

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 20, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/03/20

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. I would say for the benefit of those in the audience that this is the informal part of the Legislature. In this part hon. members are allowed to kind of wander around to hopefully . . .

MR. TAYLOR: Talk out loud?

THE CHAIRMAN: Not to talk out loud, hon. minister, but to take off their jackets and have juice or coffee, that kind of thing. It permits a kind of back and forth detail type of analysis with regard to the debate between opposition and other members and the ministers whose estimates are up. So it'll be a little less formal than the regular part.

To begin this evening, I'd like to receive permission from hon. members of the committee to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

head: Introduction of Guests

MS EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is my distinct pleasure and honour tonight to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly assembled here this evening 18 Girl Guides and 22 Brownies from Sherwood Park. Their teachers and group leaders are Kristyn Schopf, Cheryl Stone, Kelly Meters, Francine Jans, Barbara Mostat, Corinne Johnson, Susan Jensen, Kaye Potter, Karen Laine, Monique MacDonald, Robert Ross, Evelyn Weger, Marie Gamroth. They are the 15th Mills Haven Brownies and 12th Girl Guides of Sherwood Park. We also have one little Spark. Would you please join me in welcoming them warmly to the Legislative Assembly this evening.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll begin this evening's deliberations with the report on the designated subcommittee that was dealing with Health and Wellness. Just to check again to see whether or not we are in agreement as to the procedure, we have the chairman for 20 minutes, the opposition critic for 20 minutes, and, if necessary, five minutes for the other two members should they be here. If that's agreed, then we can begin.

Health and Wellness

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the chairperson of the committee I would like to report that we had a productive designated supply subcommittee on Friday morning, March 17. During that period of time, some three hours plus, members of the committee asked a number of questions to which I was able to reply but only with respect to some of the key issues raised. An undertaking was given that we will have Alberta Health and Wellness provide written or printed replies to the host of questions that were put forward.

Mr. Chairman, during the committee meeting I outlined fiscal

allocations as they relate to this government's six-point health plan to protect and improve publicly funded and publicly administered health care in this province. At this point I would just like to briefly elaborate on the six-point plan, because the application of the very significant budget, some \$5.2 billion, revolves around this overall plan.

While significant new funding is being provided over the next three years, we know that money alone will not solve all the pressures involved in the health system. The six-point plan for health focuses on doing things better. It focuses on working with stakeholders in the health system to use innovation, imagination, and strong management skills and to work at making our health system accessible and sustainable both now and into the future.

On Friday I spoke about the first key direction, improved access to publicly funded health services in this province. Budget 2000 also supports strategies to improve the management of the health system, our second key direction. It is increasingly important to be able to illustrate how the health system is effectively meeting Alberta's health needs. An analysis of the use and delivery of health services provides accurate information to help make the decisions that continuously improve health outcomes in the management of the overall system.

Mr. Chairman, in the coming months a new health services utilization commission will be launched in Alberta to enhance the public accountability of the health system and to do the kind of research and analysis that will support and improve management and delivery of health services.

Mr. Chairman, another strategy to improve the management of the health system is the health innovation fund. Through the fund our government is supporting the health authorities and other health care providers as they look for innovations; that is, better ways of delivering health care services and managing them. In the coming weeks our government will be announcing the launch of over 30 of the most innovative and promising of these projects.

The third key direction identified in the six-point plan is to enhance the quality of health services. Our work with regional health authorities and health professionals is going on to improve primary health care in the province, and this falls under this overall key direction as another very innovative focal point. The idea of primary health care is to help Albertans get the care they need from the person who can best provide it while minimizing the need to use acute care hospitals and emergency wards. In each case there are multidisciplinary teams that include medical, pharmaceutical, public health, mental health, and other professionals, all either located in the same building or traveling together as a team throughout a rural part of Alberta, making it easier for patients to access and receive the care they need.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, I emphasize this because this has been a focus of comments from the federal government, yes, but also has been a focus and a recommendation for the health care system from many sources: from the academic community, from other provinces. I think Alberta is leading in this particular area.

There are 26 projects under way in Alberta currently that focus on this particular primary care initiative. For instance, Alberta Health and Wellness and the Alberta Medical Association are co-operating on another seven pilot projects focusing on alternative compensation strategies and the integration of physician services with non-physician health services. We are examining new methods of physician service delivery and funding. Several of these projects are directly in support of primary health care reform.

Our government is also encouraging greater partnerships and teamwork among health professionals to make the best use of our overall health workforce. This includes looking at new ways to use

nurse practitioners and implementing the new Health Professions Act.

Another strategy to enhance the quality of health services in our province is our continuing work with Alberta Wellnet. This provincewide health information network will allow health professionals to share necessary information and best practices while ensuring that patient health information remains private and confidential. Mr. Chairman, overall management of the health system will improve as a result, because it will enable us to provide better, more comprehensive, more knowledge-based health care to all parts of the province.

The fourth key direction under the six-point plan is to increase the emphasis on wellness promotion and on disease and injury prevention. Mr. Chairman, I don't mind mentioning that it is a priority of our department to shift more resources to the whole area of promotion of wellness, but of course it is always a challenge when there are many needs in the acute and long-term care treatment areas.

Budget 2000 will enable Alberta Health and Wellness and the health authorities to launch a new five-year immunization strategy aimed primarily at children. Immunization programs are among the most cost-effective health interventions available and result in substantial savings to the health care system as well as improved quality of life.

I would like to just mention, Mr. Chairman, and give recognition at this point in time to the tremendous team work, the tremendous dedication that was shown by the hundreds and hundreds of health care providers and other people that were involved in the recent meningitis vaccination campaign. It was a great effort and showed how regions could come together, professions and occupations could come together. We had a great deal of support from outside the health community. The armed forces were involved; they helped with their medical resources. We had people doing work as security guards. A whole host of people just rallied to that particular need, and I want to say a thank you to all of them.

8:10

Budget 2000, Mr. Chairman, will also enable health authorities to implement a new early detection breast cancer screening plan for all women in their high-risk years. A major initiative under this fourth key direction is to increase the emphasis on wellness, wellness promotion, and injury and disease prevention. This strategy also builds on the final report of the long-term care review, which deals with the prevention and promotion of various conditions that affect our aging population.

Further with respect to the long-term care report, or the Broda report as it's sometimes called, our government's aging-in-place strategy includes two components. The first involves the healthy aging initiatives that Alberta Health and Wellness will work with health authorities on. Professional associations will be involved as well as volunteer community agencies. We're also working, Mr. Chairman, on the whole area of providing suitable housing and suitable transition for the people who are in their senior years. We're looking right now in this budget at providing support funding for a number of innovative housing projects and continuing care initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, we also reflect in this budget that the Alberta children's initiative has set an agenda for action. Work is under way in children's mental health, children with special health needs in schools, children involved in prostitution, children with fetal alcohol syndrome, and prenatal and early childhood development. This whole range of areas is something that Alberta Health and Wellness is very much involved in.

Further, Mr. Chairman, a provincewide initiative is under way to

ensure that all newborns are screened for metabolic disorders at birth to avoid future health problems. Also there are several long-term studies under way looking at maternal risk factors and low birth weight babies and congenital abnormalities. All children are being vaccinated for hepatitis B, and that's been referred to before.

New curriculum programs are being prepared in health, life skills, and physical education for kindergarten to grade 12 students, and these programs emphasize the importance of a healthy, active lifestyle. As well, job safety skills are being incorporated into several new courses that prepare students for the workforce.

So we have here, I think, a balanced overall business plan, Mr. Chairman, one which has emphasis on our seniors population, the founders of this province. We need to have a very sound health care system for them. Also, at the other end of the spectrum there are a number of initiatives here, particularly in the area of health promotion and wellness, that focus on the youngest component of our population.

