

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Wednesday, November 26, 1980

Chairman: Mr. Mandeville

10:07 a.m.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning, committee members. We will bring our meeting to order since we have a quorum.

Just before we start our meeting I would like to introduce to you and welcome to our committee this morning, two gentlemen who are touring western Canada at the present time. They are touring all of Canada and we're hopeful that when they come back they'll be giving us some good information in a report on how we can handle public accounts or what we can do to change the Public Accounts Committees throughout Canada. We have with us this morning John Kelly, the assistant Auditor General for Canada, and Hugh Hanson, who is working with Mr. Kelly on this report.

We would like to welcome you here this morning, gentlemen, and feel free to stay as long as you please.

All members have the minutes. Are there any errors or omissions in the minutes? Any business arising from the minutes? If not, we will have the last minutes filed.

I would also like to welcome this morning the Solicitor General and his staff. With Mr. Graham Harle we have Mr. LeBlanc, the Deputy Solicitor General, and Ken Babich, the director of administration for the Solicitor General. We welcome you here this morning.

Mr. LeBlanc and Mr. Babich were sworn in

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Harle, would you like to make a few opening remarks before we start the questioning of your department?

MR. HARLE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Perhaps if I just covered one or two items it might direct the committee's attention to what I think are the areas that will be of interest.

I think the two areas of public accounts where a considerable amount of funds are used in the department relate particularly to the area of corrections. It's not only funding in terms of the institutions that we have, but also from a point of view of staff and the support services that are needed to care for people who are maintained in these institutions. The other area, I think, is the area of motor vehicles, from two points of view. It is a revenue earner as far as the government of Alberta is concerned, and also provides support services to policing and maintenance of reasonable driving habits of citizens within the community.

I think members will recall that we did have a review of our facilities by Moyer Associates Inc. of Chicago. That report has been tabled in the Legislature. He spent a considerable amount of time reviewing the present facilities and programs, because I don't think you can separate the facility from the actual program itself. If you're going to carry out certain types of programs in the corrections field, then it is essential, I think, that the facilities that you have are designed with the programs that you have in mind.

Naturally, there is an ever evolving science, if you like, that develops new programs, and it's not always that your facilities are up to date and adaptable enough for those new programs, so that I think it was very useful

for the department to have an in-depth review by someone outside the department to go over the facility and the programs, and one who would be able to compare what we have in this province with the facilities and programs that are available on the North American continent. I'm not sure that comparisons with facilities and programs that exist overseas are reasonable because of very different lifestyles, different aspirations, and different standards that exist in other countries. There is, of course, a continuing monitoring done by departmental people with the situations that exist in other countries to see if we can learn and improve our facilities.

Prisons have been a continuing problem in Canada and, really, on the North American continent. We don't know the cause of crime, so we're trying to deal with a problem that we don't really know the cause of. For that reason, it is an effort that we know how to deal with inmates once they're inside the institution. We've gained some experience that indicates that there's very little you can do to maintain discipline within an institution except by some very -- at times -- difficult decisions that have to be made instantly, on the spot. I think the staff within the Solicitor General's Department continue to strive to maintain as humane and pleasant a facility as possible, with the notion that almost 100 per cent of the inmates who reach our institutions are going to go back into society, and I think that fact has always to be kept in mind.

While the next point I want to mention doesn't relate to the period that public accounts are considering with the fiscal year ending in '79, I think I should just make a comment about the illegal strike situation that we had earlier in the year. I can report that the institutions are back to normal, are working extremely well. The settlement that was arrived at has resulted in our being able to attract a well-qualified staff of correctional officers and, in fact, from the report I had this morning, there are only 15 vacancies in the whole service, which would tend to indicate that the settlement has worked very positively and we're seeing a morale improvement that, I think, we all hoped and all anticipated would result from the settlement of the negotiations this summer.

Another item that is not covered in this period of fiscal review relates to the planning of new facilities. I think hon. members are all aware that we are in the process of planning for a new facility for the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Institution, and there is a committee established of all the related people who have anything to do with the provision of services to inmates. That committee will be meeting and has started to meet, so that we co-ordinate our program with the design of the new facility. That has just started its work and I hope to have a recommendation eventually from that committee so that we can finalize the building and construction plans. The same process is being gone through in Calgary for the new facility there.

There is only one other item that I think I'd like to refer to, and that relates to the comments made by the Auditor General in his report covering the fiscal period ending March 31, 1979, dated February 26, 1980, and particularly to page 42 and the two items that relate to the Solicitor General's Department. The incorrect program charges in 4.2.7 were corrected and the department has taken steps to ensure that it won't happen again, to the best of their ability. There has been a considerable improvement in the department in the ability of auditing within the department, and also to try to ensure that through auditing techniques the difficulty that arose and was corrected will not happen again. With regard to Recommendation 19, which is contained on page 43 and relates to paragraph 4.2.8 in the Auditor's report relating to overtime payments at the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Institution, that has been dealt with. The Public Service Commissioner has removed the requirement that existed whereby a correctional officer could not earn more than the senior people in the institution.

I think I should comment that overtime is done on a voluntary basis and, while we would like to see it rotated among as many staff to bear the load as possible, in fact, because it is voluntary, unless we have an emergency in the institution and have to direct people to work -- which happens on occasion -- then the overtime is done on a voluntary basis, and it is possible for someone at the correctional officer level, through overtime, to be able to earn more than even the senior people in the department.

