

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

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8:00 p.m.

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### head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. Again we keep the usual rules: only one person standing at a time and speaking. For this evening we're back to the agreement between House leaders that was explained some time ago; that is, a 10-minute, a 60-minute, and a five-minute at the end.

### head: Main Estimates 2001-2002

#### Executive Council

THE CHAIRMAN: For this evening we'll begin with the hon. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Chairman, hon. members, thank you. I am pleased to appear before this committee in my capacity as minister responsible for Executive Council to discuss the 2001-2004 business plan and of course the current budget.

There are two main programs in Executive Council. One of course is the office of the Premier and general administration, which provides support to cabinet and the deputy minister's office as well as the office of the Lieutenant Governor and the protocol office, and the Public Affairs Bureau, which is responsible for providing two-way communications with Albertans about government programs and various government services.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to begin my remarks this evening by making some general remarks about the Executive Council business plan. One of the key responsibilities of Executive Council is to co-ordinate the government's overall goals and strategies and to ensure that all ministries are working together toward the achievement of those goals. As always, the path set out for government to follow is strongly rooted in the needs and priorities of Albertans. The government's 2001-2004 business plan recognizes that fact, stating that the province's success has been based on the strong values Albertans hold. The job of government is to ensure that those values continue to be reflected in its programs and in its services. Mr. Chairman, Executive Council will ensure that the values behind Alberta's success, values such as independence, innovation, people, and fiscal responsibility, are all reflected in the work government does on behalf of all Albertans.

Ensuring effective communications between Albertans and the government has always been an important part of the process. With that in mind, Mr. Chairman, I'd like now to turn to a brief overview of the 2001-2004 business plan goals and strategies of the Public Affairs Bureau. The Public Affairs Bureau's business plan identifies four main goals.

- Goal 1. Increase communications with Albertans in the areas they identify as top priorities . . .
- Goal 2. Make government information more accessible to Albertans . . .
- Goal 3. Improve the efficiency and coordination of communications across government . . .
- Goal 4. Deliver products and services that allow us to meet or exceed revenue projections and customers' needs . . .

One business plan strategy that will have an important impact on the achievement of those goals is the plan to increase the public's awareness and use of Alberta Connects information resources. Alberta Connects is a program that gives Albertans the opportunity to find out about major government programs and initiatives. It

allows them to ask questions and provide feedback through a provincewide toll-free phone line and e-mail site on the government home page. I should point out that efforts to make Albertans more aware of Alberta Connects are already showing marked success.

For example, good progress has been made in incorporating Alberta Connects contact points into the various communications activities and initiatives that take place across government. In fact, Mr. Chairman – and you'll find this interesting – the toll-free line logged more than 160,000 calls in the 2000-2001 fiscal year. Not all of them were complimentary calls; nonetheless, we received 160,000 calls. The total for the previous fiscal year was some 18,000, so that's a remarkable increase.

We're also seeing an increase in the number of Albertans using the Alberta Connects e-mail site on the Internet. By the way, it's a brand-new site. It's been updated to provide even easier access to Albertans who wish to seek information on the various government departments, with the total number of questions and comments received over the year increasing to approximately 10,000 on the Net. That's up from some 5,000 last year: double. Efforts will certainly continue over the coming year to build Alberta Connects into communications programs in order to ensure that Albertans are aware of Alberta Connects as a convenient and effective way to access government information and to ensure that indeed their opinions and their views and their thoughts are heard.

Another key initiative for the bureau this year is the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* project. This is a project that has been in the works for a number of years, and I'm sure that those members of the committee who are also members of the legal community will agree with me when I say that the project is a welcome one. Under the current business plan it's projected that the *Revised Statutes* should be completed and on the market by the end of this year.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to conclude my remarks to the committee by giving a brief overview of the projected spending for Executive Council under the 2001-2004 business plan. Projections show nominal increases in the Executive Council budget to accommodate a number of items.

The first item is the transfer of the Alberta order of excellence program from Community Development to Executive Council. Executive Council is both pleased and honoured to assume responsibility for a program that strives to recognize Albertans who have made a difference to their province and to their fellow Albertans. I ask the committee members to note that the structure and process associated with the awards will continue as in the past, with the Alberta Order of Excellence Council overseeing nominations and the hon. Lieutenant Governor serving as chancellor for the awards.

