

[Chairman: Mr. Oldring]

[2 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. We'll call the meeting to order, if we can, please. I understand that in the absence of the chairman this morning the meeting went extremely expeditiously, and I thank the Member for Cypress-Redcliff for doing such an efficient job of filling in. I understand that he has now set the pace and that we can expect all our meetings to adjourn within 45 minutes.

Madam Minister, I have the pleasure to welcome you here this afternoon. We're delighted that you could join us. We know that after three weeks in a new portfolio you'll have all the answers. But we are glad to have you with us. I also want to welcome the deputy minister, Mr. Rhéal LeBlanc. We're pleased to have you with us as well.

It's been customary, Madam Minister, to extend an invitation to you to make some opening remarks. We'll follow that up with an opportunity for questions and answers. Each member is entitled to ask one major question and two supplementaries, and then we try to rotate through as the Chair recognizes each member. On that note we'd invite you to open with some comments.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to be here before the committee and to keep the original schedule as planned by your committee with the former minister. I certainly don't have the expertise in the portfolio that the two former ministers did have at this point, but I will endeavour to answer your questions as best I can.

I do have with me, virtually off the press, the report of the Alberta Cancer Board with respect to the applied research on cancer, which may be useful for committee members if I were to distribute it. I understand there's a bit of an anomaly in that the heritage fund annual report is not yet out and public for this fiscal year. So this information will be part, obviously, of that report but may be useful to committee members in the interim.

Moving then to the two projects under the capital projects division for which this ministry has responsibility, I thought I'd just update members with respect to the budget status of both of these projects before entertaining questions. With respect to the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre, the University of Alberta hospital's report on the progress for the year ended March 31, 1988, indicates that the project is virtually complete and within the budget approval of \$396 million. The project expenditures to March 31, 1988, were about \$387.5 million, which include expenditures of about \$1.7 million for 1987-88.

The only work outstanding for completion is some modifications within the hospital structure of a minor nature as well as some minor modifications to the original design and some landscaping. All of these expenditures amount to about \$4 million, of which \$2.4 million is estimated for the current year and the remaining \$1.6 million for the '89-90 budget year. The total project cost, then, at completion is estimated at \$392 million on an approved budget of \$396.5 million. So in fact we are under the approved budget figures.

With respect to the applied research in cancer, during 1987-88 a total of 30 requests were received, of which 22 were recommended and approved for funding under the program. The budget status is that the project expenditures to March 31 were \$36 million, which includes about \$2 million for '87-88. The current program is approved for three years at \$2.8 million per year, ending March 31, 1990.

In terms of the issues that are before us on applied cancer research, a method and a source of funding for ongoing applied

research in the cancer area will obviously be one of the issues that we have to deal with subsequent to the running out of the existing program at the end of fiscal 1990.

I will do my very best to answer your questions. As you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, the deputy minister of hospitals and medical care, Mr. Rhéal LeBlanc, is here with me, and I will use him as my resource person, if you would direct questions through me.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you very much.

The Chair would recognize the Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

MR. PIQUETTE: Thank you very much, and welcome and congratulations to Mrs. Betkowski on her appointment to her new ministry. I'm quite sure some of the questions that you're not able to answer -- I guess we can always share some of that information.

Last year I made the minister aware that at Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre there were difficulties in terms of parking. It was one of the points we brought up in the discussion. Has there been any look in this past year at how to alleviate some of the parking difficulty within the whole use of that institution? I'd start off with that question.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Yes, Mr. Chairman. The Walter C. Mackenzie facility is virtually complete, as I noted, but remaining to be decided is the question of the interrupted demolition of the former University of Alberta hospital, the use of that hospital, or the demolition of it, as a long-term care facility appropriate within the city of Edmonton context, and parking would become part of that whole review. It is not yet completed. There have been proposals recently submitted, I understand, with respect to the use of the former structure. A decision with respect to parking would have to be part of that complete package and isn't yet ready.

MR. PIQUETTE: Okay; thank you very much. I appreciate the answer, because I know a lot of the staff and people I know who work there have mentioned that in the past. So that will be taken care of in terms of the future expansion.

