

[Chairman: Mr. Martin]

[10 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: If we could, I'd like to bring the meeting to order. We do not have minutes today, so we'll bring the set next day.

I would like to move right in and first of all thank Hon. Greg Stevens, the Minister responsible for Personnel Administration and a member of our committee, for taking the time to come before the committee. We do appreciate it. I would like to turn it over to you now, Mr. Stevens, if you would like to introduce the person with you. If you have any initial remarks you want to make, fine; then we'll turn it over for questions.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, members of the committee. On my left is Jim Dixon, who is the Public Service Commissioner for the province of Alberta. Through the work of Jim, his managers, and the Personnel Administration office, on his behalf I thank him and all our staff who have worked so diligently to assist to have, I think, the best and most efficient public service Personnel Administration office in any of our provinces.

Mr. Chairman, it might help if I just generally indicate for the members, and then turn it back to you and the members, what our department's functions are, which may help members have an understanding and relate to the public accounts before us. We have a number of divisions in the Public Service Commissioner's office which provide services to the various departments throughout Alberta. Employee relations is a very important division. It involves collective bargaining and a number of other services to our government. Management services division provides across-the-government balanced assessment and practices for our managers. Departmental services is a division which provides us with occupational health and safety, training, and so on. Organizational development, consulting services to assist departments in their staff development; planning services division; our southern Alberta regional office. Not least but last is our administrative services division. That might just give members a balance of how we are operating.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Questions from members?

MR. R. MOORE: Mr. Minister, we are all concerned about the utilization of manpower and getting the best from the dollars the taxpayers provide to us. It's always been a concern of mine that in the personnel field we have a department of personnel, yours; we have central personnel; and the various departments — the majority of them, if not all — have their own little personnel division, headed by a personnel director plus support staff: all working in the field of personnel. To me, it seems like there is a tremendous amount of overlap in this, in their operating within the system. Your department, being the one charged with the personnel responsibility for government, should have all that under your jurisdiction. I think we're duplicating services all the way through.

Would you mind giving us your perspective whether this is so or whether there is a saving to be effected

by bringing this back in under your department rather than having all these little so-called personnel divisions out there?

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Chairman. In response to the Member for Lacombe, it's one of balance between managing effectively and wisely across government and being able to deliver the services to the public. Obviously we are always very careful that we try to avoid duplication. The best decisions in the delivery of service are going to be made at the closest delivery level to the public — by the persons on the telephone, at the counter, out doing inspections, whatever, and their managers. There are many, many functions that are done each day in the field that involve keeping time records, classification, recruitment selection, and so on. We have tried over a period of years to decentralize the day-to-day personnel activity to the departments that are capable of doing that, with their staff, in their local decision-making areas.

We try to monitor those decisions across government from time to time to ensure that one department won't be making decisions that would have a spin-off effect adverse to other departments or to the public. We try to provide guidance and regulations for the departmental personnel officers so that their decisions are equitable. Where we are negotiating across government with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees or establishing personnel policies, we would of course want to have that done on an across-government basis, but we would have the advice of the department personnel officers.

Perhaps Mr. Dixon could expand on my remarks and include how we try to make sure, Mr. Moore, that we do not duplicate and eliminate any overlap, if that would be helpful.

MR. DIXON: I think the minister has done a good job of outlining our basic philosophy; that is, our office should be primarily one of assisting the government to establish and monitor policy. We do have responsibility for some centralized functions. He's mentioned collective bargaining. Our feeling is that operational decisions that are made close to the action on the line level are much more effective than if we try to make them in a central office perspective. So over the last five to seven years, we have in fact tried to move more operational decisions out to the field, and try to devote ourselves a little more to ensuring that the policies, procedures, and systems are consistent with what government wants. Our view is that that's the most effective way to operate, especially in such a large organization. At one time, and with smaller organizations, I think it was possible to combine the policy and line operations.

MR. R. MOORE: I have a supplementary, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I agree with what you say. But the system and humans being what they are, it doesn't take long before your various divisions become very protective within their own departments and don't relate across. They soon grow in numbers, and we create what we say we're trying to bring down — the numbers of people that are involved, to make us more efficient throughout the government

system. So the very nature of going out in these little areas — they start out very much looking after their own particular area, but they become very protective and they grow.

With the advent of computers in the system that can take over a lot of this and store the information related to the needs of various departments and divisions, is there any thought or are you looking at or reviewing on an ongoing basis the idea of bringing all these little areas, which I say will grow into big areas in the various departments, under the one personnel division?