Moving on to our fifth point under the six-point plan, Mr. Chairman, Budget 2000 provides for the new Premier's Advisory Council on Health. The council will help ensure the continued exploration of new ideas to protect and improve Alberta's health system, and it will provide arm's-length advice to government on health system reform. As has been previously announced, the council will be chaired by Don Mazankowski, a former Member of Parliament for 25 years and the former Deputy Prime Minister of Canada, former federal Finance minister. Of course he has quite an impressive resume. On behalf of all Albertans the chair will lead the dialogue nationally with recognized experts to identify significant emerging health system issues that face our system in this province.

Mr. Chairman, it is in this same spirit that our government has introduced the sixth direction in our business plan, and that is to protect publicly funded and publicly administered health care in this health system in this province. The government has introduced Bill 11 to put in place those legislative protections. Since the bill is before the House and will be debated in the fullness of time, I will move on to my closing remarks, but I think it is very important that that particular piece of legislation be mentioned as a very important protection of the overall health care system and also a piece of legislation which provides the opportunity for some innovation in the health care system as well.

Finally, looking toward to the future, Mr. Chairman, Albertans are in very good health generally and have access to a health system that is admired for its quality and adaptability and innovation. Our government is deeply committed to effectively planning for the future to ensure that the quality and adaptability is sustainable within our health care system.

So in conclusion, Mr. Chairman, over the next three years we will further empower Albertans to manage their health by providing them with information that enables them to protect and improve their health. We will evaluate the performance of the health system, and to play a key role in making improvements, we will call upon all stakeholders and Albertans to provide us the needed advice and the direction on which we will act.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll just go through the list of questions that I have. I have quite a few and very limited time. I'll start where I left off in the committee on Friday morning, and that was going through the different votes with regards to the different regional health authorities.

When we look at the David Thompson region, I have questions

with regards to how the department will help that region address the large number of problems that currently exist with regards to the recruitment of nurses and licensed practical nurses. Where are the dollars allocated to the Red Deer assisted living for seniors partnership pilot project, which is a project for low-income seniors, which appeared to make economic sense the way the community put it together? Have there in fact been any recommendations from the department to approve that particular project? How will this budget help the specialists deal with the concerns in that particular regional health authority and expand the third floor of the Red Deer regional hospital? Also, what are the plans for the hospital renovations that are required to be undertaken in the David Thompson region?

I also will go back to a question that I didn't ask with regards to the Chinook regional health authority, and that is: what is the department's position on the report regarding the concerns of citizens in Chinook on the effects of the feedlots? It's my understanding that the regulatory review of the livestock operations, which was tabled earlier and was subsequently changed by the steering committee in order to achieve consensus with the livestock industry, has now been put on hold for at least a two-year period. Can the minister explain that?

With regards to the Premier's Advisory Council on Health I have a number of questions, starting with: why is that needed when we have a whole department of health? Is it not the role of Alberta Health to advise not only the minister but the Premier? How are we going to measure the effectiveness of the committee? Will there be an annual report that accounts for how the dollars are going to be spent by this particular committee? If the Premier needed an advisory board, why in fact was the Provincial Health Council disbanded, and what was wrong, if we can call it that, with the way that particular health council operated that we now need another advisory board? Will this particular committee be directed to deal with the population health issues that have a huge impact on health such as the number of children on welfare rolls, poverty, housing, homelessness, and education? Last but not least, how does a chair of an advisory committee get appointed when that committee does not exist? Bill 11 hasn't been passed, and in fact there is no advisory committee, yet we have a chair and no regulations for how that chair would operate. So those are a number of questions with regards to the Premier's council.

With regards to physicians, just to finish the questions that we had on that. The regional physician action plan: we hear that the plan was successful. Can we know what the retention rate was for the 85 doctors that were recruited in the particular rural communities? Can the minister explain the inaction at this point in time in terms of addressing the recommendations in the RPAP? How many of the 20 new positions that the minister announced recently in the budget statement are announced for the rural stream?

With regards to the emergency designation under section 5 of the special register of the college, how often has that been used to recruit physicians in the rural areas? These are physicians who are not eligible for full licensure. How many physicians have practised under section 5? How many, subsequent to their term being over, have actually passed the exam, and what is the retention rate of those particular physicians? Which specialists were approved, from which countries, and where eventually did they go in Alberta?

With regards to the foreign-trained doctors – actually I'm glad that the minister of human resources can potentially hear this question – it's my understanding that some of the foreign doctors who are in the accelerated RN program at Grant MacEwan do not have adequate funding to continue in that particular program. It would be helpful if the minister of human resources could look into that particular area.

8:20

I have some questions with regards to other health professions besides the physicians. The minister has recently put out news releases that are very positive regarding the hiring of frontline workers and how in fact we have exceeded the goals with regards to that hiring. On further analysis within each region, it appears that the majority of RHAs have actually not met their goals in hiring registered nurses. In fact, the reality is that Edmonton and Calgary have overshot their allocation, and that is why we are hiring more frontline workers. There is a slim majority, I believe, of RHAs who have not met the goals for hiring RNs.

I believe that in the postsecondary expansions, from what I remember, over the next four years there are only 48 new positions for medical lab and diagnostic imaging. With the shortages that we have currently in those particular professions, I would be interested in knowing what the actual workforce analysis says that the requirements are and why in fact there are not more positions available.

Alternative medicine is always an interesting one. Has the minister or the minister's department looked at any of the alternative medicines in terms of recommendations, whether it's naturopathy, homeopathic medicine. I believe that in B.C. naturopathy is covered.

Also, a question with regards to acupuncturists. It's interesting that if a physio performs acupuncture – I don't know if that's the verb – then in fact it is covered, but if it's performed under Alberta health care by an acupuncturist, it is not. I'd like to know why there is that difference if there is that kind of difference.

I was reading recently about an interesting concept. It's called parish nursing, and I believe that the department does provide some funding. How much does the department provide for that, how many are enrolled in that program, and what are the outcomes?

With regards to mental health, it would be interesting to know – and we have tried to get this breakdown from the Mental Health Board – the breakdown of all the grants and funds that are distributed by the Alberta Mental Health Board to community-based agencies. What are the criteria for providing those breakdowns? I also understand that in '97-98 there was a surplus of \$26.3 million in the Alberta Mental Health Board, and I'm wondering whether there was any surplus in last year's budget or a carryover. I had asked some questions about the clubhouse project last year and would like to find out more information with regard to the clubhouse approach: how long is the demonstration, and what have the results been to this point in time?

It is my understanding as well that the crisis lines throughout this province are not funded through the Alberta Mental Health Board or the regional health authorities. I would think that that is a very crucial service as a frontline service, as an intake service for individuals who are having difficulties within their communities. It's my understanding that the crisis lines have to depend on funding that they access through fund-raising as opposed to having a stable source of funding through either Alberta Mental Health or the regional health authorities.

A further breakdown on the \$95 million that is being allocated to Ponoka. Will this be for inpatient beds? How many inpatient beds will result as a result of that \$95 million? How much is allocated for materials, management, support services, and administration?

The community mental health recommendations that have come forward to the minister and that the minister's department itself has been part of putting together seem to be languishing, and I guess the question is: why is the department not enacting recommendations that in fact the department has agreed to? In fact, there is no real increase in the budget for community mental health services or for

satellite inpatient services such as are required up in Grande Prairie.

The minister announced just the other day that there was an eating disorders program and that dollars were allocated to that program. Where in the budget has that allocation occurred? Actually the program will be community based, and it is positive that that is the direction of that particular program.

I have some questions around the mental health community indicators. Are those particular indicators integrated with the health indicators? I think they're being tracked differently by each RHA and also by public health. Has there been a more recent report than the September 24, 1998, report regarding the community mental health indicators? Are these measures used by Alberta Health and the regional health authorities to ascertain the effectiveness of mental health services? If not, why not? If yes, how?