A modest increase has also been budgeted to accommodate increased demands on the protocol office surrounding the World Championships in Athletics, coming to Edmonton this August. Indeed, having had some experience in this area with the 1988 Olympic Winter Games in Calgary, I know that the function of protocol is indeed a very significant one. The Worlds are an exceptional opportunity for the province to be a focus via a projected worldwide television audience of as many as 4 billion people, who will experience the championships through the 2,500 international media and the estimated 3,000 athletes and officials expected to attend, not to mention the thousands and thousands of spectators. The increase in protocol spending will ensure that the proper arrangements are made, particularly as it relates to the attendance of various senior international officials and dignitaries.

I would also like to explain the increase in the budget of the office of the Lieutenant Governor. This increase is to accommodate Her Honour's increased activities and presence throughout the province. Mr. Chairman, we very seldom get an opportunity to talk about our

Lieutenant Governor, but I can tell you without hesitation that Albertans are very, very pleased indeed that Her Honour has made such efforts to meet people in all corners of this province. Believe me; she brings distinction to herself and her office wherever she goes.

8:10

Another budget item of note is the \$1 million in spending for the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* project. I mentioned that project earlier. This is an item that has been discussed by the committee in the review of previous business plans. As a matter of fact, I think it goes back about two years. As I have mentioned during previous reviews, revenues from the sale of the product through the Queen's Printer bookstore are expected to more than cover expenditures.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my introductory remarks on Executive Council's business plan for 2001-2004. I'd be pleased now to listen to the questions that the opposition parties might have.

Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have an opportunity to review Executive Council this evening as part of the budget review process and certainly would like to thank the Premier for taking time out of his busy schedule to be here and make himself available not only to hear what we have to say but to answer the questions. In addition to that, I'd like to thank the staff for being here. I know you guys do a good job. He gets a lot more media coverage than we do, so obviously you're doing what you're supposed to be doing.

We do have a few comments and concerns about this particular department that I would like to review, and initially I'll start, I think, with the business plan as it's outlined in the 2001-2004 goals and strategies for Executive Council.

Just before I get there, I'd like to echo the comments the Premier made about the Lieutenant Governor. No doubt she's a real asset to this province, and we support the extended budget that she has. Certainly she's making a huge effort to be visible, to promote Alberta, to promote all corners of this province, and we support the direction she has taken the office in and certainly think there is a role for people in this province to understand the significance and the history behind the protocol of that particular office and the functions that it carries out at a variety of levels. So I'd like to thank the Premier for the attention that area is being given, and the additional dollars that are being spent there I think are dollars that are very well spent from a variety of perspectives.

First of all, I'd like to talk about some of the opening comments that the Premier made. The 160,000 calls as compared to the prior year's 18,000 calls gives rise to a few comments, I think, Mr. Chairman. One of the comments that I did make was that we see in the introductory comments in the business plan the office of the Premier, general administration. The statement is that they "will continue to provide responsive support to the Premier, while maintaining open communication between the Office and Albertans." It's been brought to our attention not once but many times that people will often call through to the Premier's office and cannot get through. Part of that explanation is in the volume of calls that the Premier has talked about here, the huge increase. I would expect that the office is making some sort of move towards being able to handle that increased volume of calls. So we would like to know what's happening there.

In good times and in bad it's very important that the office be open and accessible to people. When they get put on hold or when

they can't get through at all, people become very frustrated. Those calls trickle down certainly to the constituency offices and for sure to the Official Opposition. While we're happy to call the Premier to account when we think he isn't doing his job, certainly being responsive in terms of just answering the phone is of fundamental importance. We hope to hear what kinds of changes are being made to the system so that the additional volume of calls can be answered.

Then the question comes up: why would there be such a significant increase? You know, that's hugely different in terms of number of calls, so we believe that that primarily would have been Bill 11 calls, people that were not very satisfied. I know a lot of those calls were in areas to do with environment. I think in terms of being open and accountable, it would be excellent if the Premier could provide a yearly tally in terms of when the calls came and what specific areas they related to. It would be good to hear the kind of feedback that the Premier is getting, those for and against. I think that's valuable information not only for the Premier and his office but for all backbenchers, and I include opposition members in that, Mr. Chairman.

So I would like him to entertain the thought that we could get some feedback on what those calls are, both in terms of volume per month and issue related and for and against on specific issues. If we could get information like that, I think that information could be shared with Albertans and made public. There are lots of different avenues to pursue that would be valuable feedback not only for legislators but Albertans in general and would help towards maintaining the open communication that the Premier talks about in his opening comments. So if he could address that for me, I would certainly appreciate it.