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Chairman, over the past two or three years, we have been developing a strategy for improving our personnel management information system — PMIS in short. We are at a point, after this particular account, of now establishing the framework for that, involving high technology, the ability for each department to have its system as part of an overall centralized system, so that managers will have an understanding of personnel transactions, the human resources that each department has available; for example, the age and experience of personnel, the time loss due to sickness or other absences. It has been done by each department, following certain guidelines. Some departments have developed their own systems. Through the acquisition of a consultant report and working with the Public Service Commissioner and his staff, we have recently taken steps to establish a system that each department will be able to use. I think we should be operational some time this fall — if I'm right on our time, Jim?

MR. DIXON: Yes.

MR. R. MOORE: Thank you.

MR. LEE: Mr. Chairman, to the minister. I can recall three years ago, during the height of the boom in Alberta, it was not unusual to be able to look under the career section of either the Calgary or Edmonton newspaper, or other newspapers for that matter, and really see the provincial government ads dominate that whole section of the newspaper. Of course that was necessary at that time. The government was competing with the private sector, and it was difficult to compete. But today we have a different environment, a different situation. I think we clearly have an indication of a lot of very talented people who are available in the marketplace.

My question would be, to what degree has the change in the economic environment been reflected in the balance sheet in terms of what is being invested in the career section and, in fact, do we even need to continue to advertise in the career section at all?

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Chairman, to the Member for Calgary Buffalo. During that 1980-81-82 period of time, our recruitment requirements were like other public-sector and private-sector employers. We were all competing for a limited number of qualified personnel. We were in fact advertising outside the province, in the national Globe and Mail, in selected periodicals of professions, and that sort of thing. I think in that year or the year before, we had out-of-country recruitment, especially in the hard-to-recruit

areas, whether they were psychiatric nurses or specialists in engineering. We found ourselves outbidding and bidding against other employers. Our advertising budget reflected that in those '81-82 years. In '83 we saw the change that other employers, and in fact Alberta and Canada, were experiencing, and our recruiting budget declined considerably.

We also established a departmental publication called The Bulletin, which, for a very reasonable expenditure, is able to provide on a biweekly basis to each employee, at his or her desk or at home, if he or she takes it at home, information about career opportunities. Also there is information on how to apply for positions in the government, how to take courses, how to handle oneself at an interview, and how to develop a resume. We started to develop all those sorts of things, produced on an up-to-date basis, in our publication. People could study it, and they didn't have to read the career section.

We also changed our advertising format, very conscious of the concerns raised by the member about the size and headings of the ads. In fact we began to break up the ads and have them appear less. I suppose we were no longer competing with each other. So we have made strides that way.

We also are anticipating further decline in the need to expend dollars on advertising externally, simply because our turnover has reduced significantly. The levelling off of the population growth and the need for government services through privatization and so on is reduced, so we expect to see a further reduction. I have to balance that, Mr. Chairman and members, by indicating that we have not seen a reflection of reduced costs in the newspapers; they experience increased costs. I guess our lineage rates change from time to time and have increased each year.

Jim, do you want to add anything?

MR. DIXON: No, that's fine, Mr. Minister.

MRS. KOPER: Mr. Chairman, my question relates to the 1982-83 year. Since it was the first year in office for this session, a couple of things were brought to my attention at that time that I am very curious about. It seemed at the time I received a very complicated document that described the wages and salaries in both the public and private sectors. There was quite a differential between men and women in the employ of the provincial government. I wonder if this had been resolved. Is there any differential at this point in time? I'm sorry I couldn't find the document I'm referring to. I have a very efficient secretary that unloaded all my '81-82 statistics, which I know they represent. I wonder if anything had been done, Mr. Minister.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Chairman, I believe the Member for Calgary Foothills is referring to a study carried out by a consulting group — I can't remember the title of it either, but it was a study that eventually, when it was released, had about 37 recommendations in it. Many of the recommendations pertained to other employers, which surprised us since the report had been done with consultation from time to time with our department. Of the 36 or 37 recommendations in the report at the time of its release, I believe there were only six or seven

recommendations that we had not already put into effect. There were three or four we could not, because they involved federal or private-sector policies.

If this may be of assistance, the percentage of female employees in the government of Alberta has increased. For example, seven years ago 46 percent of the public service was female; in 1980, 50 percent; 1982, 52.6; and 1983, 52.4 — and that's the latest figure I have for the percentage of female to male. In terms of management, there have been steady increases in the numbers of women in managerial levels: in 1975, 5.7 percent; by 1983, 12 percent. That is not sufficient, but it is recognition of the interest of women in seeking advancement in careers in the public service. I believe it's evidence of the success of our programs which are not only encouraging the current female employees to seek new paths or career advancement, but encouraging management and recruitment officers to look at the entire human resource.

