



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Safety and Services

Department of Solicitor General and Public Security
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, March 17, 2010
6:30 p.m.

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Third Session**

Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services

Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC), Chair
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL), Deputy Chair

Boutilier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (Ind)
Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Nose Hill (PC)
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
Cao, Wayne C.N., Calgary-Fort (PC)
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)*
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (WA)
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)
MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)

* substitution for Doug Griffiths

Also in Attendance

Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND)

Department of Solicitor General and Public Security Participant

Hon. Frank Oberle Minister

Support Staff

W.J. David McNeil	Clerk
Louise J. Kamuchik	Clerk Assistant/Director of House Services
Micheline S. Gravel	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> /Table Research
Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Shannon Dean	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Corinne Dacyshyn	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Communications Services
Melanie Friesacher	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Philip Massolin	Committee Research Co-ordinator
Stephanie LeBlanc	Legal Research Officer
Diana Staley	Research Officer
Rachel Stein	Research Officer
Liz Sim	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

6:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

[Mr. Drysdale in the chair]

**Department of Solicitor General and Public Security
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: It's 6:30. I guess we'll call the meeting to order. Thanks. Welcome, everyone, to the meeting. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Department of Solicitor General and Public Security for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011.

We'll go around the table and introduce ourselves now. I'll ask the minister to introduce his staff at the table, please.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. With me tonight is Brad Pickering, Deputy Solicitor General and Deputy Minister of Public Security; Jim Bauer, assistant deputy minister of corporate services. Also from Solicitor General and Ministry of Public Security we've got Bruce Anderson, who is assistant deputy minister of correctional services; Bill Meade, the assistant deputy minister of public security division; and we've got Sharon Lopatka and Michelle Davio from the communications branch of that department. I've also got beside me Gerry McLennan, CEO of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission; and Ann Hammond, also from the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. Somewhere in here if he's not still using his BlackBerry is Mike Simpson, my executive assistant. He was squeezing in the last few strokes out there.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll start maybe with Mr. Fawcett and go around the table and introduce ourselves.

Mr. Fawcett: Kyle Fawcett, MLA, Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Mason: I'm Brian Mason, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Xiao: David Xiao, Edmonton-McClung.

Dr. Brown: I'm Neil Brown from Calgary-Nose Hill.

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

Mr. Kang: Darshan Kang, MLA, Calgary-McCall.

The Chair: Wayne Drysdale, MLA, Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Ms Calahasen: Pearl Calahasen, Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sandhu: Peter Sandhu, MLA, Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Cao: Last and short, MLA Wayne Cao from Calgary-Fort.

The Chair: Thank you. I'd like to note that pursuant to Standing Order 56(2.1) to (2.4) Mr. Fawcett is substituting for Mr. Griffiths this evening, and Mr. Anderson is supposed to be substituting for Mrs. Forsyth.

I'll just review the process quickly here. Standing Order 59.01(4) prescribes the sequence as follows: (a) the minister may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes; (b) for the hour that follows members of the Official Opposition party and the minister may speak; (c) for the next 20 minutes the members of the third party, that being Wildrose Alliance, if any, and the minister may speak; and (d) any member may speak thereafter.

With the concurrence of the committee the chair will recognize the member of the fourth party, the NDP, if any, following the member of the third party, and for the next 20 minutes the member of the fourth party and the minister may speak. I will call a five-minute break following the Official Opposition's time, at approximately 7:45. Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate. Department officials and members' staff may be present but may not address the committee.

Members may speak more than once; however, speaking time is limited to 10 minutes at a time. A minister and a member may combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their speech if they plan to combine their time with the minister's time.

Three hours have been scheduled for the consideration of estimates of the Department of Solicitor General and Public Security. If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the department's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn; otherwise, we will be adjourning at 9:30 p.m.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run.

The vote on the estimates is deferred until Committee of Supply on March 18, 2010.

I won't go over the amendments because they had to be in before now to be in order, and we don't have any amendments tonight.

Written response from the Solicitor General and Public Security to questions deferred during the course of this meeting can be tabled in the Assembly by the minister or through the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly for the benefit of all MLAs. A copy to the committee clerk would also be appreciated.

Now I'll invite the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security to begin your remarks.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to be here tonight to provide highlights from the Alberta Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security's estimates, discussions on the 2010-2013 business plan and the services and programs provided by the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. Of course, I'll answer a few questions after the presentation.

But this just came up: apparently, I have to leave early to give Mr. Kang a ride to the airport.

Mr. Mason: Take the long way around.

Mr. Oberle: Through the tunnel.

Of course, if time runs out, we'll provide answers in writing as well.

Our business plan outlines our ministry mandate to support safe and secure communities where Albertans can live, work, and raise their families. Our department meets that mandate by providing oversight and funding for policing services and programs in our province, secure correctional facilities to house offenders, assistance to the victims of crime, and oversight of the gaming and liquor industries in our province.

Our business plan identifies seven goals: one, to provide leadership for effective and innovative law enforcement; two, to ensure crime prevention and safety programs support a safe Alberta; three, to ensure officials and infrastructure in Alberta are safe and secure; four, to provide secure and efficient custody and community supervision; five, to ensure offenders have the opportunity to access rehabilitative services and programs; six, to ensure that victims of crime receive assistance, information, and support; and seven, to

ensure Alberta's liquor and gaming activities are conducted with integrity and in a socially responsible manner.

The budget for 2010-11 is \$641 million. That's a \$14 million increase over last year, and though it is an increase, the department faces very significant cost pressures. The cost pressures certainly exceed the increase that we received. Costs of contracts and manpower have increased; 84 per cent of this ministry's budget goes directly or indirectly to manpower. We looked at all areas of our operations for cost savings. We must certainly live within our means, so we had to make some difficult decisions. We refocused our efforts on strategic and critical areas to streamline our operations.

With the cost pressures that we had, we have new spending in 2010-11: \$23.8 million for salary settlements, inflationary pressures, dedicated revenue initiatives, and contract inflation and \$11.3 million for safe community initiatives, including the addition of 100 front-line police officers, fulfilling the Premier's commitment to add 300 officers over the three years, and this was the third year of the commitment.

We achieved some cost savings: \$20 million in fiscal corrections, including \$3.2 million for various sheriff functions in areas of perimeter security, fast and out-of-province escorts, and overtime; \$3.8 million in traffic sheriffs branch by sharing some information systems with the RCMP; \$4.6 million for correctional services, which includes the reduction to the Kainai contract, residential services, aboriginal contracts, and staffing; \$7.4 million reduction in funding the Alberta law enforcement response teams, ALERT; and reductions to corporate functions.

A quick overview of the public security division. That division is responsible for contract policing, police oversight, policing standards, and sheriffs. The budget is \$363 million, an increase of \$5.6 million: \$184 million to the provincial police services agreement, the PPSA, which is our contract with the RCMP to provide provincial policing. Under the PPSA RCMP provide policing for counties and municipal districts, Métis settlements, and communities with populations less than 5,000. We also provide significant support to municipal policing through the addition of the final wave of 100 new police officers, fulfilling the commitment to add 300 and \$49 million in municipal police assisting grants. Those two items total \$79 million for municipal policing. The sheriff's branch budget is \$50.7 million. The duties involve prisoner transport, court security, and traffic law enforcement.

6:40

The division is also responsible for victims of crime and the victims of crime fund. The budget for that is \$27 million this year. The fund ensures eligible victims of crime receive financial benefits. It's also used to help community groups and organizations establish programs and initiatives to meet the needs of victims of crime.

The correctional services division provides secure custody of inmates and supervision in community. Their budget is \$196 million. That's an \$8.7 million increase for contract inflation, salary settlements, and annual increments.

We operate four adult correctional centres in the province, four remand centres, and two young offenders' centres, and we supervise adult and young offenders in the community. We're currently in the process of constructing the new Edmonton remand centre, and that's progressing well, on track to open in 2012. I believe it's also on budget, under budget actually. It's a fabulous facility. If anybody's got a chance to visit it, I'd be glad to help organize a tour.

We're continuing to implement recommendations from the blueprint for corrections such as probation officers getting enhanced training, more effective monitoring, and supporting offenders in our communities.

The major initiatives in the ministry for 2010-2011 are the law enforcement framework. Our current law enforcement system needs modernization. Our system should allow communities maximum flexibility to respond to local crime issues. Communities must have equitable access to specialized policing services. We've consulted with policing partners and municipal leaders and continue to do so as we finalize that document.

We're proposing an innovative framework that includes service delivery, governance, and funding. We envision law enforcement as a network of services that's co-ordinated, seamless, integrated, and closely connected to the community. As part of that effort we're taking a hard look at current policing governance models, particularly police complaint and disciplinary processes. We need to be more efficient and more transparent. The draft framework is currently progressing through our government process. We have more consultation with policing partners and municipal leaders planned, particularly on the police funding model and on the oversight and complaint process.

We're working with Alberta Justice on implementing the gang strategy, a comprehensive and long-term gang suppression strategy. It's a strategy that co-ordinates the work of seven government ministries, and that strategy is part of the government's response to the recommendations of the safe communities task force.

We're working on a network radio system, which includes a province-wide network radio system to help ensure that first responders can communicate easily with each other in an emergency. We are out with a request for proposals right now. It closed in mid-January.

On the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission side, the commission ensures that gaming and liquor industries operate effectively, with integrity, and in a socially responsible manner. In 2010-2011 overall revenue is projected at \$2 billion. That's a decrease of \$83 million from '09-10, primarily due to economic conditions. The funds that we get from gaming and liquor activities are used to support programs and services that Albertans have said they want and they need.

The Alberta lottery fund is the government's share from the VLTs, slot machines, and ticket lotteries. Our share of the revenues go into the Alberta lottery fund: \$1.3 billion in gaming revenue is anticipated this year, slightly lower than in previous years. Thousands of public and community initiatives benefit from the Alberta lottery fund: community facilities, athletic events, arts and culture groups, et cetera. In past years gaming revenue was higher than forecast due to an increase in the number of casino facilities and a booming provincial economy. We don't see that this year.

These lottery revenues also fund horse racing. Horse racing has a long history in Alberta, a strong industry that benefits many in the agricultural communities: breeders, farmers. The industry generates about \$350 million a year and employs roughly 8,000 Albertans. We have a 10-year agreement with Horse Racing Alberta to provide funding to Alberta's horse-racing and breeding industry. The agreement expires on March 31, 2016. Grant funding for HRA, or Horse Racing Alberta, comes from slot machines at racetracks, and this funding also contributes to the Alberta lottery fund programs. In 2008-2009 the HRA grant was \$36 million, in '09-10 it was forecast to finish at about \$25 million and in '10-11 as well, at \$25 million.

The decline in the grant is due . . .

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Minister; your time is exceeded. I can see you've got a ways to go, but the allotted time is over.

The next hour is for the Official Opposition and the minister. Mr. Hehr, I assume you want to go back and forth with your time?

Mr. Hehr: Yes. We'll just go back and forth. If I do have a question and we're going along and I kindly interrupt you, please don't take any disrespect from that. I'm just finding that I've gotten enough out of that answer if that sounds fair.

Mr. Oberle: Yes.

Mr. Hehr: Perfect. That sounds great.

I guess that if we're looking at things, I'd like to start off with policing. The Premier has done a fairly good job of catching up on some of those police numbers with the addition of 300 police officers. He has followed through on that commitment. When I came into office, there was a little bit of a shortfall in that regard if you compared it vis-à-vis other jurisdictions. If we look, I think, at those November 16, 2007, numbers, Alberta had 165.1 police officers per 100,000 people, and that at the time was one of the lowest values nation-wide, and it certainly was, at least when compared to other jurisdictions that were going through some of the things we were.

I guess I'm asking: can the Solicitor General inform me of what effect the additional police officers will have on this number per 100,000 people? Is it going to go up from there, or have our population numbers equalled that out?

Mr. Oberle: Well, it will certainly go up from there. I haven't calculated the statistic, but it will go up from there. I want to point out to the hon. member that comparisons like that aren't always useful. I don't believe the number you're quoting includes sheriffs and peace officers, which we utilize, for example in traffic enforcement, which other provinces don't.

Mr. Hehr: Would your department at this time be able to calculate that number as an estimate? Would you guys be able to do that?

Mr. Oberle: We can, and we will get it back to you. That will be provided in writing.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much. Last year, for the hundred police officers that were budgeted for, we were provided a breakdown by geographic area where they were deployed to. This year it's probably still there; I just couldn't find it. Last year Calgary saw 41, and I believe that number will remain the same. Edmonton saw 35. How many this year? How many in other jurisdictions? If you could provide me where those new officers will be located.

Mr. Oberle: Again, 41 in Calgary, 35 in Edmonton, 20 RCMP officers, and those ones are allocated across the province by the RCMP to meet their detachment needs, and they target their highest crime detachments. I haven't seen the distribution of those 20 yet, but they're across the province where the RCMP provides the municipal policing. The remaining four are assigned to Lacombe, Camrose, Lethbridge, I think, and Medicine Hat.

Mr. Hehr: Those 20 that are coming on: are they currently on the job, or do they arrive when the federal money kicks in in September for them?

Mr. Oberle: All of the officers that are committed under that hundred: I'm informed by all of the forces that they'll all be on the street before the end of this calendar year.

Mr. Hehr: This calendar year. Okay. Fair enough.

Do you know which Alberta police services are currently

operating at a level short of their authorized strength? Do you guys have a list of that?

Mr. Oberle: I don't have a list. I'll hazard a guess that all of them are. Everybody has vacant positions from time to time, not because of funding but because of need to fill a vacant position.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. What you're saying to me is that the funding is available to operate all of our police services at their authorized strength level.

Mr. Oberle: Our funding is there, Mr. Hehr. I can't tell you what the cities have committed to their police forces. They may have made budgetary corrections this year that hold, for example, vacant positions in abeyance for a year. I can't comment on that. Our funding is there as it's described in this budget.