The problem with overtime has, however, been considerably changed since the fiscal period because, for one thing, we've opened the Edmonton Remand Centre and that has removed from that institution the more difficult inmates who really are a cause of a lot of the overtime, because of one crisis or another that has to be dealt with. Because of that, the need for overtime has been considerably reduced and I don't think in the future years you'd see the peak that it reached prior to the opening of the Edmonton Remand Centre. The other item, of course, that will reduce it has been the settlement this summer that I just alluded to, because it has meant that we're able to fill the vacancies. The overtime, of course, results when you have vacancies and you can't fill those vacancies, or you have periods of sickness and you have to have people covering off because of staff who are not reporting for work. Both of those areas have been resolved and, with the removal by the Public Service Commissioner of the limit on what the earnings of individual correctional officers could be, it has meant that the problem really has been eliminated, both in a technical, legal way and also because of the opening of the Edmonton Remand Centre and the better recruiting that we're able to do under the new salary levels that have been established.

Mr. Chairman, I think that covers the comments that I wish to make and I'd be only too happy to respond to any questions that members may have.

MR. CAMPBELL: Mr. Chairman, to the minister. I was just going over this and looking at the Nordegg correctional centre. I have a question as to why it was phased down, and it was strictly financial, when in fact the inmates had work projects such as cutting up wood for campsites for transportation, cleaning up rights-of-way. They also helped the forestry service fight forest fires and, of course, the staff provides emergency ambulance service for that particular area.

MR. HARLE: Mr. Chairman, the situation at Nordegg, as I think hon. members know, has always been a forced feeding type of situation. As I recall, the government took over the old mining site and has made use of it by creating a correctional institution. Because of distance and the relatively short sentences that the vast majority of inmates in our correctional facilities have, it has meant that really only a very restricted few could be allocated to Nordegg. We had requests from other parts of the province also to do a very similar type of work; that is, cleaning up various sites, chopping wood, doing all of the things that the inmates do at various forestry camps that we have located in the rest of the province. Another factor entered into it. We had developed a number of diversionary programs. In other words, various mechanisms were developed to keep inmates on short sentences who were there because they couldn't pay a fine from entering the correctional facility. As we improved our ability to serve the inmate population, it meant that there were fewer and fewer inmates who were on the type of sentences that could be transferred and placed in Nordegg, so that our potential population of inmates declined. Along with that it was felt that we should take advantage of the Nordegg facility for an outward bound program, and in order to have inmates who could take on an outward bound program, it meant that we had to have them with a reasonable degree of health. In other words, inmates who needed medical attention couldn't go there. Inmates who, for one reason or another,

were not fit enough to be able to stand the rigors of outdoor existence just were not equipped physically to be able to stand the type of program that we were trying to develop.

The outward bound program has been, I think, very successful from the point of view of reducing the rate of recidivism of those who have attended that program. So it was a good program; still is a good program. And as the population of the province expands, as we see the type of inmate who will benefit by this program, I'm sure that over the next few years there's no reason why it shouldn't steadily increase.

The past has resulted from, as I say, these changes that have occurred; resulted in fewer and fewer inmates whom we were able to place in the outward bound program and, with long enough sentences, healthy enough to be able to use the program and, as I say, it has been successful. We will be continuing it, and I'm sure as time goes on, down the road we'll see more and more people who can take advantage of it. I think really that is the explanation.

MR. CRIPPS: A supplementary, Mr. Chairman, to the minister. My understanding is that you changed that program because of lack of funds. But I also understand that the Brazeau camp, which was a direct result of the Nordegg institution, was moved elsewhere in the province with no forewarning, and arbitrarily. Can you give an explanation?

MR. HARLE: Well, first of all I don't think it was a question of funds. I've explained the rationale for the change in numbers. The program is an outward bound program. That is the purpose of it. And I'm sure that there's probably more work that could be done at the Brazeau. The camp itself needed to be replaced. We had to do something with the camp. We were having demands for exactly the same type of work from other segments of the province and, in fact, have developed camps down at Kananaskis. So it really is a question of numbers. We were trying to operate and also do clean-up work along (inaudible) Creek using the same crew. Again, because of the nature of the outward bound program, that has now been shifted over and is now serviced out of the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Institution. It's a combination of factors, where certainly the work that was done on the Brazeau I think was very much appreciated -- but simply numbers. There comes a time of having to say when the camp is desperately in need of refurbishing and you have fewer and fewer numbers whom you can handle doing that type of work when they should be doing other work. So within institutions you get a competition between various types of work that can or should be done, and it was felt that because of the need, inmates with those kinds of skills could be more beneficially used in other areas.

MRS. CRIPPS: A further supplementary. So you're saying, really it was a matter of priorities: where you wanted the inmates to work throughout the province. It really had nothing to do with the needs of the Brazeau.

MR. HARLE: Mr. Chairman, you can always clean up brush. We wanted to get the (inaudible) Creek done. The Brazeau, I'm sure, will be back in there at some time in the future. A fair amount of work was done. Kananaskis needed inmates for a very similar type of work. So that's what was done.