When we talk about the core businesses, it's important, we think, that the government put their best foot forward, no doubt, and that they supply professionals, co-ordinated efforts, writing services, editing services, and purchasing of communications support services, including advertising, printing, and graphic design. All of that is quite important in terms of a co-ordinated effort and an overall image that the government is trying to portray.

But the flip side of that is Orwellian control, Mr. Chairman. The communications department, the Public Affairs Bureau, now controls so much of what the ministries do that it begins to become a concern, an area where we start to believe through what we see and what we hear in terms of feedback from people that there is very little ability for our ministries to operate with any kind of arm's-length ability, that things, issues, and ideas have to be vetted through the Public Affairs Bureau. The concern, then, is that that control creeps even beyond ministries into areas that would be normally at arm's length. We saw an example of that this week in question period, when the law courts office called the Justice department for permission and a communications officer is the person who called back, a communications officer who works for the department, all in a very short time period.

Those are concerns in terms of the kinds of tentacles that the Public Affairs Bureau now has throughout the ministries and perhaps reaching even beyond those ministries. So if the Premier could either in his closing comments or in writing at some point in the future talk about that for us and give us some feedback in terms of: where's the dividing line? Where's the autonomy for the ministries? How do they feed into the overarching umbrella coverage that the Public Affairs Bureau gives, and how do they make those calls? It seems to me that we don't want a government that is run through the Public Affairs Bureau. I don't think that that's in the best interests of Albertans, and it seems that's the appearance, that the optics are that that's where that's going. I'd be quite happy to have clarification on that. I'm grounded in fact, Mr. Chairman, but perception is

a great deal of politics, and certainly that perception is out there, not just within our caucus but in other areas. So if we could get some feedback on that. That was dealing with core business 1, to “help government ministries communicate with Albertans.”

8:20

Now I'd like to talk for a moment about number 2, to “provide Albertans with two-way access to government.” The RITE telephone system is a great system to give Albertans toll-free access to government. Fairly extensive coverage in terms of advertising the fact that that's available. That's good. It still seems like there are a lot of Albertans who aren't aware of that service, so I'm hoping that what you're doing in that area in terms of letting people know how to use this system, how to access it and so on, is going to be ongoing in nature and perhaps given a little more focus.

Managing “the two-way flow of information through the Alberta Government Internet Home Page and Alberta Connects” is great. Nice to see that there's twice the amount of feedback through e-mail as there was in the year prior. Certainly not the increase that there was in phone calls, so that tells me that there are still a lot of Albertans who aren't connected or who don't feel comfortable using that system. I think that's important to keep in mind as decisions are made in other areas, like Supernet. In terms of access and training I think we've got a long way to go in this province. Supernet gets it to the doorway, but the question that we have heard throughout, Mr. Chairman, has been: who gets it over the doorway?

“Manage the province-wide distribution of news releases and provide technical support for major government news conferences and announcements.” Excellent. No doubt. I have a problem when that also includes promoting business interests, which I believe is what we saw happen this week, as an example, with the Minister of Environment in terms of what's happening with additional coal-fired generation here in the city. [interjection] Don't be complaining to me about that. There is no doubt that there is a great deal of what could be deemed to be interference by the government department in promoting business interests. [interjections] Open and accountable when the minister and his staff provide support to businesses?

AN HON. MEMBER: Relevance, Mr. Chairman.

MS CARLSON: Stand up on a point of order if you don't like it.

In fact, if you take a look at . . . [interjection] Well, stand up on a point of order if you don't like it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, it's not necessary to engage others in lively debate who are not responsible for these estimates.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The point is on . . . Excuse me. I'm going to have to take my chair. I'm losing my voice. I'll be back.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am quite anxious to participate in the debate or the exchange this evening on the estimates of public affairs. Again, I would like to join my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie in thanking the Premier for being present in the Assembly. We all realize that the Premier has a very, very busy schedule.

Now, I am always interested in the activities of the Public Affairs Bureau. Certainly, for whatever reason, I feel that as an opposition member I should be entitled to the same services from the Public Affairs Bureau that they provide to the Premier's office and to all different members of Executive Council.