We have a number of programs which encourage people on selection committees to ensure that they are asking the appropriate career questions and eliminating all those kinds of questions that male-dominated society had developed years ago. We have programs that will assist men and women, but have been aimed specifically at women, to show them how to develop their resumes, how to bring forward their part-time and volunteer experience as part of their resumes, how to conduct themselves in interviews and, with the assistance of their departments, to provide them with time off to take training that is not only directly career related but may even involve training at universities, colleges, and outside the work place, to advance themselves and make themselves more marketable.

I think the average salary was the point you raised. In 1977 the percentage of female to male average salary was 63 percent. By 1983, that has changed to nearly 74 percent. I should say, though, that the government's pay scales for both bargaining unit and management involve the establishment of a pay level that does not differentiate between men or women. The person is paid on the basis of his or her qualifications, length of time in the position, and the pay level of that job as determined by negotiation or as set in the management or senior officials list. There's no differentiation between a male or female in that regard.

MRS. KOPER: Thank you. My second question to the minister relates to any initiatives the government has taken over that year regarding the placement of disadvantaged people, such as older people who are looking for jobs, or perhaps displaced by technology, or perhaps native employees. Are there any specific programs geared to the upgrading?

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Chairman, the government of Alberta is very proud to have established in 1975, I believe, a special placement program. This program is geared toward providing the disadvantaged in the labour force, whether that person may be disadvantaged by reason of his or her age, by reason of having doors not open for whatever reason — due to education levels or lack of experience or training. That program reaches out and, in consultation with other employers and other

counselling services, endeavours — in the case of the disabled, for example — to place persons in the work force in the government or, if we do not have the position for which that person is qualified or can be trained to qualify, to refer that person to another position. It has been a very, very successful program. Many of the persons who are placed in project positions, temporary positions, or work experience positions are able to adapt themselves, acquire the skills, and eventually find themselves in a permanent position.

In 1983 we provided assistance to the following categories of disadvantaged persons: physically disabled, mentally disabled, socially disadvantaged, and over 45 years of age. There were 88 clients: female, 64; male, 24. They have of course a variety of age groupings, from 18 right up to 65 years of age. One hundred and fifty-one clients, which includes a number that were carried over from the previous year, were placed in a variety of positions. Of course the department continues to provide this service. It has been a very successful service. I'm not sure if it's over 50 percent or 60 percent that continue to remain in the service or have a permanent career once they've had that experience.

MR. GOGO: Minister, the government recently announced a Women's Secretariat for the province of Alberta. I believe the Minister of Advanced Education has that responsibility. For some number of years your department has put special emphasis on women, and I don't think it's always been entirely within the public service. I've heard pronouncements from you and from your department, and I think they're to be commended. Now that that secretariat is in place, could you indicate to the committee what implication — this ties in a bit with the Member for Lacombe's question — that has with regard to possible duplication between your department and another area of government?

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Chairman, for the Member for Lethbridge West, we have worked as a department with each of the government's departments and agencies in ensuring that training programs that encourage advancement of women are identified by those departments and, across the government, by our own department — supervisory training roles for persons who perhaps have not had supervisory experience, who are about to become supervisors; to train them in that area. We have worked with the former Women's Bureau, and now look forward to working with the guidance of the new secretariat. We have established programs that monitor the advancement of women through each department. Each department has identified a co-ordinator, and in fact this year will now identify a second person. I think we'll be focussing on our programs across government as a whole, in consultation with the Minister of Advanced Education acting in his role. We'll continue to do our very best to work with our personnel offices. I think it won't be a duplication but will be an enhancement of what we're already doing.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Chairman, for fear I may not get this in, I want to put the question to Mr. Dixon. I see federal legislation, either in place or pending, with regard to things such as maternity/paternity leave

expanding in a very meaningful way. Could you advise the committee, Mr. Dixon, how that affects the collective agreements — not the ones in place, but the sort of trend? I'd be interested in how Alberta responds to other initiatives, or initiatives in this case by senior governments, for new thrusts in the area of labour relations with regard to personnel — in this specific case, maternity/paternity leave.