MR. CAMPBELL: A supplementary, Mr. Chairman, to the minister. I wonder if he could give the committee the differential in costs of holding inmates in the cities, compared to keeping them at, say, an institution such as Nordegg, taking into the consideration the costs that would be saved as far as the inmates' cutting wood for transportation, fighting forest fires for forestry, and, of course, these ambulance services, et cetera.

MR. HARLE: I think cost is only one factor. When I looked at the actual cost of operating Nordegg, I believe that the figures showed that Nordegg was the most expensive from the point of view of looking after an inmate, if you want to just count the basic costs. It isn't as though these inmates are not doing other work; they are, in fact, wherever they happen to be located. A forestry camp, if you take all things into consideration, is probably a very efficient way to maintain inmates, because they are doing productive work which ordinarily would not be done. But there again, you're allocating many times a fictional amount to the work, because certainly if you wanted to have it done by non-inmate labor, it would cost you an awful lot more than the amount that is paid to inmates. So cost, I think, is only one fact. The forestry camps certainly are not very expensive to run. Nordegg itself is fairly expensive, if you take the fact that you've got a very high number of staff per inmate level, even with the reduced facility. For example, the cost per inmate-year in Nordegg in '79 was \$16,691, whereas the cost per inmate-year at the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Institution was \$14,769, and at Lethbridge, \$20,388. So a lot depends, when you divide out these numbers, as to how many inmates you have, on cost per inmate. We were finding in the situation at Nordegg that, as we had fewer and fewer inmates who were able to take advantage of it, of course the cost per inmate starts to increase.

MR. R. CLARK: Mr. Minister, if I got your comments correctly, we really said that there were two basic reasons for slowing down the operation at Nordegg; basically that there weren't enough people who were sentenced long enough so that they could be there and, secondly, that -- I wrote this down -- something to do with the health of inmates.

What percentage of the inmates would be in such bad, decrepit condition that they wouldn't be able to live at a place like Nordegg? I ask the question because in the late 1960s we got the same kind of recommendation from the civil service, to close down Bowden. The arguments that you've given us this morning are virtually the same that we heard in 1966-67. We said no at the time, but the now government made the change. What percentage of the inmates are in such an unhealthy situation that they wouldn't be able to live at a place like Nordegg?

MR. HARLE: I can't give the thing in a percentage way. I'd add a third factor, which I covered also, and that was the diversionary programs. If we have a relatively healthy individual who is in because he can't pay his fine, that person is no longer a client we can put into the correctional facility because we're diverting him from the institutional life. We're getting him back into the community. So we're eliminating all what you might call the best people. To put somebody out at Nordegg, they must first of all be minimum security types who are, nevertheless, healthy, but who we feel are not going to walk away or run away. When I say that they have to be healthy, these people are taken on canoe trips, mountain climbing expeditions, and taken away from Nordegg. They don't just sit in the camp at Nordegg. They're out doing things, chopping wood, fighting fires, and all the rest of it.

We can't put into Nordegg an inmate who, for one reason or another, is in need of medical attention, and certainly within our institution there is more done for the general health of the inmate. If he needs work done on his teeth, or needs drug and alcohol treatment, all of these things are being given now in the institution which again means that there are fewer people who can be transferred out to an outward bound type of program.

MR. R. CLARK: Mr. Minister, that's all very fine. We're saying we haven't got enough people for Nordegg, and the kinds of things you've been doing there.

We've opened up Brazeau, and for some strange reason we've opened up Kananaskis . . .

MRS. CRIPPS: No, we've closed Kananaskis.

MR. R. CLARK: Oh, we've closed Kananaskis. Thanks, Shirley.

But how come, if we haven't had enough people to do what we've been doing fairly successfully in Nordegg -- we've had to scale down there -- we're opening up Kananaskis?

And are we talking about 50 per cent of the people in the prison system who aren't healthy enough to go through an outward bound kind of program? My gosh, if we are, we're more unhealthy in this province than I thought.

MR. HARLE: As I said, Mr. Chairman, the diversionary programs have been, if you like, so successful, that we no longer have that pool of people who are really the ones who would have gone out to Nordegg, had they been in the system. So we not only have to have someone who is in for a length of time that permits them to be transferred out there to do the outward bound program and then come back before their discharge, but also, as I say, if they need any other health care of any type -- or I believe they do some education out there; they do some programs to try to upgrade their education -- there are some limits when it comes to trying to take care of their general health.

MR. R. CLARK: Well, how far is Rocky Mountain House from there? (Inaudible) facility is there.

MR. HARLE: Not for drug and alcohol abuse work, not for psychiatric health, not for operations. There has to be a certain amount of care taken with inmates when they're going to hospitals. There's a massive transportation problem from Nordegg to bring people back the 50 miles to Rocky Mountain House, for example, for medical care, which they are doing now. If an inmate needs attention at Nordegg, of course they have to come back to Rocky.

MR. R. CLARK: What's the distance between Kananaskis and Calgary?

MR. HARLE: We have the same difficulty. But down in Kananaskis we're using the inmates from the south of the province and it is closer to the Lethbridge facility, whereas we were having to, as I say, force feed the Nordegg one by transferring the inmates from Edmonton, Lethbridge, or some other place. I don't know whether you followed it, but whenever there is a transfer of inmates, that in turn creates tension within an institution. If you try to do too much, then you get a breakdown of the inmate morale and the first thing you have is sit-down strikes and hunger-strikes and you-name-it.

