey, MLA, Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Amery: Mickey Amery, MLA, Calgary-Cross.

Mr. Barnes: Drew Barnes, Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Carson: Good evening. Jon Carson, MLA, Edmonton-West Henday.

The Chair: We'll go to the members participating remotely. When I call your name, please introduce yourself for the record. Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Richard Gotfried, MLA, Calgary-Fish Creek.

The Chair: And do we have Mr. Loewen?

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Loewen is going to be joining us later.

The Chair: Okay. Who else have I missed? Is Mr. Dang participating? Okay. That's great. All right.

I'd like to note the following substitution: Mr. Dach will be substituting as deputy chair for Ms Sigurdson.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*. The committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and visual stream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the legislative Alberta website. Members participating remotely are encouraged to have your camera on while speaking and your microphone muted when not speaking.

Remote participants who wish to be placed on the speakers list are asked to e-mail or send a message in the group chat to the committee clerk, and members in the room are asked to please signal to the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. A total of two hours has been scheduled for consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Service Alberta. Standing Order 59.01(7) establishes the speaking rotation and speaking times.

In brief, the minister will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of the minister's comments a 50-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition begins, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for independent members, if any, and then a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus.

Individuals may only speak up to 10 minutes at a time but may be combined between the member and the minister. After this rotation of speaking time I will then follow the same rotation of the Official Opposition, independent members, and the government caucus, with individual speaking times set to five minutes for both the member and ministry. These times may be combined, making it a 10-minute block. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send an e-mail or message to the committee clerk about the process.

Ministry officials may be present at the direction of the minister and may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area and are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commenting.

Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table.

Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members. However, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to two hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and the committee will adjourn.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and individual speaking times will be paused; however, the speaking block time and the overall two-hour meeting clock will continue to run.

Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all members. The vote on the estimates and any amendments will occur in Committee of Supply on March 21, 2022. Amendments will be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk with 20 hard copies. An electronic version of the signed original should be provided to the committee clerk for distribution to committee members.

Finally, the committee should have the opportunity to hear both the questions and answers without interruption during estimate debate. Debate flows through the chair at all times, please, including instances when speaking time is shared between a member and the minister.

I would now invite the Minister of Service Alberta to begin his opening remarks. You have 10 minutes, sir.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, everyone, for joining me this evening. I'm pleased today to speak to the 2022 Service Alberta budget by presenting our estimates for the upcoming fiscal year. Earlier, when we just started, I already introduced my

team. I want to thank them all for being here to assist in any technical questions we may need their assistance with.

Budget 2022 supports Service Alberta's foundational and strategic role of modernizing government, driving innovation, and fostering efficient delivery of government programs. We work hard to make government information more accessible through freedom of information and open government, all while protecting Albertans' privacy. We oversee consumer protection within the province, ensuring a fair marketplace for hard-working Albertans and fair competition for businesses. We oversee registry services, supporting Albertans through their milestone events like getting a driver's licence, buying a home, or having a child. We support crossgovernment services like payroll and procurement. All of this is in addition to our primary role as the technology and innovation centre of government, responsible for cybersecurity, delivery of new digital systems, service modernization, and much, much more.

Service Alberta is integral to smooth government operations, a responsibility that I and my department take very seriously. Budget 2022 is moving Alberta forward by strengthening our health care system, getting more Albertans working, and bringing our finances back into the black. To support this vision, Service Alberta will focus on improving connectivity, ensuring the security of our digital assets, renewing service delivery, and driving innovation through everything we do. These actions will play a critical supporting role throughout the fiscal year as Albertans seek meaningful careers and more diverse health care supports and as our colleagues across government seek to deliver better, smarter, and faster services that make the public sector more efficient and more effective.

With this in mind, Budget 2022 invests a consolidated \$702.6 million to fund Service Alberta programs and services in the upcoming year. This represents an increase of \$145 million from the last fiscal year. One of the most exciting commitments in Budget 2022 is a \$320 million investment over three years into rural connectivity, and \$75.1 million is dedicated to financial and administrative shared services such as fleet management, procurement, and payroll. Another \$38.8 million will be invested to support data, information, and privacy services, which includes the important work of our public servants in the FOIP division, who work hard every day to protect the privacy of Albertans and to support access to information. As always, we are looking to harness the power of new technologies to improve our services and to deliver a better experience for all Albertans. Consumer and registry services has a budget of \$61.2 million, which includes approximately \$6.7 million for the Utilities Consumer Advocate. A total of \$493.1 million will support technology, digital delivery, and cybersecurity operations.

Throughout the fiscal year Service Alberta expects to generate \$717 million in revenue, an increase of about \$56 million from the 2021 fiscal year, due primarily to anticipated increases in land titles and motor vehicle revenue resulting from higher volumes due to Alberta's strong economic recovery. We will also continue our work to implement modern technologies to support increased efficiency and reduce duplication. By doing so, we can deliver a better experience for Albertans while saving them money. We will leave no stone unturned in this pursuit.

Arguably, the most important work that my ministry will undertake this year is the implementation of Alberta's broadband strategy, putting Alberta on a realistic path to universal connectivity. Right now an estimated 489,000 Albertans, or 201,000 Alberta households, do not have access to reliable high-speed Internet connections. This must change. Alberta's broadband strategy includes a \$390 million commitment over four years to support investments in rural broadband; \$320 million of this is included in Budget 2022: \$150 million in the first year, \$100 million in the second year, \$70 million in the third year, and then a final \$70

million has been committed by our government publicly in the Alberta broadband strategy for 2025-2026.

7:10

But Alberta can't do this alone, and that is why I was so excited to announce last December that we had negotiated a matching agreement with the federal government. They had initially matched \$150 million, and I continued to work with my federal counterpart to secure additional matching funds. This would bring our total combined public funding for rural broadband to \$780 million between Alberta and Canada. Working with the federal government maximizes public investment and minimizes duplication to connect more Alberta homes and businesses in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities than either government could accomplish on their own.

Investing in broadband is one of the most important things that we can do to secure the future of our province. Eliminating the digital divide will ensure that all Albertans, regardless of where they live, have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from our economic recovery. For the last three years Albertans have told me that rural connectivity is one of their top priorities, and our total provincial investment of \$390 million over four years is proof that we are listening and that Alberta's government is taking action to secure their future in an increasingly digital world.

Another key theme in the Service Alberta budget is a focus on optimizing and modernizing the delivery of current programs and services to meet existing and emerging needs and to provide good value for taxpayers. Albertans expect their government to offer high-quality online services similar to those offered by the private sector, and so they should. To help meet these expectations, Service Alberta is focused on implementing more technology and innovation in everything we do. To support this effort, we have reorganized our teams and resources to ensure our structure is optimized to develop, introduce, and update services faster and more efficiently than ever before. I'm especially excited to highlight the introduction of a new cybersecurity division that will build on our already strong focus on protecting the government's digital information systems as well as improving the province's overall cybersecurity posture by facilitating more collaborative work with Alberta public- and private-sector organizations.

We will also have one division dedicated to supporting the existing systems that provide important services to Albertans and to other government departments, including running the technology backbone of government and leading the implementation of our broadband strategy. Another division will support user-centric service transformation through application of innovative approaches and will partner with ministries across government to design simpler, faster, and better services for all Albertans.

As I noted earlier, the former FOIP division was expanded to include an increased focus on data management. An integral part of modernizing our service delivery model centres on improving the way Alberta's government uses, stores, and secures information and data. With this in mind, Service Alberta is investing \$4.5 million into our data strategy to support data-driven innovation. This will benefit Albertans in a number of ways by improving public services, attracting investment, creating jobs, and helping to grow and diversify our economy.

Service Alberta's new divisions will work collaboratively with each other and other ministries and Albertans to deploy new services that leverage cloud technologies, open-source coding, consistent service standards, and other best practices inspired by leading digital organizations in both the private and public sector. This will result in a more responsive organization that can keep pace with technological change. Leading digital organizations in

both the private and public sectors have taken similar approaches with great success. Adapting our practices and learning from other successful organizations will position Alberta as a digital public-sector leader in Canada and around the world.

Budget 2022 also invests \$9.5 million to introduce new capabilities to IGX that improve finance, human resources, and supply chain management processes. This investment will introduce new functionalities that improve the efficiency of government and provide organizational insights that will help leaders make more informed decisions faster. The added tools will support staff training, help with long-term staffing and succession planning, and provide insight into workforce skills planning. Our work on IGX will give Alberta's government some of the best and most complete organizational insights in any jurisdiction in Canada.

The last topic I want to highlight in my opening remarks is our important work in the land titles office; 2021 brought exponential growth to the real estate market, a clear indication that Alberta's recovery plan is working and our economy is on the rebound. In order to deal with this increase in volumes and to address the increased wait times that Albertans are experiencing today, we are investing \$9.1 million into additional staffing and support for application processing. Our goal is to bring wait times back to normal by the end of this calendar year.

This will be a milestone year for Service Alberta. We will transform our organization, our approach to service delivery, and our province's connectivity to ensure that the future is bright and filled with new opportunities for every Albertan. The world is changing, and Service Alberta is changing with it, and we're focused on leading the way.

Thank you for this opportunity to share Service Alberta's plans for Budget 2022. I'd be happy to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

For the next 50 minutes members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Hon. members, you will be able to see the timer for the speaking block both in the committee room and on Microsoft Teams.

Member, would you like to combine your time with the minister's?

Mr. Carson: I'd appreciate that.