6:50

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Well, your funding is there. Could I still get a list, then, of the Alberta police services that are not operating at their authorized strength, obviously, through not having a contribution from either one level of government or another? I guess you can always argue about that, but if we could get that, that would help me.

Mr. Oberle: I don't know that I could actually supply you that information. You'd have to talk to the individual police agencies. On the policing that we fund, the RCMP and the sheriffs, I can provide you with staffing complements.

Mr. Hehr: Well, do your best. Provide me with what you can. If you can't get it, I understand. You're going to use your best efforts and go from there. If you can provide it, just use your best efforts, and if you can't provide it, then I understand.

Are Edmonton and Calgary hiring enough members to maintain an enforcement rate greater than 170 per 100,000? Given your estimates, would you know if that number would be achieved?

Mr. Oberle: I don't. I'm not responsible for staffing the Edmonton and Calgary police forces. I'm responsible for supplying them with funding, which I do through a number of avenues, and providing police oversight through ASIRT and a number of other mechanisms. But we don't dictate to Edmonton and Calgary how many officers they should have, and I really don't know what their complements are. You'd have to talk to a city councillor about that.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. I know that. Nevertheless, you are in charge of policing over this whole province. For whatever reason – for budget shortfalls, economic depression, what have you – I assume it would behoove you to get an area some of the funding they would need. That's why I'm asking some of these questions. Again, I realize there are different distinctions.

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. I can provide you with what we understand to be total numbers in those forces right now. Calgary has 1,764, and Edmonton has 1,492. I can't tell you whether those positions are fully staffed, whether the city has targeted in their upcoming budget to maintain those, increase them, decrease them. I can't tell you that.

Mr. Hehr: That's fair. It's just that those numbers help me. Maybe at some point in time, when I go back and look at things, that type of information is helpful to me.

When retirements occur, are those factored in? We say that we're

having 300 additional police officers hitting the street. A retirement happens. Obviously, that position is backfilled plus the 300 new people coming onto the streets.

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. In fact, our commitment to the province and our arrangement with the cities is that our 300 officers are not designed to fill created vacancies within those departments or to relieve other people's budgets. They are additional officers on the street.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. I guess it goes to this sort of question: when retirements are happening in our various jurisdictions around the province, are you able to answer whether they are able to get enough qualified police recruits into those positions?

Mr. Oberle: Well, all of the municipal police forces do their own recruiting and most of their own training if not all of their own training, and I can't comment on that. I bet you that the police forces, like anybody else, are challenged to find recruits at times, and they've been running vacancies at times. But they work very hard to recruit, as do we, and sooner or later you're able to fill positions.

Mr. Hehr: Well, why don't we talk about that right now? Let's jump into that. Calgary right now provides its own training and recruitment of officers. Is that correct?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah, that's correct. They're an independent police force run by the city of Calgary.

Mr. Hehr: Does Edmonton?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Then what areas does the province hire and train police officers for?

Mr. Oberle: We hire and train sheriffs under our department. We have contracts with the other police agencies that provide policing services, so the RCMP. The RCMP does their own recruiting and training. You will probably know that the RCMP does their training at the depot in Saskatchewan. We recruit sheriffs and train them ourselves.

Mr. Hehr: Fort McMurray: do they have a police service? Where do they train? Who does their training of officers?

Mr. Oberle: Fort McMurray is policed by the RCMP. There is no Fort McMurray police service. So there the RCMP recruit, train, and provide officers to fulfill the terms of their contract.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. The Medicine Hat Police Service.

Mr. Oberle: Medicine Hat has an independent police service.

Mr. Hehr: They hire and train their own?

Mr. Oberle: They hire and train, yeah.

Mr. Hehr: Lethbridge as well?

Mr. Oberle: Lethbridge as well, yeah.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Help me, then. If all these people are independent and they train their own officers currently – let's just jump right

to this. The vision of the Fort Macleod police site: was it to train, then, all of these officers from Calgary, through Edmonton, to Lethbridge, to Lac La Biche? Was it to train all of these officers for these various different departments?

Mr. Oberle: I'll beg the member's minor indulgence here. I wasn't involved in the vision of the original facility. I know that the idea was to provide at least some of the training for all of the police forces. I don't actually think that it's wise or desirable to have a flat, uniform training for all of the police services in Alberta. I think that there's value in independence, cultural pride, best practices, and comparison thereafter, but there are certain things that certainly could be combined in training and certain things that we would like to see standard across police forces.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. I understand that. I'm not commenting on whether Fort Macleod is needed, necessarily. I realize that it wasn't on your watch that this project was envisioned. Nevertheless, I'm hopeful that you're confident that these institutions right now are handling their own policing, recruiting, and all that stuff and that they're able to get qualified people trained in their own facilities in their own manner.

Mr. Oberle: Well, my department is responsible for police oversight. Nobody can operate a police force in this province without the approval of our department, and they have to meet certain standards. Their chiefs and officers and their police commission have to be staffed by people of a certain standard. I'm confident, in fact extremely confident about the level of policing in our province and of the calibre of police forces we have.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Well, then, let's talk about the elephant in the room. Are we going to go ahead with Fort Macleod, with that project there? Is it still on the books? I say in all sincerity that I really don't care where it's built as long as people are able to staff police in this province. If the police commissions, whether that's in the city of Calgary or Edmonton or Lethbridge or Medicine Hat, like the situation the way it is, if they're able to do it, fine. But if we need it, you know, then that's something else even if Fort Macleod is the best location. I know I've rattled off a whole bunch of things there, but if you could do your best to sort of answer those.

Mr. Oberle: Well, need is an interesting word to choose, Mr. Hehr. For example, I can train sheriffs right now in Alberta. We have a staff college right here in the city. I can train sheriffs here now. So need is kind of an interesting word to use, as I put it. The college, as it was considered, did not work. We did not attract the private funding, and we did not identify a self-sustaining training model there.

My task is to find a model that will provide cost-effective training compared to what we have today, and in order to do that, I'll have to draw in other police forces or resources to do that. That is my task, and I will do that. Then the next task: having done that, now I have to find a way to profile that in our capital plan. It's not there right now, so I can't make any commitment.

What I did commit to in a meeting with the Fort Macleod community: first of all, the location is chosen. It's going to be Fort Macleod for a whole bunch of reasons, not the least of which, of course, is historical and the connection that that particular community has to policing in Alberta. That's one: it's going to be in Fort Macleod.

Second of all, I will try as hard as I can to achieve those two things and to profile that facility and try to get it built. I believe we

can, and I'm going to work on it. I will be travelling, actually, next Tuesday to Fort Macleod to speak to a community gathering there and tell them essentially that.

Mr. Hehr: I understand it's a difficult position for you when you have a community who wants their police college built. I also understand that difficult decisions have to be made. Do the Calgary and Edmonton police forces want to have their officers trained in Fort Macleod? Do they find that this is the place where they want their police officers trained?

7:00

Mr. Oberle: Well, there's maybe a little bit of a chicken and egg argument there, for lack of anything better. I believe you were in the press conference when we announced the 300 officers, where Chief Hanson from Calgary said: "If you build it, we will come, essentially. We will use it." The RCMP themselves have committed that they will do a portion of their training for Alberta recruits at the college if it's there. I have to get solid commitments and then, you know, profile a facility around that. That's what I'm working on. I don't have letters saying that we will commit X number of dollars or X number of officers but certainly letters of support.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. This is just a comment. Obviously, I haven't studied this in as great a detail as your committee has, but you look at young men and women going to train in a place, probably for a week, setting up residence for, I believe, a 12- or 14-week program to become a police officer.

Mr. Oberle: Twenty-eight weeks, actually.

Mr. Hehr: Well, there we go. Twenty-eight weeks in a community. You know, Fort Macleod might not be the first place where they want to go to train and to attract personnel. Maybe I'm wrong, but that might be a question: am I going to pack up my life to go to Fort Macleod for 28 weeks? I don't know. Has that question come up? Has that concern been mentioned, whether this is truly the best place to be recruiting young people to come work, to attract the best and the brightest people to come and work in Alberta policing?

Mr. Oberle: Well, as an MLA from rural Alberta, if only in jest, I'm going to take offence to your characterization of having to spend 28 weeks in such a place. They're not there for the night life. They're there for the training. If the facility can provide the level of training, the quality of training we need, that's where they go.

Mr. Hehr: I understand that. I realize that. I played junior hockey in some small towns. Some of the best times of my life were spent in Olds and Lloydminster, so I realize there are some opportunities to have fun or get into trouble, so to speak, there as well. Needless to say, that's not what this conversation is about.

If we can sort of go back to other jurisdictions, are a lot of police officers retiring at this time throughout the province? Do you guys know this? Is our police force aging like many of our others?

Mr. Oberle: Not that I'm aware of. I don't know if we have any demographic information right at our fingertips here, but not that I'm aware of. I think police officers, like the rest of Albertans, are a pretty young profile overall.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Can we talk about sheriffs here quickly? How many sheriffs do we have? Can you do your best to sort of break down the various departments that sheriffs work in and the numbers

associated with them all? I realize there would be maybe X number for traffic, X number for our community drug reduction work.

Mr. Oberle: Okay. We have 603 sheriffs right now. Traffic is 115 of those, protection service is 73, and 410 are court security and prisoner transport. Then we have five in head office. About two-thirds are court security and prisoner transfer.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Out of the 115 that are in charge of traffic violations, are they dispersed throughout the province?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. We're just in the process of transitioning them to 19 centres of integration with the RCMP across the province. Over the next two years we'll be locating them in 19 centres across the province. They're providing integrated traffic operations with the RCMP. It's a good model of integration, but it also provides us 19 centres with a critical mass of officers that allows us to do roadside safety checks, checkstops, those kinds of things. You can't do a checkstop in Manning, for example. You have two officers in the detachment there. You can never pull off a checkstop. There are big reaches of this province that are difficult to service that way, so this integrated model will spread a complement of officers across the province.

Mr. Hehr: Now, would you have these numbers? How many of these sheriffs doing traffic duty would be, then, former police officers? Do you have numbers?

Mr. Oberle: I wouldn't have those. I'll mark that down. I don't know that we could supply that, but we'll find out.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. I believe the sheriffs – and I should have this name in my notes, but I don't – are also assisting with some drug enforcement work. Can you remind me of that program name? How many sheriffs are working in Calgary and Edmonton and other jurisdictions on that work?

Mr. Oberle: I believe you're referring to the ALERT model of policing, which is an integration with the RCMP. There are officers supplied by the Calgary Police Service, the Edmonton Police Service, one officer from the Medicine Hat Police Service, and then a number of sheriffs involved in that. They're a collaborative sort of interjurisdictional crime unit, and they work across the province. There are a number of teams that are housed under that ALERT model: the integrated child exploitation, for example; the FASST teams, which seek out repeat offenders or long-term offenders; a couple of other police models under that. There are 62 sheriffs committed to that model right now, to ALERT. ALERT is a big organization.

Mr. Hehr: That's their primary job? They're not charged with traffic duty or anything else. They are working primarily at the direction of ALERT?

Mr. Oberle: No. ALERT is actually a nine-part company. It's run independently, and those officers are committed to ALERT. Now, the actual officers may move in and out from time to time, and some of the municipal police services' officers do, but when they move out, they're replaced.

Mr. Hehr: Okay.

Mr. Oberle: There are that many officers committed to ALERT.

You probably have heard the successes that ALERT has had across the province in drug busts and firearms.

Mr. Hehr: They're well publicized, as well they should be.

Mr. Oberle: You bet. Gee, I wonder how that happened.

Mr. Hehr: Exactly. I see that. It seems like it's been effective at doing some of these measures that Albertans want. So if it's working, great. What can I say?

I guess that if we talk about sheriffs, too, right now there's no civilian oversight for sheriffs, and that to me is a little bit of a concern. Am I wrong in that? I believe the deputy minister – not that I don't have the utmost faith in him and his abilities and all that stuff. I believe the best way to do this is probably to have some civilian oversight to our policing models. I think, you know, Robert Peel, the originator of police forces, said that it was important in this process. I think sheriffs are doing more of the heavy legwork. I think it's going to be good that they're doing some of this, you know, clamping down on drinking and driving and all that stuff and working on our ALERT teams. But, nonetheless, you get the point.

Mr. Oberle: I do, and if I could comment on that. The sheriffs are provided civilian oversight, the same as all RCMP or all police officers in the province are. Complaints against sheriffs are investigated by the professional standards unit, which is independent of the sheriffs branch. It's a government unit. Disciplinary action is taken by the sheriffs branch as required and appropriate when directed. There is a civilian sheriff appeals delegate that conducts an impartial review if requested. That's actually Don McDermid, who was a former RCMP commissioner in Alberta. Any criminal allegations are turned over to the police. We can have those criminal allegations investigated by a police force or by ASIRT, which is, again, an independent investigative unit. So we are providing oversight.

That being said, I mentioned earlier that the whole complaints oversight model in Alberta for sheriffs and all police forces is under review right now and will be updated, I think would be a good word, in the law enforcement framework.

Mr. Hehr: I believe the Edmonton Police Service, in fact, has asked for that to happen. Is that not correct?

Mr. Oberle: I believe so. They haven't asked me, but all police forces are concerned about it, and the Calgary Police Service directly asked me about it. It's something they would all like to see. Transparency, accountability is good for all of us.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. If my memory is correct, I think I asked some questions in question period, of course, spurred by the *Edmonton Journal*, that reported that the Edmonton people also wanted it. I could be barking up the wrong tree, but I'm pretty sure that that has happened as well, so I'm glad.

Do you have any timelines on sort of when you're looking to bring in that extra accountability?