MR. DIXON: I think the legislative initiatives the hon. member is referring to are the Canada Labour Code proposed amendments, that I understand have all-party support. I think there definitely is an indirect, if not ultimately a direct, impact of those kinds of initiatives finding their way into other legislation. The Canada Labour Code, as you know, covers only those national industries such as railways and other modes of transportation. It doesn't cover a large number of employees. But those kinds of initiatives certainly can result in increased demands to have personnel policies put into place by all employers. Over time, I think government initiatives to establish base levels have had an impact on personnel policies. But in many cases, organized labour — unions and organized employers — have in fact had better policies than some of those that are being proposed by legislative change. So it's kind of hard to generalize across all those provisions. At this stage, I don't think it should have a direct impact on us as an employer.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Chairman, just a final comment. The reason I raise that is that we've seen recent examples, the Young Offenders Act being one, with tremendous financial implications to this province. I'm just curious, Minister. When you get into the budget planning process, particularly in a period of restraint when you're expected to trim things, and you get these external forces acting, I just wonder how a department like yours, which has the responsibility for so many civil servants and the wage component being the largest single item in there, can possibly cope with these external forces. I just make that comment.

MR. PAPROSKI: Mr. Chairman, my question deals with the extensive proliferation of things like computers, automation, robotics, high technology, and indeed all of their impacts on the workplace and ultimately the work force. Specifically with respect to the Alberta civil service, has the minister endeavoured to delve into this particular area with respect to how all these new technologies are impacting on the work force, in an attempt to allay perhaps some fears of the population out there, or perhaps not necessarily allay the fears but give them the facts with respect to this whole area and how it's going to be impacting on the work force with respect to the Alberta government?

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Chairman, for the member, it's a very important and timely question. I have found no evidence in other jurisdictions that high technology or automation or microtechnology has led to a reduction in the work force. What it tends to do is provide more information, perhaps more quickly. One wonders how much information the human mind can absorb and come up with recommendations and answers, given the ability of the computer. But what

it does tend to do is dislocate; it tends to change the characteristics of the job so that some persons are dislocated. What we have done, recognizing that whether it was the telephone or the typewriter or some new system that may provide a manager with the ability not only to write his or her own report but in fact to produce a printed copy, bound in time — it tends to provide an opportunity for the clerical person, the secretarial worker, to upgrade his or her ability to be part of a production team.

We have a number of programs; for example, the women's program offers to the supervisory clerical level a program entitled The Supervisor in the Automating Office. In other words, this is a program to help persons going through this new experience. The department has acquired a new system, a new piece of machinery — advance warning, work with the system, understand how to use the system to its best advantage, to explore how the supervisor can prepare his or her personnel for these changes.

I guess there are a number of departments that are now going through this in various ways. One example would be Alberta health care, where the introduction of a major new system has meant considerable dislocation. A number of programs were established by that department to bring the employees into the process, understand the process, and cope with the process the best they could.

As a department, we will try to monitor each of these activities and provide resource training, in the private sector basically, using colleges — NAIT, SAIT, and Grant MacEwan — where management personnel will have the opportunity to be aware of these things.

MR. PAPROSKI: If I could ask one supplementary dealing with this area again. We heard in the House yesterday — and I know we were talking about this a year ago — that there are robots working in particular departments. I just wondered if the minister expended any funds at all in the previous year to do an extrapolation study, if you will, of the impact of this technology — a 10-year study or whatever on what our civil service will be like with respect to this new automation and new technology. Although the minister indicates there won't be a major displacement, I'm sure there's going to be an extensive alteration of our work force because of this. I just wonder if you have considered or put money into this particular area in the past.

MR. STEVENS: Within the Personnel Administration office, we are of course examining ways and techniques to improve our own effectiveness and productivity. Mr. Dixon may want to add comments on that. Basically we work with departments, who are themselves best able to judge how to deliver their department's services. I don't believe we have taken an overall look at the civil service in 1990 and how it will provide services. It's really a departmental decision as to how they will manage within their budgets and their manpower planning.

Overall, we are examining ways of improving our communication, ways of providing our services through changes in our recruitment advertising, for example, using high tech. But I'm not aware that we have done the kind of study the member has asked about, and I don't know if any department has. Possibly Public Works, Supply and Services, who have

certain guidelines for all departments in the purchase of equipment, in changeover to new equipment through Treasury Board guidelines, and so on — that would be where those 'megalooks' would be taking place.

MR. DIXON: I think we see our role as being one of primarily service. Things are changing so rapidly in the case of automation, and various departments are taking various approaches to deal with it. We involve ourselves in terms of helping them. I'm not sure we could predict with any accuracy what things would look like five or six years from now.