So it is a continual problem that the institutions have in transferring people, and certainly force feeding institutions by just saying, "Well, instead of being here, where you have contact with your families, you're put out at Nordegg", then you get into difficulties.

MR. R. CLARK: Mr. Chairman, could I just ask one third supplementary question, and I promise no more.

We still didn't get a figure. Are 50 per cent of our inmates not healthy enough to be at a place like Nordegg? Mr. Minister, I ask the question -- and I'm not trying to be facetious -- but of the three reasons we gave, that was the second reason that was given. I would assume that's a rather substantive reason, and really the first reason and the third reason about people not being there long enough and diversionary programs are in basically the same argument.

MR. HARLE: I understand that about 10 per cent of the prison inmate population would qualify for the outward bound type of program.

MR. R. CLARK: What percentage are not healthy enough to go to a place like that, having regard that the question of health was one of the reasons that was raised by the minister for that place not being able to operate?

MR. HARLE: There's probably about 20 per cent, and that is a rough estimate, of the total number of inmates we have attending various types of health-related programs, from the drug and alcohol abuse commission to hospital care to psychiatric treatment.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Of the 10 per cent who can go into the outward bound program, I think Mr. Clark's question was: is it 50 per cent of that 10 per cent who are unavailable for this kind of work? What are the actual numbers? What are we talking about in terms of numbers? When we say 10 per cent of the population is available for the outward program, what does that mean in numbers? Is that 500, 200, 100?

MR. HARLE: Well, as I said, Mr. Chairman, there is competition within the institution for all the programs that we're operating. There are probably about 50 to 60 who go out to the outward bound program, and we've entered into cost of service agreements with the federal prison system to have inmates of a minimum security category transferred from Drumheller, to be able to make use of the facility. As I say, there are about 1,200 on a daily basis in the system, so that because of work-related projects that need to be done, while we could probably clear out to there 125, or roughly 10 per cent, the others are involved in doing the type of work that was done on the Brazeau or the type of work that's done at (inaudible) Creek or down at Kananaskis. So that you do have competition. And Moyer in his study demonstrates that.

So it's tough to make that decision as to whether somebody should be out merely chopping wood when they could be taking advantage of the outward bound program. As I say, we've tried to force feed the program to get as many out to the outward bound program as we can, because when we do that, and they're healthy enough to stand the pace, which is pretty rugged, then those are the cream of the crop, if you like, so obviously the recidivism rate is pretty low, and it appears to be a very successful program. But because of this competition between the various programs within the institution, we do find that trying to force feed the Nordegg program, which is the outward bound program, means that we are putting out the cream of the crop into Nordegg.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would just like to remind committee members. The rule of our committee is that we have one question and three supplementaries, and I appreciate we went well over that. Possibly we could come back to the question at a later date.

Mrs. Cripps, has your question been answered?

MRS. CRIPPS: No. That was a supplementary to Jack's. Since it was the first one, I guess it was legal.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mrs. Cripps, you'll be next.

MRS. CRIPPS: My question's with law enforcement. I notice that the financial support for '73-79 was \$41 million, but of that, \$779,000 was unexpended. With the policing shortages that we apparently have in the rural areas, can you explain that, and can you explain what we do need in order to beef up the force to have adequate protection in rural Alberta?

MR. HARLE: The estimates, of course, are based on population projections, and it depends on what the actual populations come in at for the year for the payment of the grants. So it doesn't quite always mesh with the actual.

MRS. CRIPPS: That doesn't answer my question: the \$779,000 that was unexpended. Surely, if we're short of policing in Alberta, we would not be not spending some of the funds that we have available for that service.

MR. HARLE: Well, I don't think the two are related. We base our grants and payments on projections, and when you're talking about policing, the grants are made to the 11 municipalities that have their own police forces. They, of course, employ whatever numbers of personnel they decide they need. In the case of the RCMP contract municipalities, we make our projections based on the needs which have been identified by K Division, Alberta and, if Treasury Board in Ottawa doesn't make the approvals for the figures that have been requested, our estimates are based on that and, of course, they come in less. So I think the two are just different figures.

MR. L. CLARK: I was wondering, could the minister tell us whether or not the shortage of manpower in the RCMP that we've been unable to obtain until just recently has had something to do with the unexpended part of this?

MR. HARLE: That's right. That's what I said.

MRS. CRIPPS: If I may, Mr. Chairman. I'm talking about an unexpended portion of money, not an overexpended portion of money, and my understanding is that we are short of RCMP and that the rural areas feel that they need more RCMP protection.

MR. HARLE: You know, I think I've covered it. The forecasts are based on population projections of need and, in the case of the RCMP contract, those needs are sent down by K Division to Ottawa, to the Treasury Board. They go through the federal Solicitor General's Department. They go then to the Treasury Board. If Treasury Board doesn't approve the amount that is being requested, we've covered it in our budget to pay it, but we're not getting the manpower that's been asked for. So obviously we have an unexpended budget.

MRS. CRIPPS: All right. My next question is: why aren't you getting the manpower that you've requested?