7:10

Mr. Oberle: I want to table a complete law enforcement framework before the end of the calendar year. You have to recognize that oversight and complaints involve a larger stakeholder audience here. I have to speak to municipalities that run police commissions and police committees and those sorts of things. I bet that the criminal trial lawyers will want to have some say in the matter and those sorts of things. I have a larger stakeholder group to consult with, but my

commitment is to have the law enforcement framework wrapped up by the end of the year.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. If we could just sort of move on to corrections. Obviously, you're aware that we've had a significant increase in our inmate populations since 2000. I think it's a 60 per cent increase. You might have better numbers than I do. Anyway, there are a lot of prisoners. I know you're building the remand centre in 2012, but if we could talk about those things. How many people is the Calgary Remand Centre, I guess, housing a night, and how many was it initially supposed to hold?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. I don't have the actual initial construction numbers for Calgary. I know that Edmonton, for example, was something in the 350 kind of range, and it runs significantly over that. It's running 700, 800 at times; 750, let's say, for an average. I don't have the exact number here in front of me.

Calgary runs around 700, and I'm told that it was designed around 350.

Now, you have to recognize that those facilities were designed as single bunk, and now they're double-bunked, and when we need to, they're triple-bunked.

Mr. Hehr: Which is a concern to me, as it probably is to you. These people have been charged with a crime, but they're not guilty of a crime. We're going to get more into this, but there is a difference. I'm sure you appreciate that. The real, I guess, theory of time in remand should recognize the fact that these people are only charged and are not guilty of anything. At least, that's my personal philosophy. You know, when you're convicted, yeah, that can be a different story.

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. I wholeheartedly agree with you with the caveat, you recognize, that when you're held in remand, you're there because you're considered a danger to society – right? – guilty or not.

Mr. Hehr: I hear you. Nevertheless, I grew up with the saying that 10 guilty men walk free for the life of one innocent man. I realize that ebbs and flows of those things happen over time. Needless to say, those are my thoughts on remand, and they're on the record. We'll leave it as such.

Mr. Oberle: That's spoken like a prosecutor who never made very much money in the business.

Mr. Hehr: There you go. Exactly. I hear you.
Does Fort McMurray have a type of remand?

Mr. Oberle: No. I don't have a remand facility in Fort McMurray.

Mr. Hehr: That's RCMP.

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. We only have Edmonton, Calgary. We house some remand at Fort Saskatchewan, and I have Red Deer and Medicine Hat as well.

Mr. Hehr: Could you give me the numbers of what they're holding right now and what, then, they were originally built for?

Mr. Oberle: I'll get them for you. Just carry on.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Fair enough. That's great.

Here's another, I guess, couple of things on that. Let's move into what we've talked about in question period over the last couple of days: the Kainai corrections facility. Was that for remand, or was that for people who were convicted of crimes?

Mr. Oberle: No. That's a correctional facility. It's not a remand facility.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. You know, let's face it. It was the only one designed in Alberta for the housing of native prisoners. In my view, that is one of the problems in the criminal justice system, that so many aboriginal people are being locked up, rightly or wrongly. It's one of those situations we as government should be worried about in trying to work towards ameliorating or getting better results or trying to work on that number coming down. At least the idea of the Kainai corrections service appears to me to be a good one. Whether it's operating as such, whether it's not, it appears to me that at least the idea of it seems to be a good one. I realize it's budget cutting time, and I'm surprised that this place, with this philosophy and the only one dedicated to it in Alberta, would be closing. I'll let you comment.

Mr. Oberle: Well, I will comment on that. It's not the only correctional facility in Alberta constructed to house aboriginal inmates. As you'll know – and you yourself quoted a statistic in the House – a large percentage of our inmates are aboriginal, and certainly nowhere near that percentage could be housed at the Kainai facility. We house aboriginal clients across the spectrum of our facilities.

With respect to the Kainai facility itself, while I may have some considerable understanding or sympathy or support for the facility, the bottom line remains that it's not just about aboriginals. It's about a profile of prisoners that I have to provide custodial services for. The fact of the matter is that that's a minimum security facility, and I don't have minimum security prisoners to stick in it, so it runs at lower capacity.

That being said, on even that you could make an argument, "Well, you know, it's a community," and I understand the argument. I get it. But the bottom line for me is that if the facility was full, it would cost me over a million dollars a year to house 24 inmates, that I can house at about \$200,000 in an existing facility right now.

Mr. Hehr: Then let's turn to other existing facilities. What kind of budget are you devoting to, I guess, any native programs or holistic native healing mechanisms, anything that specializes in or tries to ameliorate the aboriginal difficulties we currently find in the Alberta justice system?

Mr. Oberle: Well, we offer some form of native programming in all of our facilities, including young offender facilities, and I'll give you an example. In the aboriginal-focused programs at the Lethbridge Correctional Centre, which is where many of the inmates would be housed, we have a full-time native program co-ordinator, who specifically addresses the needs of native offenders; regular visits by native elders who provide sweat lodge and other religious ceremonies; the native community connections program; release planning for natives; native brotherhood and sisterhood programs; and a healing circle program for both male and female offenders. I think you can see that philosophy carried across our correctional facilities. You've got to see the healing circle room in the new Edmonton remand. You'll be astounded. The programming that we can deliver there will be very impressive.

Mr. Hehr: Do we have a budget number? Could I get that exact budget number? How much is dedicated to those programs?

Mr. Oberle: I'll have to provide that.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. That would be great.

Are we doing anything, besides waiting for the Edmonton Remand Centre to be built in 2012, to ameliorate the conditions as they exist with the extra 800 people being housed in a place for 450?

Mr. Oberle: We are. There's certainly a heightened sense of urgency because of the Marceau court decision. I need to point out, though, that that was kind of a snapshot in time. It involved a whole raft of complaints, only four of which were found to be valid, and we've addressed most of them. The problem we have is that actually, surprisingly, you couldn't simply characterize it as overcrowding. It is a very significant number of inmates in an environment where you can't very simply move people around. You have to keep this gang separate from that gang. You have to keep these drug offenders away from those people that don't want to be on drugs. The sex offenders have to be kept somewhere else. It's a very, very complex environment of moving prisoners around while ensuring their security and the safety of our officers.

We have housed more remand clients at Fort Saskatchewan, and we've changed our models. We have exercise equipment located in the pods now, so they get more frequent access to exercise. We're moving them out for fresh air more frequently. We have additional adjustments to make, but we're working on it. We can't and we aren't just relying on the fact that the new facility will be available in 2012.

7:20

Mr. Hehr: But those changes, however positive they may be, do not change the fact that there's significant overcrowding in the remand locations, both in Calgary and Edmonton. Is there any way of exploring if there could be – I don't know what. Has your ministry looked at some other things that they could do on a reasonable cost basis that could house maybe a hundred of these people a night?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I think you also need to recognize that the Marceau decision wasn't really aimed, from my understanding of it, at the broad profile of our remand inmates. It was aimed at some longer term inmates, that are in that facility for a very long time. As a lawyer I'm sure you're aware that some of them are in there. The average length of stay in a remand province-wide is 18 days. We move clients through very quickly, and those clients are not part of the concern here. Only 11 per cent of our inmates stay between 30 and 90 days; 2 per cent or fewer of the inmates stay in remand longer than 90 days.

It's the long-term clients that we're really concerned about and both their physical and mental health and access to exercise, fresh air, and interaction. That's the issue that we have. We have reduced the client load in there, though. We're moving remand clients out to Fort Saskatchewan. We're operating remand out of there as well.

Mr. Hehr: Through all that, you're not looking at providing any more temporary facilities to alleviate the population?

Mr. Oberle: No. We believe we can manage our way through this. The issue is not going to be the number of beds. It's going to be the number of officers I have to put on the floor, the staffing models to move these people around, the temporary holding cells to put a guy in here while we move another guy that's dangerous to this guy.

Those kinds of operational difficulties are, really, the reason that we're in this in the first place. If everybody was all happy, we could house more clients in the remand centre, and we wouldn't have to worry about it. They could all go outside and exercise at the same time. Clearly, that can't happen.

Mr. Hehr: How many people in our remand system to this date have been there for longer than a year and a half?

Mr. Oberle: Well, less than 2 per cent of our client load. I don't know that I could give you that number right now.

Mr. Hehr: Can you get me that number?

Mr. Oberle: For longer than a year and a half?

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. Thanks.

Let's talk about staffing, then, of remand institutions. Tell me: has your staffing increased since, let's say – pick a year – 2003? Tell me about the staff increases that have occurred in Edmonton and Calgary remand, just to pick those as an example, and what the staff is doing.

Mr. Oberle: I would have to provide that to you in writing. My figures don't go back to 2003.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Have we increased the number of corrections officials on per shift given the numbers that currently exist in remand?

Mr. Oberle: I believe we have. Maybe we'll provide you a little better profile than that. I wouldn't be surprised if our overall corrections staff has decreased over that long of a period because you'll recognize that we have already closed a number of minimum security facilities. I believe that over that length of time certainly our staffing in a particular facility would have increased commensurate with the inmate population increase.

Mr. Hehr: Well, let's just pick those two places, Edmonton and Calgary. If you guys could do your best to give me since 2005 data on how many more employees you have in those facilities, what you're doing to increase, if you have the number of people on shifts, whether you're flowing them through more frequently to different sections of the prison, whatever best information. You guys know better than I do what information I'm looking for. Primarily, I'm looking for: how are these prisons operated, are these people safe, and are inmates reasonably safe?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I'll tell you what. I will certainly endeavour to get you what numbers we can get you, but it's not going to tell you how our facilities operate. Any time you want, let's head out to the remand centre and have a look. You've got to see it. I've had the pleasure of attending the Edmonton Remand Centre, the young offenders' centre in Edmonton, and then to look at the new construction. You've got to see it because it's hard to visualize what happens there. It's quite something to see. I think you'll be astounded by the staffing level and their professionalism. So any time you want.

Mr. Hehr: I understand that. However, I also maybe come with a frame of reference, having read that whole Marceau decision, that paints a different picture than the one you just gave me. Trust me; I'll take it with a grain of salt.

Mr. Oberle: Sure, which is why I invite you to the facility rather than taking my word for it.

Mr. Hehr: I hear you, and I thank you for that offer. Nevertheless, we've got to still work on some of those things. Thank you very much for getting me that information.

If we could move on to sort of our victims of crime program. I believe it was a good change you guys made yesterday, but can you tell me about your victims of crime program: where you guys are going, what you're doing, what programs you're funding? Do you see an increase in that funding this year going out to groups? If you could help me with that.

Mr. Oberle: We didn't announce any changes to the victims of crime fund itself yesterday. We announced changes to the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, which relates to our ability to seize and hold the assets of criminals and then disburse those. The victims of crime fund is kind of separate from that, and it's a surcharge on court-imposed fines.

Now, one of the things we could do with the proceeds of seized property would be to transfer some into the victims of crime fund. I'm unaware right at the moment . . .

Mr. Hehr: I understand. I got mixed up.

What are your projections for the surplus this year? Do you guys have a projected number? What do you guys estimate the surplus to be as of this date or as close to this date as you can give me?

Mr. Oberle: If I recall, we're talking something in the neighbourhood of \$45 million in the fund. That's right.

Mr. Hehr: So that has come down since last year. It was 47 point some million dollars last year.

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. It has decreased a bit. I guess we could always talk about the number – that's the number that we proposed – but I think you'd probably agree that we should run some form of a surplus in there to ensure a predictable, stable, sustainable level of funding into the future. We don't want that fund to evaporate at some point.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah, and I understand that. You know, the fund has been in existence for some time and, we have seen, fairly level. If there are valid programs out there to be funded, I think this government through that fund maybe should take up some of those opportunities. Maybe we don't need quite as large a surplus, and I think that's why you have us questioning that surplus every 14th day in question period.

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. The Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, that we discussed yesterday, or the amendments to it will provide a lot of our program funding off to the side; community crime prevention initiatives, for example. It might help us make the impact on this fund or the draw on this fund more predictable and more sustainable.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Thank you.

Now, I guess I got ahead of that thing. Is your ministry offering services to victims? I know it does. You do some of that through the victims of crime fund. You offer some opportunities for them to not only get money but some counselling and stuff. In how many languages does your ministry, I guess, serve right now?

Mr. Oberle: Oh, that would be a good question. We've translated

our services into a number of different languages, and we have a private contractor that does that for us. A good amount of the service that we provide is funded through the victims of crime fund to community organizations. Many of those are local, community, ethnic kinds of organizations that provide culturally appropriate services. We fund them more than directly provide them. In 11 different languages, I'm informed.

7:30

Mr. Hehr: So if an individual has a complaint to make in the city of Calgary, you guys have 11 different languages. When that person indicates to your officer, "I speak Chinese, or I speak something," you guys can then take the complaint. Is that how it works? I'm just seeking information right now.

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. If the complaint or the concern is voiced to the victim services unit, yeah. Whether every one of those offers 11 languages, I don't know, but certainly they could put them in contact with somebody that can provide culturally appropriate services.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Now, we talked about some of those programs that are available in jail, I guess, but outside of jail how much money? Is your ministry involved in any of the activities that are looked at to reduce the victimization of some people in Alberta aboriginal communities or aboriginal individuals in the cities? Is there any money from your department going to programs specifically to deal with that situation, whether on lowering the offence numbers or lowering the number of people who are victimized?

Mr. Oberle: Well, under the victims of crime grant program we provide significant funding to crime prevention groups, community education groups, initiatives by police forces or municipalities to work with youth, for example. There is a significant amount of funding there.

Mr. Hehr: Can you identify for me the ones that are going specifically to native groups?

Mr. Oberle: No, I can't. We could probably provide that. We're looking at '10-11. It's about \$11.3 million that will be provided to victims' programs. Then we do grants to community organizations, \$150,000 in grants to organizations, except in Edmonton and Calgary, where we can go up to \$300,000 for police-based programs.