MR. PAPROSKI: Just a quick supplementary, and I suppose it follows back to the Member for Lacombe's question dealing with the fact that there are so many departments. I for one — and I suppose this is a comment — believe that perhaps the minister's department would indeed be a tremendous umbrella to look at this particular area and be a sort of key in this whole area of automation and robotics.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Chairman, I could indicate too — I appreciate the suggestion, and we will discuss it and whether we can, perhaps through our departmental officer meetings, examine more closely what each department is doing. We may learn from that experience and be able to encourage it being shared.

I suppose that from the point of view of the person undergoing the change, it is still the most difficult for that individual employee. We have done our very best to ensure that the departments provide advance notice when they are going to make these changes, hear first directly from the employee to the supervisor whether or not the equipment and its work station, the ergonomics of the environment are in fact conducive to work productivity of an efficient nature. Obviously, if someone is looking in a screen in the sun or has an uncomfortable chair or is in a room that is not ventilated and undergoing heat change, we're not going to gain anything by making those changes that affect and deteriorate morale. So we are trying to do our very best to ensure that the equipment and the environment are conducive to good, efficient production.

MR. McPHERSON: Mr. Chairman, in preparing to come to this meeting this morning, I grabbed an old file. I'm looking at an award of an arbitration board. It's not dated, but it's back in 1982. It was in the Matter of the Public Service Employee Relations Act and In the Matter of an Arbitration of a Dispute as to the Terms and Conditions of Employment between the provincial government and AUPE (Division II). I'm fearful that I'm going to be accused of picking out information in this thing without going over the whole thing, but I'm interested in this whole discussion, this whole area of the arbitration system and how it's going to work, how it's going to be affected by all of this, how it's going to affect the taxpayers.

I guess I want to start my comments, leading to a question on that area, by perhaps reminding the minister that in this province some 29 percent of the nonagricultural sector employees are represented by unions, leaving a full 71 percent of those in the marketplace who depend on the direct employer/employee relationship. Perhaps it's worthy

that other members recall that about 16 percent of employees in the private sector belong to unions — half of those are in the construction trades — and that about 80 percent of employees in the public sector are in a union and have collective agreements. So clearly we have a circumstance in Alberta where the vast majority of Albertans rely directly on the employer/employee relationships and the quickly changing economic realities that develop for them.

But getting back to this report, I notice one area where there's a comment that says: "It must be noted that the settlements which result in these statistics" — referring to the rather large awards made — "represent only a small percentage of the Alberta labour force". That's true. Then it goes on to say — and I want to read this and enter it into the record, because I want the minister to comment on it. I think the comment made by this award is revealing.

This Board is certainly aware of the economic malaise in Canada. No thinking person could be blind to these depressed times which affect us all in one way or another. Moreover, it is a factor to be taken into consideration during these deliberations. Whether general economic illness comes under the heading of "the interests of the public" or "any other factor . . . relevant to the matter in dispute" does not matter.

Of course the report is referring to the old rules under the Public Service Employee Relations Act, section 55, "Matters to be considered":

55 In the conduct of proceedings before it an arbitration board shall consider

(a) the interests of the public.

I'm going to get to my question in relation to the new area, but the comment in the report is interesting. It says:

Whether general economic illness comes under the heading of "the interests of the public" or "any other factor . . . relevant to the matter in dispute" does not matter.

I notice there's a dissenting opinion in this report by one of the arbitrators, which I think is rather interesting too. The dissenter simply states:

The Chairman's approach to this matter in my view makes it impossible for the arbitration process to effectively work excepting in times where we have an inflating economy.

Mr. Chairman, my question to the minister is simply this: what success does he see in the new parameters established for arbitrators? What can we expect in terms of realistic wage settlements in the public sector, giving consideration to the economic realities out there? Does he anticipate that the new matters to be considered under the Public Service Employee Relations and the arbitrations thereunder will become effective?

MR. STEVENS: Wow. Mr. Chairman, I think the Member for Red Deer raises the most significant concern that faces all of us. It's true that the size of the public service of Alberta is less than 3 percent of the Alberta labour force. On the other hand, it is a

significant factor in establishing trends, in establishing rates, when one takes into account not only the public service of Alberta, say 32,000 persons in the year we're considering, and adds to that other public-sector employers such as school boards, municipalities, hospital boards, regional districts, and so on. When one adds all the public service together, a service that is essential to Albertans, our legislation for the public service of Alberta does not, and never did, provide the right to strike, nor does it provide the employer with the opportunity to lock out. In other words, it's a balanced approach. To help resolve disputes that are unresolvable at the bargaining table, it provides for an independent arbitration process.