Is there information on the Red Deer community clinics, whose funding was going to be suspended? Now there's a bit of an extension on that. That should be part of the community mental health information system. If so, how do these particular community agencies rank as compared to other facilities?

If you look at the social problem index – and unfortunately 1992 was the most recent that I could find – the far northern region as per that social problem index ranks in the top five. So the question is: why are there no psychiatric beds planned for hospitals in the northern region and more of a concentration on how to deal with the problems that occur there?

The other question that I have. It appears that in the health department's performance measures and in its plan the issues like poverty and homelessness, the real population health indicators that affect a population's health, are not addressed in any concrete fashion.

With regard to some public health issues, there was some discussion, it appeared, regarding establishment of a protocol to immunize health care workers working in nursing homes, long-term care facilities, and home care with regards to the flu vaccination. Who is the minister consulting on this particular policy, and will it in fact be a policy that will be enacted this coming winter? If it will be, are there any costs allocated in the budget right now for the costs of the vaccines and also costs that will have to be provided to the employees who will have to take time off, perhaps, in order to be vaccinated, especially if those employees are in the private sector? How in fact does that occur?

The cost of the meningitis immunization program. How are those dollars allocated? Are they in the budget right now, or will that be through a supplementary estimate? As the rates for E coli, salmonella, and TB are increasing by the department's records, what concrete action is the government taking with regards to that?

There was also, I noticed, an item – I think it was in one of the budget documents – that the department is involved in the national food retail and food services code and regulations. What was the input? Was there any discussion around genetically modified foods?

There was some indication that the minister was interested in an agency or centre to do research on chemical sensitivity. I did not notice that anywhere in the budget or in any of the budget documents, and I'm wondering whether the department is still going to be looking at setting up a centre for research along those particular lines.

Could the minister also indicate what the role of the Sustainable Development Co-ordinating Council is and some examples of the initiatives undertaken by the health department – it indicates in the budget that the health department has undertaken some initiatives – pertaining to sustainable resource management of diseases? I believe that's what was referred to. Also, given the fact that the population health determinants are extremely important, why hasn't there been a larger increase in the role of public health?

8:30

Injury prevention. The department has taken a very important step in setting up the centre for injury prevention. I have a number of questions with regards to possible policy direction that the government may take. One, there was a new study from the United States with regards to banning contact in hockey for children under the age of 15. Has the department ever looked at enacting something like that or looking at whether or not that is a direction the government would want to go to? I'm not sure; I'm asking. There appear to be a fair number of accidents due to contact in hockey.

Another question that I have is with regards to snowmobile usage for children. Is the government looking at any initiatives with regards to that? Also, where is the whole issue around bike helmets? What support is going to be provided particularly to neurotrauma programs? Some of the other provinces are looking at proposals where a portion of the relevant traffic violations go to a neurotrauma fund. What other funding mechanisms is the government looking at?

Ambulances I believe are an integral part of our health care delivery system, yet I keep hearing from paramedics that there are concerns especially in some of the rural areas with regards to the safety of the vehicle. Some of the vehicles are very old, have lots of mileage, and the frequency of inspection is not very often and inadequate. One person indicated to me that the cardiac monitors in the ambulances in some of the rural areas are so old that the company who provides those monitors refuses to service them anymore. So there may be a requirement to look at the regulations with regards to ambulances in this province. I also have a question as to what the minister is going to do about the AAMD and C resolution on ambulance service and funding, and how many recommendations of the Judy Gordon report, which is about four years old now, have been enacted and which ones? Is the province looking at standardizing the usage of paramedics across the province at all?

Home care, long-term care, and lodges are a whole huge area that almost requires a session to deal with in terms of the questions that I would like to ask, as are issues around laboratory services, telemedicine, Wellnet, women's health, primary health care, and pharmacare, whether the government is considering a program, if not national, like Quebec's program. Have there been any studies or recommendations made with regards to pharmacare? Has the department given any thoughts to a pharmacy audit program at all to determine how the dollars are being spent?

There is an issue around the approval of drugs, in particular drugs with regards to helping individuals who are suffering from MS and diabetes – I will provide some information to the minister on that – whether or not it will be possible to cover those drugs. I had one letter from an individual who indicated that their daughter-in-law almost died because of the fact that she could not afford the insulin that was required. That is a huge, huge area.

The waiting lists with regards to cancer and some other areas I will probably not be able to cover in full detail.

With regards to home care my questions centre around what percentage of the market in home care provision in this province right now do large corporations and their subsidiaries have, corporations such as Olsten and Comcare. Does the Auditor General or the minister's office overview the number of beds, the contracts, and quality of care with regards to home care that's being provided throughout this province? If not, why not? Is this something that the Health Services Utilization Commission will or can monitor? If so, how will they monitor that? What systems are currently in place to ensure that private companies spending public funds are being monitored and that the dollars are being used wisely?

I will forward the rest of my questions to the minister, and I will table them in the Legislative Assembly so that he can answer them as well. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business at hand and the proposed estimates for the Department of Health and Wellness, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$5,623,442,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Learning

THE CHAIRMAN: To begin the 20, 20 period we have the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to give a report of the meeting of the designated supply subcommittee on Learning which was held on Monday, March 6, at 8 a.m. In my view we had a very good meeting, indeed. By unanimous agreement of our subcommittee members we met for about two and a half of the usual four hours. The minister and members engaged in what amounted to a relaxed yet very informative dialogue. Each member appeared to have plenty of opportunity to ask the questions they wanted to ask of the minister. With that, I thought it was important that everybody had an appropriate opportunity to address Alberta Learning's estimates. Most of the questions that were asked during the meeting were most ably answered by the Minister of Learning, and he will be tabling the answers to the remaining questions in the coming weeks. There were no recommendations that came out of this designated supply subcommittee.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I conclude my summary. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I have a few questions for the minister that I didn't have an opportunity to raise during our previous session. A lot of these questions arise out of the review of the framework for funding school boards that was conducted for the previous minister of education in May of 1999. I know that the ministry has acted on some of these recommendations, but there are a number of others that I would be interested in knowing the progress the department has made and whether or not the recommendations are going to eventually be accepted or rejected.

8:40

The context for this year's budget estimates is rather unusual. There are a large number of parents across the province that firmly believe that the education system is underfunded, and the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and myself heard from those parents at a meeting in Fort Saskatchewan where six of the schools

chronicled the effect of underfunding on their particular schools. We heard the same message at a forum in northeast Edmonton where a series of schools went through the same exercise and listed the impact of underfunding on their schools. That underfunding has resulted in larger-than-acceptable classes. It's resulted in youngsters not getting the individual attention that they require, and it's placed a strain on schools and school parent support groups in terms of fund-raising.

A second piece of information that applies to this year's estimates is a question that has been raised by the Premier himself when he asks the question: how much is enough? We've heard that question raised by the Premier in this Legislature a number of times, and that's the very question that a number of parents are beginning to address themselves to. It's a question, I think, that they have decided is very important to be answered.

A third factor in these estimates is that as you examine the business plans – and that's not peculiar to this business plan but the previous business plans – there's never been set forth a rationale for the funds that are provided to schools. Other than taking the number of students and the number of dollars the government wants to spend on learning and doing some quick division, there's never been a rationale for why money is allocated, for instance on a per pupil basis, the way that it is from the ministry. So there are those factors working on this set of estimates.

I'd like to ask the questions from the review of the funding framework within that kind of a context. If you look at recommendation 1, you will see that the recommendation is that the ministry "initiate a review to ensure that all socio-economic and other demographic factors that may have an impact on instruction costs are being addressed equitably for all [schools]." So recommendation 1 of the review focuses on equity and socioeconomic status of students' parents.

Recommendation 2 reads: "Initiate a study to identify an alternative funding approach that will not unduly limit boards' capacity to meet the needs of [their] students." Then it says that "the scope of the study should be broad enough to identify causes and to develop recommendations and strategies that may reduce incidence rates." They're talking about severe and emotional behavioural disabilities. So again a call for an alternative funding approach.