I'm sorry, Mr. Hehr. Can you just remind me what that last question was that you were looking for?

Mr. Hehr: I was just seeking information on how much money your department was providing this year towards ameliorating aboriginal groups from becoming victimized and/or becoming victimizers. I don't know if that's correct. Maybe Dr. Brown could help me with my linguistics there, but you get the point of where I'm going.

Mr. Oberle: I got it.

Ms Calahasen: He's a lawyer.

Mr. Hehr: Exactly. Exactly. Well, so am I, but my vocabulary might not be as good as his. Nonetheless, there we go.

If we can talk to the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. I know that you have instituted some new policies and things in that direction, which I think will be good. But since the round-table on violence in licensed premises issued its recommendations, how many outstanding recommendations are left for implementation?

Mr. Oberle: I'm sorry. Outstanding recommendations from where?

Mr. Hehr: From the round-table on violence in licensed premises. Do we have that report there? I'm sort of jumping all over the place. Sorry about that, guys.

Mr. Oberle: I can speak to the programs that have come out of that. I don't actually have the document here that would say how many outstanding recommendations. I don't believe any.

Mr. Hehr: Do you know if we've had an increase or decrease of violence around bars, restaurants, those types of things that serve liquor? Is that difficult to judge?

Mr. Oberle: Very difficult to measure. The perception might be that we have an increase, but some of the incidents happen at raves that are not licensed facilities and not regulated by my department. We believe we're doing some really good work in bars and lounges, and that's our intention. We want to make an evening's entertainment in Alberta safe and attractive to people, and we're going to do what we can. We've got a number of bar programs: ProTect, which is an educational program for security personnel; ProServe, an educational program for liquor staff. There is a whole raft.

Mr. Hehr: In terms of the ProTect program, what is the total number of staff working at licensed premises that have completed the ProTect program? Are there people actually using the system or people taking the course?

Mr. Oberle: I guess they would come and go. I couldn't tell you how many security personnel there are in bars, for example. Some would be casual hires, that kind of thing. But we regulate that. Oh, actually we have trained 4,321 security staff through Alberta.

Mr. Hehr: So security are the traditional bouncers or doormen?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah, bouncers, doormen, that sort of thing. We've trained something like 77,000 servers in the province.

Mr. Hehr: And that's on the ProServe program?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. I think the thing is you're supposed to have at all times one person working in a bar who's completed ProServe. Or is it now that everyone who serves a drink in a bar needs to have ProServe?

Mr. Oberle: In a bar everyone that serves. It depends on your liquor licence. If you're at your family's weekend wedding that has a liquor licence, the requirements are different. But in a bar everyone, yeah.

Mr. Hehr: Have you guys been out checking on that, your enforcement people?

Mr. Oberle: Yes. Absolutely.

Mr. Hehr: When was the ProServe requirement put in place, January 1?

Mr. Oberle: Mandatory January 1 that everyone had to have it.

Mr. Hehr: I guess, then, how many violations have been written to places that didn't have a server who had ProServe in that time?

Mr. Oberle: You could count them on one hand, I think. There are very few. The AGLC did 33,000 inspections on licensed facilities last year. We're on them. We genuinely want to improve the performance in our bars and provide a safe environment for Albertans.

Mr. Hehr: I think the ProServe program is very good, and I think it's commendable that we're making servers take it. At the same time, is it the strategy of the ministry to give these people a little bit of lead time before you start checking this out? Say that you have a young lady or a young man who's serving me a rye and coke in a local pub and they don't have a ProServe thing, when your guy comes in, will they receive a ticket or will that bar be shut down? What happens?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Hehr, I have to say that the people that provide this entertainment experience in Alberta by and large are a very responsible bunch of people. It's their business, and they all recognize it. They've been very supportive of our program. They have 30 days from the day of hire to train this person. So if we encounter somebody that isn't compliant, they have 30 days. Typically, we'll issue a warning. We try to work with people rather than arrest them. I have to say that the entertainment business in Alberta has been very co-operative.

Mr. Hehr: I realize that there are a number of turnovers and all that stuff. The reason I ask is that people are overserved all the time. You know it. I know it. It's not highly enforced. So at least if at some point in time – have you guys figured out, then, your process after you've given them 30 days' notice? Are you going to start laying some more, I guess, restrictive penalties on repeat offenders? Is that the plan? When do we see those? I guess that's sort of where I'm heading. Do you give any direction to your officers in the field about when to start saying: "That guy didn't have a server working there six months ago. Go back there, and if he doesn't have one, shut him down"?

Mr. Oberle: We have an escalating vigilance. Of course, over time you develop a profile of the people that you're dealing with, and you know who the good ones and the bad ones are.

But I do need to take objection to your comment that people are overserved all the time. I'm sure it happens occasionally, but the number of people that attend licensed facilities in our province and come home with a reasonable and lesser amount of alcohol consumption – we would rate with anybody. We run good, safe bars in this province. Maybe I have a longer drinking history than you do, but I'll tell you that the profile has changed over my lifetime. It's unbelievable. Absolutely unbelievable.

7:40

Mr. Hehr: I appreciate the hon. member inviting me to the corrections facilities, so maybe I'll invite him out one Friday night to some of the places I run at, and then he may see that what I'm speaking of is somewhat true. Nevertheless, that invitation stands, and you can bring some of your staff along as well.

Mr. Oberle: Well, I'll take up that invitation. I'm a cheap date, I'll tell you that.

Any time you have a complaint about people being overserved in bars or activity in bars that you don't think is in keeping with how they should be run, you let us know.

Mr. Hehr: I'm not going to report myself. I'm joking here, tongue-in-cheek, of course. But there we go.

I guess we can talk to responsible gaming centres. How many people were users that registered in the responsible gaming centres this past year?

Mr. Oberle: For over three years now we've staffed responsible gambling information centres. There are 16 of them in casinos and racing entertainment centres across the province. I don't think I have the actual number of people that have attended or registered.

Mr. Hehr: Can you get those numbers for me?

Mr. Oberle: I could, I believe.

Mr. Hehr: How much in your budget, I guess, is funded towards these centres?

Mr. Oberle: Our budget for socially responsible liquor and gaming is \$7.5 million.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Of that \$7.5 million, a portion of that goes to operating these 16 places, right?

Mr. Oberle: Yup.

Mr. Hehr: Can you guys break that down further for me? It doesn't have to be right now. Just get it to me in the future. That would be great.

Mr. Oberle: Okay. I could do that. Many of these figures aren't at my fingertips. I don't actually run the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. They do. My budget is a net transfer model, a net funding model, a net revenue model. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, which is a separate entity, operates that, so I don't propose or manage the line item budget on their side. I would have to refer you to their annual report and also to the Public Accounts process, which reviews their annual report. They are subject to call before the Public Accounts Committee, as are many agencies and boards.

Mr. Hehr: Well, they're here right now.

Mr. Oberle: They can't speak to you.

Mr. Hehr: I'll go look at the thing, and I'll write a question if at all I need an answer from it. Thank you very much.

Let's talk a little bit about gaming machines. How many slot machines are out there and how many VLTs? Are they the same numbers? Have they remained stagnant from last year?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah, roughly, give or take for maintenance and that kind of thing.

Mr. Hehr: So there have been no additions to the slot machines?

Mr. Oberle: Oh, look. I have historical information on this one. The number of slot machines in Alberta in '08-09 was 12,680; VLTs was 5,964. The VLTs have been stable right back to 2000-2001. The slot machines have increased, from 4,000 in 2000-2001 up to 12,000 last year.

Mr. Hehr: Are there plans to increase that number?

Mr. Oberle: I couldn't say that there are plans to increase it. You will know, I am sure, that there are a number of casino applications before the AGLC right now and racing entertainment centre applications. We have a moratorium on processing new applications at this time. We're studying whether we want to proceed with the expanding of gaming in Alberta or whether or not we've kind of reached the maximum point already.

Mr. Hehr: Is there a report coming on that, whether we've reached that? Have we commissioned a report?

Mr. Oberle: There is. You may be referring to an MLA committee that was struck last year to look at the distribution of charitable gaming revenues from casinos.

Mr. Hehr: No, I don't think I'm talking about that. I thought there was an outside report commissioned by your group to look at gaming in Alberta.

Mr. Oberle: The AGLC is looking at it right now. We are working with the universities in Alberta, and the Alberta Gaming Research Institute is doing a study. Gerry informs me that we are expecting that this summer, and that'll look at: are we expanding that program?

Mr. Hehr: Thank you.

The Chair: That concludes the time for the Official Opposition. We'll take a five-minute break and then resume.

[The committee adjourned from 7:46 p.m. to 7:52 p.m.]

The Chair: I'd like to call the meeting back to order, please. For the next 20 minutes members of the third party, the Wildrose, if any, will speak.

Seeing none are here, for the record I will now recognize the members of the fourth party, NDP, and the minister for the next 20 minutes. I assume you are going to go back and forth.

Mr. Oberle: Sure.

Mr. Mason: Sure. I sure hope you guys don't lose more people because I don't want to be the fifth party. So hang on to your MLAs.

Okay. I want to start with a question, Mr. Minister. Your website says that a key part of the Solicitor General's responsibility in the safe communities initiative is working with First Nations and the federal government to develop pilot projects designed to build safer communities, reduce crime, and address the needs of at-risk community members. According to the '08-09 annual report, however, this department's safe communities budget went towards more police, more probation officers, more supervision of high-risk offenders, more specialized services for offenders, and enhanced training of staff in offender management. So it looks to me like none of that money went to aboriginal crime reduction and risk prevention initiatives. Can you tell me if I'm wrong and why?

Mr. Oberle: I believe you're wrong. First of all, some of the resources you list, probation officers, for example, provide services in aboriginal communities and thereby reduce crime. As you'll recall from the line of questioning that we had going with Mr. Hehr, a significant part of the community crime reduction grants are targeted at aboriginal communities, crime prevention programs, and those sorts of things. The gang reduction strategy also has a

component in aboriginal communities. I guess I object. No, we're not doing nothing.

Mr. Mason: Are there any programs that are directed specifically to the aboriginal community?

Mr. Oberle: Well, any of the crime reduction grants that are targeted towards aboriginal communities are directed directly at aboriginal communities. So any of the grant applications can come in under the safe communities innovation fund or under the victims of crime grants. Those grants do go to aboriginal communities.

We support programs for aboriginal victims, the youth justice committee program, for example, and the First Nations police forces that we work closely with. About 25 per cent of the designated youth justice committees serve the youth of aboriginal communities, and that's providing mentoring, elder support, and a link to their traditions.

We have RCMP officers dedicated to First Nations communities, First Nations police officers, and we believe that they are positive role models and help mentor young people who live on reserves. Yeah, we have a presence and a mission in First Nations communities.

Mr. Mason: I'd like to know a little bit about the move to close minimum security facilities. Is that being done as a cost-reduction measure, and what are you doing with minimum security inmates?

Mr. Oberle: It's been a long time in evolution. We've been closing facilities for years. I know the Footner Lake facility in my constituency closed before I was elected. It's been a progression. It's not a cost-reduction measure so much as it's a reflection of the scarcity of minimum security inmates in our facilities. You will know that sentencing changes over the years have put a number of the former minimum security population, that we would have been dealing with, out on community sentences, and the ones that are left are more serious offenders and higher risk offenders. So it's a pretty marked change in the inmate profile over a relatively long period of time.

Mr. Mason: Okay. In 2008 Alberta had three facilities specifically designed for the needs of aboriginal offenders, and now there are none when you close Kainai. I'm just wondering, given that aboriginal people make up 5 per cent of the general population with 35 per cent of the inmate population, if you don't feel that some specialized facilities would be more helpful to those individuals.

Mr. Oberle: I spoke to the number of programs that we run in our own facilities. I do recognize the very high level of aboriginal offenders that we have within our facilities, and we certainly have recognized a need for special programming. At this time I have one facility that's designed to house minimum security inmates that has been running well below capacity and doesn't meet our needs and doesn't address the prisoner profile I have in my facilities, whether they're aboriginal or not. So I hear you. You heard the exchange I had with Mr. Hehr. We run a lot of programming there, but at this time, yeah, I don't have a facility dedicated to aboriginal clients.

Mr. Mason: Okay. One more question along this line is the aboriginal justice initiatives unit. The '08-09 annual report states that the aboriginal justice initiatives unit was transferred to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, but we've looked quite closely, and we can't find any mention of this program. The best we could do was come up with a 2006 document summarizing all the cross-

ministry Justice initiatives. I was wondering if you could provide us with an update of what happened to this unit after it was transferred?

Mr. Oberle: I can't. You'd have to talk to Aboriginal Affairs. I don't know when their estimates are, but certainly you could ask the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr. Mason: You don't have anything to do with it anymore?

Mr. Oberle: It was transferred. According to my deputy people are still there, but they don't fall under our jurisdiction or our budget process.

Mr. Mason: Okay. The federal government has been moving to show that it's tough on crime and introducing more mandatory minimum sentences. I'm wondering if you've assessed the impact of those changes on the Alberta system. I understand that the provincial is two years or less, and beyond that it's a federal prison. Right?

Mr. Oberle: That's right.

Mr. Mason: Will some of that overlap into provincial corrections?

8:00

Mr. Oberle: It could. We're monitoring what the federal government does. Occasionally there's sabre-rattling and other things that go on there, but one of the emerging impacts is that they're reducing extra credit for time served in remand facilities. That will have an impact on us. We actually believe that will reduce our remand population. That's the indication that we get from the lawyers and the judges.

Mr. Mason: May I ask how that would happen?

Mr. Oberle: Well, there's a belief out there that there is a little bit of a tactic utilized. Knowing that they're going to get extra credit for time served in a remand facility, then it would be logical that they would extend the time that they serve in a remand facility for as long as possible. There is a number of ways they can do that: delaying court proceedings and that kind of thing. We think it'll reduce our remand population.