Our government has in the past, and will continue to in the future, honour the process that is set out in legislation. In 1982 that process led to very unreasonable settlements by arbitration. I use the word "unreasonable" perhaps in hindsight. But at the time those awards were coming out in the fall of 1982, it was obvious that the private-sector settlements were not at the levels that arbitrators were awarding. If we think for a moment of the legislation as it was, it required the arbitrators to consider, in the factors before it, terms and conditions of employment, provided for the need to consider appropriate relationships between various classes of employment, between the various work levels. It provided for the arbitrator to consider terms and conditions of employment that are fair and reasonable with regard to the qualifications of the employees, and then, as the Member for Red Deer has mentioned, any other factor the board considered to be relevant.

I found it very difficult to understand how an arbitrator, a chairman, or a chairman and one other arbitrator, or even a chairman and two if they were unanimous — and there were no unanimous decisions that year — could ignore what was just read and is noted in the dissenting opinion.

The new arbitration legislation factors are very clear. An effort by this government, through the Legislative Assembly process, through hearing the concerns that were expressed through the public hearings and through finally passing the legislation, has continued to provide the arbitrators with those guidelines. Those are conditions set out that the arbitrators may consider. But in addition, the arbitrators are now to consider wages and benefits in private and public, unionized and non-unionized, employment. As the member has mentioned, the majority of Albertans are working in that environment. The arbitrators are to continue the continuity and stability of private and public employment; in other words, the turnover or need for recruitment and all those other factors that both parties are able to present to the arbitration boards. They are also to consider very clearly fiscal policies that are declared from time to time by the Provincial Treasurer for the purposes of this Act.

At this point in time, May 23, for the 1984 bargaining period the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees has approached the Public Service Employee Relations Board for the right to arbitrate in two divisions and the right to arbitrate the Master Agreement. Decisions have been given by the Public Service Employee Relations Board in all three instances, in the case of the two divisions and in the

case of the Master Agreement, to have the parties continue to negotiate. I can only express the wish and belief that should arbitration boards in fact be required during these times, the legislation be considered very carefully by arbitration boards. In the interests of employees who live and work with their neighbours who are undergoing work sharing and income reductions as we begin to come out of this recession that all of Canada has found itself in, I hope very much for the employees' sakes and the sake of the public of Alberta that they consider those factors very carefully.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You got it all in, did you?

MR. McPHERSON: I can think of some more, but I'll wait.

MR. PAPROSKI: Mr. Chairman, my question to the minister is not as detailed as the previous one. It deals with an area some constituents have a few concerns and comments about, and that is the long-term sabbatical leaves granted by the provincial government. I wonder if the minister could just comment as to the regulations and procedures in obtaining long-term professional leave.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Chairman, this is a question that I may specifically direct to Mr. Dixon. I wasn't aware. Are there specific areas or a department?

MR. PAPROSKI: I'd like to know the procedure if one wants to go on professional leave.

MR. DIXON: We have an educational leave policy that provides for departments to be able to send employees to educational institutions to upgrade their skills or properly equip them to handle changes in the work environment and so on. I don't think those would be commonly termed sabbatical in nature though. My understanding of a sabbatical leave is a sort of renewal process where persons have a period of conducting studies, travelling, and so forth to renew themselves, and are more commonly found in educational institutions.

The two policies we have are educational leave and the shorter term course subsidization policy. I'm not familiar with the kinds of concerns your constituents may have had.

MR. PAPROSKI: What I'm asking specifically, Mr. Chairman, is: must employees be employed by the provincial government for a period of years before they're granted these particular leaves? Is a leave for one year? Are there short-term and long-term types of leaves? When a person goes on leave, is his job guaranteed upon his return? Is that automatic?

MR. DIXON: There is quite a wide variety of leaves that can be authorized by departments. I mentioned educational leave; that's primarily leave for at least a year, maybe two. In all cases of leave, there's a requirement for employees to make a return commitment to the employer. I believe it's a two to one commitment: a year's leave and they guarantee they will work for us for another two years.

The responsibility for administering the program rests with deputy ministers. It's primarily designed for what we call permanent employees, regular

employees who have already gone through their probationary period, which is normally a year, or in some cases six months. But deputy ministers do have some flexibility to apply it in the case of other employees where there are circumstances that warrant it, where there is work to be done that requires even a short-term employee to get upgraded training and it's more economic to do that than hire a new employee who may already be trained. They can have that kind of flexibility.