The Chair: All right. And the minister?

Mr. Glubish: Let's go with block time. Thank you.

The Chair: So we'll go with block time.

Mr. Carson, please proceed.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Chair. First of all, thank you for the opportunity to join you all this evening. Thank you to the members of the committee for joining us this evening, Chair, Minister, as well as the department staff in putting together this important work that we're reviewing today.

Again, just looking at what we have before us specific to the 2022 ministry business plans, we only see five pages specific to Service Alberta, with only two of them highlighting key objectives and showing ministry performance metrics. I have to question again, as I did last year, why the decision was made to remove valuable information from the ministry business plans regarding these initiatives and key objectives. For instance, the 2020 business plan, looking back a couple of years, had six pages alone focused on these metrics and objectives, and now we only see two in this budget. I do digress.

We heard some comments in the opening remarks from the minister regarding the broadband proposal on high-speed Internet.

Now, last year through the estimates process the minister committed to putting forward a plan by the end of 2021 showing how the government was going to connect all Albertans to high-speed Internet. In December of last year, 2021, the minister told the *Sherwood Park News* that, quote, 'in an ideal situation we are working towards full connectivity by '23-24. And, of course, now we are three months into 2022. We are finally just hearing about these plans, not to mention the government's, the UCP's, own timeline to roll out high-speed Internet to all Albertans has been pushed back from those initial comments from the minister to the '26-27 year or budget in the course of those three months, between December and what we have now before us that was just recently announced.

Now, I am hoping to find out if the minister still has hopes to see full connectivity by the '23-24 year or budget cycle. I'm hoping to find out how many of the 200,000 Alberta households who are desperately waiting for high-speed Internet in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities the minister expects to connect by the end of the '22-23 year as well as the following year. We heard some discussion of the funding breakdown, and I might come back to that later, but I'm hoping to hear with that initial contribution – it sounded like a split between the provincial and federal government for the '22-23 year of \$150 million – how many Alberta households the minister plans to connect with that initial investment. I'm hoping the minister can share specifically which communities can expect to see high-speed Internet achieved over the next year because of these commitments, these initial commitments.

Looking to line item 5.1 on page 195 of the government estimates, it shows that \$150 million capital grant for technology support and operations. Again, I'm expecting that this is the commitment to universal high-speed Internet as we've heard discussed so far. I'm hoping the minister can confirm that this line item, well, is coming out of a 50-50 split between the provincial and federal governments, and, again, it sounded like that was the case in the opening remarks.

I'm hoping the minister can explain why after reviewing their broadband strategy there is no mention of the creation of an agency or advisory group. Maybe that was an oversight. Maybe that is in the works, but we didn't see that mentioned. So as it relates, again, to this budget line item, if we can expect to see an agency or advisory group under the ministry or within the department to ensure the proper rollout of these important programs. Are there any dollars committed from that line item or anywhere else in the budget that are going to be used to create such an agency, ensuring the equitable distribution of these funds across the province through consultation?

7:20

Again as it relates to line item 5.1 on page 195 of government estimates and the commitment to connect all Albertans to high-speed Internet, is there any plan to commit some of these funds to subsidize the use of low Earth orbit technology or any other technology for the hardest to reach corners of the province? I'm sure that the minister heard through consultations that this was something that should be considered not only for the hardest to reach parts of the province but potentially people that simply cannot afford these technologies. But, again, as we're looking into the future, these are, at the end of the day, services that are vital to the long-term viability of our province, especially when we look at rural connectivity.

Again, after reviewing the broadband strategy produced by this government, it seems that the province will be using an application-based model instead of a reverse auction model like we see in other jurisdictions, like Ontario. When we look at a reverse auction model, it would allow companies of all sizes to bid and ensure tax

dollars are used wisely, and again relating it back to line item 5.1 on page 195 of the government estimates, I'm just wondering why the ministry decided to go with the application-based model through the universal broadband fund instead of an open and competitive process ensuring the best use of Alberta taxpayer dollars.

I'm hoping to find out what metrics we can expect to see in either future annual reports or budgets to ensure Albertans are getting value for their tax dollars when it comes to this line item and Internet connectivity as a whole. I'm just taking a look at my time here.

Finally, I'm hoping to find out how many full-time equivalents, or FTEs, in the department will be specifically focused on achieving 100 per cent high-speed connectivity for all Albertans in the 2022-2023 year, as it relates to this line item, and potentially into the future, if there is an idea of needing more staff in the department, if the ministry believes they have the capacity already, and, again, going back to the fact that we didn't see any commitment to an agency, how they are planning to achieve such outcomes.

Now, moving on to something that we discussed in last year's estimates, and at that time there was a \$600,000 commitment from this government. Again, last year the minister may remember that through that process I had raised the point that this government had been musing about the idea of replacing Alberta's paper health care cards with, well, hopefully, a better system. At the time the minister said that this was indeed a campaign commitment from the UCP, and as far as I know, we haven't seen any new announcements regarding this process. Again, while we saw a \$600,000 commitment in that budget, at that time I raised concerns because it seemed like an awfully low number in terms of being able to overhaul that system.

I'm wondering if there are any additional dollars in this year's budget to complete that process or if we can expect to hear more about the completion of this process in the near future or in this budget cycle, at some point soon. Again, a population like the one we have here in Alberta, replacing every single card, administering that: I'm just hoping to hear a breakdown of how you came to the conclusion of that \$600,000; if we see additional funds in this budget, how you came to the conclusion that that would be enough to cover it; and, finally, if that isn't going to be enough to cover it, how the ministry plans to get some of that money back. Are we going to see a cost placed on Albertans to finish that process?

Moving on with my last minute and a half, looking at the RTDRS. On page 98 of last year's business plan 3(b) showed that in the 2021 year "94 per cent of urgent tenancy applications were heard within the established 15-day timeline." The ministry targets also show that in the '21-22 year there was a target of 81 per cent regarding hearing urgent applications within 15 days, but page 102 of this year's business plans show that in 2021-2022 only 50 per cent of urgent tenancy applications were heard within that timeline. So I'm hoping the minister can explain why there was such a large discrepancy between the two documents, specifically, between the two years. How does the minister or the ministry plan to get this percentage up from 50 per cent, reaching their target of 83 per cent, as shown in this year's business plan on page 102?

Again on page 195 of this year's government estimates, line item 2.1 shows that there's actually a budgeted reduction of over \$3 million, and I would question the minister, asking: shouldn't we be investing more, not less, at a time when the ministry's own documents show that we are missing these timeline targets by over 30 per cent? It's deeply concerning to me and to the many Albertans who are struggling to afford their homes and also struggling to find resolution between themselves and their landlords.

I'll leave it at that. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Now we'll move over to the minister for a response.

Mr. Glubish: Okay. Thank you. Let me start with broadband because, again, as I said in my opening remarks, I think this is the most important thing, I believe, that Service Alberta will be focused on in the upcoming year. The member brought up a number of questions and made a few comments, and I think it would be valuable for all of us to just go through that in an orderly fashion.

One of the first things the member talked about was a selective quote from an interview I did with the *Sherwood Park News*, where I did talk about how, in a perfect world, it would be great if we could get to 2023-2024 for universal connectivity. But in that interview and in many interviews I said that in addition to that, we do need to recognize that with the reality of the pandemic and supply chain issues and access to procuring fibre and the related electronics, it was more realistic that it might take a little bit longer than that.

You know, the good news is that now that we have released Alberta's broadband strategy, which is a credible and comprehensive plan to reaching universal connectivity by 2026-2027, this is also a funded plan. We now have more detail in that plan, that we have now released to Albertans to give them a sense of the path forward.

In terms of the funding breakdown the member talked a bit about line 5.1 and the \$150 million there. I can confirm that that is, in fact, year 1 of our broadband commitment. As I said in my opening remarks, there are obviously follow-on commitments over the following three years, that we have made publicly, that total \$390 million over a four-year period: \$150 million in year 1, \$100 million in year 2, \$70 million in year 3, and \$70 million in year 4.

In terms of how many households and what communities would be covered, I think it's important to talk a bit about what our process is to roll this out. One of the things that we've said publicly and outlined in our broadband strategy is that we are partnering with the federal government – for a lot of reasons – with their universal broadband fund. One of the reasons is to ensure that we don't duplicate efforts and don't both end up supporting competing projects in the same area, because the whole point is: let's make sure that every dollar of public support goes as far as possible to covering the largest number of households and communities as quickly as possible.

We also wanted to make sure that we could get this started as soon as possible, and being able to leverage an existing application process, an open and transparent and fair process that the federal government had implemented with the universal broadband fund, meant that we could ensure that Alberta's financial supports for broadband would reach the market way faster than if we started from scratch with our own program.

We have been working with the federal government over the last number of months to evaluate the hundreds and hundreds of really exciting projects, Alberta connectivity projects, that are in front of the universal broadband fund today, and we are very, very close to coming to an agreement with the federal government on which projects and which communities will see the initial investments from our broadband strategy and from our collaboration with the federal government. I can't share that information today. As I'm sure the member would know and appreciate, when you're working with another level of government, like the government of Canada, you have to work together, and you don't have unilateral control over when you announce something and when you finalize something. But we're working really hard with them and working well together, and I'm very excited that in the very near future we'll be able to answer a lot more of those questions for the member.