That's Bill C-25. That's in effect now, but we haven't seen any impact from that. We also have C-42, a proposal to end conditional sentencing for select property and other serious offences. That's only had first reading in the House in June 2009, and we're unclear on where that's going. There's that and a number of criminal justice bills that are hanging in abeyance.

The federal government has also indicated some desire or willingness to visit the Young Offenders Act, but we don't know what that means right now. All we can do right now is monitor. We do believe we've got a handle on what the impact in our remand facility will be, but we'll watch this unfold.

Mr. Mason: Okay. I'm just going to editorialize a little bit . . .

Mr. Oberle: Sure. That would be so unlike you.

Mr. Mason: . . . at the expense of the federal government, not you, Mr. Minister. The prisons are schools for crime. They train criminals. They're extremely expensive, and they don't rehabilitate people. I guess if I had my way, 80 per cent of the people wouldn't be in jail; the other 20 per cent would never get out. That's my editorial.

I want to ask about remand a little bit. You indicated that people in remand have been judged a potential danger to society, but how many people are there because they were denied bail? How many people are there because they couldn't make bail? Do you know that?

Mr. Oberle: I don't have that statistic for you. My understanding of the system is that very low-risk offenders are afforded every opportunity to find a way to make bail. We'll do whatever we can to find the statistics for you. We should be able to get them rough, at least.

Mr. Mason: I always ask, every year, a question: will you reconfirm to me that you have no intention of turning the sheriffs into a provincial police force?

Mr. Oberle: Oh, please allow me to reconfirm that. The RCMP will be our provincial police force. We have an excellent model with the sheriffs in the integrated model with the RCMP providing traffic services right now, so we will have sheriffs around. Of course, we provide court security, prisoner transport, judicial security, those kinds of things. There will be sheriffs around, but the RCMP will be our provincial police.

Mr. Mason: Where are we in terms of renegotiating their contracts?

Mr. Oberle: We're in the throes of renegotiating the contract, you can imagine, as it involves several provinces, territories, and the federal government.

Mr. Mason: Oh. It'd be lots of fun.

Mr. Oberle: Yes. Fun would be one way of wording it. Absolutely. That's going on right now. We're looking at drafts this summer, I believe, as 2012 is the expiry.

Mr. Mason: It expires, and you expect to have that renegotiated before it expires?

Mr. Oberle: We certainly hope so. You know, we can poke fun. We have a good model with the RCMP. We're happy with them as a provincial police force. While contracts always need to be updated, we're confident we'll get there and we will have the RCMP as our provincial police force.

Mr. Mason: What has been done to assist municipalities who have the RCMP as their police force to have more local input into the policing in their community?

Mr. Oberle: Okay. It depends on the size of the community. Of course, the larger Edmonton and Calgary, for example, have police commissions for their own police forces.

Mr. Mason: They have their own police force. I'm talking about RCMP, if you use the RCMP.

Mr. Oberle: Okay. RCMP. We have police committees. I believe that all municipalities that pay for their policing have some form of a police committee. I'm not sure that we have a hard, defined model, and I would say that probably some of them are more effective than others. There are some best practices out there, and there are people learning. Something that we want to define better and provide better to municipalities in this year's review of the law enforcement framework is how we deliver oversight to police.

Mr. Mason: What authority do the police committees have relative, say, to a police commission?

Mr. Oberle: They're not commissions. They don't have oversight authority. They're advisory bodies, really, which is part of the problem there. Their involvement with the police is often dependent on the capacity of the people at the table and the capacity of the RCMP officer that works with them, so I would say that some of them are probably less effective than others.

Mr. Mason: So they're basically just advisory. They don't have any real authority.

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. They work with the police to establish priorities for the community, identify priorities for policing for the community. They don't do oversight with respect to officer conduct, for example. They have no authority. They do not do investigations in the way that, say, an Edmonton Police Commission would be involved.

Mr. Mason: Could they say, you know, that speeding is going to be their priority or dealing with break and enters? They can't really instruct the RCMP in any real way, can they?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah, but they can identify: our community is very deeply concerned about the number of break-ins we had in the last little while; what are you doing? Those sorts of things. They can't instruct the RCMP officers to pull resources here and put them there, but they can certainly raise enough political pressure to ensure that happens. It's not a direct authority line, but they can make things happen.

Mr. Mason: Okay.
How is my time, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: Five minutes.

Mr. Mason: Okay. I raised this last year. It has to do with needle exchanges in correctional facilities and the availability of condoms. According to the HIV/AIDS Legal Network estimates of HIV prevalence in Canadian federal and provincial prisons range from 2 to 8 per cent, or at least 10 times the reported prevalence in the population as a whole. Estimates of hepatitis C range from 19.2 to 39.8 per cent, or at least 20 times the estimated HCV prevalence in Canada, and those are even higher for individuals who inject drugs. My concern, of course, is that the policy of not providing needles and condoms in provincial facilities means that these diseases spread. Almost all of the inmates are released at some point and go back into the community, so I'm really approaching this not from a moralistic point of view but from a harm prevention and disease control point of view. I wonder if you have any comments.

Mr. Oberle: Well, there was the under the skin program, the research that was undertaken in Canada about drug use and HIV prevalence and those sorts of things in prison and discussed the possibility of needle exchanges in prisons. They interviewed 50 individuals who had served or are serving time in the federal prison system, not in the provincial system. Five of those interviewees were from Alberta, but none of them were in our provincial correctional system.

You have to recognize there is a significantly different profile here. Provincial prisons, obviously, have much shorter sentences, so drug use is not as significant as it is in the federal system. About 90

per cent of our adult admissions spend three months or less in a provincial facility in custody. About 59 per cent of remand admissions are in custody for seven days or less. We believe that drug use is much less prevalent in our provincial facilities than it is in the federal corrections system. We do maintain an aggressive search schedule to turn up contraband, but we rarely find injection needles – very rarely. We do have drug dogs that search these facilities.

8:10

We do drug and alcohol awareness workshops, and we have native program co-ordinators offering counselling to offenders in these facilities. There is a methadone program that diminishes drug cravings for opiate users. We do have a disciplinary process for offenders who are detected as under the influence of an intoxicant of some description. In our new Edmonton Remand Centre – we're evolving to that already – we will be utilizing video visiting for most of the visits, and that will really cut down on the traffic of contraband into our facilities.

I would just like to close that comment with the fact that we do offer condoms in our facilities upon request, and the requests are almost nonexistent.

Mr. Mason: Okay. When did that start happening?

Mr. Oberle: I'm informed that it has always been.

Mr. Mason: I had quite a go-around on that issue with the last Solicitor General a year ago. I'll swear he told me that they weren't allowed.

Mr. Oberle: Well, I can't comment on that.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Well, that's interesting. I didn't know that.

I want to ask about domestic violence. Safe communities recommendation 15 states that the province should "expand provincial support for programs aimed at preventing domestic violence and providing support for families that are victims of domestic violence." This funding is within the purview of the victims of crime fund. In 2009-10 funding was only provided to nine groups to address domestic abuse. I'd like to know if you've taken any action to increase funding to these organizations through the fund to fulfill this portion of the safe communities report.

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. Now, we do a lot of work in domestic violence. Some of it is program funding, as you indicated. Some of it is actual police funding, like the Integrated Threat and Risk Assessment Centre, I-TRAC, that operates through the ALERT model. That's a multidisciplinary team of professionals that assess threats, provide threat management advice in situations involving relational violence and in criminal harassment. That unit alone assisted in more than 250 family violence cases in 2008-09 and 60 formal threat assessments, helped provide new identities to five extremely high-risk victims, delivered more than 100 speaking, training, and information sessions to groups within and outside of Alberta.

We have developed the family violence investigation report, launched in 2008. Police complete the form when responding to domestic violence calls, which helps first responders gather critical information. The ministry has been involved in family violence training for police. We've offered training in our police forces. We developed the Domestic Violence Handbook for police and Crown prosecutors. We've got domestic violence guidelines for police. So I think we're doing quite a lot, and we take domestic violence very seriously, as I'm sure you do.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. The time has expired for the party.

Now we go to the speakers list. I have a list here. First on the list is Mr. Cao, followed by Mr. Hehr.

Mr. Oberle: How long is each one of these?

The Chair: It's 20 minutes shared.

Mr. Oberle: Twenty minutes? Okay. I'm good.

Mr. Cao: Well, mine would be less, Minister.

A few years ago I had an opportunity to review the court services for aboriginal people through the Justice department, so I have travelled a bit in the province here regarding that matter. A particular one, now, that you mentioned, Minister, is about the Kainai reduction and whatever contract is there. I know this situation of constrained budget finances, so my question is not about why you need to do it. My question is regarding what happened to those services now that contracts are cut by the 1 point something million dollars that you mentioned. My question is: what happened to the services, and what happened to the inmates? When I was down there years ago, it was quite a showcase, really, for the community. That's my question about the Kainai.

Maybe just two more questions, and then I'll stop there. The second question is that I must say that I'm very appreciative of the funding and the initiative on the fight against gangs in urban areas. I see the impact of it in my area, where the police are praising us on that, the Calgary police. My question is: with the constraining of dollars, what happened to those initiatives? Are we still gung ho on there and getting on that?

My third question is probably – I don't know if this applies to the Justice department or your Solicitor General department. A police officer told me that, say, if they went into a home and captured stolen properties and they took the property to a place and let the owner claim, what remains they have to return to the culprit, very unhappily, but they have to return that to the person. They said that I should voice it out.

Thank you.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Cao. First of all, the Kainai community correctional facility. I can't say and I don't think I ever said that I'm very happy about closing this facility. It's not just about aboriginal offenders, though, and it's not just about cost reductions either. It's also about the fact that I have few minimum-security inmates that I can house in that facility. It's not owned by us. We contract the services there, and it's a minimum-security facility that I have no clients to put in. It operates at less than full capacity, about on average 14 out of 24 beds last year.

The decision we've made won't impact the safety of the public or the inmates. As I said, there were about 14 on average in 2009. It's just not fiscally viable to continue it because so few inmates are eligible for it. It's been underused for several years, and we don't see that changing right now.

We will transfer the inmates to the Lethbridge Correctional Centre. They're offered an aboriginal-specific program at that centre, which includes a full-time native program co-ordinator, regular visits by native elders providing sweat lodges and other religious ceremonies, a native community connections program, release planning for natives, native brotherhood and sisterhood programs, and a healing circle program for male and female offenders. We are providing culturally sensitive programming within our facilities. So those inmates will be transferred. At the moment I think it only involves a transfer of two prisoners, if I remember right.

You asked about funding for mainly the gang reduction strategy. Recognize, of course, that only a portion of that funding falls under my budget. That's a multidisciplinary and cross-ministry initiative. I supply the enforcement side of that, and this is a problem that you will never arrest your way out of. For every guy we arrest and put in jail, they recruit two more. While enforcement is a big part of that, we have to focus on other gang reduction activities. We have to talk about education and intervention services. My department, through victims of crime and those sorts of things, can offer some of the funding there, but there are volunteer agencies in the communities, municipal councils themselves, other ministries involved in that effort. We are full steam ahead on gang reduction.

We have added a couple of enforcement pieces over the last couple of days, one of which we spoke about earlier, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010, which allows us to seize property and dispose of it. Some of that property comes from gang members, and some of the funding goes back to gang programming.

We've introduced the body armour legislation in the House, which allows us to charge people that don't have a permit to wear body armour. We have gang members today that go into bars wearing body armour as a kind of show of machismo or whatever else they do it for. That's not going to be allowed.

8:20

The other piece of legislation we added is the witness security protection, which allows provincially a witness protection program, short term. During the duration of a trial, for example, we can offer witness security to prevent intimidation of witnesses. If they require longer term security, then there is a federal program that covers that.

So we're still working on our side, but there is funding and programming in other ministries as well. Absolutely, we wholeheartedly believe in gang reduction and a comprehensive approach to that, not just throwing people in jail.

The last piece you mentioned was about stolen property and when property is seized. If the property seized and stored is property as a result of a crime, whether or not the owner shows up, it's not returned to the offender. If it's held in the police system lock-up, it's still a proceed of crime. I mean, if it's a stereo with a serial number, for example, if it's stolen property, it's never returned to the offender.

Now, the amendments to the victims restitution and payment act allow us to dispose of that. Under our civil fortification legislation, we can seize it. The police have already seized it. They can apply through the courts to sell it and utilize the proceeds for what we want, for crime prevention programming, for a number of initiatives. So that stolen property does not get returned to offenders. Whether or not the owner shows up has nothing to do with it.

Mr. Cao: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cao.

Next, Mr. Hehr, followed by Dr. Brown.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Just following up on a few issues. There are some communities in Calgary and, I assume, otherwise that are being inundated with a drug called doda, which is primarily an opiate being used by many people in the East Indian communities. It's a drug that was prevalent back in their homeland and has made its way now to Canada. I wonder if your police forces are aware of it. Are they doing anything specific? Are they looking at that as being a problem? Is your department doing anything in that regard?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I'm not specifically aware of that drug. I can guarantee you, without asking the question, that our police forces are and ALERT is and that we're tackling drugs in whatever form they make it to our streets. I'm new to this portfolio.

Mr. Hehr: I only have a cursory knowledge of this drug. I don't know if there's legislation on the books that sort of makes this an illegal drug, but it really has to be looked at. I've been told by MLAs in that community that it is a problem; it's a problem amongst youth. Maybe you guys could as your department look at that and increase the legislation on the drug, which I'm told is causing some havoc in those communities.

Mr. Oberle: We'll look at that. I'm informed that our covert people are looking at it, but drug listing in Canada is federal, so we have to work with the federal government on that.