MR. HARLE: Because Treasury Board in Ottawa said no. They did just recently come out and say they're going to give us the numbers that have been requested for this year, but they've done that by taking away personnel from the other provinces to fill Alberta's needs, and the indication is that we will not get the needs for next year because we've got some this year.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, I hope you won't rule my question out of order, but it deals with the subject we discussed a little earlier, the one dealing with minimum security camps. It had nothing to do with Nordegg, as my understanding is, nor Kananaskis nor Brazeau, and as there were a large number of supplementary questions that appear to be permissible under the rules, I'd like to raise one with respect to this question, and if it's permissible with you I'll go ahead.

It deals with the minimum security camp in Judy Creek. Nowhere in the document do I see a vote expenditure figure on pages 20.5, 20.6, or 20.7 with respect to expenditures at Judy Creek. Perhaps the Solicitor General's

officials might draw that information for me while I go on and raise the basic question that I would like to raise.

I think without any doubt that the minimum security camp situation in Alberta, and particularly the one in northwestern Alberta, Judy Creek, has proven to be a very, very successful venture. It has complemented police and rehabilitation work in the province to a very, very significant degree. This past summer I held three interesting meetings: one with the town of Swan Hills, one with the village of Fort Assiniboine, and one with the advisory council of ID 15. They wanted to tell me that they were very pleased and, in fact, went even further, and said that we want to give you a list of some 13 items that are rather significant.

I think the suggestions were made a little earlier that perhaps what some of these people in our minimum security camps do is simply cut firewood, so I would like to point out to the Solicitor General that there are at least some people in the province of Alberta who are very positively happy with respect to it. I want to read into the record some 13 items that some of my constituents have indicated as being very positive.

First of all, the inmates at Judy Creek responded to some 75 forest fires in the 1978-79 fiscal year, or the three years previous to that. They cleaned up the old Judy Creek townsite after the townsite was moved from there to Swan Hills. They assisted the RCMP in searches for lost children. As well, they assisted the RCMP in the recovery of corpses from aircraft crashes. They did some brushing along Highway 32. They built the Freeman River campground, and assisted on a recreation development in that part of Alberta. They also worked on the ski slope in Swan Hills. They prepared a 40-acre site for genetic seed tree plantation for pine. They developed a 20-acre spruce tree site for the Alberta Forestry Service. They spent better than two crew-years removing fire fuel hazards in and around the town of Swan Hills. They constructed a playground for the people in the area. They worked with the good citizens of the village of Fort Assiniboine in peeling and preparing logs for the development of a major, new, cultural historical museum in Alberta's second-oldest community, and they prepared firewood for at least four recreation areas.

Perhaps the most positive statement given to me was one that came from, really, all three municipalities, that the inmates located at Judy Creek did three important things from the sociological point of view. They first of all learned to work regular hours. They learned to eat regularly, and thirdly, to develop a good work habit. I think that's a positive reflection of what's happening, and I think that most people would agree that rehabilitation is perhaps more successful if the people of a community are involved in it, participate in it, and are behind it.

Now, that's a good side. Now I understand that your department is going to close down the Judy Creek minimum security site, and that comes as a rather negative to our part of Alberta, primarily because you have accomplished a great deal, rehabilitation has taken place and, thirdly, the community is behind it.

So, to the Solicitor General: could he, one, identify for me the cost expenditure of the Judy Creek minimum security campsite and, secondly, clarify for me whether or not the decision has been made to close down the camp; if it has, of course, the question: why?

MR. HARLE: Well, first of all, Judy Creek is not being closed down but, nevertheless, the types of things that you have just talked about, and talked about so glowingly, are the very reason why we're having the difficulty. In other words, if inmates are going to do it at Judy Creek, they can't do it at Nordegg. We haven't got that number to be able to do that. You're just lucky that you can cite all those things, because we have requests for this kind of

work all over the province. If we have to close down yours, it doesn't mean that the program's being closed down; it means we're trying to do it for somebody else.

So there is competition, as I said, between the amount of work that can be done with the number of inmates that we have. And I'm just pleased as heck that you've recited all the good things that have been done. That's just great. But what about all the communities that also want these things done? And if we're going to try to do it, we have to spread it around a little bit.

MR. KOWALSKI: A supplementary, Mr. Chairman. The question is: are we closing down the Judy Creek minimum security campsite?

MR. HARLE: I said no.

MR. KOWALSKI: So, then, another supplementary. Do I take it, then, that there is not a lack of inmates, if we're going to continue Judy Creek and will work on the other items identified?

MR. HARLE: As I said, there is a lack of inmates. We can't do that in Judy Creek and also get it done in Nordegg, in Kananaskis, the Brazeau -- you name it. There are all of these projects and there are others. We did work at Fort Victoria, we did the Cochrane Ranch, the Plateau Homestead. There are literally all kinds of things that are being done.

MR. KOWALSKI: A supplementary, Mr. Chairman. To you, sir: you say that your department will not close down the Judy Creek minimum security campsite, but yet it was closed down this year. Can you tell me what might happen next year or the year after?

MR. HARLE: We have to close down the campsite at various times. For example, when we had the strike this summer we closed them down. We just had to. Who was going to look after the inmates? So, yes, they get closed down. There are times when, if we get caught up on the work, we will close it down in order to get some work done at another location. But the program is still continuing; the crews move around.

MR. STROMBERG: Mr. Chairman, on supplement 2.03, I see where there's no expenditure for highway air patrol. I was wondering why that was dropped, and what was the expenditure for the year '77-78?

MR. HARLE: I could get that information, Mr. Chairman. It's actually in the moneys that are paid to the RCMP.