Now, recommendations 4 and 5 are in the same vein. Recommendation 4 asks that the ministry "implement an equity adjustment for above average teacher grid placement costs on a three-year trial . . . effective September 1, 1999." If I could maybe just continue with number 5: the ministry

undertake a complete analysis of the cost of utilities, services and trades, the impact of travel within a school jurisdiction and space utilization. Use this information to determine cost variances across the province that are beyond a board's control.

So all of those recommendations are aimed at trying to either improve or replace the funding formula that the department is currently using. I guess my question to the minister is: what is the ministry doing in terms of looking into alternate funding formulas, and how are they approaching determining how much is enough?

There are some computer models that I know have been developed elsewhere that address that very problem. There's a model called a resource cost model that's being used south of the border. It's a model that claims to address both equity and adequacy of funding. It is the equity the government has claimed has been addressed, but the question that the Premier and those parents are raising is the question of adequacy. How much is enough? How much is needed to fund youngsters adequately in schools?

The resource cost model that's being used elsewhere is one that takes units that school boards have to deal with. For instance, the

unit might be a 6th grade class, and to cost out that resource, to provide the resources for that class, what that actually cost - for instance, for a full-time teacher it might cost part of a teacher aide. There's obviously capital equipment in terms of desks, tables, and chairs in the classroom, and there are supplies and materials that the youngsters need. They go through a list. They have a rather lengthy inventory they use to sort out what those costs are for a particular classroom. One of the claims they make for their model is that it is able to accommodate differences in school sizes. It doesn't make any difference whether the school is a large high school like Harry Ainlay or a small rural school with 32 students; this formula will identify the costs.

It can also accommodate school location, whether that location is in a remote part of the province, whether it's in an inner-city location or it's in a suburb. The model will also accommodate for a mix of students. So if you have a number of special-needs students or if you have a program like the international baccalaureate program, this cost resource model claims that it can accommodate those differences and come up with costing that makes sense, and it allows administrators and school boards and parents to look at a school situation and say: what is it costing right now, and how much more would it cost to do the kinds of things we think should be done in our school? So they argue. I have to admit that I have no personal experience with the model, Mr. Chairman, but I put it forth as one proposal that the ministry might look at.

I think it's that more global looking at the funding formula that all of these recommendations are addressing, at least these first five recommendations from the framework for funding school boards review, and in one way or another they're picking away at parts of the current formula and trying to suggest improvements. I would submit that the task is larger than that, that there needs to be an overall look at the funding.

I think we shouldn't go without noting that the ministry has acted on one of the recommendations, recommendation 8, which dealt with the cash flow to school boards. Making monthly payments to school boards from the general revenue fund and the Alberta school foundation fund has made a huge difference to boards in terms of the interest they've had to pay and again is making sure that the money that is allocated goes to educational use and not to support interest payments at the bank.

8:50

One of the other items in the review that causes great concern among school board members and teachers and principals is the use of earmarked funding, and we made reference to this in the previous session on estimates. Earmarked funding is rejected as much by school boards as it is by the provincial government when the federal government earmarks funds. No one likes them. They take the money and say, "Yes, we can use it," but they don't like the restrictions that are placed on them.

My question to the minister in terms of earmarked funding would be: how much has been done to meet the recommendations in the review? They asked for a number of things; for instance, that when there are earmarked funds, there be a set of specific objectives laid out for those funds. They asked that measures be in place in terms of: how will they determine whether or not the earmarked funds have been successful in achieving the goals for which they were originally intended? They also asked that there be sunset clauses, where applicable, at the very beginning of the initiatives, so that if it's the early literacy initiative, those people that put in place those programs will know that the program has a definitive end and can plan accordingly; that when an earmarked fund is proven successful, it be added to the basic instructional grant. So my question to the

minister would be: just what kind of progress have they made in terms of meeting the recommendations of the review panel in terms of earmarked funds?

There was a great deal of attention paid in the review to differences in costs among boards. In the highway 2 corridor teacher costs are much higher than they are in other parts of the province, and there have been a number of reasons put forth for that. One was the proximity of universities and colleges, that teachers want access to those facilities. There are additional costs, for instance, in Lethbridge if they have a policy where they would like to hire graduates of their own university. Their program requires a minimum of five years of teacher education before you can practise, so they are faced immediately with additional costs. So I would ask the minister: what has been done in terms of trying to in some way make some adjustments for costs that are often out of the control of school boards and which put those who have costs above the average at a disadvantage in trying to serve youngsters? That was what recommendation 21 was getting at, that they look at some of the variances among school jurisdictions and try to adjust the formulas for that.

One of the major criticisms of those people who were interviewed was the almost commonly held view that the funding framework does not provide the kind of flexibility that school boards need to meet local decisions. Again my question would be: what moves has the ministry made? Are there moves in these estimates that will add to the flexibility of school boards and allow them to better address local needs?

I've talked about earmarked grants and just would like to raise a number of other issues that I think I would appreciate some comment on from the ministry. There's been talk about fund-raising, and I'd like to know the kind of progress and what the budget intends in terms of parent fund-raising and the source of funds. Does this source of funds make a difference to the ministry? I know that there's a court case right now. Again, in the interests of making school boards more accountable to local ratepayers and allowing them to tailor-make programs for the particular student population they serve, has there been consideration to giving them some access to the tax base?

Has any work been done on addressing the inequities resulting from the accumulated reserves before regionalization and the joining together of a number of boards? Some of those boards had reserve funds set aside, others had deficits, and that has resulted in some inequities. Has any work been done on addressing those inequities?

The last one, of course, is a perennial for us, and that's early childhood services. Has there been any move or is there going to be any move to fund them at .5 of the rates of all the funding categories for grades 1 to 12?

Before I come to the end of my time, Mr. Chairman, I would like to propose an amendment. I believe you have a copy of the amendment. If I might read the amendment?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, hon. member. This will be known as amendment A1. Go ahead.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you.

Be it resolved that the estimates for the standing policy committee on Learning under reference 1.0.11 of the 2000-2001 estimates of the Department of Learning be reduced by \$96,000 so that the operating expense and capital investment to be voted is \$3,105,307,000.

Mr. Chairman, this is the perennial motion that we put forward. The effect would be to eliminate the money for the standing policy committee on learning. Our arguments are the arguments that we have made in the past, that those are committees that all elected

members of the Legislature should have an opportunity to speak to and to take part in, and if it's being paid for out of tax dollars, as legislators we all should have access to those committees.

So that's my amendment. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering, then, the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Learning, are you ready for the vote?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$3,105,403,000
Non-budgetary Disbursements	\$65,800,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Hon. members, just some guidance from you. It looks like in the past we have been doing a similar 20, 20, and five.

9:00

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Satisfactory.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's satisfactory? That's agreeable?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Justice and Attorney General

THE CHAIRMAN: To begin this evening's deliberations, we'll call upon the Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be here to continue our discussion pertaining to the main estimates and business plan for Alberta Justice, that we started discussion on on March 6 in subcommittee B. Again I'd like to draw the members' attention to Deputy Minister and Deputy Attorney General Mr. Paul Bourque; Mr. Dan Mercer, executive director of strategic services; Mr. Shawkat Sabur, director of financial services; and Jack Jannsen from my office, all of whom continue to prevail with us this evening, having had the opportunity to persevere through the earlier reports. I'd like to ask members of the House to give them a warm welcome.

At the last meeting on March 6 I reviewed with the subcommittee the environment in which we operate, the relevant aspects of the Summit on Justice, our budget estimates, and what's new and improved with respect to goals and strategic initiatives. Since I went over that material in some detail and I know my hon. colleagues would like to hear more, I'll go through it in detail. No, I won't, but I will mention a few highlights and talk about some of the significant changes from the previous year.