The administration of the policy and the program rests with each deputy minister. The overall policy is established by our office, with government approval of course.

MR. PAPROSKI: One further supplementary, if I could, Mr. Chairman. That deals with the individual who believes that there is another higher position, and if he or she goes on a sabbatical for upgrading of some sort, they would qualify for that particular position. In this time of restraint, I just wonder whether this type of thing should be happening, if indeed it is happening. If an individual wants to better themselves for another position, should they not perhaps want to take that particular time off on their own time?

MR. DIXON: I agree with that. I think it is a managerial tool and that it should be management initiated. There's a joint objective of course. By obtaining increased qualifications, the employee benefits from that. But it is a managerial decision to determine that the most effective way of having that work done is to retrain an existing employee. Where the objective is primarily one of the employee wishing to upgrade their skills to obtain a promotion, that should be done on their own time and at their own expense. We provide for leave of absence without pay in those cases so that when the employee comes back, they can re-engage in the work force with a minimum of discomfort.

MR. STEVENS: As Mr. Dixon was explaining, Mr. Chairman, there are the educational aid programs. There are two other programs we might add to that. One was established last year, and I hope it will continue to be a successful program. That's the voluntary extended leave program where, subject to operational necessity for the departments, employees have been able to take leave without pay. It may be to return to a family, to travel, or to take education on one's own time. That has provided the government with the opportunity to hire from the other people who may be available in the work force to cover those duties.

The other program is the National Defence College. We were not able to nominate a senior personnel employee this year to take the course. That course has been very successful across Canada. Alberta has been invited, and I'm sure will be invited next year, to nominate a deserving individual to attend the college at government expense. The department maintains a position for that person to come back to. There have been several senior management personnel sent to the program in previous years. We are not doing that this year.

MR. MUSGROVE: Mr. Chairman, in the process of negotiating with the union in the Alberta

government, do they go straight from the negotiating table into arbitration or do they go through the processes that are established through other public-sector negotiations; for instance, a conciliation commissioner and the last resort is going to arbitration?

MR. STEVENS: For the Member for Bow Valley, Mr. Chairman, I'm sure for all parties concerned the process can involve lengthy deliberation, and probably frustrations on the part of employees — certainly the employer and the negotiators from the government and, I'm sure, for the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and its negotiators.

Basically the process involves the chief negotiators of both parties meeting together with the chief negotiating teams. In the case of the Master Agreement, there are a number of individuals involved. In the case of each division, there may be different individuals involved. That negotiating process can take as little time as the parties working together can use, or it can take a lengthy time. Hours and hours can be taken in the process. At some point, the legislation provides that either party or both may seek mediation or arbitration. Either party presents a case to the Public Service Employee Relations Board.

As I mentioned earlier, in the case of the three presentations made to the board to date, the board has returned the parties to the bargaining table. So there is a process provided in the legislation should an arbitration board be established by the Public Service Employee Relations Board. Then each party is given a period of days — I think it's 10 — in which to nominate a representative. The two nominated representatives, one from each party, then choose a chairman. If they cannot choose a chairman or if one of the parties chooses not to nominate a member, the Public Service Employee Relations Board will determine a chairman or will establish a member. The three parties to the board then establish their meeting dates, hear presentations made, and at some point come down with a conclusion which is binding on all parties — the government, the employees, and the union. The decision of the board can be a unanimous decision, a majority decision, or an independent chairman decision. But whatever the final decision is, it is binding on all the parties.

MR. MUSGROVE: I have to recognize that my experience in negotiating with the public sector is somewhat different from the Alberta government, because arbitration board awards were not binding in those cases. There was a regulation that said that those disputes had to go through mediation or conciliation before that. It was our experience that quite often that settled the dispute. I wonder if the Alberta government has had that kind of experience, or are they not bound by the same rules because of the arbitration award being binding?

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Chairman, in a moment I would like Mr. Dixon to perhaps think about our past experiences and whether mediation has been successful. At the most recent hearing of the Public Service Employee Relations Board, on May 17, the board asked if the parties, the government and the union, would consider mediation, because it is an avenue that is available to us. The union indicated to

the board that it would not consider mediation. Subsequent to the board's decision to send us back to the bargaining table, the union has in fact requested that the government consider mediation. That is being looked at right now.

Perhaps Mr. Dixon could remind the committee of the history of whether mediation has been successful.