Mr. Hehr: If you could pass that along to the federal counterparts – that's what we would ask – and continue to work on that for our communities.

If we could just go back to remand centres, some specific questions on that. Do you guys track attacks on our people working in our remand centres?

Mr. Oberle: Attacks on our staff, you're asking?

Mr. Hehr: Yeah.

Mr. Oberle: I don't have that data here, but we do track that. We'll supply that.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. If I could get it for Edmonton and Calgary for the last three years so I can see if that number is increasing or decreasing.

I guess another question is then just back to setting up our independent review committees. Have you looked at the models that are sort of available in B.C.? It's my understanding that in British Columbia all local authorities have an independent review committee, so an independent commission would be set up to oversee the Calgary police force and Edmonton police force. Is that a model you guys are looking at?

Mr. Oberle: Well, it's a model we already have in large municipalities that have their own police forces. It's not a model we're going to consider in every community in Alberta. The costs would be unsustainable, and I don't believe that every community that is policed in British Columbia or any other province has a police commission. Very different from a police committee, right? But we will provide an oversight process accessible to all Albertans.

Mr. Hehr: I'm probably asking the question wrong, but I'll get it right for question period. There we go. I'm just giving you a heads-up, so there we go.

If we could look at some other things here that are going on, and if you could give me a couple of seconds here to find my place. I think some of these questions were asked by my counterpart from the fourth party. It's my information that Alberta drinking and driving convictions are down vis-à-vis comparisons with other jurisdictions. On that front are we doing enough random checkstops at night in Calgary and Edmonton and other centres? That was just an article I read in the paper.

Mr. Oberle: Our convictions are down. It's very difficult to compare it to other provinces because you don't know at what rate

they put checkstops out on the streets. It could be that they're putting more out there, and they're catching more. I can't comment on that. Very difficult to compare crime statistics between provinces, even between regions within the province.

I described earlier that we're doing an integrated traffic enforcement model across our province. There are reaches of the province where we don't have the critical mass necessary to man a checkstop. In order to pull one off in Manning, Alberta, we have to draw resources from other communities, and that could occur at a time when those communities don't want to lend those resources, New Year's Eve, for example. Our new traffic model will allow us to array checkstops across the province in a much better, more efficient fashion. I don't know what that will do to our statistics. Our statistics will continue to decline is my hope.

Mr. Hehr: You know, I'm hopeful of that, too, but I'm not naive. I believe statistics also indicate that Albertans are younger and drink more per capita. That would lead me to believe that on a per capita basis they're probably driving more intoxicated. Just logic would lead me to that conclusion. I have a sense that then our conviction should be at least equal to these other jurisdictions if not higher.

Mr. Oberle: If that's the case, then we'll address it.

To go back to our earlier conversation, I see behaviour in bars as significantly different today than it was. You often see young groups of people that have designated drivers at the table. Many of the bars have designated driver programs. You get free pop and all that sort of stuff. I'm hopeful, as I said, that our conviction rates go down.

Mr. Hehr: Fair enough.

Do we actually have the number of checkstops that Calgary and Edmonton police force provide? No?

Mr. Oberle: No. You would have to speak to the cities about that.

Mr. Hehr: Do you have numbers of, I guess, the checkstops that your policing units would provide?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. We'd have to get that from the RCMP. We'll endeavour to do that for you.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Thank you. That would be great on as best as you can across the province.

I think those are actually good. I'm all right. Between me and the member of the fourth party all my questions are answered. Anyway, thank you very much to you and your staff for your time tonight.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hehr.

Next we have Dr. Brown, followed by Mr. Boutillier.

Dr. Brown: Well, thanks, Mr. Chairman. I've got several questions. Minister, they are all about traffic enforcement, which is something that I've taken an interest in. I get a lot of feedback from some of the people in my community who are either policemen or retired policemen and do bring me information on things of concern to them to do with traffic enforcement.

8:30

The first thing I want to talk about is something which is not really related to safety but more to the dollars and cents to the

province of Alberta, and that has to do with the registration of motor vehicles. I know you're not responsible for registration of motor vehicles, but we do have a provision in the laws of the province of Alberta that says that new arrivals to the province of Alberta have to register their vehicles in this province if they take up residency within 90 days of their arrival. We're not talking about chump change here. According to my information as of 2005 it was \$280 million that was taken in on vehicle registrations in the province of Alberta. I just looked it up on the Internet, and as of 2008 we have 2.5 million vehicles under 4.5 metric tonnes that are on the road here in Alberta.

Mr. Xiao: And you own five of them.

Dr. Brown: And I own five of them, as my friend points out.

My question is: how do we reduce the number of out-of-province registration vehicles on the road in the province of Alberta and make them pay for part of the upkeep on our roads?

I will just say one other thing. In 2006 we did a small survey, nonscientific, based on a sample size of 500 in the city of Calgary during the month of April, which is not traditionally a tourist month, in the constituency of Calgary-Nose Hill, and fully 5.25 per cent of the vehicles on the road were using out-of-province licence plates. We did a similar survey – it was only 200 cars – on the QE II, and the percentage there was about 4 per cent.

When you look at those numbers over the whole province, we're talking about a massive loss of income. It's an issue of enforcement, in my view. I wondered whether or not the minister could offer any encouragement or any plans that might reduce the number of out-of-province vehicles on the road, bearing in mind (1) that they need to get a safety check when they come here, which a lot of them don't want to do, and (2) the provinces on both sides of us have no-fault public insurance, which a lot of them don't want to change. There's a disincentive there, and it has to be overcome by enforcement.

Mr. Oberle: Well, I guess that at some level of altitude I'll agree with you, hon. member, but you have to recognize that at least some of the vehicles that are travelling on the QE II or driving around the city of Calgary with out-of-province licence plates are legitimately doing so. Furthermore, we can't instruct our police officers to pull over everybody with an out-of-province plate. That might be effective, but it would also be illegal. We have some issues in enforcement; there's no doubt about it. I'll certainly be happy to talk to the Minister of Transportation and see if we've got any thoughts about what could be done.

But you're right: once you're here for a while and you're working here, you should be registering your vehicle and insuring it in the province of Alberta. Once that vehicle is stopped for doing something, speeding or whatever else, and the police officer can determine that that person has actually lived in the province, then they can be charged. But until they actually commit an offence, we don't just profile people because they have out-of-town plates.

Dr. Brown: Well, I guess what I'm suggesting is that there should be some selective traffic enforcement program and that the police force is simply alerted to the fact that this is a huge economic issue in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Oberle: Well, if I could just tag onto that. There is selective – well, let's not call it selective traffic enforcement. There is targeted traffic enforcement looking at vehicle safety and those sorts of things. Our new traffic divisions right across the province will now be staffed sufficiently so that they can actually run programs across the province.

Dr. Brown: I think it's simply an issue of asking a few questions, "Where do you work?" and so on.

Mr. Oberle: An officer travelling on the highway can't pull somebody over with an out-of-province plate and say: where do you work? The guy can drive away. But you can be stopped at a vehicle safety check, and your papers can be gone through, and then the officer can start asking questions about you.

Dr. Brown: Or speeding or stop signs, any offence.

Mr. Oberle: Yes, any offence, certainly.

Dr. Brown: Okay. My second question is with respect to the compliance with the seat belt legislation in the province of Alberta. I know the minister is aware of a recent University of Alberta study that was released which indicated that approximately just a little over 10 per cent of the population is noncompliant with the requirement to use seat belts when driving. However, that little over 10 per cent of the population accounts for, if I recall, approximately 40 per cent of the fatalities and 30 per cent of the motor vehicle injuries. Again, the cost to society and to the health care system in particular, not to mention lost productivity, is quite enormous. I wonder whether or not the minister has any ideas or any plans on how we might step up enforcement of seat belt use.

Mr. Oberle: We do spot enforcement for such things. Certainly, any officer that sees somebody travelling without a seat belt will pull them over. You'll know that that falls under the Traffic Safety Act, and part of traffic safety is administered by the traffic safety division of Alberta Transportation. They do programming, and as it happens, March was restraint month. They're looking at specific enforcement activities around the use of seat belts. Their division was focused on it for the whole month of March. We certainly charge and prosecute whenever we see it.

I gather the member is concerned about the 10 per cent, as am I. As far as I know – and I didn't actually see the report – that compares, actually, favourably with other provinces, doesn't it?

Dr. Brown: I haven't compared it to other provinces, but it was around 10.3 or 10.4 per cent, I think.

The third question I have for the minister is with respect to the impact that the sheriffs are having on traffic safety in the province of Alberta. I know that last year the minister reported that there were some quite favourable improvements in view of the fact that the sheriffs are out there enforcing the traffic laws. I'd be interested in knowing what the year-to-year data is. Do we have any data compiled yet for the 2009 calendar year with respect to the number of vehicular accidents, the reported numbers of collisions, the number of injury accidents, and the number of deaths?

Mr. Oberle: I'm informed that the officer traffic safety division does that, and we're just in the process of compiling that. It looks like fatalities are down about 10 per cent. Right at this very moment I can't provide you much more than anecdotal evidence. I think you would probably travel the QE II between Edmonton and Calgary regularly, and my experience in driving that highway the last couple of times is that there is a marked difference in the traffic flow on that highway.

Dr. Brown: I think it's gotten a lot better, and I'm certainly an advocate of the utility of the sheriffs in reducing those vehicle accidents and whatnot. But the one that probably is more interesting

to me, other than the fatalities, would be the number of injury accidents. We do know that there's a large correlation of injury accidents with speeding, and I know that the sheriffs have been instrumental in stepping up the enforcement on the speeding end of it.

Mr. Oberle: Well, the sheriffs have, and they've been particularly effective in combination with the RCMP because it allows us full application of the law at the roadside. The RCMP have Criminal Code responsibility. Not only are we catching speeders; we're catching drugs, guns, those sorts of things, impaired drivers moving through or around our province. Yeah, it has been a highly effective addition to have the sheriffs involved in that integrated traffic model.

8:40

Dr. Brown: Just one final question following up on that same line. Is there any contemplation of using technology? I'm thinking particularly of the photoradar with respect to enforcement on highways that have overpasses on them. It's a relatively simple matter to install those devices on there and certainly, to my way of thinking, a cheaper way of enforcement than having real people in cars out there chasing speeders.

Mr. Oberle: It is an inexpensive method of enforcement. It's also been called an inexpensive method of revenue collection. It's a controversial subject, you would know. At present there is a cabinet decision which says: no, we won't install photoradar on our provincial highways.

Dr. Brown: Well, I think the only people that really object to it are the people that want to break the law.

Mr. Oberle: Well, there are people that object to it on the grounds that the government collects enough taxes as it is.

Dr. Brown: It's not a tax. If you don't break the law, you don't do the time.

Mr. Oberle: Well, you will understand, I'm sure, that it's a controversial subject.

Dr. Brown: It's sensitive, perhaps to many of the legislators who are the worst offenders.

Mr. Oberle: Well, I'm not sure that you could say that. You heard the hon. member from the NDP here talking about his feelings about correctional inmates. It wasn't because he thinks he might find himself to be one one day. It's because people have concerns for other people in society.

Dr. Brown: Well, there certainly is a marked correlation between the incidence of speeding and injury accidents, and it's something the national traffic safety board can tell you. It's right up there with impaired driving. Until we get serious with speeding on the highways, in my view, you're not going to make a significant impact on injury accidents.

Those are my questions, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Brown.

Next we have Mr. Boutilier, followed by Mr. Xiao.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, congratulations on your ministry.

Let me pose this question to you. The province of Alberta at one point had the Attorney General's office and ministry and the Solicitor General's ministry combined into one. Would you support that in terms of these recessionary times and the economic times we're facing as a cost-cutting measure while still ensuring that the service of the front-line police officers and protecting the public safety are adhered to? What impact do you see would happen if that were done?

Mr. Oberle: Well, you could ask the same question: why don't we just have one cabinet minister providing that all of the services and standards . . .

Mr. Boutilier: I didn't say that.

Mr. Oberle: But you could ask the same question. This department has about 2,900 employees; 1,400 or so, 1,500 contract police officers; a budget of \$650 million. That's a pretty large department. Adding Justice to it, for example, would make it that much larger. Also, you know, the police and the judiciary are different departments. They're independent. So, no, I wouldn't support that, but it's not up to me. It's up to the Premier as the President of Executive Council to make that decision.

Mr. Boutilier: One of my suggestions was that if the Attorney General were to join your ministry, would you support that?

Mr. Oberle: Well, it's the same question backwards. No, I wouldn't support it.

Mr. Boutilier: My question . . .

Mr. Oberle: What if the two departments met in the middle?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, you know what? There's a lot of grey in every ministry.

Again, Alberta taxpayers are paying for the service. I agree with the idea of front-line service and the police officers. You said 1,500 contracted officers, I think it is, which I think is really important. They do a very good job. Does that include RCMP, or is that just the sheriffs, or is it a combination of both?

Mr. Oberle: It's both, yeah.

Mr. Boutilier: At one point there was this discussion about, for instance, the RCMP from a budgetary perspective. At that time the K Division commander – he's now assistant commissioner – was Sweeney. We had talked about the idea of a division in Sherwood Park, which your deputy would be aware of.

There is a division of the RCMP over in St. Albert. There are divisions around with all of these overheads that are there. Actually, the RCMP commissioner thought at this point that there seems to be an administrative efficiency if, in fact, it could have been amalgamated into one. Is there any initiative within Solicitor General that would consider that from a budgetary perspective?

Mr. Oberle: Well, the RCMP's services are provided under contract to us. I just want to clarify a couple of numbers for you. The total police in Alberta is 6,200. Of that, 960 are RCMP employed by municipalities, and 1,289 are RCMP provincial police, and 351 are RCMP federal positions. So that gives you some numbers. Then we have 1,700 Calgary police, 1,450 Edmonton police, 156 in Lethbridge, and then down from there.