7:30

The good news is that this is a significant financial commitment from the province, and we've had great success at negotiating matching funds from the federal government to take that investment even further. This is something that we will very soon be able to announce the specific projects, but our intent – and we've said this publicly – is to ensure that there are shovels in the ground this construction season as a direct result of this initial \$150 million commitment from Alberta.

The member talked a little bit about line 5.1 and questioning whether this was a 50-50 split. Just to remove any potential confusion that anyone might have: yes, we have negotiated a matching agreement with the feds on our initial \$150 million commitment. That means we're doing \$150 million and they're doing \$150 million. That means a total of \$300 million in year 1 for projects that will be supported with this initial tranche of investment. This is a really great step forward for Albertans and for rural, remote, and Indigenous communities all across our province.

You know, I've been working directly with municipalities and telecommunication and Internet service provider companies as well as businesses and Albertans from all across the province for the last two and a half years as we worked towards laying the groundwork that ultimately led to the published Alberta broadband strategy and ultimately led to the financial commitments that form a part of Budget 2022. I can assure the member that we have been listening intently to all of these folks about their priorities, their challenges, and the opportunities that they see in their communities. This is a made-in-Alberta strategy that leverages matching funds from the feds but allows Alberta to play a critical role in selecting what projects and where are going to be funded first.

Some of the criteria that we're using – you know, the member was asking: how can we assure folks that this is going to be done fairly? Well, one of the criteria is, of course, to make sure we're getting the best value for Albertans for the public dollars that are going to support these important investments, and that means looking for every opportunity to get the largest number of underserved and unserved households and communities served as quickly as possible. We also know that this is a problem that stretches out to every corner of the province, and we need to ensure that there is some element of regional fairness so that not only one pocket of the province would see benefits in this first year. That forms a part of our evaluation for this initial tranche.

We've also talked about how it's important to consider all types of technologies. The member made mention of low Earth orbit satellite technology, and he's right to do so. We've said since the very beginning, even before we published our broadband strategy, that we need to be open to all types of technology where they make the most sense. In some places it does make sense to invest in fibre directly to the home. In other places that would be just simply too cost prohibitive, and it would be impossible to reach universal connectivity with fibre alone. There are some places where fixed wireless will make sense, and there will be room for that in the rollout of the broadband strategy and this funding commitment.

Then there will be some places in the province, that are the most remote areas, where new advances in low Earth orbit satellite technology could serve as a very viable option and maybe even the best option. We remain open to all of the above, to say: what is going to help us to get to universal connectivity in the most optimal fashion, that balances getting the best bang for Albertans' buck along with the other criteria that I've shared here today? These are some of the criteria that we are using as we evaluate the hundreds and hundreds of projects that are in front of the universal broadband

fund today, and by taking that approach, we, I think, can give us the best chance possible of success for Albertans.

In terms of the topic of the reverse auction model the member brought up and talking about the concept of using tax dollars wisely, look, just because it works somewhere else doesn't mean it's the best choice for Alberta. I would suggest, for all the reasons I've already mentioned, that partnering with the federal government to leverage their systems and their infrastructure on dealing with an open, fair, and transparent application process like the universal broadband fund does in fact save Alberta taxpayers money and gives us a better result for our investment. It also lets us get to making those investments and getting shovels in the ground way faster than if we started a brand new reverse auction model that would be essentially competing with the universal broadband fund. That is why we have chosen to go in this direction, and I am confident that this will ensure we are using Alberta's tax dollars wisely.

I'll maybe pause there on the broadband topic, and I'll just jump briefly to the question about health care cards. As I shared with the member last year, the \$600,000 was an initial investment in some preparatory work as we collaborated with the Department of Health on looking for ways to accomplish the goal and meet our platform commitment of eliminating paper health care cards and merging them with our secure ID cards and drivers' licences. That work continues today. We will continue to collaborate with the Department of Health, and we're working hard to make sure we can deliver on our platform commitment.

I know the member had a few other questions, and I'm happy to get to those in another session.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now we'll return back to the hon. member.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you for that, Minister. I think maybe we can wait to go back to broadband. I appreciate some of those answers. I might have more here in the future, but just as you ended on the health care cards piece, hopefully, we can get an update. I don't think we really heard in terms of when Albertans could expect to see that process finalized and see something other than the paper cards they have in their pockets. If the minister is willing to give this committee a commitment that that is going to be finished by the end of this year, if there's a commitment that it's going to be finished by the end of next year, I think Albertans are expecting more, especially when we are talking about investing hundreds of thousands of dollars into such a change. Again, I feel like it's something that most or many Albertans do support, that change, but I think that there should be some accountability there for timelines for completion of those projects.

Now going back to the residential tenancy dispute resolution services questions. I don't think we got to hear too many answers on that, but looking back on – we were talking about the \$3 million reduction that I see in the budget for such services. So I ask again: why is there a budget reduction of \$3 million in line item 2.1, which encompasses consumer-related legislation, fraud investigations, consumer complaints, and administers the 310 call centre as well as the RTDRS? I'm hoping the minister can explain where that \$3 million reduction is coming from. If it's coming entirely from the RTDRS process, if it's coming entirely from consumer complaints, if it is split between multiple programs or services that are being reduced, I think that I would expect a breakdown of how those reductions are being made and why that decision was made.

I would ask the minister to confirm how many FTEs currently work to support the RTDRS system. What that number – and I can appreciate that looking back is not necessarily what we always do

here, but if the minister has those numbers readily available from last year compared to this year as well as the expectation of what those numbers might be in the coming years, next year, I'm hoping that the minister can share how many people requested support through the RTDRS this year compared to how many people were able to actually access dispute resolution services in total this year.

I'm also wondering if the ministry has begun separating mobile-home concerns out from other RTDRS metrics. I think I asked this question last year, and I would ask again. And if that's not the case, then why not? I think that the needs are quite different between the two, and I think it might be a good idea to separate those concerns out between regular relationships between landlords and tenants compared to what those in mobile homes might be raising with their landlords or their site property managers as well.

7:40

I'm hoping the minister can provide how many mobile-home concerns have been brought forward versus how many have made it to the RTDRS through that process since the ministry made changes to allow those concerns to be heard through the RTDRS process. Again, hopefully, we can get some answers regarding why there were such discrepancies between that 81 per cent target and falling all the way down to 50 per cent and with that \$3 million cut how the minister expects to get, you know, upwards of 30 per cent in terms of timelines within 15 days of having those hearings for urgent applications.

Moving on to freedom of information and protection of privacy, one of the many performance measures and metrics which, again, as I stated at the beginning of this process, have been completely removed from the Service Alberta ministry business plans this year is targets regarding those FOIP timelines. We had previously seen the ministry put forward clear targets and metrics regarding FOIP requests being completed by government public bodies within 60 days or less, but this ministry has not provided that for the last two years under this UCP government, and I continue to question why that's the case.

In last year's estimates the minister explained that the target was 90 per cent for the 2021 annual report and showed that at the time of release 89 per cent of FOIP requests were completed by government bodies within 60 days or less. I'm hoping the minister can confirm what the percentage was by the end of the 2021 year. I'm hoping that the minister can provide for members what the target is for the '21-22 year as well as the targets for the following years applicable to the current business plans.

Looking at the ministry's 2020 business plans, there were performance measures for FOIP requests handled without complaint to the Information and Privacy Commissioner. We have seen these measures removed from this year's business plans. Looking at the 2021 annual report for Service Alberta, we can see that target for last year was 95 per cent, but at the time of reporting that data was unavailable. I'm hoping that the minister can confirm for members that that 95 per cent target was met and if the minister can also confirm what the targets are for the upcoming years related to the business plans.

Hoping also that the minister can confirm in total, based on the percentages that we are able to see, how many Albertans or organizations had FOIP requests that went past the 60 days or less as well as how many Albertans or organizations came back with a complaint to the ministry regarding the handling of their FOIP requests in the 2021 budget cycle. In previous budgets we saw a line item specific to the freedom of information and protection of privacy. It seems that in the ministry business plans this year it has consolidated into a line item titled Data, Information and Privacy

Services. Is that correct, Minister? And if that is the case, why have you gone that route?

Line item 3 on page 195 of the '22-23 government estimates also reflects this change to no longer specify the budget for FOIP on its own, and I would ask why such an important line item, if I am correct, has been amalgamated with other programs. In the '21-24 business plans for last year we saw the line item for FOIP estimated at \$11,377,000 and the '22-23 target listed at \$11,290,000. I'm hoping the minister can confirm that those numbers or the expense targets remain correct or, if they have changed, what the new expense targets are and reasoning for the changes in those targets if they did in fact change.

Additionally, with the consolidation of FOIP and other processes in line item 3 in this year's government estimates, which lists, beyond FOIP, the FOIP office governance and service delivery of access to information, protection of privacy, content management, and data strategy, can the minister provide a breakdown of each of these expenses in separate line items for the members of this committee?

I'm hoping to find out if the consolidations of these processes has changed the nature of the work being done by the FOIP office or the level of full-time equivalents in that office and hoping that the minister can confirm the amount of FTEs currently in the FOIP office, if that is up or down from last year, and if that is expected to change in the upcoming year.

Finally, hoping to find out if members can expect to see a difference in how FOIP metrics are reported in the next annual report based on the consolidation of this line item.