Mr. Chairman, I'm very, very I guess the word would be jealous of the professionals that members of Executive Council have at their fingertips. In fact, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry and I were discussing this afternoon after question period the luxury of having a detailed communications plan. The hon. member was describing to me the researcher and himself sitting down at 8 o'clock in the morning and getting a press release out by 10 o'clock in the forenoon. We were assuming that with the communications staff that the Premier would have at his fingertips, there would be perhaps a three- or four-day window to get together with key messages and discussion points and talking points. The luxury of this – well, I felt jealous of this staff that the Premier and other members of Executive Council would have at their fingertips. [interjection] Yes, but the province is also a democracy.

Computers. In fact, at one point we were having difficulty with amendments to some legislation. Whenever we would propose it to legal counsel, the letters and the words wouldn't come together on the computer. The computer wouldn't print them out. Now, the public service . . . [interjections] How old are these computers? We had one word, “legal,” and the “al” at the end of it would not join the rest of it. Now, I don't know whether that's reflective of the whole province, Mr. Chairman, and I don't want to go there. But we had “leg al.” We worked and we worked and we worked on this. So this is some of the equipment we're working with. There are two researchers to an office. Things are different, but we will manage.

You know, when you look at this Public Affairs Bureau, the work they do, it is amazing just what can be accomplished. We think of public relations. Many people stop me on the street in Edmonton-Gold Bar, and they say to me – Mr. Chairman, with all due respect to the Premier, they don't call the Premier the Premier in Safeway. They call him Ralph. They say: what's he like? And I say it's like the television newscasts. The projection, the communication, the image that's communicated is warm and it's fuzzy. And they say: is it really like that? And I say: the strong part of this government is public relations. Everyone is talking me about natural gas prices; they're talking to me about electricity prices. It's strong on public relations and not so strong on consumer relations. This is the discussion in Safeway.

You think of the importance of public relations, particularly in a government. I saw it for myself firsthand, up-close, pretty well on a daily basis. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry and I would go down, and the communications that were displayed by the Premier and staff during the Bill 11 debate is an example. And I'm going to get to this a little later. The resources that were available and the resources that were available to the Friends of Medicare out on the steps – the difference was amazing.

My first question to the Premier this evening would be this: is the entire budget of the Public Affairs Bureau dedicated exclusively, or do other departments chip in? Do they chip in with staff, or are they movable from one department of the government to the other depending upon what issues they may want to work on? Are members of the Public Affairs Bureau full-time equivalents of the government, or do they get contract positions? “Are they contractors or are they government employees?” is the synopsis of that question.

What steps will be taken by the Public Affairs Bureau during the three-year planning period to better respond to Albertans' request for information about health care, education, infrastructure, and fiscal priorities? Again to the Premier: what steps will the Public Affairs Bureau be taking over the next three years to further develop the navigation and design elements of the Alberta government Internet home page to give Albertans improved information access and feedback? Now, I hope the public is going to have a better record of having access to information to the government than I, because I'm

really getting disappointed with the FOIP requests that I have initiated and the information that I'm receiving back. I've often thought of FOIPing the Public Affairs Bureau, and I think it's going to be one of my projects over the summer.

8:30

MS CARLSON: How much is it going to cost, and who's going to pay?

MR. MacDONALD: I hope it doesn't cost what it's cost me for Alberta Human Resources and Employment; there was a \$54,000 figure there. Alberta Environment relating to the Husky truck stop in Hinton: thousands of dollars there. The bid-rigging scandal: that's in Alberta Environment as well. That's in the thousands upon thousands upon thousands of dollars.

This information is vital. It's in the public interest, because with this softwood lumber dispute that's going on between us and the Americans now, I would certainly hope that we were not through lax enforcement of our timber disbursements giving some sort of economic advantage to Canadian timber harvesters that the Americans would like to know. But this is getting further into the forest and away from the Public Affairs Bureau. I think we should get back to the Public Affairs Bureau.

Will the Premier elaborate on the Public Affairs goal of making "government information more accessible to Albertans," to all Albertans, including this member of the Official Opposition? Will the Premier provide additional information on the goal of the Public Affairs Bureau to "improve the efficiency and coordination of communications across government." Now, this is getting back to what I talked about earlier. The Premier can correct me if I'm wrong, but this vision I have is that the Public Affairs Bureau is the nerve centre of the entire government of the province of Alberta. It's like they're always taking the pulse of Albertans. Again, I'm disappointed that they don't share that information with the opposition.