First of all, the current deputy commissioner, Rod Knecht, worked closely with Sweeney, who's not there. There's always some efficiency to be gained in amalgamation. There is also some efficiency and effectiveness to be lost in doing it incorrectly. So the question would be finding a balance. Certainly, K Division itself provides some level of integration across the province, but I'm sure that if we decided that the best way to do that would be to remove all of that overhead from the local RCMP detachments and we decided that the detachment in Fort McMurray were to close down, you would find a sympathetic ear on my end, and you'd be the first to complain about that. There is value in having that level of supervision, that level of overhead out in the communities and in the engagement that it provides with the community leaders. I don't think there's great value in reducing that.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. You mentioned about closing down my police station in Fort McMurray, so that's caught my attention. I was making reference to the fact that if the city of Edmonton, a million people bordering on a municipality, is five kilometres away – I remind the hon. minister that Fort McMurray is almost 480 kilometres away.

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. It's almost as far away as Peace River is, actually.

Mr. Boutilier: My understanding is that Peace River is further, so I'm surprised you didn't suggest closing down the Peace River RCMP.

Mr. Oberle: Well, I wouldn't do that. I'm the minister.

Mr. Boutilier: You're the minister for all Albertans.

So my question, again, to you is: of the 6,200 police officers that we have in the province, from a budgetary perspective how many police officers would you like to have in the province of Alberta?

Mr. Oberle: At the moment the numbers I've just quoted you.

Mr. Boutilier: So you're happy. You do not want any more police for law enforcement and public safety? You're happy with what you have?

Mr. Oberle: Well, we revisit it all the time, and at any given time it's open for adjustment. We adjusted it by 100 officers this year that the province paid for. I imagine that the municipalities are revisiting their own numbers, and they may be adding police officers.

Mr. Boutilier: My question was: how many would you like? Is there a number? As a minister in providing the leadership and the vision . . .

Mr. Oberle: No. Surely you recognize the impossibility of answering that question.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, you said that you are at a higher altitude in answering questions, so I was kind of curious of your altitudinal view of that as part of the leadership.

Mr. Oberle: Well, why don't you share with the committee your view of how many police officers we should have?

Mr. Boutilier: I asked first, and you're the minister. You don't have a response?

Mr. Oberle: I don't.

Mr. Boutilier: Okay. Let's move on. If you want, perhaps you can provide that in writing. Will you have a response?

Mr. Oberle: No. I won't be providing that in writing.

Mr. Boutilier: So you don't have a response on how many police officers you would like in the province of Alberta?

Mr. Oberle: No. I don't.

Mr. Boutilier: And you don't have any vision of how many you would need or want?

Mr. Oberle: I have a vision of effective policing in Alberta, and the number of police officers – it's an impossible question to answer and, I might point out, a ridiculous one, too, but carry on. I won't be providing an answer.

Mr. Boutilier: So it's a ridiculous question for a Member of the Legislative Assembly . . .

Mr. Oberle: Okay. Let's say 10,000. Does that help you?

Mr. Boutilier: I'm asking you a question. It's not what helps me. I'm asking for the minister's leadership view on how many police officers he believes should be required in the province of Alberta to do an effective job in providing public safety to the people of Alberta.

Mr. Oberle: Okay. I understand where you're going.

Mr. Boutilier: Is 10,000 the number?

Mr. Oberle: You didn't hear at the start when I gave my opening introduction. I pointed out to the other members of the committee that were here that the mandate of my department is about providing safe communities and effective policing, effective police oversight in the province of Alberta.

8:50

Mr. Boutilier: So 10,000 is your number?

Mr. Oberle: Nowhere in that mandate did it say to determine the exact number of police officers required in the province of Alberta, and I didn't. Again, you weren't here. I didn't lay that out in my introduction at all.

Mr. Boutilier: You mentioned 10,000. I'd like to provide you with the opportunity . . .

Mr. Oberle: I was being completely facetious, as I think you are, sir, but carry on.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, you've made some comments that, in my view, Mr. Chair, I don't think are very appropriate, you know, in terms of facetious and other commentary. But I guess you have to be responsible for your words.

You're not suggesting having fewer police officers in Alberta, are you? Just so I understand that.

Mr. Oberle: No. I pointed out that the provincial government added 100. I can't comment on what the municipal police forces added this year, if any. I'm not sure.

Mr. Boutilier: Under Responsible Actions, a government-accepted report, I'd like for you to highlight within your ministry under your core principles what you have done in the Responsible Actions report relative to high-growth areas, specifically indicating the recognition by the government that more had to be done.

Mr. Oberle: I'm not sure what report you're referencing here.

Mr. Boutilier: That was the Radke report in dealing with high-growth communities. Policing, of course, was identified in areas where large sums of money are being made. The instances of crime and dealing with drugs, which I know is an important goal of your ministry, are highlighted in the Responsible Actions report.

Mr. Oberle: I will apologize to the member. I don't have that report here and can't grab any of the recommendations within that report, so it's difficult to respond. I believe I'll have to provide that in writing.

Mr. Boutilier: In writing? Okay. I'd appreciate that. What I'm looking for is the progress report since that report was announced over a year and half ago. The additional funding that went with that: I know part of that was earmarked for the Solicitor General.

I'd like to move next to the issue of speaking with police officers across Alberta. Of course, you're Solicitor General. Police officers support the ban of cellphones because of driver safety and the many accidents and deaths that they are creating. The Minister of Transportation, as you are aware, has made comments in the Assembly relative to that. At this point I'm not sure what your position is. The police officers are saying they support a ban on cellphones and texting and things like that. I'd like to know what your public position is and if, in fact, you support the police officers in banning cellphones while driving in Alberta.

Mr. Oberle: Well, I can't comment on what the police officers support. It's never been identified to me in a discussion that police officers do or do not support a cellphone ban. You'll know that the department is not responsible for the Traffic Safety Act, that would define what distracted driving is. I'll comment that I think it's fairly obvious that the use of hand-held cellphones and definitely the operation of texting within a vehicle is dangerous, and we need to do something about it.

At the same time, I think I have some understanding and agreement with the Minister of Transportation, who thinks not at all that we shouldn't go there but that distracted driving is actually a broader problem than just the use of cellphones or texting in a vehicle. I have some agreement with that. But I think we should, and I believe he is moving forward.

Mr. Boutilier: Okay. So you just haven't landed on what you believe to be the right public policy relative to cellphones?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. I think probably eating cheeseburgers in a vehicle, which I'm certainly guilty of upon occasion and I suspect you are, too, is probably not the brightest thing to do in a vehicle either. I guess I await advice on that.

Mr. Boutilier: The reason I say that is we have a hand-held in our car. Personally, my wife and I and my two and a half year old son were almost killed a week ago in Fort McMurray by someone who was actually texting while going through an intersection. So I only say to you that when an action of someone or some driver that obviously police officers enforce – and the police officer had

indicated that, you know, this is an example. It scared the living daylights out of us because of an inattentive driver who was texting, and it was really unfortunate.

It has certainly influenced my decision on where it is, and I do not support the idea of being able to and being allowed to operate a motor vehicle. My understanding is that the only municipality, where I think your deputy minister comes from, where they have banned cellphones is Sherwood Park. But I find from a highway traffic perspective, which is the purview of the Ministry of Transportation, but as Solicitor General you provide the enforcement of the laws in Alberta, that there is quite a distraction of: am I in a municipality that supports cellphone bans, or am I not? Could you understand becoming aware of in the province of Alberta 360-some municipalities? Really, should a driver be wondering: are we in a jurisdiction that allows them versus not? Doesn't that strike you as somewhat – you know, we are the province of Alberta. We don't have 360 Solicitors General.

Mr. Oberle: Well, first of all, you've acknowledged that I'm not responsible for the highway Traffic Safety Act, so I can't really comment on that. I highly doubt that you would advocate that all of the powers of a municipality should be blended and standardized across the province. There was a time when you could smoke in some municipalities in the bars and some you couldn't. That's a creature of how municipal governments work and the fact that municipal governments are independent bodies in our province. While occasionally it may have strange ramifications, it's still a strong model and one we support.

I think what we should focus on is whether or not we have and allow or encourage distracted driving in our province. You indicated one incident that you've encountered with a distracted driver. If you would agree that there are a whole bunch of reasons that people are distracted on the roads and all of them are every bit as dangerous to the health of you and your son, then I think we're in full agreement, and I think we probably have to do something about it.

Mr. Boutilier: I think provincially we often within your ministries compare with your other colleagues from across the rest of the country. Of the Solicitors General in other provinces and territories, the 13 that we have, you'll find that almost 90 per cent of them, in fact, disallow cellphones while driving. I'm wondering if that bears any influence on you in meeting with other Solicitors General.

Mr. Oberle: I have not yet met with other Solicitors General. I'm hoping within very short order to meet with the western Justice ministers and Solicitors General, I believe in May. I haven't met and I haven't had those discussions with any of them. Again, I'm not the guardian of the Traffic Safety Act, so all I can do is advise the minister, which I certainly will do.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Right. I appreciate that on behalf of my wife and son and Albertans. In terms of other Solicitors General, I'd also ask that: in your first meeting with Solicitors General would you endeavour to consult with them and ask them their opinions, for those Solicitors General that, in fact, are part of the enforcement of cellphone bans in provinces and to gauge their reaction of how successful it is?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I think probably we're all going to be considering such information when Transportation moves ahead. When studies become available and data becomes available, we'll be looking at data from across other provinces, data from within our own province, if differentiations are available between what happens

in Sherwood Park and what happens in other places. I think we'll all have that information available to us. I certainly hope so. We shouldn't be debating such serious legislation without being properly informed.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. I agree. A final note on this topic before I move on to my other topics is that in light of the fact that you're responsible for policing and enforcement, do you agree that police officers would provide a real, you know, front-row view, at ground level, not at 30,000 feet, of what they observe in some of the accidents that have taken place because of cellphone use? So would you view that as helpful information to provide to the Ministry of Transportation, or is that happening as we speak?

Mr. Oberle: Well, obviously, police officers have attended the scene of some very unfortunate incidents – I have no doubt – as have ambulance drivers and others. I don't know whether you could count that as statistically sound or anecdotal evidence, but there is statistically sound evidence of the impact of such laws. I'm sure that there is statistically sound evidence which would point to the proper way to craft such laws, and we'll be looking at all of that. In saying that, I don't at all discount what the police officers encounter out there very often, and they should inform public policy.

9:00

Mr. Boutilier: Right. So can I be assured as a member and can Albertans that information is being provided to the Solicitor General, who provides it to Transportation? Because the Minister of Transportation is not responsible for the enforcement; that is under your purview as minister. I just want to ensure that the gap is closed, that the valuable input you collect from police officers is provided to the Transportation minister. I just want to be assured of that.

Mr. Oberle: Well, the Transportation minister is, actually, responsible for some enforcement out there.

Mr. Boutilier: I understand.

Mr. Oberle: We have a traffic safety division, so there is that. But, yes, absolutely, the Solicitor General will work with and inform the Transportation minister. Absolutely.

Mr. Boutilier: Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that, and I know that my family and Alberta families will appreciate that as well.

Do you have any idea of when Transportation, since we were talking about that, will be coming back?

Mr. Oberle: I don't know.

Mr. Boutilier: No?

Mr. Oberle: I don't know.

Mr. Boutilier: Okay. We'll move on to licences.
Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: Fifty seconds.

Mr. Boutilier: Fifty seconds, and it's about 47 now. Okay.

The last question I will ask at this juncture will be on licences. When you get your licence renewed, it is actually destroyed and properly so. Then for a period of two or three weeks before it's

mailed back to you, you do not have an official ID because it's been destroyed. Any thought of enhancing that system where, in fact, when they rip up your old one, there is a security system for public safety where you could be able to not have that gap of two or three weeks? The reason I say that is because I hear that some young people use it to get into the bars. Chances are you and I don't have to be ID'd because we do look over 21 because of all those cheeseburgers. Did you ever give any thought to eliminating that?

Mr. Oberle: I have, actually. The member will know that it particularly affects, for example, university students who are away from home; they don't have ID, and they're in the city. That's a problem. I have actually made the problem known to the Minister of Service Alberta, who actually issues the licences. My department doesn't. I've had the complaint from my own constituents, as I'm sure the hon. member has, so I've brought that forward to the minister. I haven't heard a response yet. Aside from the functions that a driver's licence performs, it is also a piece of ID that's used in bars or restaurants or a number of places. So, yeah, the concern is there. I'll raise it again, actually.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boutilier.

Next, we have Mr. Xiao, followed by Mr. Kang.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good evening, everybody. I've got a few questions. I think I just want to go through my questions one by one if I may. The first question I'd like to ask is about organized crime. As you know, organized crime has been on the rise for some years. In your annual report on page 31 you are talking about enhanced response to organized crime. So my question is: under the current situation in what areas is enhancement going to occur? You're talking about enhanced response to organized crime, so I want to know in what areas you want this enhancement.

Mr. Oberle: Our primary response to organized crime right now, our most effective tool in organized crime is the Alberta law enforcement response team, ALERT, that I had mentioned earlier. That's a large effort. We have partner agencies that allocate about 80 positions to ALERT at their own expense. That would be Edmonton police, Calgary police, Medicine Hat police, and the RCMP, and we provide sheriffs to that. It's designed to oversee province-wide initiatives directed at criminal activities, especially including organized crime but also including child exploitation, drug operations, which are very closely linked to organized crime, and domestic violence.

ALERT provides strategic direction and targeted funding to disrupt and dismantle organized or serious crimes. It operates at arm's length from the government, and a civilian board of directors, actually, provides its governance. It's funded by grants. It doesn't fall directly under my department, nor does it fall under the governance of any particular police agency. It's a collaborative, integrated model, and it actually is gaining some wide recognition in the country as a very innovative approach.