At that time, Chair, only about a minute left, but I'm going to hand it to my colleague to finish up.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Chair. I'll just get in one issue that I would like some clarification on. Through you, Chair, to the minister, regarding the \$9.1 million investment that we see on page 102 of the business plan, initiatives supporting key objectives. Now, in 2022-23 \$9.1 million is allocated to "improve the Land Titles service model to reduce application backlogs." Now, could the minister please explain to 11,000 Alberta realtors, thousands of Alberta mortgage brokers, dozens and dozens of mortgage lenders, hundreds of Alberta land surveyors, and millions of Alberta consumers who either own or plan to sell real estate in the near future exactly what, quote, improvements to the land titles service model he has in mind? He seemed to indicate that this \$9.1 million will go to staffing. There seems to be much more behind it. I want to know a lot more detail about that staffing. With five seconds, we'll hear the answer next in response.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. members.
Minister.

Mr. Glubish: Okay. Great. Well, thank you. Some good content there to dive into. Why don't we start with some of the topics about the RTDRS because I know that came from the first block of questions and then carried over into the second, so I don't want to miss that.

That tied a little bit to, I believe, the questions about line 2.1, if I recall correctly, on the funding. The member was talking about a – he was alleging a \$3 million reduction in the budget on line 2.1 of our expenses on page 195. I'd like to just correct the record because that's not true. The 2021-22 budget was \$14,837,000 for line 2.1, and the 2022-2023 estimate is \$14,498,000. That's roughly a \$300,000 difference, not a \$3 million difference, and this is primarily a function of the work that we have been doing in our department on being able to be more efficient in how we deliver services and implementing more technology and innovation in

everything that we do. We have found that we will be able, in the upcoming year, to deliver the same or better service for roughly \$300,000 less expense. This is good news for Alberta taxpayers, and this is what Albertans sent us here to do. It is not true that there's a \$3 million reduction. There is a \$300,000 savings, which is a very modest amount on the total funding commitment. I'm confident that we have made the appropriate funding commitments in this area in order to maintain or improve our service levels.

Now, specific to some of the questions about turnaround times for urgent requests to the RTDRS, the RTDRS does scheduled hearings as soon as possible, and they also have priority given to applications that resolve situations where the tenant is still in the rental premises. Historically the RTDRS does hear urgent applications, with an average of 15 business days. Now, the recent state in Alberta has led to some longer wait times for urgent applications, and we're working on that now.

One of the things that we've been doing is to work on incorporating telephone hearings and giving priority to hearings for applications that involve significant damage to the premises or instances where a tenant has assaulted or threatened to assault another tenant or the landlord. We're monitoring the performance, and we're adjusting to best address the specific needs in applications. We have begun to see some turnaround in the times, and I'm confident that in the upcoming year we're going to be in a position to get that back to a more normal level. Of course, our goal, as stated in the business plan, is 85 per cent of urgent cases held in that target time frame, and we're working hard to get back to that.

7:50

Just going through my notes here. There was also the question about health care cards. Look, this is still under way. We said last year that the \$600,000 was an initial step for some of the work that needed to happen in Service Alberta, but obviously the combination of drivers' licences, which is a Service Alberta responsibility, with health care cards, which is a Department of Health responsibility, is going to take some significant collaboration between the two departments. You know, my budget doesn't cover the work that's happening in the Department of Health, but what I can tell you is that the Department of Health and the Department of Service Alberta are working together. We continue to work together on this platform commitment, and we're looking forward to getting closer to releasing that once that work has concluded and we're ready to launch it. We know this is a commitment we made to Albertans, and we take that commitment very seriously.

In terms of talking about mobile-home concerns as it relates to the overall RTDRS, I mean, I just want to highlight that this is something I'm really proud of that our government accomplished – I believe this was in our first year – where the folks from mobile-home communities had been asking for many, many years to be included in the RTDRS so that they could have a dispute resolution service other than the courts to handle issues that they had with their landlords relevant to the relationship between them and their landlord as spelled out in the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act. I was very pleased to be able to work with them and to deliver that exact ask that they had, which was to give them access to the RTDRS. It only made sense to do that.

I was also very excited to be able to make funding commitments in previous budgets to ensure that our RTDRS officers could handle mobile-home concerns and that we had the appropriate level of staffing to handle these new cases. We ensured to take the time to train officers in the RTDRS properly to handle the unique nature of mobile-home disputes because it's true that in some cases those might be different than traditional disputes that fall under the Residential Tenancies Act. We put a lot of work and we put funding

into making sure that that could happen. The good news is that thanks to the action that our government has taken over the last couple of years, mobile-home residents do have access to this dispute resolution service. As of January 31, 2022, I can say that the RTDRS has received 58 mobile-home site tenancy applications in the 2021-2022 fiscal year, and in fiscal 2020-2021 there were 40 applications received. That, you know, I guess, gives you a bit of a sense of the uptake so far from folks in the mobile-home communities across the province.

Maybe now moving along to – actually, let me just quickly touch on the land titles comments and questions. On this, you know, I'll just say that we know that there has been an enormous turnaround in Alberta's economy. This is good news, right? This is evidence that Alberta's recovery plan is working. This is evidence that our government's policies and the heavy lifting we have done over the last two and a half, almost three years are delivering results. We had some setbacks due to COVID, as did every jurisdiction in the world, but the good news is that Alberta is now poised to lead the country in economic growth and job creation and investment attraction, and this is having extremely great results for Albertans.

But sometimes that also means that there are some pressures that come, and our land titles office is experiencing that. We're seeing significantly higher volumes of applications to the land titles office. In fact, due to the significant real estate market activity we've seen across Alberta since April 2021, we've had a 97 per cent increase in registration documents at the land titles office. As a result, that has caused some escalation in the turnaround times for these documents. Now, we've done a number of things to address this and to work with the industry in the short term to alleviate some of those pressures. We implemented what's called the pending registration queue to help implement guarantees that a party registering an interest in a property maintains their position of priority in the workflow of the land titles office, and this will continue to remain in place and continue to benefit parties in the real estate transaction moving forward.

We've also implemented a process to expedite registration for new condominiums that are unable to use the pending registration queue. Also, you know, in those cases they're unable to use title insurance to accelerate closing on a transaction, so we worked very closely – we spent several weeks working directly with the real estate industry and with developers and with lawyers who specialize in these kinds of developments to say: how can we work with you to deal with this? And we came up with a solution to help accelerate some of these unique transactions because they were affected disproportionately. I'm proud of the work that my department has done to look for every opportunity in the short term to bring some much-needed relief.

But what I'm also really excited about is that we have committed an additional \$9.1 million as a part of Budget 2022 to ensure that we can staff up this office. We can talk more about this.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. member, the remaining time in this block is yours if you use it. You could choose to leave some time at the end for your questions for the minister. I'm just going to say that all again. The remaining time in this block is yours to use if you wish. If you choose to leave some time at the end of your questions, it can be used by the minister for a response.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Chair. At this point I'm going to let my colleague finish his questions, my ND colleague, of course, and we will see how far we get from there. Thank you.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister. I could not have asked for a better segue than the last comments that you made

regarding the \$9.1 million, which I briefly touched on in my questions earlier in the last segment. You indicated that the \$9.1 million was a staffing investment, and I wanted to really get some granular detail on that and find out from you, Minister, through the chair, what specific kind of staff you're getting for those \$9.1 million. Where will they be placed and targeted? Is there a training requirement? How will they be integrated into the system? How many full-time equivalents will that \$9.1 million investment buy, and what metrics are you going to be using in the ministry to indeed show that the number of full-time equivalent staffers is going to be addressing the problem and the backlog that we have in the real estate industry for processing land titles transactions? Is it an adequate amount, and how will you be able to tell if indeed you're making the type of impact that you want?

Indeed, it's not simply a question of the recent increase in transactions; the backlog of land titles has been an ongoing concern, and it may be not only staffing. Of course, you indicated a couple of other measures that you're taking to try to address this, but I'm just wondering, Minister, if indeed you believe you've captured all of the problems that have led to this backlog by the measures that you've been taking. More detail on the \$9.1 million would be greatly appreciated.

Now, moving on to another issue I wanted to get a fair bit of detail on, it was of great concern to all industry professionals when, in January 2021, Service Alberta issued request for expressions of interest SA-RFEL-001, sale of a concession, select registries of Alberta; in other words, privatization of land registries and other corporate registries. Now, that initiative proceeded through three stages: request for expression of interest; request for indicative proposals, which yielded a short list of qualified respondents who would participate in the next stage of the process; selected respondents who would be requested to submit binding proposals, which were anticipated to be submitted by late Q2 or early Q3 2021.

Now, it was very difficult to determine, Madam Chair, exactly where in the process Service Alberta was because there was quite a shroud or veil of sort of secrecy and quiet around it, but ultimately what happened was that Service Alberta withdrew the request for expressions of interest, and thousands of stakeholders were pleased that that happened and that you stopped the process to privatize the land titles registry. Now, what millions of Albertans want to know is why you engaged in this process again in 2021 after another Conservative government, in 2013, decided that it was not in the public interest to proceed with privatization. Was this a pause or a full stop to the sale of land titles operation?

8:00

They also want to know how much this whole exercise cost, and so do I. That's one other issue that I'd like you to cover in some detail. It was an interesting process to follow, but you came to the same conclusion in 2021 that the former government did in 2013, that it wasn't in the public interest to proceed. I want to know some of your explanations around that.