We've eliminated the goal of partnering with outside stakeholders to support the administration of justice from this year's business plans, but I want to emphasize again, as I did in committee on March

6, that that does not mean we intend to stop collaborating with our stakeholders, nor does it mean we intend to stop partnering. Rather, it means quite the opposite. We have integrated and included partnering as part of our operation in a significant manner, and it's now a standard practice in the department.

DR. TAYLOR: You're finally going to get tough on crime.

MR. HANCOCK: We're going to be tough on crime.

More significantly, we've removed public satisfaction with the justice system as a performance measure. From our surveys we've learned that over 90 percent of Albertans do not realize that crime in their communities is going down.

DR. TAYLOR: No. I can't believe it.

MR. HANCOCK: Even in your community it's going down.

Almost 70 percent are unaware that the province is responsible for administering justice in Alberta. Because of these findings we're recommending a more effective measure of public satisfaction with the justice system. Instead of asking the public how satisfied they are with the job Alberta Justice is doing, we plan to ask them how safe they feel in their homes and neighbourhoods, and we plan to ask them how satisfied they are with the level of policing in their communities. These questions will provide a truer picture of how satisfied Albertans are with the administration of justice in the province.

A final change is that we've added a performance measure specifying the number of community service hours provided by offenders. While this may not be the best way of measuring community involvement and contribution to the community, one of the objectives of our corrections program is to challenge offenders to give something back to their communities, challenge offenders to learn in many ways the benefit of making a contribution to communities. As a result, we'll measure how many hours of service Alberta offenders provide to nonprofit organizations, community groups, municipalities, and other government ministries.

Many of our initiatives, Mr. Chairman, respond to what we heard from the summit. Others recognize and respond to the ever changing social and economic climate of the province. All these initiatives are broadly based and will result in a justice system which is more sensitive to the needs of citizens.

I'd like to briefly review the financial context of the business plan. Our spending targets are approximately \$457 million, \$447 million, and \$452 million over the next three years. This represents an increase of about \$45.5 million for the year 2000-2001. Of this, \$30.5 million is committed to nondiscretionary expenditures such as judicial and general employee compensation and contracted services. Approximately \$6.2 million will be cost recovered either from the federal government or through self-funded programs and directed to victims of crime and youth criminal justice program implementation. The remaining \$8.8 million represents discretionary funding increases and will be used to implement the recommendations of the Summit on Justice. This includes funding for provincial and criminal and family and youth courts, additional Crown counsel, court mediation programs, First Nations policing, and restorative justice programs.

As I reviewed with the subcommittee in detail on March 6, our major initiatives this year are in the areas of family law reform, and in that context I'd like to once again thank the Member for Calgary-Lougheed for taking on the job as the chair of the unified family court task force. I think this is a very important initiative, one that's long overdue in Alberta, and I believe that under the capable

guidance of the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, which she's shown in a number of other justice reviews in the past, this initiative will be one whose time has come.

[Mrs. Laing in the chair]

We have, of course, the review of the Police Act happening. We have initiatives in the area of youth justice, improving our courts, restorative justice approaches, First Nations policing and prosecution, policing and crime prevention, private trustee monitoring, and victim services. As well as these objectives related to the summit, we'll be undertaking corporate development objectives to build support for our programs, and we will undertake a communications plan to better inform Albertans about how the justice system works and, more importantly, how they can get access to it.

In our previous subcommittee meetings I heard many comments from members relating to the administration of justice, which is, Madam Chairman, as it should be. The administration of justice touches every Albertan. I know that we're all interested in ensuring that it continues to work in the public interest. We have a major focus on community justice, and we'll be discussing a community justice policy over the course of the next year. I continue to maintain that justice begins in the community, that we all have an important stake and an important role to play in making sure we have safe communities. So with this in mind I've taken careful note of the comments made by subcommittee members in the past. I will listen carefully to comments made this evening.

I'd like to take this opportunity to table responses to those questions that I was unable to answer before the House at the time of the subcommittee meeting, and I'd be more than happy to deal with any other issues that might come up.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Madam Chairman. Good evening, Mr. Minister. A couple of observations I want to make straight off. Sometimes the members on this side have been accused of being too miserly with praise when government does things properly. I'm not sure I'd ever agree with that assessment.

I do want to make the observation that there should be some recognition that it's extremely encouraging to have as our top justice official in the province, the Minister of Justice, somebody who understands that in fact our communities are very safe, that Albertans are exceedingly fortunate in terms of the level of public safety they're able to enjoy in their communities, and also and perhaps most importantly, a Minister of Justice who understands that he has a huge, an enormous responsibility to explain the justice system to the people of this province instead of playing on their prejudices and fears, torquing issues, which has the effect of doing such a huge disservice to the importance of the issues of the people who work in the field, the people who work in the system, the excellent men and women who make up the judiciary in this province whether at the Court of Appeal or Queen's Bench or Provincial Court. So I make that observation just to say that it's recognized and certainly noted by members of the opposition.

Also, some of the steps in terms of dealing with performance measures are heartening, because I think it suggests a more thoughtful, analytical, rational approach to trying to measure whether the dollars that are spent by the Department of Justice are well spent.

9:10

Now, we don't want to go on with praise too long, because time is short and there are lots of things that haven't done as well as we'd

like. Let me start with aboriginal justice. Madam Chairman, the Cawsey commission – it was a number of years ago, but it's still very fresh in this member's mind – made a number of recommendations. I mean, they looked at the absolutely miserable job we do in this province, as many of the other prairie provinces do as well, in terms of dealing with issues unique to aboriginal offenders and aboriginal communities. That resulted in a host of recommendations that the Cawsey commission made.

You know, to the government's credit – and even this minister can't claim credit for some of the things his predecessors did – there was a move to try and adopt some of the Cawsey recommendations, but one of the chief recommendations was nixed by the government, and that was the recommendation to create an aboriginal justice commission. The purpose of that was to create a body that would be able to provide a degree of high-profile leadership, a body that would be able to challenge the Justice minister and the provincial government to move in areas where progress and reform were proceeding at a glacial pace. What was identified by the Cawsey commission was the need for somebody to audit, supervise, manage, assess progress in terms of the aboriginal community justice reform.

Now, what happened is that the provincial government said no to an aboriginal justice commission. The reasons have never been satisfactorily explained to me, but I've deduced it comes down to this. The provincial government is fearful, absolutely fearful of having an independent body of some considerable stature that would be able to blow the whistle on aboriginal justice reforms that are either not meeting the test, not proceeding adequately, or not having satisfactory results.

This is what the Justice department did, and this was a number of years ago, before the current minister, before the current deputy minister assumed their offices. They created a sort of aboriginal justice secretariat. A very capable woman was appointed to co-ordinate some different initiatives, to report to the minister, but that was the rub, Madam Chairman. It was reporting to the minister. You don't have anybody keeping the Minister of Justice on his toes, challenging the minister.

If we accept that the one area where probably our Justice department has been least effective is dealing with the aboriginal justice issues in this province, this is the thing that really needed to be kick started. What the province did was look at the Cawsey report, which called for a very bold initiative, and didn't want to go there. Instead, they decided they wanted to fiddle with incremental progress. Well, Mr. Minister, the incremental progress is too slow. We're not making the headway that the Cawsey report had called for, had envisioned with an aboriginal justice commission. I want to ask the minister whether he's reconsidered that position, whether he now is prepared to do what the Cawsey commission recommended, which is to create an aboriginal justice commission.

This is a little bit like putting a bus on the road and talking about how nicely outfitted it is but not putting a driver behind the wheel. I suppose if you take the brakes off and put it into neutral, the bus, if you've got a bit of a slope, can roll down the hill a little bit, but it can't go uphill and it can't negotiate turns and the rest of those things. That's sort of where we're at in terms of aboriginal justice.