The other question I'd like to ask is relating to the applied research in cancer. One of the questions I'd like to ask the minister: if there are problems, for example, in terms of specific geographical areas that seem to have high cancer incidences or cases higher than the normal -- and I am talking about the Lac La Biche region here, which has been identified by the hospital administrator and the doctors as having an above average, I guess the highest in the province of Alberta, higher than what was reported in the Sherwood Park area a few years ago. How do they go about asking the applied research to take a look at that particular region to determine whether it'd be environmentally caused or genetically caused or whatever? Or is that something the minister would take note of and ask for such research?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Well, I think there are a couple of points that can be made. First of all, the Alberta Cancer Board is responsible for the screening, if you like, of these submissions. So certainly if there were concerns within the Athabasca-Lac La Biche constituency, those could be vetted through the MLA or directly into the Alberta Cancer Board for review. But I think it's important to remember that we're dealing here with applied research, which is taking basic research and getting it into actual

patient care and attempting to condense the period of time which is normally taken between basic and applied research. But certainly in terms of opportunity for the Cancer Board to review a submission by someone in your particular geographic area for a concern you or your constituents may have, it's clearly there with the mandate of the Cancer Board.

MR. PIQUETTE: The health unit or it could be the hospital or simply myself as an MLA to make them aware?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Yes. Then it would be for a project to be identified which would be appropriate and would be internationally acceptable. If, for example, research was going on in some other part of the world which was directly related to that identified project, there could be better co-ordination of using our dollars as best we can.

MR. PIQUETTE: My last supplementary is relating to the Cross cancer clinic. Up until two years ago there had been started a number of satellite types of treatment hospitals, in terms of a patient not having to travel as far to get specific cancer treatment. That was discontinued because of the cutbacks. Is the minister taking a look at reinstating those types of satellite programs, which were allowing people to remain at home in order to access treatment rather than having to travel many hundreds of miles?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Perhaps with respect to the actual specifics of the program that was in place, I will ask Mr. LeBlanc to comment. But may I simply say at the outset that the opportunity that this new portfolio now provides under the term of health -- unmodified; simply health -- is that I believe we have an opportunity where we can look at more effective co-ordination and better use of the programs that we have in place in Alberta. Certainly using those key resources under the Cancer Board specifically into outreach and outpatient and outside of the urban cores in which they're located is an approach that I am taking to health. I think I look at the whole issue of health as being not one that is an illness-supporting system but rather a health-supporting system, and access to an appropriate level of care throughout the province certainly has to be a goal of all of us, recognizing that some facilities are going to be of a higher level of care than others. But that outreach is very key.

That's sort of the general approach. But with respect to the specific on the satellites, I'll ask Mr. LeBlanc to comment.

MR. LeBLANC: Just to supplement the minister, I spent an afternoon a couple of weeks ago at the Cross and talked to Dr. Jean-Michel Turc and Dr. Fields, and the difficulty that they are experiencing, which is a worldwide difficulty, is trying to find the very highly skilled specialists. They still support the outreach programs; they mentioned Barrhead, and they mentioned other ones across the province.

MR. PIQUETTE: In Lac La Biche because they had a doctor trained there.

MR. LeBLANC: That's correct. I think they are still supportive of those clinics, and if there's been any interruption of service, it would be related to the departure of staff and trying to find those very highly-skilled oncologists that are in short supply across the world, certainly across North America.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Lacombe.

MR. R. MOORE: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. My first question and my two supplementaries are interrelated, Mr. Chairman, so I'll give all three at once because the reply will relate to each one of them. My concern is children's care and the children's hospital situation in the province. We have the Alberta children's hospital at Calgary, in which we've got \$40 million now invested as of March 31, 1988. I was wondering what the utilization of that is. Is it running a third, a half -- our utilization of it? I also look at the demand across the province for more children's hospitals. What is the need in the rest of the province that indicates that there is more of a requirement for this sort of thing? We're looking at the children's hospital we have now. Is it being utilized? Does it indicate a need for further expansion?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: I'm assuming that the hon. member is referring to the existing children's hospital in Calgary and the plans now being developed for a northern Alberta children's hospital in the Edmonton area: is it needed?

MR. R. MOORE: I'm talking about the one in Calgary, the facility there. Is it being utilized fully, or does the experience we've had there indicate a need for further development throughout the province? Anywhere in the province -- it doesn't matter. I'm just saying that we're looking at our existing facilities; what is our experience there?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: The existing facility is being used. In fact, it's looking at an expansion of its use in the Calgary area. Certainly there's been a judgment that a centre of excellence for children to serve the northern Alberta geographic region is needed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn.

MR. PASHAK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have some questions of a public interest perspective. Perhaps they're a little after the fact, but maybe the answers and the discussion that could follow from that might be instructive for future decisions in the health care field.