Now, next issue, on page 195 of the government estimates under operating expense item 5.4, cybersecurity services: a reduction of expenditure in 2022-23 is forecast from \$8,914,000 to \$8,874,000. Now, given that cybersecurity did not just raise its head last week as a serious global risk to all governments and given that the, quote, Internet of Things and smart technologies are increasingly being connected to public infrastructure, including our electricity grid, and given that electric vehicles will increasingly be part of that interconnectivity and given the inherent vulnerability of smart technologies to being corrupted by being embedded in components along the global manufacturing supply chain, why is Service

Alberta decreasing rather than sizably increasing its investment in cybersecurity protection across the whole of government? What level of cybersecurity protection does one get for under 9 million bucks? How exposed are we to cyberattack because Service Alberta has failed to identify current risks to cybersecurity and fund the necessary measures to protect Albertans' privacy and the public assets of the province?

People are, rightfully, concerned, especially in the environment that we find ourselves in currently around cybersecurity and cyberattacks, that the government has to have a real clear handle and has to fund the necessary programs or procedures to protect us from cyberattacks. On those three matters, Madam Chair, I'd like some greater detail. Indeed, if my colleague has a moment or two, he could add a couple of things himself while we have a few minutes to spare.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Chair. I think that at this point there was a lot to be answered there, so we'll give the minister some time to reflect. I hope and imagine that he can use it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.
Minister.

Mr. Glubish: Sorry. My turn?

The Chair: If you so choose, yeah.

Mr. Glubish: Okay. Again, lots to cover. I'm going to start by just maybe wrapping up some of the questions on the land titles office topic. As I've said, we're very excited to be making a significant commitment in this budget of an additional \$9.1 million to ensure that we can address the growing demand through our land titles office. Again, this is a function of a good, strong economy. That's some good news. What we're focused now on is making sure that we can get our turnaround times at the land titles office back to standard levels by the end of the calendar year. A significant part of this is going to be staffing up to handle the increased demand. The kinds of staff that we're looking for would mostly be paralegals. You know, they've got the right technical expertise to handle these kinds of transactions and to ensure that we can process these things accurately and to a high degree of quality. They're needed for both the registrations but also for the survey areas, both of which are important parts of what the land titles office does.

In terms of what's a success metric, well, the metric of success is when our processing times come down. We're confident that with these targeted investments we're going to put our department in a position to address this and get us to where we need to be.

Now, of course, the member talked about a past project on the concession agreement that we were exploring, and he used the word "secrecy." I need to correct the record. I mean, there was nothing of the sort. This was a fair and open, transparent process consistent with all of the government's usual rules and policies around procurement. Everything was followed to the letter. Everything was disclosed proactively to Albertans, and we said to Albertans that we would leave no stone unturned in evaluating whether there was a way to partner with other folks with expertise to deliver a higher quality of service, to modernize our systems, and to deliver better value. We did our homework, we've made a decision based on that homework, we've moved forward, and now we're looking at other ways to accomplish our objectives. This investment in Budget 2022 is going to put us in, I believe, a really good position to get our turnaround times back to where they need to be for the benefit of all Albertans.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

That concludes the first portion of questions for the Official Opposition. We'll now move on to independent members for 20 minutes of questions.

Would you like to combine your time with the minister?

Mr. Barnes: Minister, would you like to combine, or would you like to go block?

Mr. Glubish: Let's go block time.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Madam Chair, we'll go block. Does that mean I get a 10-minute block?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you.

Okay. First of all, thank you, Minister, and thanks to your staff for all being here tonight and all the work you do on behalf of Albertans. Greatly appreciated. I want to start on land titles, too, and I'm on page 103. Minister, I'm confused by your revenue numbers. You talked about the increase from \$83 million to \$113.99 million because of a strong Alberta economy, but your targets for the next two years, '23-24 and '24-25, fall back to \$87 million and \$88 million, barely an inflationary increase from this year's \$83 million, so I'm wondering if you're not expecting the strong real estate economy to continue.

Minister, in all honesty, I'm a little bit surprised. You said that the increase in real estate activity started April 1. Well, our budget year ends March 31, so that should have meant that most of the increase was already in the '21-22 increase, so I wonder why that number wasn't higher.

I'd like you to comment on those, but I'm especially concerned, you know, about the \$9.1 million, the effectiveness of that and where we're at with it today. I was talking to a lawyer last week who told me that to register a property in Alberta today is 11 weeks. To register a similar property in Saskatchewan is less than one week. Stop me if I'm wrong. Please clarify, but I think the principal difference between Alberta and Saskatchewan is that Saskatchewan has smaller land titles offices around the province. My goodness. I look at what 11 weeks instead of one week costs us. First of all, title insurance: my guess is that tens of millions of dollars are being spent by Albertans or people that invest in Alberta real estate in title insurance. My belief is that the three companies that lead the charge in selling title insurance are not Albertan, and two of them are not even Canadian, so there's a lot of money leaving our economy because of this 11 weeks. If \$9.1 million can solve the problem, great, but I understand this has been an issue in Alberta for a long time.

I'm also concerned. This lawyer told me one of the problems with this is that if I'm transferring a title in a week, it's less likely that somebody will get in there to interfere with the title to cause a problem, to cause a dower problem or what can ever happen. Of course, Alberta has – don't we have an insurance fund to protect innocent victims? If this is happening, I'm wondering if it's costing the Alberta taxpayer, you know, more money, and I'm wondering where the extra insurance money would show up in the expense column, so if you could point that out, I would appreciate it.

Of course, when we look at the forecast for this year, your department is showing almost an \$81 million surplus – good work – but next year it only shows a \$14 million one, and that's with a \$20 million increase in land titles, so if that doesn't happen, you will break even or you'll be in the red. That concerns me.

8:10

Next I want to move on to the rural broadband strategy. So good to hear that news. So many parts of Alberta need that. I'm so glad

that the federal government is partnering with us. I'm concerned about a couple of things, though. I'm grateful to have been around here for 10 years, and one of the things that I remember was an old contract with I think it was Axia and Telus. There was a lot of information that wasn't out there. There was a lot of uncertainty. I kept hearing, when Cypress-Medicine Hat was more rural, that a lot of times this contract only took the broadband to one hub, like a library or a town hall, and then it was unaffordable to expand it from there. So I'm wondering, Minister, what safeguards your department has to make sure that Albertans really, really have the benefit of this.

Then I sort of wonder if you're jumping the gun a bit, too. Cypress county south of Elkwater there are 30, 40 miles in there where cellphone reception is nonexistent. It's a terrible place to have a breakdown or to have a problem. I've talked to many of my MLA colleagues from around the province and all of a sudden we lose them as they're in their more rural areas. So, Minister, should we maybe concentrate on 100 per cent cellphone coverage? Should we maybe make sure we get that first and make sure that Albertans are truly protected that way?

On page 103 also – I'm going to move on to something else – we have line items about technology, digital delivery, and cybersecurity services. Yeah. We're spending a lot of money on those: jeez, \$567 million estimated next year. I'm wondering why the registry system isn't more digitized. I've heard about a situation where if I register federally my business online, I can do it totally online, but if I go to Alberta, I have to download the form, then I have to fill out the form, and then I have to go to a physical registry location where a clerk manually enters the information, and it costs me more money. My goodness. In a busy world, in a world where red tape is so redundant, so expensive, is this the case? Are we looking at this, you know, every week or every month so we can make things easier for Alberta businesses and Alberta families? Thank you for that.

Another question, again on page 103: why is technology, digital delivery, and cybersecurity services listed as both an expense and a capital investment? What part of that would be a capital investment? Is that computer equipment? Is that broadband? Like, in this year you've got \$82 million as a capital investment and \$567 million as expense. Can you briefly touch on what our long-term investment is for that \$82 million compared to what we're spending?

Next, please, Service department and Minister Glubish, I'd like to move on to page 103 again, other revenue. In 2020-2021 actual other revenue was \$69 million and estimated was \$72 million for 2022-2023. What is other revenue? What comprises that?

Premiums, fees, and licences: the same thing. In 2020-2021 your actual revenue is \$47 million. This year's estimate is \$49 million. What is that comprised of? What happens there?

One of my colleagues from the Official Opposition was talking a little bit about the privatization, and I'd like to move on to that last in your business plan. I've heard some concerns about, you know, the changes. I've heard some opportunities to improve things, and I'm wondering if any of this expense money is put at all towards studying privatization, looking at improving the services, and where we may be at with that.

Okay. In my last two minutes, if you could, Mr. Minister, if you have some extra time, please talk a little bit more about where this federal money shows up in the budget. I thought I heard you say \$150 million this year from the taxpayers of Alberta and \$150 million from the Canadian taxpayers, and I don't see an increase quite that big unless it is in technology, digital delivery, and cybersecurity services. But then I wonder if your other numbers matched as much, so if you could touch on where that is and some of the real – you know, cybersecurity services. Of course, we've heard many, many things from around the world about hackers and

fraud and big losses. If you have an extra minute to touch on some of the front-line stuff there, please.

If that's okay, I'll just pass to you, Minister Glubish.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

Please proceed, Minister.

Mr. Glubish: All right. Great. Thank you. I just want to co-ordinate to make sure I can do the best I can to cover the topics you've brought up. In terms of the revenue side of the land titles piece there's a pretty good answer to just explain why, in fact, yes, in this first year we're seeing a more significant increase and then it comes back down in the second year. The reason for that is because, as we talked about, there's been a growing backlog of registrations that are waiting to be processed, and every month that we go by without making some of these important investments to get caught up, that backlog continues to grow. These are unprocessed transactions. We only collect revenue on the fees when the transaction is processed.