It's not to denigrate or deny that some positive developments have happened. From my perspective, Madam Chairman, it's too little; it's too slow. I think we can do more, and having an aboriginal justice commission doing an annual report, which the minister would have to bring in – his deputy minister and his assistants would not want to have to deal with the embarrassment of a bad report card. You know, I'm not sure they pay much attention when they get bad report cards from us in the opposition. Maybe they'd pay more attention if we had a high-powered commission doing that kind of

assessment. That continues to be a problem, and I don't know what the minister's current position on that is.

The other question I raise with the minister. When I look at *Hansard*, the minister talked about the federal Youth Criminal Justice Act. In fact, I've highlighted the note here because I was interested. This is at page B24. He said: "We've had commentary on that. We've had concerns about how far it goes." Then he goes on to say, "We've encouraged the federal government to make changes to that act to deal with some of the issues and concerns we have." That would be the end of the quote.

The point is this. This Minister of Justice is obviously putting forward a set of recommendations for legislative change to the Parliament of Canada. But do you know what, Madam Chairman? The elected members of this Assembly don't know what the government of Alberta is putting forward. What's scary is that the one example used by the Minister of Justice is one that caused me great concern, and that's reducing the age to throw out a great big dragnet and bring in more of those children – we're talking about people under the current age caught by the Young Offender Act – under this misguided notion, in my view, that these children are somehow going to benefit by being ensnared by the criminal justice system.

Madam Chairman, the evidence is absolutely overwhelming that younger children may well need help if they're in homes where they're at risk of abuse, if they're not being properly supervised, guided, supported, but the answer is not to make criminals of them, to bring them into the criminal justice system. The answer is for this minister to talk to the minister responsible for Children's Services and to talk to the Minister of Learning and the Minister of Health and Wellness and identify what kinds of programs have to be put in place to catch those children at risk and deal with them.

If this is an example, if this minister's idea of making recommendations to the federal government on this act is to reduce the age and drop more kids into this hole, then I'm scared stiff about what other recommendations he's making on our behalf. Will the Minister of Justice provide us with a list of all the recommendations, provide us with the submission he's made to federal Justice minister Anne McLellan or to whomever else in the federal government he's making that submission to? [interjection] Well, we'll see who ignores anything. We just gave you an example of a strong recommendation to this government that they ignored, that they choose not to accept.

I'm less worried, frankly, about what the federal government is doing than what recommendations our provincial government is making allegedly on our behalf. Will the Minister of Justice commit to provide us in detail the submissions that are being made to the federal government in terms of what changes they want in the Youth Criminal Justice Act? As I say, if I look at B24, I only see the one example.

Speaking of young offenders, there was some good information given by the minister last time on youth justice committees. If the minister would give us a list, perhaps, of the alternative measures committees that exist under section 4 of the Young Offenders Act, give us a list of the youth justice committees that currently exist under section 69 of the Young Offenders Act.

Just to go back in history a little bit, Madam Chairman, in terms of youth justice committees we lag badly behind. We had Wabasca-Desmarais, and we had Slave Lake, and there was a third aboriginal-based youth justice committee years ago. But that was it. Beyond that, we weren't spreading out. Then a couple of years ago, perhaps three years ago, finally a bit of a fire under our former Minister of Justice, and we started seeing a big push in terms of implementing and establishing a lot of youth justice committees. I know we have

a considerable number. I'd like the minister to tell us what evaluation is being done on the effectiveness of those. When we looked back to the early days in New Zealand, where they'd done a lot of work with youth justice committees, and Maryland, Massachusetts, and I think some other states like that that had a lot of experience with them, we saw that there were some pretty exciting developments.

9:20

This is a government that says they believe in performance measures, in evaluation, so I'm asking the Minister of Justice to tell us what evaluation is being undertaken to determine what kind of success those alternative justice committees under section 4, the youth justice committees under section 6(9) are having, what kind of difference they're making in those communities. If we can have that update from the minister, we'd sure appreciate it.

Now, if the minister looks at his business plan summary on page 322 of the budget book, we have the number of eligible persons receiving legal aid services. We see that in 1999-2000 the target was 93,190, and in 2000-2001 the target is 94,177. Does this minister not recognize the rate at which this province is growing? I don't know where this projection comes from unless you start off by accepting that a whole lot of people are going to be denied access to their own court system because they're not going to get legal aid certificates.

On what possible basis would this minister think that it's realistic to increase the number of legal aid certificates – I take it these are certificates, not clients, because some clients may have multiple certificates. Firstly, the minister might indicate whether that chart on the bottom of page 322 represents 93,190 clients or 93,190 certificates and the same for 2000-01. Then can he particularize what specific criteria he's using to project such a modest increase?

I can tell you just from my own experience in Calgary that not everybody coming to the city of Calgary – Madam Chairman, you know better than anybody how quickly this city is growing, and they're not all people with PhDs and marketable job skills. They're not all journeyman carpenters or electricians. A lot of those people are young people from P.E.I. or Newfoundland or Quebec that couldn't find a job in their home province. They've come out here looking for work. Those people don't have a lot of job skills. That may be an area where some of those people are going to be involved in activity that requires legal aid certificates. That's part of the reality of that population growth. So I don't know why the government is projecting such a modest increase when we know the way this province is growing.

Perhaps the minister can particularize what the basis of that projected target is. How many people are going to be denied legal aid certificates?

I'm also a bit concerned – despite what the Minister of Resource Development suggests, it's been a long time since I've done very much legal aid work. I'm not as much of an expert in it as he tries to suggest, Madam Chairman. But I do know this, that we have difficulty . . . [interjection]

You know, somebody suggests that it's almost 9:30, and they'd like me to sit down. Well, the short answer to that is that we have too little time to challenge your colleagues and your cabinet to make sure we're providing the kind of access to legal services that Albertans should be entitled to, and I don't feel badly at all, Madam Minister, through the chair.

MRS. NELSON: Calgary-Foothills.

MR. DICKSON: Calgary-Foothills. I have relatives living in that

constituency. I'm constantly reminded of the work being done that . . .

MRS. NELSON: They all voted for me, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, now the Member for Calgary-Foothills is just being outright provocative. So I'm not even going to look her in the eye, because I know she's going to get me going, talking about the next election campaign in Calgary-Foothills and who is taking a campaign sign for her and who isn't. I'm not going to be baited so easily.

Madam Chairman, I was very disappointed in the response I got when we were talking on March 6. That was the time when I pointed out to the minister that we have this inequality, and while the Member for Calgary-Lougheed is on the premises, I want to remind her that we have a problem with ages in terms of support obligations. I'm not going to go through it all. I'll just refer the minister to page B21. The minister said in answer, "We're reviewing in total the family law legislation, doing a comprehensive review of it." Now, when I read *Hansard*, I was frightened for a moment, because my response was, "Excellent." I hasten to add that I'm delighted to see movement on it, but I've learned there's no prospect that we're going to see legislation in this respect for the balance of 2000. Since many of us expect there's going to be an election, there's a real concern.

MR. HANCOCK: That won't stop us from bringing it back after the election, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: Well, we will bring it back after the election, Madam Minister.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Madam Chairman.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman. I'm sorry. Nobody more richly deserves than you a seat at the cabinet table, and every time I see you, I cannot believe that the Premier overlooks your talents and your hard work in Calgary-Bow. In fact, it makes me wonder. If the Premier of this province overlooks the good talent he has available languishing on the backbenches of this Legislature, you wonder what other kinds of errors of judgment he's making when it comes to ensuring good access to the legal system in this province.

Finally, just changing the subject completely, the Justice department of this province did a terrific thing in terms of making those renovations to the youth and family court, Provincial Court in the city of Calgary in the John J. Bowlen Building. But I come back and ask again – and the minister may say that this is Infrastructure, but you know, Madam Chairman, he's got a responsibility too. When are we going to see that new courthouse in Calgary?