MR. STROMBERG: That's why there is no expenditure shown here?

MR. HARLE: That's right. It's around \$75,000 a year.

MR. STROMBERG: And then on statement 2.03, project recoup, \$200,000. Could he explain what that expenditure was?

MR. HARLE: That's Chester Cunningham's project at Beaver Lake forestry camp.

MR. CAMPBELL: Mr. Chairman, to the minister. How long can out-of-province motor vehicles be operated in Alberta with out-of-province plates?

MR. HARLE: Three months.

MR. CAMPBELL: A supplementary, Mr. Chairman. Has there been any effort on behalf of the police force to check into this? Living where I do in the Rocky Mountain House constituency and driving up Highway No. 2, I've noticed quite a few plates. There are a lot of people I know full well have been there more than three months.

MR. HARLE: Well, the police check these as best they can. It's a continual enforcement problem. Check Stop picks them up. Anytime there's an accident, of course, they're checked. But I don't think we want every vehicle stopped on the highway.

MR. CAMPBELL: Nor do I, Mr. Chairman, to the minister; just the ones over three months.

MR. HIEBERT: Mr. Chairman, it refers to motor vehicle registration and driver licensing depots. It is my understanding that a number of these were phased out and consolidated in the city. What saving was realized as a result of doing this, how has the efficiency of such depots worked, and what is the experience to date as a result of making such a move?

MR. HARLE: I suppose we'd have to run a calculation on what the savings are, but let me describe it in this way. We have a workload problem and a site problem. We've tried to select sites which are suitable from a point of view of the driver training program. In other words, there has to be space to carry out the various activities that are done. Not all sites within the city have suitable locations at which these driver tests can be carried out.

The workload problem was a serious one, because we found that there would be an overload of people at one and we had staff sitting around with no clients at the other. The way it is now, we have the ability, therefore, to adapt more quickly to the overload problems, and I think it's working reasonably well. Our difficulty still is that, obviously in this country, in springtime when the kids are wanting to get out of school and get their licences, we have a tremendous number of people who are applying at times like that; whenever there are people who have arrived in the city, and it seems, obviously, to relate to the cycle of the school year, people who are coming into this province and require to be tested, so that we do have a very cyclical effect of numbers. If it were scattered around the various locations that we had it would be fine, but it isn't. This way we're attempting to meet the demand on a service basis, and I think that basically there's a good job being done. There are peak periods. There are times when you can't just get in and get your test right away. We're working with the schools so that the driver testers are going out to school sites to be able to deal with numbers and thereby relieve the pressure, but the way we have it now does mean that there are not staff sitting around waiting because there are no customers at that particular location.

MR. PAHL: Mr. Chairman, to the minister on that question. I don't know if he's aware of the fact that the population within Edmonton Mill Woods is 40,000 and that approximates the size of a good number of our other urban centres. There are no driver training facilities there, to my knowledge, and there is a considerable wait in the one area where driver testing is made available in Edmonton. I wonder if he was aware that perhaps the mentality of queuing every driver at the one place is creating some inconveniences, I'm sure, throughout the southern part of Edmonton and the eastern part. I'm sure my colleague was on the same point.

I'd like to make that observation and invite any comment you might have on that.

MR. HARLE: I think it goes right to the heart of what I was talking about. If we set up individual locations around the city and they're not busy, what do we do? And we're busy at the other place. We've got a problem. If you set up and establish offices with space and all the rest of it, you can't just shift those people over to the other location because where do they fit in? Where are their offices able to be located? Where are their cars to do the operations that have to be done?

If you're going to set up an office it has to have all the facilities. You can't just say, we need it over here because this is where the overload is.

MR. PAHL: A supplementary. I don't wish to get into a debate on it, but the point I was trying to make is that I am sure there is some level or standard of service across the province, and surely the convenience that would be extended to an individual, say, in the city of Red Deer -- or inconvenience, if you will -- should be approximated in our major urban centres, and I would submit that it's not being so done.

So within that area of service I ask the question whether there is a standard that the department has set with respect to per capita level service which I don't understand the rationale for, given the present situation in the city of Edmonton.

MR. HARLE: Well, I can't answer your question in a way that maybe you're prepared to accept. I know lots of villages and towns around this province which would say, well, my goodness, the service that you're giving in the city is so far superior; why do we have to take less service? Rocky Mountain House, Nordegg, you know, also want these services.

I don't know what you do. We're struggling with it. We had offices scattered around. It didn't work, because you had people overflowing at one and they wouldn't go to the others. So what do you do? We've now got it so that we're keeping everybody busy, we've got the staff fully occupied, and we're providing the service. Now it's true that you have to drive from Mill Woods to do it. But what about having to drive from Big Valley up to Stettler, 25 miles, to get that same service?

MR. PAHL: Well, I'd answer that very quickly, and say I got my driver's licence -- and I hate to give credit to any previous administrations -- in Hanna quite a few years ago, and I don't believe I had to wait two weeks to take the driver exam. In fact, I know I didn't have to wait any longer than two weeks. Also, if you take the Big Valley-Stettler argument, that 25 miles can be driven in 25 minutes or, at minimum, 30, and that is not the same level of time that you can always drive across from one end of the city to the other, particularly if you're subject to appointments.