By making this investment in staffing up and focusing on efforts to be more efficient, we will in this first year chew through much of that backlog, which is where the increase over previous years comes from, because we're actually processing more transactions, which means collecting more fees in that period. Once we have chewed through that backlog and we are at a state where we can manage with the current status quo level, then, of course, our levels will come back down to reflect the normal course of volumes, where there isn't a backlog to chew through. So that is why you see a blip going up and then coming back down. It's not because we are contradicting the economic activity that our government expects; it's because there's a backlog. We're going to chew through it. Once we've chewed through it, we're going to be at more of a status quo. That's where those numbers come from, so I hope that that gives you some clarity on the revenue side.

In terms of comparing to Saskatchewan, you know, with some of the anecdotal evidence you had from your lawyer friend, I think it's important to point out that, first of all, Saskatchewan hasn't had the same kind of increase in volumes as Alberta – there are some unique differences between our provinces – but another element is that they have a much more modern system. Their technology systems are far more modernized compared to Alberta's. We all know that more modernization is needed at our land titles office and in many of our registry systems. We are looking at all of the different systems in the various provinces around the country to look for ways to make improvements to the back end that supports all this work so that we can take some steps to make some improvements that will then go hand in hand with the investments in additional staff to deal with the volumes. That will put us into more of a long-term sustainability track to deal with any future blips, but that's going to take some time, and it's not going to happen overnight. But as we do work towards reducing this backlog, we're doing so through the lens of modernization and always looking for ways to improve with more technology.

In terms of why we hadn't seen an increase in the revenue in this year, it's because all of that increased demand that was happening in this year was going into backlog instead of being processed, right? We didn't have the capacity to process it as those additional transactions were hitting our system. That's why you will see that happening in the upcoming year as we make these strategic investments to be able to handle the demand.

My hope is that that helps to address those questions on the land titles side of things, but let me just assure you and your lawyer friend and all Albertans who are interacting with the land titles office that we know this is an important issue. We need to resolve it. We're making significant investments as a part of Budget 2022. We know that in addition to staffing up, we need to look for ways

to modernize and implement more technology, and I'm confident that we're headed in that direction. It's just going to take a little bit of time, but this is a top priority for me and for my department.

8:20

Let's talk a bit about cybersecurity. That's another good question in some comments that you've made, and it also tied into some comments of some of the other members here today. I just want to assure all of the members here today and all of those watching at home that there has not been a cut in our cybersecurity budget; in fact, there has been a \$2.8 million increase. Now, I understand why there is maybe some confusion, but as I mentioned in my opening remarks, we've done a little bit of reorganizing of our team at Service Alberta. One of the things that I'm really proud of us doing is that we elevated our most senior public servant who's responsible for cybersecurity from an executive director to an assistant deputy minister. He's a brilliant man who does a lot of really important work to protect Alberta's interests and to protect those interests not just of the Alberta government but of all Albertans.

It was important to me – this is something we talked about last year – as a department that we needed to focus more on cybersecurity, and I'm glad that we laid some of that groundwork as a part of preparing for this budget because, as we are seeing with the geopolitical tensions happening around the world today, that is just confirmation that we need to be taking more steps in this direction.

As a part of this recent reorganization there was some moving of staff from technology services operations to the new cybersecurity division along with some of the funding associated with that, but there were elements in that old framework with some budget levels that stayed there in terms of responsibility for costs, and then the personnel for cybersecurity moved over to the new division. But cybersecurity no longer had to pay for some of those old costs because of staying in the other division, where it was more appropriate, yet cybersecurity's budget stayed at roughly \$8.8 million whereas before they used to only have about \$6 million specifically for cybersecurity. That's where this actually is. Because of our strategic restructuring and our focus on highlighting and elevating our team to an assistant deputy minister level, we are able to demonstrate a \$2.8 million increase in our funding.

This is so important, to lay that groundwork to make sure that Alberta can be a leader in Canada and North America as a cybersecurity leader. We're going to be focused in the upcoming year a lot on not just working on the important work we do inside of government but also working with those private-sector players who are responsible for some very critical infrastructure that's important to Alberta's future. Think about pipelines and refineries and petrochemical plants, and in a growing digital world, you know, we need to make sure that we're all thinking together as government and private sector to say: this is critical infrastructure for the future of Alberta; let's make sure it's not vulnerable to cyberattacks from bad actors and from nation states. We will be continuing to expand the work that we're doing both internal to government but also in working with and collaborating with cybersecurity personnel from the many great private-sector organizations across Alberta that have had a hand in helping to build some of the great infrastructure that's so important to our economic future and to our success.

There's a lot more I could touch on on cybersecurity in terms of specifics that we're doing. I mean, we've replaced some of our Trend Micro antimalware for desktops with the new Microsoft Defender. This has brought in about \$400,000 in annual savings compared to our old licensing costs. Think about it that way. Not only have we increased our budget by \$2.8 million for cybersecurity, but we've also achieved this \$400,000 savings on something that we used to use. Now we have a better tool that costs us less. This is

another example of ways that we're being smart and thoughtful and proactive to be able to respond to future threats that may emerge and to position Alberta for success. I just thought that was a good, tangible example of some steps that our team has taken.

Just checking my notes here on some other things that you'd raised that were of importance to you. You were referring to Axia, and I believe it was actually Bell, not Telus; it was the two of them that were involved in some of the development of what's called the Alberta SuperNet. That's from back in the early 2000s, of course, long before my time, but it is an important piece of the broadband puzzle in Alberta. In fact, Alberta did spend about a billion dollars back then to build out this fibre backbone that connects a little over 300 rural communities. It connects a little over 3,300 specific properties like libraries, municipal buildings, academic institutions, medical facilities. The intent there was to make sure that, you know, knowing that the private sector would probably be unable to make an economic case to build that kind of infrastructure to those communities, this would be a way for Alberta to ensure that those communities had a reliable long-term high-speed connection.

You know, we know that there are some folks who are interested in building off that, and we are willing to work with them to help connect them with Bell, who now owns the SuperNet, so that they can know exactly how they can go about proposing to do that. We're open to that being a part of our overall broadband strategy. Definitely, I want to assure Albertans that that SuperNet infrastructure is of great value to them.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

During this portion of the meeting, when the maximum speaking time is 10 minutes, if a member or the minister does not use their full allotment of time, the other participant in the rotation may speak a second time.

Member Barnes, do you have any further questions or comments that you'd like to make?

Mr. Barnes: Yeah. I would. Thank you. I'd just like you to touch on the lack of a cellular phone service in so many rural parts of Alberta, please.

Mr. Glubish: Sure. Okay. Happy to do that.

How much time do I have to do that?

The Chair: Thirty seconds.

Mr. Glubish: Okay. Long story short, I'm aware of it. It ties to a lot of federal policy around spectrum licensing. The federal government, through the CRTC, has all of the policy control over this. They license spectrum, which is essentially wavelengths and bandwidth, that can be purchased by telcos to then develop wireless signals and transmit them in our airwaves. Right now take a look at our broadband strategy. It talks a little bit about the advocacy I am doing to the federal government, which will explain a little bit more of how we're going to deliver results on that.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

That concludes the first portion of questions for independent members. We'll now move to the government caucus for 20 minutes of questions from members. Would you like to combine your time with the minister's?

Mr. Hunter: Can we go back and forth in questions?

Mr. Glubish: I think – let's stick to the theme of block time for the day.

The Chair: Block time? Okay.

Mr. Hunter: First of all, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to be here with everyone and to have the minister and his team here. First of all, I want to just start out by thanking the minister for his great work that he's done in his ministry to help our government get to balance. This is something that I think every ministry can take credit for because it takes the whole government to be able to make that happen. Thank you so much for the work you've done there.

I wanted to take a quick minute here and tell you about a friend of mine in my riding. We'll just call him Bill. Bill is an innovative farmer that recognizes where the trends are going in terms of automation, and he has done what he can in order to be able to try to keep up with other jurisdictions in first-world countries. As you know, Minister, many of the emerging markets and BRIC countries just don't have the same kinds of costs that we do because they have different labour rules. They have different environmental rules. Really, it is the innovation of our farmers, our entrepreneurs in Alberta here that helps us to be able to be competitive.

I was excited to hear of the investment in rural broadband connectivity that your ministry is making. I'm just wondering. With this connectivity, it talks about how there's going to be a partnership with both the federal government and with the private sector. Have the details been made clear to Albertans, how that's going to look? Have we been able to figure out – we know the amounts; it's a billion-dollar project. But how far are we at with the federal government? How far are we at with our private-sector investors?

I'd like to also just kind of go back to this friend of mine, Bill. One of the things that he was telling me is that not only do we have to be innovative to be able to keep up with BRIC countries and emerging markets, but we have to do this because of the labour shortage that we're seeing even now in rural Alberta with farm labour. I'm hopeful that this will be the solution for my friend Bill.

It was interesting, Minister. As I was taking a look at what his operation was, the trucks would come in. He had automated the process so that it would weigh it immediately. That information was catalogued. There was a sample taken from that load so that they could be able to figure out all the details of that, specifically where it's coming from. They were using GPS to know exactly where, and they could use all this data, this information, to be able to make sure that they have better yields. This was all connected because of the Internet, because of the software that he was using. They communicated back and forth with the trucks that would come in. I was amazed at the way this guy was looking at his operations. Very different than what you'd see so many years ago in rural Alberta, but he is the future. He is the future of our industry in rural Alberta.