What types of training programs are used to train staff as consultants? Perhaps the Premier will share that information with members of the opposition. What criteria are used by the administration working in conjunction with branch managers to adjust resources to ensure that the communication staffing levels meet the requirements of client departments? How many employment opportunities are expected to be filled in this fiscal year in the Public Affairs Bureau? As I said before, issues of consumer relations, issues of confidence in our health care system, confidence in our public education system: as confidence changes – and I'm sure that's being measured at least on a monthly basis by the bureau – there's probably need for more employees as issues come about.

What actions are now being taken by the Public Affairs Bureau during this fiscal year to increase satisfaction levels in the areas of supervisor feedback and leadership recognition and workload levels? Are the members of the Public Affairs Bureau members of a professional association? Are they salaried? [interjection] I can't imagine that they're members of the AUPE. I don't think so. If they're working overtime, perhaps they have an interest in joining the AUPE. That would be an interesting organization drive.

What type of management and leadership training programs are being established to help managers better meet the needs of their staff? What is the staff turnover rate in the Public Affairs Bureau? I've met a couple of people from that department.

MS CARLSON: Are they on contract or staff?

MR. MacDONALD: I asked the question earlier if they're on contract or whether they're staff.

Again to the Premier: what steps are being taken by the Public Affairs Bureau during 2001-2002 to improve satisfaction with training programs such as technology training? Has a professional certification program for public affairs officers been established, and if so, what are the criteria? What are the strategies behind the development of a human resource plan for the bureau including a plan and initiatives to improve staff training and recognition?

Now communications, which we so admire. Communications services, reference line 2.0.2.

MS CARLSON: Just lend them to us for six months, and let's see what we can do.

MR. MacDONALD: We could have a coup.

What strategies has the Public Affairs Bureau developed to support government communications surrounding the 2005 Alberta centennial celebrations? Earlier in the Premier's opening remarks, Mr. Chairman, there was a discussion around the track and field event which is to occur later on this summer in Edmonton. Again, for the Alberta centennial celebrations, what role will the Public Affairs Bureau play in that?

What strategies have been developed by the Public Affairs Bureau to work with the PAO, the personnel administration office, to build recognition of the Alberta public service as an employer? That would be a strategy that hopefully can be developed. I think that the Alberta public service is going to be actively recruiting personnel to join the public service. There has been a perception in the past: oh, it's the bureaucracy. The easiest for anyone, whether it's consumers or whether it's media personalities or whether it's any frustrated citizen, is to express their frustrations through the public service.

We need a stable public service. We need to attract young people into the public service who are entering the workforce for the first time. One of the main attractions is the stability that they can have perhaps for 30 years and get a pension and retire. But we've seen in the last eight years that confidence in a public service job or taking your profession and applying yourself within the Alberta public service is no longer what it used to be. To restore confidence in that would be a big job, and I would encourage the Premier to have a development of this nature with the Public Affairs Bureau.

Now, what is the process used by areas of the Public Affairs Bureau to develop business plans to ensure that the organization is contributing to the goals of government and client departments? One of those issues that I could think of that would be relevant to that process, again, would be the Department of Energy. We have this ongoing concern about electricity deregulation in this province. It's a problem. We were discussing last night in Energy estimates the problems that have occurred in Montana, our neighbour to the south, which deregulated its electricity generation and distribution system a year before this province introduced Bill 27, the Electric Utilities Amendment Act. Nothing but problems: high costs, shortage of supply, industry shutting down.

How will the Public Affairs Bureau deal with the business plans of the Department of Energy? Is the Department of Energy just simply going to change the business plan? How will this deregulation initiative be communicated to Albertans? They're going to have their work cut out for them on that.

8:40

Again to the Premier: what criteria are used by the Public Affairs Bureau to determine which agency is contracted for media buying for client departments? Another question is: how much money would be spent?

Now, again to the Premier: why does public satisfaction with

government information continue to be consistently below the target of 75 percent, and how is the 75 percent target for 2001-02 going to be achieved? This is on page 148 of the business plan.

What role is communications services playing in assisting the Ministry of Health and Wellness in communicating the government's policy statement and legislation on the delivery of surgical services to Albertans? Now, that's again, I believe, a public relations discussion. How much of the \$5 million budget under communications in 2001-2002 has been allotted to communicate the government's policy statement and legislation on the delivery of surgical services to Albertans?