I simply make the point to the minister, Mr. Chairman, that the level of service I know should be approximated across the city, and I think I'm stating on behalf of at least two of the Public Accounts Committee that the level of service in Edmonton, through the rationalization perhaps, has dropped below what might be the standard across the province. That's the observation that I raise and I leave it at that.

MR. L. CLARK: Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask a question on vote 5.0.1, a grant to the Alberta Racing Commission. I wonder if the minister could explain how this grant is made up and if some of it is used in upgrading the blood stock in the racing stables across Alberta.

MR. HARLE: If you want to get into that -- you've put it down on the committee -- I can have the chairman of the Racing Commission here to answer questions. There is, of course, a take from the pari-mutuel betting, and the commission

is concerned about blood stocks. It also, of course, is interested in working out satisfactory arrangements for racing dates and making sure that the various interests in the horse racing business are satisfied, and only one part of that is, of course, the blood stock side.

DR. CARTER: With respect to item 3.2.3 on 20.6, the intermittent detention of intoxicated persons. I wonder if the Solicitor General would be good enough to comment with respect to the development of the plans for the detox centre in downtown Calgary. I am interested as to some delineation of the overlap between Social Services and Community Health, Housing and Public Works, and the department into the development of the new site, as well as the user profile, I suppose, with the hope that we'll be able to get some of the people who are presently using not only the police cells in Calgary but the single men's hostel, into the new facility.

MR. HARLE: That is progressing, I think, very well, Mr. Chairman. There has been an arrangement arrived at with the drug and alcohol abuse commission in Social Services and Community Health, and the plans, I think, are going ahead. I think it's out for tendering. We hope that there will be a much better facility in Calgary for the intoxicated person. I've had a number of meetings with the chairman and director of the drug and alcohol abuse commission, and it will be eventually transferred out of this department's budget.

DR. CARTER: Does one assume that the use of the facility will be strictly for males? And, perhaps, a comment with regard to the completion date, please.

MR. HARLE: I believe 1982 is the forecasted completion date, and it's both male and female.

MR. R. SPEAKER: I'd like to direct a question to Mr. Rogers with regard to the overtime payments in 4.2.8 in his report.

One, the minister has indicated the deficiency revealed in the procedures has been overcome and all corrections have been made. Does the provincial auditor request a report back from the department, or does the department give it automatically?

Second, are there other departments of government doing the very same thing and, from the finding here, was a general review of these kinds of procedures done in other departments of government?

MR. ROGERS: Mr. Chairman, we have carried out review work right across the government in the salary area and we have not found the same extent of overtime. Of course the point here was, one, to bring the item to the attention of this committee and also to point out that there was a contravention of the regulations as they then were. Those regulations have since been changed, so there is no longer a technical violation of the regulations.

As far as any matters in the report, we do, at a subsequent audit, determine the way in which the problem that had been brought to light in an earlier report had been tackled, and do review that the work was actually carried out.

MR. STROMBERG: Under Vote 2, Mr. Chairman, where it would appear that each year when licences are renewable there's this mad rush to get your plate and quite a tie-up. I understand that in some American jurisdictions, as licences are issued, or as a motor vehicle is registered, that that is renewable at the month it was purchased. For instance, if I were to buy a car and buy some plates in the month of August, the following month it would be

renewable. Would that speed up and smooth out the rush in April, and has it been looked at?

MR. HARLE: We're looking at the principle of staggered licence renewals. However, we did take a couple of other steps to try to reduce the problem, and I think it was successful. First of all, we developed and promoted the mail-in registration. That, I think, achieved a great deal. And we are opening seven offices in the high-volume areas of the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. This was worked out with the members of AUPE and, again, has been successful. The result was that I think we all recall there was very, very little in the way of lineups this spring as a result.

But we are looking at the staggered system. I guess it's relatively easy to do staggered renewals; it's a little more difficult to operate a system of enforcement. So we'd have to look at the enforcement side if we did, because how could you tell, when you looked at a vehicle, as to whether or not it should be renewed?

MR. STROMBERG: The question was asked me by the minister, so I would like to reply. Apparently in other jurisdictions they use a color for the month of August, another color for the month of July, and it has been quite convenient for law enforcement agencies to spot.

MR. HARLE: Well, as I say, we are looking at the staggering and the ease, or the difficulties, which these other jurisdictions may be having with it. It's one thing to talk about it, but it's another thing to go back to that jurisdiction and say, well, what experience have you had with it; do you want to keep it or do you want to change it? So we'll obviously have to take a look at that as well.

MRS. EMBURY: Mr. Chairman, I actually have four questions. I'm not sure if there are many other people who want to ask questions, so I guess you'll just have to stop me when you think I've had my share.

In regard to page 20.6, 4.2.2, the driver examination services, is that primarily for examinations of new drivers? How many re-examinations are carried out?

MR. HARLE: It is for examinations, and about 90 per cent of it would be new drivers.

MRS. EMBURY: So 10 per cent. I imagine it's the backlog that creates a problem that more isn't done in the area of re-examinations, is it? I have a terrible concern in the city of Calgary with our traffic problems, and I just feel that there should be more re-examination of drivers, and I'm wondering .