8:30

I'd just like to have, maybe at some point, you talk about how you see this rural broadband connectivity helping Bill and how it can really help his business and the other people in the riding that are actually also trying to be able to work through, because one of the problems that he faced is that he had to be able to create that whole infrastructure in order to be able to make it work for his own operation, which was pretty expensive. He's happy that he did it, but a process that the government is investing in would probably have been a lot better for him.

I also wanted to talk about how, with the rural broadband strategy, certainly there are a lot of people that want to move to smaller communities but because their work, you know, needs them to have broadband connectivity, there is a digital divide that we kind of see between those who are in rural Alberta and those who are in urban centres. How will this affect the future as we see jobs start to kind of go online? We saw that especially with COVID-19, where there were lots of Skype and lots of Zoom meetings. I'm just wondering how you see that being able to help and how that might actually

help revitalize some of our rural communities, as well, as people start to say: “You know what? I think I actually could live out in an area where housing prices are a third of the price, maybe, in Edmonton or in Calgary.”

Actually, with that, I guess I’ll just turn the time over to you for maybe some answers to that, or maybe some of my other colleagues would like to ask questions.

The Chair: Please proceed, members.

Mrs. Frey: We won’t all jump at once. I guess I’ll get on here.

Minister, I’m referring to page 99 of your business plan and also outcome 1 on page 101, so I’m on the business plan directly, and I’m going to ask you some questions about the mandate and the structure of Service Alberta for this budget year. I notice that you focus on three key areas, and just because we’re limited in time, I’m not going to read those out for you. I was interested to read about Service Alberta’s plans for modernizing government and making all services digital by default.

Considering the digital gap in relation to being able to access more online services, I see that your target is to provide 130 services through MyAlberta e-services in 2022-2023. I’m curious as to if you could elaborate on what ways your ministry has been implementing key objective 1.1, and what new services are you planning on adding this year? I think that’s something we’ve all been waiting on hearing. What ways can government innovate, and how does that ultimately achieve government goals? I know from speaking with you, Minister, that you are very innovative yourself and that you have a lot of really great ideas, so I think that’s something that the committee and all Albertans could benefit hearing from.

Thank you. I’ll give it to my colleagues if they have any other questions they would like to ask.

Mr. Amery: All right. I may as well jump in here and try to get the last few minutes of my time in here.

Minister, thank you again for being here. I hate to dwell on the issue – I think it’s been asked a few times already – but I have a particular interest, as you already know, with the area of our land titles department and the processing that’s taken place. Now, Minister, as you’ve heard from some of the colleagues that have spoken earlier, I’ve heard from constituents, from business owners, from landowners, builders, contractors, law firms, mortgage brokers, and pretty much everywhere else that the processing times for the land titles office are getting out of hand, to say the least. I think we’ve heard from some folks earlier today and I can confirm for you from a personal point of view – as you know, I did practise in real estate for almost a decade, so I can speak to this with fair certainty – that the wait times currently are somewhere between eight to 12 weeks for registration of a particular property. Now, this has got many impacts, negative ones, certainly. Profitability, consistency, and the ability for people who are looking for registration to take place in a timely manner have been impacted by this.

Now, in the documents that we have before us, we see a significant increase in the funding allocated to reduce the backlogs, and I think that’s going to address some of the issues. I don’t want to dwell on some of the questions that have already been asked, but we know that Alberta is on fire with respect to real estate, and we know that’s really good news. As you mentioned earlier, the economy is doing extremely well, and that generally attracts people from out of province to come forward and invest in this province, which means more buying and selling and movement towards acquiring property.

I want to direct your attention, in the brief time that I have left, to the increases in your budget and particularly on page 200, where it shows an increase of \$214 million, which is essentially a \$37.9

million increase specifically dedicated to the land titles office. Now, we’ve talked a little bit about the \$9.1 million and what that is doing, but I’m wondering if you can comment in detail about the \$37.9 million and where that is going and how it is going to improve our situation, as I’ve described to you.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, members.
Minister.

Mr. Glubish: Okay. Great. Well, let me start from the top and see how we can do here. Some great questions. You know, with the original questions about the tie-in to connectivity in rural and remote areas and how that ties into innovation for agriculture: I share your enthusiasm and excitement. I mean, you’re right; there is some enormous potential. I mean, Alberta has been a global leader in agriculture for a long time, but we’re just scratching the surface of what’s possible when we start to look at implementing these new innovative tools and technologies.

You know, I’ve often said that technology is the future of every industry. It’s not just an industry unto itself. I absolutely believe that technology will be the future of the agriculture industry, but I’ve also said that connectivity is at the root of technology, right? I mean, if you can’t be connected, then that severely limits the power of the technology tools at your disposal.

So, for all of the reasons that you shared and your stories, that’s why our historic commitment of \$390 million over four years for Alberta’s broadband strategy is so important, because when we are able to get to universal connectivity, that means that there will be so many more farmers and agricultural operations across this province that will be able to adopt even more exciting technologies and innovations. We believe, based on our research, that the agriculture sector’s GDP contributions to Alberta’s overall GDP are likely to increase by up to 5 per cent through increased productivity through ag tech, much of which, of course, would need to be enabled by connectivity. This just again reinforces the urgency and the need to do this, to make these investments, and I’m so excited that Budget 2022 lays the groundwork for the beginning of a historic financial commitment for this strategy.

In terms of the overall digital divide and, you know, your comments about how there are many folks who see rural Alberta as a great destination and a great opportunity for them to have a lower cost of living and a great quality of life: I agree. It’s a great option for so many people, whether they be existing Albertans living in urban Alberta looking to make a change or whether that be folks from across Canada or around the world saying: “You know what? Rural Alberta is a great place for me to call my next home.”

8:40

But one of the challenges is the current state of the digital divide, and by making this significant financial commitment and by successfully negotiating with the federal government for significant matching funding to double down on the commitments that we have made and bringing those tax dollars back from Ottawa to Alberta to focus on this urgent priority that is so important to Alberta communities, we are able to make sure that those folks who would be wanting to consider rural Alberta as a destination for their next home can feel confident that they will be able to participate in Alberta’s economic recovery and participate in the modern digital economy that we are seeing grow in exciting new ways all around the world. That is why we are committed to reaching universal connectivity, and we’ve released our comprehensive and, I believe, very credible plan to reach universal connectivity, and we have funded that plan.

We will continue to work with the federal government to deliver results in that regard and to seek to maximize the amount of dollars that we are able to bring back from Ottawa to support us in this important endeavour. That's what I think good government looks like, finding ways to collaborate with other levels of government and finding ways to make sure that we fight for our fair share of federal tax dollars to go towards funding Alberta's priorities, and absolutely rural connectivity is a priority for Alberta's government.

Speaking to some of the questions about our mandate and structure and our focus on digital services, I mean, this is absolutely something I'm really excited about, as you know. Before I was an MLA, I was a venture capital investor, so I spent the better part of my 15-year career investing in and helping to build new technology companies all across Alberta, some of which have gone on to be really exciting success stories. Now I'm looking at my role in Service Alberta as an opportunity to do similar things inside of government, finding ways to implement more technology and innovation in everything we do. The concept of digital by default for new services I think is a really important move. We've seen other jurisdictions who've done that have really exciting results.

By making sure that anything new that we do, that digital by default is how we design these services – Albertans want more choice, more convenience, to be able to get better results when they're interacting with their government, and better value. Ultimately, that's one of the ways that we can deliver better services while also saving the taxpayer money. To me, it's a win-win. By being innovative and implementing more technology in everything we do, we can deliver outstanding results for Albertans both in terms of services and in terms of savings.

One example of something I'm really excited about is a pilot that we're doing with some Alberta innovators that have a good track record in artificial intelligence and machine learning research and development. We're doing that in connection with the department of forestry to look at ways to analyze data proactively to better anticipate where and when a wildfire is going to start, because we have lots of firefighting resources all around the province, but they're not always in the same place. They move around, and they're not necessarily always in the right place at the right time. But imagine if we could know that right place and that right time and proactively move those resources around so that we could deploy them more quickly when a wildfire is beginning. We've had some really promising results with that pilot. I believe this is going to save Albertans an enormous amount of money in terms of wildfire response in the coming years.

That's just one example of many ways in which we are modernizing our services, bringing more digital tools into how we operate as a government, and delivering better value for Alberta taxpayers while also protecting their interests and delivering better services.

In terms of the land titles topic, which I know is a hot topic, you know, the increases in our budget, I think, here are a testament to our commitment to addressing this issue and making sure that we can get back to reasonable turnaround time for all the reasons that many members have mentioned today. We know this is important, and I just want to assure Albertans and those folks in the real estate industry that we're taking this seriously. This is a priority. Obviously it's a priority, because we're committing an additional \$9.1 million to address this, and we know that as a part of that we need to look at technology. Again, not to sound like a broken record, but the technology systems that form the back end of our land titles office: in some cases they predate the Internet. They're that old, so they're not equipped, they're not designed to anticipate the modern economy, and they're not designed to adapt to streamlining and improving our processes.

We're, you know, all hands on deck on this. Of course we're focused on staffing up to deal with the immediate backlog. We're also doing a ton of work with our digital innovation office to review our entire operation in the land titles office from front to back, start to finish so that we can identify every opportunity for modernization, streamlining, in some cases automating elements of that process, and of course, learning from other jurisdictions that have made investments in the past to modernize their systems. We know there are some examples in Canada where that is the case.