Given that we're having trouble raising revenues in the province at the moment because of falling oil prices and given the size of our population base and looking at \$400 million, approximately, of expenditures for the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre, in the minister's view is the expenditure to develop a facility that can take the leading edge in programs for heart/lung transplants, et cetera, justified in terms of the population base and the economic conditions that confront this province at the moment?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: From where I sit at this moment, yes, absolutely. In terms of Alberta's leadership in the medical field, both in research and active care, I would add Alberta's leadership -- and I hope growing leadership -- in the area of preventive care. The Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre is a facility which is virtually second to none anywhere in the world, and I think we as Albertans can be proud of having that kind of a resource in our province and in our city of Edmonton, our capital city.

As we look to the future -- and this was really part of the question that your colleague raised with me -- I think the utiliza-

tion of those facilities, the important rationalization of those facilities, but always focusing on the health of an Albertan as the purpose of our system, will give us a better way of using those facilities. But do we need those facilities? Yes, and we're lucky to have them. Our heritage fund has given us the opportunity to build them.

MR. PASHAK: I suppose I could ask a similar question about cancer research, and I don't want the fact that I'm asking these questions to suggest in any way that I've made a prejudgment. The medical approach to solving the problem of cancer and its treatment: in your view is that an approach that should be at the provincial level, or would we be further ahead in this endeavour if we co-operated in national programs and made our contribution in that way?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: I don't think it is an either/or, and I think you're very right that there are other initiatives going on in the area of cancer research, not only in Canada but around the world.

I think we basically in Alberta have the opportunity of four sources of funds for research in the cancer area. The first is obviously private dollars raised through things like the Heart Foundation, the cancer fund when it comes around to our doors, and individual Albertans have a sense that they have some ownership of that research going on towards a very dreaded disease and a very large killer of Albertans and Canadians. There are the applied research funds, which again take the basic research into the knowledge of the disease and apply it to a clinical setting without infringing, I guess, on the privacy of the individual and all of those kinds of issues which must be dealt with, ethical issues which must be dealt with in the hospital environment. But there is also research going on through our faculties of Medicine in Edmonton and Calgary. There is also research going on in hospital budgets to look at research in the various levels.

I believe it's an important use of dollars. I believe it's something that Alberta and Canada can contribute to a world marketplace in terms of being able to have the brainpower, if you like, that can do some of this research, and I think it's a very key thing to how we can diversify our economy into some of these kinds of areas while still maintaining the best health program possible for Albertans.

MR. PASHAK: One final supplementary, Mr. Chairman. Am I to understand, then, that at the moment the only ongoing expenditures that are contemplated from the heritage trust fund would be in the area of cancer research?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: The Walter C. Mackenzie has the few points that I raised this fiscal year and next, which should be the completion. Then the continuing up to March of 1990 of the applied research is what will be the use of the capital project division dollars in the medical area.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Member for Stony Plain.

MR. HERON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, I'd like to focus just for a moment on auxiliary care, or what we have now come to call extended care. Last year there were some questions relating to the integrated auxiliary and nursing home facilities. I just would like clarification, since it was recently announced in Stony Plain that we would have a new 75-

bed extended care facility with the capability of adding on 50 acute care beds to give you a totally integrated health care facility. Have you had the opportunity to look at this concept of integrated health care facilities in terms of providing a level of care to the patients in a stable environment and varying the nursing care and medical care around those patients as opposed to, say, moving them from a nursing hospital to an auxiliary hospital? Have you had a chance to look at that whole concept?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: I haven't had a chance to specifically look at a proposal for the Stony Plain area, but I can tell you that you used the key word of integration. I don't think it's simply an integration between auxiliary and nursing home care; it's an integration which has to occur with the focus on health, if you like. There is more of it going on, in just the little while I've been in the portfolio, than I gave the system credit for. Hospitals are looking at how they might better use the public health facilities right in their area to do some of the things in the community that they had perhaps always thought of as going on in the hospital. But it's a process which is incomplete, and incomplete even in terms of how it's addressing what levels the integration must occur on.

We have several committees that have been looking at the issues associated with it. Obviously, the long-term care report submitted by one of our colleagues, the MLA for Calgary-Glenmore, is now a part of that, looking at how we can better use the care. We have a study on ambulance use in the province, which may well be the distance/access factor to filling in on access to those health facilities. But I think the way that we look at health facilities has to again be focused on health as opposed to sickness care. Instead of an isolation, if you like, between long-term care, auxiliary care, nursing care, and active care, we can look at it as a spectrum and one that you don't have to necessarily get to the end of, but rather one that can be complemented through institutional and community care. This integration occurs on so many levels. But if there is such a proposal which the Stony Plain people have, I will be very interested to review it as a concept.