Thanks very much, Madam Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Any other speakers?

After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Justice, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$419,916,000
--	---------------

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Municipal Affairs

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister. [interjections]

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Is it okay for me to talk too?

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Yes. Go ahead.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Madam Chairman, I'm pleased to . . . [interjections]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, would you like to begin, please?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to provide responses for the vast majority of the questions that were not answered in detail last Monday evening. There are a few that were raised last week that remain outstanding, and I'll forward the responses to those in writing as soon as they are completed. In the meantime I'd like to table the questions that we have answers for.

9:30

Madam Chairman, I would only offer a few comments in addition to the discussion of last week. I want to thank the members for Edmonton-Manning, Edmonton-Rutherford, Calgary-Buffalo, West Yellowhead, and Edmonton-Mill Woods for their questions and their comments.

On the subject of education property taxes I'd reiterate my comments of last week to the members opposite to bring forward any ideas and thoughts they may have to the MLA committee, headed by our hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane. I remember the words of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods when he said that

we're all in this together, that tax money is pooled for the common interest, that we can't continually attack each other if the system is going to work, and that it's built on trust and sharing and trying to do the best we can for each other.

Those were wise words and certainly should be repeated and quoted. I'm encouraged by those words, Madam Chairman, and look forward to his and Edmonton-Manning's participation in phase 2 of the MLA committee's work.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

In reflecting on the question raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo last Monday evening, I was very interested to hear from a constituent on the weekend who in an obvious moment of boredom while flipping through channels happened to catch some of the coverage of the federal Liberal convention in Ottawa this past week. It appears that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was questioning the Prime Minister on the federal freedom of information legislation. He told the Prime Minister and the entire federal cabinet that the federal act was outdated. He said, and I quote: the existing federal legislation has been eclipsed by much stronger laws in Ontario, in British Columbia, and in Alberta. I find it very interesting that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo repeatedly criticizes our legislation, adopts one point of view in this House in nothing more than a very vocal attempt to score political points and then contradicts himself with a completely different assessment of our freedom

of information legislation in front of the federal counterparts in Ottawa.

In addition, Mr. Chairman, the members of the subcommittee will recall the comments of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo regarding federal Bill C-6. He pointed out to this Assembly that Albertans were not being involved in consultation on this very important legislation. He questioned the awareness of Albertans on this matter. As I pointed out last Monday, this is a federal government bill, and the federal government's complete failure to consult with Canadians on this matter is shocking. Given the Member for Calgary-Buffalo's interest in this matter and his strong words just seven days ago, I'm at a loss to understand why the hon. member opposite while at a national forum – in fact, it was on a national stage with an opportunity to be heard on national television and make the point directly to the Prime Minister, the entire federal cabinet, and other provincial Liberal leaders from across the country – chose to ignore the very real concerns of Albertans and Bill C-6.

Mr. Chairman, I find it very interesting that he had the opportunity to raise these concerns about the lack of consultation and to indeed communicate on this, quote, important matter at the highest possible level, but he chose not to. This hon. member chose not to raise the concerns he raised in this House just last week on Bill C-6 and the need for more and more meaningful consultation by the federal government. Once again, we have a situation where the hon. member opposite seems to have one critical point of view in this House and is completely silent on the matter when he is in front of his federal counterparts.

Those are a few of the comments that I have for tonight, Mr. Chairman. I conclude my remarks, and I will listen with great interest to the comments from the other side.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on the estimates.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Chairman, I think you know what kind of a temper I have.

It was interesting listening to the minister, and actually I hope there are lots of answers in what he's tabled tonight, because we had to go to the Blues, to *Hansard*, to get any answers on this particular item.

Over the last week we actually got an information news release, Municipal Grant Program Offers Bonus for Intermunicipal Cooperation. This is a very good program – and I don't want to sit here knocking it – to the point of emphasizing that some of the items in here are actually very good, that I hope all municipalities actually go forward on. Last weekend at the home show I was talking to quite a few towns and municipalities that were actually displaying their wares, and the town of Viking and the town of Wetaskiwin said that they are going to participate and submit something to the Municipal 2000 sponsorship program.

I'm going to ask a few more questions so that we can get it on record. I'm going to start with the Municipal Government Board. The gross budget for the MGB was \$1.805 million, and the forecast expenses are \$2.157 million. The 2000-2001 gross expenses are estimated at \$1.847 million. The forecast is \$352,000, which is 19 percent over budget, and the estimate gives the MGB an increase of \$42,000. Will the minister explain why the MGB overspent its budget by \$352,000? Why is the MGB receiving an increase of \$42,000 for its 2000-2001 budget? What is the backlog of appeals currently facing the MGB, and how many appeals were heard in 1999-2000? How many of these would be considered major appeals requiring a significant amount of the board's resources? Has the minister plans for increased mediation to relieve some of the

caseload with which the board was previously backlogged? How is the minister evaluating the success of mediation in municipal disputes?

We have quite a few different items under disaster recovery. Will the minister provide details of where the \$10.283 million for disaster recovery was spent? Why, despite the forecast being over 800 percent over the previous budget, has the minister reduced the 2000-2001 budget in disaster recovery by 45 percent?

We're reading in the paper and following a few items on fire commissioners. Will the minister explain what expenses are included under program 3.3.4, fire commissioners, and why the forecast is 235 percent over budget? Why is the budget for the fire commissioners receiving an increase of 16 percent in 2000-2001? Is that because it is proposed to be a very dry year?

There are a number of items, like petroleum storage tanks. What expenses are going to be covered by the \$10 million budget for the petroleum storage tanks in 2000-2001, and how many tanks does the province have to deal with under this program? Are the taxpayers having to pay to support errors made by the private sector?

Regional services, 3.3.3. Will the minister provide details of the type of services included under regional services and explain why, even though the forecast is under budget, the program is still receiving an increase in 2000-2001?

Branch management and programs. Will the minister detail what types of spending are covered under branch management and programs for disaster services and explain why the program is receiving a budget increase of \$85,000 for 2001? That relays into some of the other questions I asked around disaster recovery.

9:40

It was interesting to listen in the committee to the questions to the members presented from AUMA. We're talking about grants. We're talking about dollars and cents. They're looking for stable, predictable funding. When we're still relying on grants, I think this is the biggest problem we do have. If they were treated like true partners and as a true government that could govern themselves, maybe they wouldn't need a grant. Maybe we have to look at the three-year plan that is proposed. Don't wag the carrot. Don't put the one-year dollars out there. Don't base all your budgeting on the difference between \$12 and \$32 a barrel for oil. Actually sit down and do an overall view of what's happening. They came with some good lobbying factors and very good deliberations to the people in room 512. I hope that everything I've said in Municipal Affairs, everything I've said in my deliveries is that we have to look at our local governments, treat them as true partners.

To put things on record that they presented, municipal governments must have a fiscal capacity to fulfill their mandate through primary access to the property tax base. Now, it would be better to sit down and look at how tax base dollars are going back to them instead of throwing back the question: "Well, what do you want? What's your answer?" I believe they should not be pressed into a corner. Don't give them grants. Treat it like their own tax base so that they can go out there and look after a stable, long-term, and progressive source of revenue.

You know, we've looked in the last five, six years actually at the downloading from the federal government to the provincial, from the provincial down to the local governments. The time for playing that one-string guitar from both levels of government should be over and long gone. There is probably a better ruling factor, and that is that the municipalities throughout this province try their best. I believe, from everybody that I have gone to, that they're doing a very good job.

I put some questions out on the table last week on what is actually

being said to me out in local Alberta and some of the items that they're actually stressing. This is what I put into Infrastructure on Thursday. Their number one item is downloading. That's their biggest concern. The fourth one is infrastructure, fast moving up into second, and the second, in my tabulation, is being treated as a child of the provincial government and the lack of respect from those MLAs that actually did sit in local government in their background.