We will continue to work on that because we know how important it is. We want to make sure that we're supporting those Albertans who are seeking to purchase or sell real property in Alberta and make sure that they can expect a reasonable turnaround time on those transactions and just transact with confidence and certainty about what they can expect. So I think that the work that we have under way – stay tuned. I think this next year is going to demonstrate some really exciting results in that regard, and I can say that with confidence because we are making the financial commitment as a part of Budget 2022, increasing our commitment to tackle this issue that we've heard. As you have heard, so have I heard from many folks across Alberta that this is an important priority. That is why we have made the financial commitment to this important priority.

Maybe just circling back to the topic of just modernization of services. You know, this is so important. For me, this is about creating a culture in government to focus on technology innovation as the first resort, not the last resort and also a culture where we're not afraid to work with those innovators and those academics across the province who have great pockets of expertise that could add value to what we're trying to do and to collaborate. That's why I ran the hackathon recently, where we involved many folks from the innovation ecosystem to participate with government on collaborating to solve some problems. You can expect a lot more of that kind of work from me in the future.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

That concludes the government members' first block of questions.

Now we move to five minutes of questions from the Official Opposition, followed by five minutes of response from the minister. Please go ahead, Member.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Chair. I'll start off with some questions regarding the Utilities Consumer Advocate. First of all, has the minister seen an increased demand with the Utilities Consumer Advocate with the increasing price of utilities so far? Does the minister have any performance metrics related to timelines for Albertans to be heard by the Utilities Consumer Advocate? And, you know, past the idea of timelines if the minister can provide wait times for somebody to receive feedback or the opportunity to hear from the advocate or somebody from their office, I would appreciate that.

As far as I could tell, there is a slight cut this year to the advocate, so I'm just hoping to find out from the minister where these reductions are coming from and if the minister still expects to meet this increased demand if that is the case. Again, I would appreciate if the minister is able to provide some context through performance metrics or key measures that we're able to see as a committee. I'm hoping the minister can speak to the advocacy work done by the Utilities Consumer Advocate and if there are any changes to policy based on their recommendations and also if the minister feels that the funding is currently sufficient for that advocate, especially with what I imagine is an increased demand as we see utility costs increasing across the province.

Just moving back to the residential tenancy dispute resolution services. I have some lingering questions, I think, that might still

need answers or clarification potentially. I'm hoping to find out from the minister what the current average wait time for an Albertan with an urgent tenancy application is to have that application heard. Again, this is reflected in the business plan. It's one of the only metrics that are left in those plans, so we see – and I'll get into this again – that there is a large reduction of the people that are having their opportunity to be heard from the RTDRS this year, and that's deeply concerning. So I would like to know what kind of backlog we're talking about here and, again, what kind of current average wait time Albertans are expected to see when going through that process.

8:50

Now, I know that the minister tried to clarify this point regarding funding reductions. Maybe I'm just reading this wrong, but the fact is that when I look back – and I think maybe this is where the issue was. Looking back to the 2021 actual, compared to what we saw in last year's budget and again in this year's budget, I, as far as I can tell, am seeing operating expenses reduced by \$3 million.

Again, you know, we're talking about a yearly reduction of \$3 million compared to the 2021 budget. The minister can clarify that. Again, if I am incorrect, I apologize, but this is at the same time that the ministry is adding complexities coming from opening up these services to mobile-home communities. Again, I support this move, but I'm interested to find out, again, why we are potentially seeing reductions at the time of adding more opportunities for people to come forward.

Now, again, we're seeing from the ministry's own documents that these timeline targets are being missed by over 30 per cent, and I think it's important to note that, again, we're looking at, as far as I can tell, a budget reduction essentially at the same time as these targets are being missed. That's concerning for me. So I'm hoping to find out how the ministry – and please be specific – is going to bring the number of urgent tenancy applications back in line with the established timeline, from 50 per cent back to 83 per cent, which is the target for this year.

I think I heard the minister talk about – and I apologize – 50 mobile-home site applications. I'm not sure if that was for this year. I think I heard 40 applications in 2021, so I'm hoping to find out how many of these applications that were brought up are being done within the established timelines that we see in the metrics within the business plans.

Finally, I want to come back to the broadband piece. As far as I can tell from the minister's answers, there is no plan for an agency or an advisory group specific to supporting the build-out of rural connectivity and rural broadband. Just looking for clarification on that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.
Minister.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you. So on the UCA, the Utilities Consumer Advocate, I will just say that one of the performance metrics, I think, that makes a lot of sense is to say: how much money have they saved Albertans from their interventions? You know, they've had a track record of significant success in that regard. For example, in 2020-2021 the UCA evidence and arguments cited in Alberta Utilities Commission decisions saved consumers \$281 million. So far this fiscal year UCA evidence and arguments have been cited in AUC, or Alberta Utilities Commission, decisions that have saved consumers over \$91 million. Of course, that's just a partial year figure.

You know, the AUC does important work on advocacy to represent residential, small business, and farm consumer interests for affordable rates in front of the AUC. In terms of some of the

other work that they do, they focus on education to make sure that Albertans can make the best decision possible to meet their needs when it comes to making choices in electricity and utilities markets.

In fact, recognizing that there was likely to be some price fluctuation in the near future, which we're now starting to see, the UCA worked with our office on a public awareness campaign to promote retail energy choices available to consumers so that they could find the products and services that best meet their needs. So they invested a little over \$600,000 to focus on that campaign, and that contributed to about 143,000 users making 500,000 page views on the UCA website from December 15, 2021, to February 3 of this year compared to only 31,000 users making 138,000 page views for the same period the year before.

So this just demonstrates that, you know, we worked very closely with the UCA to deploy some resources to make sure that we could help Albertans to make informed decisions to protect their interests. So the work that they're doing is really important. While it is true that there is a \$140,000 difference between this year's budget and last year's expected, actual numbers for the UCA, that is actually just anticipated savings from operating efficiencies coming from things like prioritizing proceedings that have the highest possible savings for consumers and using their staff for scheduled interventions by reducing costs of external consultants. This is one of the ways that they're able to continue delivering significant results to protect Alberta consumers' interests even with a modest change, a fluctuation in their budget for this year. It is a budget that goes up and down from year to year. It's still significantly up compared to a couple of years before.

In terms of the RTDRS, I can confirm that the current average wait time is about 20 days, as of the end of December 2021. So if our target is to do this within 15 days, I mean, of course we want to get to the 15 days, but it's a reasonable backlog for us to be working through, and I'm confident that we're going to be in a position to get that turned around this year.

In terms of the mobile-home times, these are treated as a part of the broader application. They're treated just the same as any other application to the RTDRS. That was the whole point of us making sure that we hired the right people and enough people to handle both traditional RTDRS and mobile-home disputes, so these are all being heard in the same time frame.

Getting back to the broadband conversation again, look, this is a really exciting investment we've made and, look, I don't think we need an agency to redo all of the work that we've already done over the last two and a half years. We need to focus on getting shovels in the ground. That's what our commitments are going to accomplish. We're working very closely with the federal government to roll out not just our investment but also the money we've secured from the federal government to bring that back home to invest in Alberta's priorities. I'm really excited about the results we're going to see this summer.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Loewen, the time is yours if you choose to take it.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Thank you. I'd like to go back and forth if I could, please.

Mr. Glubish: We'll stick with block time as we have for the whole ...

The Chair: Sorry. There are only three minutes, Member.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. So how is that split up, then?

The Chair: You can go ahead and ask your questions.

Mr. Loewen: And then will he have a chance to respond?

The Chair: You can just ask your questions, then stop and let the minister answer with the remaining time if you like.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. On page 103 under revenue sources, I would like to know specifically what is included in other revenue. And on page 103 under revenue sources, a list of all premiums, fees, and licences included, I'd like to know specifically what fees, licences, and premiums are included in those revenues.

On to the broadband announcement of \$390 million, I understand there's \$150 million from the province, \$150 million from the feds: where is the other \$90 million? Where does it come from? I would also like to know: where will this be spent and how will it be spent? I would also like to know which line item this \$390 million is in.

I would like to mention to the minister that in rural Alberta there are many, many areas that do not have even cellphone coverage, so I'm wondering if there's going to be anything in this budget for increasing cellphone coverage to areas of Alberta that have no communication at all, not even just broadband but they don't even have any communication at all in their homes, on their farms, and the places that they travel.

Obviously, Minister, you've travelled Alberta gaining information on what's available in each of the communities, and I would like to see a report on that and what information you've gathered in specific communities across Alberta as far as the

broadband access that they have and how you plan on filling in the gaps in those broadband facilities there within the communities.

I'll turn the time over to you, and the information that you can't provide in the next 36 seconds, if you could undertake to provide that to me in writing. Thank you.

Mr. Glubish: Sure. Okay. Thank you. Let me just clarify on the broadband side that we have made a \$390 million financial commitment in our broadband strategy; \$320 million of that is in Budget 2022 over the three years contained in the fiscal plan: \$150 million in the first year, \$100 million in the second year, \$70 million in the third year. Then as a part of our broadband strategy, which goes out four years – so a year beyond what our fiscal plan can cover – we have publicly made the commitment of a further \$70 million. So that's where the \$390 million comes from. The federal government has matched \$150 million of that, and I will keep working with them to get every dime that I can.

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded.

I would like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet tomorrow, March 8, 2022, at 9 a.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Children's Services.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9 p.m.]