MR. HERON: Thank you. Just for the matter of record, the proposal is in, and there has been an announcement of a new extended care facility, as I said, with that capability. So we're looking forward to the opening in 1991 of the new facility. But I would like to go on record, if I could, as saying that we in that constituency and the hospital board certainly would like to reinforce that concept.

Last November in this committee a pilot study on nursing and auxiliary care costs for long-term patients was discussed, and it said that it was under way. Has this study been completed, or have you seen any of the findings or recommendations of that study?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. LeBlanc tells me that the study is expected to be completed towards the end of November of this year.

MR. HERON: Thank you.
That's all, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
The Member for Ponoka-Rimbey.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Chairman. At last year's meeting

when we were dealing with this department, the previous minister, when discussing future areas that might warrant the application of heritage fund money, mentioned the possibility of special funding to upgrade the province's ambulance system. I wonder if the new minister has had the opportunity to consider that suggestion or other areas that might warrant the use of heritage money in the field of health care in the future.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: I guess it's really going back to the question that was asked by the Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn with respect to the freeing up, if you like, of dollars within the capital projects division that may be looked at for other programs in the province. Is the ambulance care proposal as, again, reviewed by one of our colleagues, the MLA for Drumheller, one that should receive heritage fund dollar support? I think there's an important discussion going on within the community now, which is expected to report back by the end of December. And it may well be, but I'm not prepared to make that commitment here today, because I don't have sufficient appreciation of the issues involved. I do think, though, as I've mentioned, that the ambulance care and ambulance services are one way where we can, in a very sparsely populated province in some areas, improve access for those Albertans to the excellent health care that we have.

MR. PIQUETTE: I'd like your feedback in terms of what came out in the Mirosh report on home care for senior citizens as well as the multilevel care facility proposal or idea, with which I wholeheartedly agree. Is the minister now taking a look in terms of areas in the province that would benefit in terms of the multilevel care type of facility? Because I do think that if we are moving in that direction, that is the right area to move: to be providing the service to the patient as opposed to the patient having to move where the service is going to be. Is that high on your agenda as the new minister?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Yes, very much so.

MR. PIQUETTE: In terms of the multicare facilities, would this be facilities attached to existing hospitals, or would they be kind of structures standing by themselves, as some of nursing homes are built at the present time? Have you looked at that aspect of it?

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, on a point or order.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Point of order, Member for Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, I'm very much interested in the discussion that's going on now and the questions, but aren't we getting -- not just a little bit off. I mean, there's a Y in the road,

and we're a long ways down the Y when we're talking about multicare, and it's not being tied to the trust fund at all. It's a very good discussion; we could maybe talk about it for about two hours after the meeting's over with, at least.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Chair has shown quite a bit of discretion and latitude in the questions that are coming forward, and I'm sure that the Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche will take that under advisement as we continue with our questions in relevance to the trust fund report.

MR. PIQUETTE: Well, I guess I could have made [inaudible] to the members that we do fund through the heritage trust fund, for example, senior citizen lodges. You know, we're talking about senior care here, so I just want to make sure there is a tie-in between the two. So would the minister please answer my previous question? Are you looking at perhaps the conversion of other existing facilities for the multilevel care units, or a new type of structure? Are we basically looking at an entirely new concept?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Let me just answer this way, with the agreement of the chairman, in terms of the integration into the issue at hand, the heritage fund report. We are looking at multilevel care now, and that, as I said earlier, is not just auxiliary and nursing homes; it has the sense of a health centre kind of concept. But I think if we focus merely on what form that care will take as opposed to how we might get there, we will do it a disservice. So the integration, say, of home care and discharging a patient from a hospital, using home care and homemaker care instead of having that person in the active treatment facility, becoming dependent upon that facility, is something that we have to look at. How that is all going to configure out I don't think matters as much as that we're trying to co-ordinate those services.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, if there are no further questions, before I recognize the Member for Lacombe, I want to thank the minister for appearing in front of the committee this afternoon. You've shown a tremendous grasp of your new responsibilities in a very short period of time. You've obviously been a very busy person, and we certainly wish you well in your future endeavours.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Thank you, and thanks to the committee very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Recognize the Member for Lacombe.

MR. R. MOORE: I move we adjourn.

[The committee adjourned at 2:32 p.m.]