Education tax. Here we are. We are tinkering. I brought this up before. I know that the people from AUMA didn't come forward with a direct answer on what should be happening with education tax. I believe that what was mentioned today is that the 60-40 is actually 62-38 on the overall average. In some areas of this province it's 70-30, and in some areas it's 75-25. I hope that we are looking at that. I'm tired of looking at the tinkering, listening to the tinkering. We have to look at, hopefully, what was mentioned by the minister, that the committee is working long and hard on it, consulting maybe for the first time on this particular item. That's major.

I could talk throughout this whole thing on what was brought forward. I'm glad, like you said yourself, Mr. Minister, about what was coming forward on the MGA changes. I brought my thoughts to the AUMA at the end of January, saying that there were too many submissions to the MGA each year and that it seems to be coming from the two cities with all the legal beagles that are actually pushing all these different items forward. But I do believe that there were some good thoughts being brought forward at the AUMA in the fall when they worked on their policies and their submissions to the MGA. I do know that there is a committee headed up by the mayor of Claresholm, and I've had a number of communications with him on this particular item.

I'm looking at another item in here – it's actually under the budget system – that hadn't been put on the table; that is, 2.4.3, grants in place of taxes. The grants in place of taxes program was budgeted at \$37.392 million for 1999-2000. The comparable forecast is 29 percent less, at \$28.98 million. The gross estimate for 2000-2001 is \$32 million. This represents a 15 percent decrease from the gross comparable budget of 1999-2000. Will the minister provide a list of where the \$28.98 million for grants in place of taxes was distributed? Why is there a 15 percent decrease in the budget for grants in place of taxes programs in 2000-2001? This might seem kind of weird, me asking questions like that, but until we come to a plan where we can have a stable financing system without wagging the carrot of grants, we're never going anywhere.

Under financial support to local authorities, will the minister provide the criteria for distribution of funds under the financial support to local authorities program as well as a list of which municipalities received money under this program in '99-2000? Why did this program have spending that was 186 percent over budget in '99-2000?

Like I mentioned before, with your announcement last week on the Municipal 2000 sponsorship program, will the minister provide a list, a complete list instead of just what I got in the release, of which municipalities received funding throughout this '99-2000 program? We actually got a good list from you last year, but if there is more to it, we're asking just to keep our own records in place.

The municipal debenture interest rebates under 2.4.2. Will the minister provide a breakdown of where the \$14.368 million for the municipal debenture interest rebates program was distributed? Why is the minister budgeting for a 13 percent decrease in the spending for municipal debenture interest programs for 2000-2001?

Working a little bit backwards in our book here is 2.4.1, unconditional municipal grants. The unconditional municipal grants are estimated at \$39.619 million in 2000-2001. This is an increase of \$2.999 million, or 8.18 percent, from the \$36.62 million in 1999-

2000. Will the minister provide a list of how \$36.62 million was distributed among Alberta's municipalities in forms of unconditional grants in '99-2000? How does the minister anticipate the \$39.619 million will be distributed in 2000-2001? Why is the extra \$2.999 million required for municipalities?

9:50

It's interesting, as I peruse the AUMA *Urban Perspective* and as different ministers have actually gone and talked to the AUMA and their board, that it seems like both sides of the House here are talking the same language. I'm asking questions and pursuing different things under infrastructure, pursuing things under property tax, pursuing things under a lot of cases. On January 27 and 28, when ministers met with them, when the Leader of the Official Opposition and myself met with the AUMA, I believe they were talking about how good a conversation they had with the ministers. Yet when the budget came out, the number one thing I'm seeing in this mailing to me was that

absent from Budget 2000 were any clear steps in confronting the problems of seniors and affordable housing, and homelessness. The province has shown a disappointing lack of leadership in addressing these difficult issues.

That is so true, and it hasn't been something just brought up over the last few months. It's actually been brought up, studied to death from both the federal and the provincial, yet we're seeing no movement on this particular item.

I can read other things.

Unfortunately, the Province has been less than bold in its treatment of Alberta's property owners. In spite of huge surpluses and planned reductions in other tax sources, they failed to reduce the \$1.3 billion Provincial tax demand on property owners. I sympathize with members' concerns over their restricted ability to provide basic local services . . .

This is really what was emphasized today in our meeting at 6 o'clock, and it's continuing on here.

. . . and their frustration in accessing a long-term, stable funding source. Provincial property taxes are too high, and tangible tax relief to property owners is long overdue. It is clear that a significant reduction of Provincial property tax is needed to help municipalities properly fund local services.

So paying lip service isn't answering the questions. They're stressing the fact that they want to get involved with the provincial government and the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure – which relays, really, back onto municipal, because you can divide up the ministries and try to make them sound as if they're working, but the actual fact is that the only thing I could see was that you took all the deputy ministers out of their silos and just confused the populace of Alberta a bit more. It took most municipalities six months to recover, but now they're back on track, and they're asking where we are going from here, Mr. Minister.

I do know that I could continue on for a long time, but I know that I have a member on our side who would like to ask a few questions. I'm looking forward to looking at your answers, Mr. Minister, and I'm going to sit down and have somebody else stand up.

THE CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Buffalo, in the three minutes remaining.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, I don't know what's more distressing, the fact that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has nothing else to do on a Saturday afternoon than watch a Liberal convention in Ottawa or the fact that he doesn't recognize the difference between the statute and the regime surrounding it.

You know, I've always said that this minister is new to the FOIP responsibility, but the Liberal opposition has consistently said that we have one of the strongest FOIP laws anywhere in Canada. It was

modeled on Ontario and British Columbia, and we went a couple better. But what we hadn't counted on when we passed that law and when we supported that law was that just before October 1, 1995, this government was going to bring in a set of fees that would make these the highest application fees for a FOIP access request anywhere in Canada.

That \$25 fee was way higher than anybody else was charging. The only place that had an application fee was the federal government, and it was a \$5 fee. I'd expect that the Minister of Municipal Affairs would be delighted that the Liberal opposition would be working as hard to hold the federal government accountable in the interests of Albertans as we work to hold this provincial government accountable.

The other comment I would make, Mr. Chairman, is that with respect to Bill C-6 we had tried to suggest to this minister that he could take a leadership role like other provinces had, like the select special committee.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: You could've last weekend.

MR. DICKSON: Well, for the minister's benefit, I spent an hour and a half with Mr. John Reid, the access to information commissioner, and I want that minister to know that I think I'm working at least as hard as the government of the province of Alberta is to protect those interests of Albertans when it comes to protecting their privacy. I don't know whether he spent any time talking to the national access commissioner.

The final point I wanted to make with respect to Bill C-6 is simply this. In about 1970 a select special committee of this Legislature made up mainly of Social Credit government members was concerned enough about privacy of Albertans to flag the concern to urge the government to build legislative safeguards to protect the privacy of Albertans when it came to information held by private corporations. You know, that was about 1970, and here we are in 2000, 30 years later, and we have not had a government that's had the courage, the foresight, the initiative, the resourcefulness, or the imagination to start addressing that. This government ought to know better. They've been told better. They've got bureaucrats that have told them better, but they haven't seen the light.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Municipal Affairs for the fiscal year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$142,890,000
--	---------------

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report the estimates of Health and Wellness, Learning, Justice and Attorney General, and Municipal Affairs.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MRS. LAING: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, for the following departments:

Department of Health and Wellness: operating expense and capital investment, \$5,623,442,000.

Department of Learning: operating expense and capital investment, \$3,105,403,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$65,800,000.

Department of Justice and Attorney General: operating expense and capital investment, \$419,916,000.

Department of Municipal Affairs: operating expense and capital investment, \$142,890,000.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of Supply on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to table copies of the documents tabled during Committee of Supply on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

10:00

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If that's all the reporting we can do tonight, I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[At 10:01 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