For example, since April 1, 2009, the Alberta law enforcement response team, ALERT, has completed projects such as Kouch, which I would probably name one of my operations, 17 individuals arrested for drug trafficking; Kush, 8 arrests, seizure of 2,000 marijuana plants and \$500,000 in grow op equipment, \$70,000 in cash, and \$1.1 million in property. They've laid 2,351 charges against 546 accused persons; 229 targeted individuals were identi-

fied to law enforcement units; 44 subjects or groups of interest were targeted in investigations. The recent operational improvements have contributed to successes such as the arrests of over 2,500 individuals on 6,500 charges relating to drugs, weapons, and violent crime; the seizure of nearly \$8 million in cash, approximately 800 kilograms of drugs, and over 350 firearms off the street.

So I think we've unleashed a rather successful beast, and that is going to be a big part of our team going forward. We're very pleased with the success of that.

Mr. Xiao: Yeah. I really appreciate that information. I think Albertans will be happy to hear that.

My next questions are also related to enhanced law enforcement which is related to the exploitation of children and online pornography and so on. I understand you have an integrated child exploitation unit. I want to know what concrete measures have been taken. Although we try to fight this crime, some people describe it as out of control. It's very difficult to police online. What are the concrete measures you are taking? I tried looking through the budget. I couldn't find the allocation of the dollars, you know, put into this.

Mr. Oberle: Yes. You won't find the allocation of dollars in the budget because it falls under ALERT, and ALERT is run as a part 9 company. They're an independent arm, independent from my budget. They're funded by grant funding. ALERT includes a number of operational units: the combined forces special enforcement units; the provincial marijuana and drug teams; the integrated intelligence units, including Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta; integrated child exploitation teams, which you referenced; integrated threat and risk assessment centre; safer communities and neighbourhoods teams, SCAN you might know those as; fugitive apprehension and sheriffs support team, FASST; and sheriffs investigation surveillance units. So it's a number of operational units under ALERT.

You've said that it's a crime that's really on the rise. I don't have statistics that would indicate that. That may be so, but it's something that we're all over in Alberta. It's a difficult crime to pursue and prosecute. It involves building relationships with other police forces across jurisdictional boundaries.

Mr. Xiao: That's what I mean, not necessarily just within the Alberta jurisdiction.

Mr. Oberle: Or within municipalities within Alberta. Our integration model allows us to cross municipal jurisdictional boundaries. With the RCMP participation and the federal databases that brings in, we can cross provincial boundaries as well. So the intelligence aspect of the ICE work is greatly enhanced by their participation in ALERT.

9:10

Mr. Xiao: My next question also is a crime prevention related question about community crime prevention. Since the programs were introduced, I can see it has been very successful. From the feedback I got from the community leagues, from families, and from people I talked to, it seems they are very supportive, you know, of this program.

In the fiscal year of 2008-09, according to your report on page 41, you allocated \$585,000 in grants to support 15 projects, including prevention of elder abuse, family violence, community safety, youth development, and community outreach. I understand that this is a joint-effort initiative working with the stakeholders in the community, and so on. My question is: how are you going to really enhance this program? It has been so successful, so effective. You know,

this program, basically, is based on a grassroots initiative, working with community-based organizations. So how are you planning to enhance this program, and what kind of resources are you going to allocate to make this program more successful in the future?

Mr. Oberle: Well, hon. member, up till fairly recently, I think, most of the funding for that came out of the victims of crime fund or the crime prevention grants that flowed out of this department. That will change. That will evolve here. For example, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, that I discussed earlier and that's on the floor of the House right now, will provide additional funds from the proceeds of crime that could be targeted towards this area. In addition to that, we had a cross-ministerial approach to safe communities that provided the safe communities initiatives fund that's housed under Justice, and that's about \$14 million as well. So there's a significant amount of additional funding available.

What's incumbent upon us now is to do some evaluation and find out where and how we are being effective and where and how we should target resources in the future. But those grants are absolutely well received across the province. I agree with you; I believe they're being very effective.

Mr. Xiao: How many minutes do I have?

The Chair: Nine.

Mr. Xiao: Nine. Okay. Good. I'm not a big spender here. Right? That's good.

My next question is about horse racing. You know, from time to time you hear some criticism about the government funding horse racing. Right? If I may, I would ask you to make some comments about the horse racing programs: why we need Horse Racing Alberta, how Alberta benefits from this program. Then, the specific question is: how is the funding allocated? On what basis?

Mr. Oberle: Horse Racing Alberta, an organization that was created by an act of the Legislature, governs all things horse racing in the province. So they govern the operation of tracks in Alberta. We have an arrangement with Horse Racing Alberta, under a contract that runs until 2016, which provides for the operation of racing entertainment centres; let's call them casino-like facilities. A portion of the proceeds from the slot machines located at those licensed racetracks are allocated to the horse-racing and breeding industry under that contract arrangement that we have with Horse Racing Alberta.

What happens is that from the slot machine proceeds 15 per cent of the proceeds go directly to the operator, which is not Horse Racing Alberta. It would be Northlands or Evergreen Park in Grande Prairie. Fifteen per cent of the proceeds from those slot machines go to the operator, and 85 per cent, the remainder of those funds, go to the Alberta lottery fund. They're transferred to the government. From that 85 per cent, 51.67 per cent is allocated back to the horse-racing and breeding renewal initiative and 33 per cent to other lottery-funded programs. The disbursement of those lottery funds is contained within the estimates. That is a contractual arrangement between the government of Alberta and Horse Racing Alberta.

Horse Racing Alberta runs breeding programs, purse enhancements, a number of things to assist in the maintenance of a viable horse-racing industry in Alberta.

Now, as I said in my introductory comments, the industry generates about \$385 million a year for the provincial economy,

which is about 15 times what the slot proceeds are. It employs I think it was in the neighbourhood of 8,000 people in the province of Alberta, and it provides an entertainment product across this province. That's a contract that we have with Horse Racing Alberta.

I might also add – and it's been criticized that we're giving away lottery revenue to Horse Racing Alberta. None of these revenues would be available if Horse Racing Alberta didn't run races at tracks. Consequently, there's a racing entertainment centre there. This doesn't at all in any way relate to the revenues that come from casinos, from other gaming; VLTs in bars, for example. It's only from the slots at racing entertainment centres. While, yes, a portion of the funds do go back to Horse Racing Alberta, a portion of the funds wind up in the lottery fund and fund good programs in our province.

Mr. Xiao: Well, thank you very much for the information.

Mr. Chair, my last question is about the victims' benefits program, so I'm jumping all over the place. I know this is a very complicated process: how can a victim be qualified for that program? I just want you to make some comments on that.

Mr. Oberle: Certainly. There is a victims' benefits program – it's called the victims of crime financial benefits program – which provides assistance to victims. There is a qualification process. The program provides eligible victims with payments based on the severity of injuries they've sustained. In 2010-2011 we're budgeting \$14.4 million for those financial benefits. There are eligibility criteria. The incident in question has to occur in Alberta. The applicant has to be a direct victim. It has to be an eligible offence. The incident has to be reported to police in reasonable time, and the recipient has to have co-operated with the police.

There's a section which deals with the victim's previous criminal behaviour. Three or more convictions may result in a denial. Is there any contributory behaviour? If there is, there could be a reduction or denial of the benefit. The application has to be made within a two-year time frame. We're averaging about 208 applications a month in 2009-2010. We expect by year-end 2,500 applications received compared to 2,385 in the previous year, so a slight increase but not real significant at this point.

9:20

Mr. Xiao: Okay. Well, those are my questions. Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Xiao.

Next is Mr. Kang, followed by Mr. Sandhu.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to be kind of all over the place here with my questions, Mr. Minister. Regarding the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission the economic downturn has impacted the province's gaming and liquor industries as Albertans are spending less of their disposable income purchasing liquor.

The second one: "The responsible service and consumption of liquor products will be promoted through programs like ProTect Security Staff training and the ProServe program."

The third one. I'll just read a couple of lines:

For gaming, the ministry will ensure that charities and communities continue to benefit from the changing gaming landscape in Alberta. Initiatives that encourage responsible gambling will be developed and implemented in conjunction with partners, and current initiatives, like the Voluntary Self Exclusion Program and Responsible Gambling Information Centres, will continue to be offered.

My questions. Since the round-table on violence in licensed premises issued its recommendations, how many outstanding recommendations are left for implementation?

Mr. Oberle: I believe none. We'll provide you detailed comment in writing.

Mr. Kang: The second question is: has the rate of violence in and around licensed premises increased or decreased? Are any stats kept for that?

Mr. Oberle: I don't have good statistical information on that. As I pointed out earlier, hon. member, it's a hard thing to nail down. You're clouded by perception often. For example, some of the violent incidents that happened in Edmonton were at raves, which do not have liquor licences and are not in any way regulated by us. They're not licensed facilities. It's kind of hard to say for sure. We believe that we're making great strides in improving the safety and entertainment value of bars and lounges. As I also said earlier, we have a very co-operative business community that's going down this road with us.

Mr. Kang: Okay. What would be the total number of staff working at licensed premises that have completed the ProTect program?

Mr. Oberle: We looked at those numbers earlier. ProServe has educated 77,000 liquor service workers and ProTect, I think, 4,200. ProTect targets what would be security personnel – bouncers, doormen, that kind of thing – and ProServe is the people that actually serve liquor.

Mr. Kang: Thank you.

What is the information about all the new strategies that you encourage for responsible gambling that the ministry intends to implement during the upcoming year? Please provide some information on that. Do you have any?

Mr. Oberle: I don't know that we have new programming that we're planning to implement in the coming year. We have a number of responsible gaming programs that we will continue to operate this year. There are certainly no cutbacks. We operate RGIC, which stands for responsible gaming information centres. We have people working floors in gaming facilities. We're very aware of the incidents and the problems around problem gambling. The AGLC is certainly working on it.

I'll just share a little information with you. We have a number of programs: Deal Us In training, which is for casino and racing entertainment gaming workers; Reel Facts training for VLT retailer staff; A Good Call training for bingo gaming workers; Both Sides of the Coin, which is a strategy developed to ensure Albertans who choose to gamble have the resources they need to make informed decisions and minimize related harm. We run Responsible Gambling Awareness Week. We have a voluntary self-exclusion program which people can sign up for, and then they are excluded from casinos. That sounds different. We actually have people that have violated their own orders to stay out of a casino, though, so it is, in fact, a valuable program. I mentioned the responsible gambling information centres.

We measure what we think to be problem gambling and satisfaction levels, and we're quite pleased. In 2008-09 satisfaction among Albertans that the gaming that they participated in was provided fairly and in a responsible manner was 89 per cent; 81 per cent of Albertans were aware of prevention and treatment programs for problem gambling. Beginning in 2009-10, the AGLC started surveying Albertans to determine the percentage who gamble responsibly and the percentage of Albertans that are satisfied that licensed gaming venues in Alberta are safe and responsible environments in which to gamble.

Mr. Kang: Okay. You said that the total number of users registered at the responsible gambling centre was 81,000? What was the total number of users registered with the responsible gambling centre?

Mr. Oberle: With the responsible gambling institute? We'll have to provide that number. I quoted a figure of 77,000. That was the number of liquor service workers that had been trained. I didn't provide a number for responsible gambling centres, and we'll provide you that number.

Mr. Kang: Okay. Please explain how the ministry evaluates the success of the voluntary self-exclusion program, how you measure the success of that program.

Mr. Oberle: The voluntary self-exclusion program? Well, that allows people to voluntarily exclude themselves from activities in casinos, and once they're on that list, they're excluded. The success of it, I guess, is first of all in assisting with problem gambling. Second of all, we do find people that violate their own self-exclusion order. Their voluntary signing-up includes our ability to fine them if they violate that order. It's a way to work with clients, and they're in effect providing their own penalties for their own behaviour. It's kind of a unique program.

It's designed for people who feel that it's in their best interests to take a break from gambling. They submit an application to the AGLC. They voluntarily agree to be excluded from entering all Alberta casinos and racing entertainment centres for a specified period of time. They choose the length of the exclusion period. It's usually six months to five years, that kind of a thing. They can be charged with an offence pursuant to the Gaming and Liquor Act if they violate the agreement. They've agreed to that by signing the agreement.

The program is administered by the AGLC and enforced by casino security staff. We had 664 violations in 2008-09 under the voluntary self-exclusion program. Recommendations from the program review have enhanced AGLC's detection efforts, so we have a higher number of reported violations. I actually have a number for you

here. We have 1,500 to 1,600 people enrolled in the voluntary self-exclusion program, and that's been fairly consistent.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, sir. Is there anything for the people who are addicted to buying Lotto 6/49 or Super 7? There are people out there who just go crazy about buying lottery tickets. Is there something in place for those people, compulsive lottery ticket buyers?

Mr. Oberle: It's perhaps a harder thing to pick up. The person doesn't have a direct interface with somebody from AGLC. We don't find a high degree of that, but where we do, we have programs in place and Alberta Health Services has programs in place through what was formerly AADAC and is now incorporated into Alberta Health Services. We have gambling advice programs. We try to pick up on that.

The Chair: Forty seconds.

Mr. Kang: Okay. Just 40 seconds? Well, then, I'll just thank the minister for all the answers. I have more questions here but maybe for next time.

Mr. Oberle: Okay. I think we've recorded some of your questions, in fact many questions during the session, and we'll be providing written answers.

Mr. Kang: I wish I had more time. Thank you, sir.

The Chair: I just want to thank everyone for coming. I must advise the committee at this time that the time allotted for this item of business has concluded.

I'd like to remind committee members that the vote on estimates is scheduled for Thursday, March 18.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(2)(a) this meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:30 p.m.]