MR. DIXON: When you refer to conciliation or mediation, my recall of conciliation is that it would more than likely have been bargaining under the Labour Relations Act rather than the Public Service Employee Relations Act. The Public Service Employee Relations Act does provide for a mediation step.

Yes, we have engaged in mediation on occasion in the past. In all cases it's been successful to some degree, even if it means resolving only a few issues. In many cases, it can sort out the major issues from those that the parties probably should have been able to resolve themselves but for one reason or another couldn't, so if arbitration is ultimately necessary the arbitrator has a much narrower problem to deal with.

I think it can be of great assistance to the parties. I don't recall that any disputes we had were settled at the mediation step. But certainly there have been many issues settled at the mediation step.

MR. MUSGROVE: Thank you. It was our experience that mediation quite often defused a lot of the concerns that were on both sides of the table, by walking back and forth between the labour union and the management group, listening to the concerns, and then going back and explaining them to the other side. A lot of times, it was a great mechanism in defusing confrontation over issues.

MR. HARLE: Mr. Chairman, I have two questions, in somewhat different areas. I'm looking at the Auditor General's report for the year ended March 31, 1983, particularly at item 2.3.7, which discusses salary payroll — inadequate documentation. There is a recommendation that better records be kept not only for payments but also for deductions. Incidentally, a similar recommendation was made in the Auditor General's report of 1981-82. I'm wondering what progress has been made as a result of both those recommendations, in this latest report and those in the earlier report. I gather progress has been made, but it's still an outstanding item.

MR. DIXON: I think this is an area where there is some overlap between financial management responsibility and our office's responsibility. If I could try to differentiate between the two, we basically are involved in establishing the policies and basic payment levels and so forth for our employees, and financial management policy comes into place to ensure that those policies and practices are properly administered within departments.

When the observations were first made by the Auditor General, we established a committee with the Treasury department to try to ensure that we were dealing jointly with those kinds of problems. I think considerable progress has been made. As I've observed in the later reports, if there are problems remaining I think they are primarily of the application of the actual procedures as opposed to the interpretation of the policies and benefit levels

and provisions and so forth. More work needs to be done, but through this ongoing committee liaison we have established with Treasury, I think we should be able to do our best to ensure that that problem is looked after.

MR. HARLE: Thank you. The second question I have relates to early retirement. As I understand it, one of the mechanisms that is possible for use in trying to reduce staff, when necessary, is that there are some individuals who might wish to take an early retirement. Has there been development of a program or a process that enables an individual to seek early retirement? What sort of guidelines are there for that step?

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Chairman, generally across government, policies having to do with the administration of pensions would lie with the Provincial Treasurer. But through the deputy ministers of each department there are some opportunities available, depending on circumstances of that department and the individual and the number of years service, where in fact early retirement may be one of the tools available to the deputy minister.

Basically the government has taken the position, though, that an early retirement program across government is not a program that will be used as part of the current streamlining, downsizing, of government. There are a couple of reasons for that. One is that in the private sector and in other large public-sector employers, it has been found that across-the-board programs of early retirement can lead to the loss to the employer of a number of employees with skills, career services, that in fact one does not wish to lose. In other words, by having a general program one might see a loss of the very people the government needs to manage through these difficult times. That's not to say, though, that one or more Crown corporations has not found an early retirement program very effective. One example is Alberta Government Telephones and its need to downsize, given the change in development of the urban areas. It is being used as an effective tool there, where the number of positions to be vacated was very large.

The other area is that our government feels, and our department policies reflect, that we should not lead the private sector. Certainly we do not want to lag in the case of benefits to employees, but we don't feel we should be leading. Many employers are not able to provide the pension programs that our government programs provide. Our program is a fairly rich program. When one reaches a certain number of years of service or age, there are opportunities to retire on an actuarially reduced pension or to no longer pay into the Pension Fund once one has reached a certain number of years of service, and still accumulate benefits. So we feel the program is still a voluntary decision for each employee to make rather than one across the board.

Jim, is there anything specific I've left out?

MR. DIXON: No, I don't think so.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I don't have any more people on the list. Are there any more questions of the minister? Seeing none, I would like to thank Mr. Stevens and Mr. Dixon for taking time out to appear

before our committee. We appreciate it; we know it takes time away from your busy schedules. Thank you very much.

I remind people that Public Accounts will meet next week, on May 30 at 10 a.m. Our guest at that time will be the Minister of Transportation, Mr. Moore.

Would somebody like to call for adjournment?

MR. R. MOORE: I move that we adjourn.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I take it we have unanimous consent on that.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

[The meeting adjourned at 11:06 a.m.]

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