MR. HARLE: I think that the backlog problem occurs with the new drivers -- not with the re-examinations -- where, for example, a condition of getting one's licence back is to be re-tested. That is not the major problem. The problem is with the new drivers. Very often language difficulties and all the rest of it go along with it, and the result is that we do have backlogs, as I say, particularly related to the school calendar, because there are a lot of youngsters who come out of the schools in the spring who want to get tested. That's one peak period. The other peak period, I presume, is in the fall, when they want to get it done just before they get back into the school system, or there are people who have moved to the province and they are coinciding their moves with the school year.

MRS. EMBURY: May I ask another question, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. Mrs. Embury.

MRS. EMBURY: Thank you.

On the same page: I wonder if you could please tell me what would come under 3.2.7, municipal police assistance grants, and also 3.2.8, the innovative policing subsidy. What programs would those include, please?

MR. HARLE: 3.2.7, municipal police assistance grants are the grants that we're now paying on a per capita basis to all communities over 1,500, basically. In other words, we pay \$12 per capita to those who are under municipal contracts with the RCMP. We pay \$18 per capita to the 11 communities that have their own police forces.

3.2.8, the innovative policing subsidy, is basically the preventive policing work and, I think, includes the purchase of cameras that are used for surveillance of stores that are being victimized.

DR. CARTER: I wonder if the Solicitor General would be kind enough to comment with respect to the age of majority and how it affects the clients within his system. I understand that there is still this variety of ages of majority in the various provinces across Canada, and I understand the federal government is still perhaps studying the matter. But I wonder if the Solicitor General and his department have made any recommendations with regard to this age level, and how it affects the numbers within the prison population within the province.

MR. HARLE: Mr. Chairman, it is one of the, I suppose, difficult areas that we have in a sense of the impact that very different ages have upon our system. As far as the Solicitor General is concerned, we're keeping a watching brief on the discussions that are ongoing across Canada on this particular subject. I don't think that from our point of view it really matters. The job is to be done, whatever age is arrived at, but if that age level is changed it will impact upon the numbers that we have in the correctional system. I know that there is ongoing discussion on that particular topic among the Attorneys General. Basically, I think that while it sounds in theory nicer if you had one age across Canada, I think there is a point that different provinces may feel more comfortable with the age that they have decided upon, and I don't think it's an easy question to resolve from the point of view of standardization.

DR. CARTER: One supplementary. Perhaps your departmental officials could make an educated guess. My understanding is that our age in this province is 17.

AN HON. MEMBER: Sixteen.

DR. CARTER: Sixteen. But if we moved it up to 17, how many persons presently within your jurisdiction would that affect?

MR. HARLE: It's probably around 150, but it's in the annual report, I think. There is a table in the annual report that shows a breakdown of the numbers at each age level, if I recall, and that's off the top of my head. We'll just check.

MR. CAMPBELL: Mr. Chairman, do the minister and the department have any plans in the foreseeable future to upgrade the police service in rural communities and communities under 1,500?

MR. HARLE: We will continue to strive to provide the best policing under the RCMP contract that we possibly can to the province. That's our present aim. There has been a new commander of K Division. In my discussions with him, he is very anxious to provide as good a service as they possibly can. We did get more personnel from the Ottawa Treasury Board for this year. We will ensure that the best possible service is given. I think certainly the RCMP are dedicated to that objective. I meet on a regular basis with the commander of K Division. If there is any community or area in the province that feels it's not getting adequate service, I will certainly follow up on it and have a discussion with the commander of K Division. I think, though, that really it's a matter of expectation. There are those who would like to see a great number of policemen enforcing every law at all times with each of us and, obviously, that would have to be almost a one-on-one type of situation.

It does mean that there have to be priorities. We watch the caseloads of the personnel. We watch the crime statistics that indicate the number of crimes, particularly serious crimes, that occur. We also watch the clearance rates: that is, how many they are actually getting resolved and are able to do something about. I think the results across the province, certainly up until the end of 1979, were extremely good. In the last few months we have started to see perhaps a rise in certain types of crimes, and we're keeping watch on it to see, first of all, the type of crime and where it is occurring. The latest report I had was that there seem to be a few more in the armed robbery and robbery type of crime, I suppose partly due to circumstances of slowdown in the economy. Obviously, when people face difficult times, you do get -- and I suppose can anticipate really -- an increase in that type of crime. There are other types of violations that are maybe not as serious, and sometimes mere police presence is what is needed.

However, I think when you train, and go to the expense of training, policemen, as all forces are doing today, they must be effective in using those talents, and I think, by and large, the general state of policing across the province is pretty good. But I don't think anyone would take from that that you can rest at all. It's an ongoing problem, and I'm sure that the commander of K Division will do his best to provide the most effective and best policing service available to the citizens of the province.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I see our time has expired. I don't have any more names on the list, so the Chair is assuming that there are no further questions for the minister and we have . . .

MR. HARLE: Mr. Chairman, could I just respond to that question about the number of 16-year-olds?

In the '78-79 statistics we had 389.

MR. CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the committee, Mr. Minister, I would like to thank you and your staff for bringing the information to our committee this morning. I would also like to staff the other resource gentlemen who are here on behalf of the committee.

I'm just assuming that we're going to be adjourning in the near future, so possibly we won't set up the agenda for the following Wednesday. If the case does happen that we have to set it up, possibly we could get together with Mr. McCrae and Mr. Clark.

Motion for adjournment by Mr. Stromberg

The meeting adjourned at 11:07 a.m.