Again, how much of last year's preliminary of a little over \$5 million was used to communicate the government's position on Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act? That was a public relations exercise that I don't think, Mr. Chairman, any province in this country has seen anything like. There was an amazing list of issues to be dealt with in Bill 11, and I'm sure there was daily contact between the Public Affairs Bureau and the Ministry of Health and Wellness. There just had to be. Here again we're back to the warm and fuzzy: the Health Care Protection Act. This is what the people in the Capilano Safeway notice about the enormous communications skill the current Premier displays, but they're not convinced with the Health Care Protection Act. I don't know how much of this \$5 million budget was used, but when we think . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I hear the minister of health wants me to continue, as he interrupted me before.

MR. MAR: You can always defer to your hon. colleague, you know.

MS CARLSON: Yeah, I know. I have a sore throat, and sometimes it gives out on me. Although I'm sure government members wish that was a permanent condition at least during the duration of budget debate, it isn't.

MR. MAR: I wish you good health; I assure you.

MS CARLSON: Yes. Thank you.

I want to continue with the comments that I had started to make before there was some degree of heckling involved, and that was on core business 2, "provide Albertans with two-way access to government," and specifically "manage the province-wide distribution of news releases and provide technical support for major government news conferences and announcements." I was suggesting, Mr. Chairman, that that should also include providing key support on industry initiatives, because we've seen that happen increasingly, it seems to me although I may just be more aware of it, over the last couple of years.

Like the public meeting that just happened the other night. We see a great deal of stage managing, I would suggest, of some of these public meetings. The question for the Premier on this issue is . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: I didn't see you there, Debby.

MS CARLSON: I wasn't at that particular meeting, but I have been at many that both of you have been involved in where there has been a significant . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Address the chair.

MS CARLSON: I am addressing the chair.

Mr. Chairman, there has been a significant involvement . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Ignore the comments from the side, if you could. Just stay with it.

MS CARLSON: It's very tough, Mr. Chairman. I'm trying to, but they're very persistent.

THE CHAIRMAN: But they're going to be good from now on.

MS CARLSON: I hope they will or else perhaps engage in debate at the end of the hour. That would also be welcome.

So the question I have for the Premier on this issue is: is the role of the Public Affairs Bureau and the government as an enabler in these areas? It could well be seen as the role in promoting economic development or other interests. Is its primary function as an enabler in these situations? Or is the government's role more global in perspective, a monitoring role, more of a grassroots collecting of information and looking over the global kind of public good? If the role of government is the public good in general, then I don't think there's a role for them to be an enabler in terms of organizing public meetings. I think that's in direct conflict. So I would like to hear the Premier's comments. [interjection] Mr. Chairman, I'm being provoked, and I'm going to be responding here in a second.

The question is: should they be enabling in those kinds of instances, or is there a more global role for government? This becomes increasingly an issue as we deal with competing interests in the province and conflicts in a variety of areas. I would like the Premier to address that if he could, because I think it is an important distinction that needs to be made. The government has a long history of supporting business initiatives. [interjections] They do in terms of organizing public meetings, and we have all been there where there have been staff from the Public Affairs Bureau directly involved in the organization of the meetings. My question is: is their role there as an enabler, or is there a more global function? I think that's a legitimate question. I think it's fair for Albertans to have the answer to that question.

I will move on to goal 4 now, where the Premier talks in the business plan about delivering "products and services that allow us to meet or exceed revenue projections and customers' needs." My concern with that statement is the term "customers." I don't think all Albertans are customers, Mr. Chairman, in terms of the context of their relationship with their government. I think they are citizens first and foremost and that citizens deserve to have their basic needs met and sometimes exceeded.

So I would like the Premier to tell us on what basis he uses the term "customers" over "citizens." I think that's a legitimate question to be asking here. There are many people in this province who would not view themselves as customers, and we are not always all customers in all areas in terms of what we expect or need from delivery. Semantics are important when you're talking about these kinds of issues, and I think that definitions are also very important. The kinds of filters that the government uses to make decisions that decide the future of Albertans are very important. These are issues that need to be discussed and need to be debated, and we'd be happy to see private members from the government side participate in this debate if they wish to do so on the record. It would be a nice role for that particular member to participate in for a change. If we could have that kind of feedback, it would be appreciated, Mr. Chairman.

The Premier talked about the review that they're doing of the *Statutes of Alberta*, and I'd like to thank him for that. I think it's excellent that that review is being undertaken. He doesn't know

perhaps that we use those statutes quite often, and to have them revised and updated would definitely be an asset to the kind of work that we do.

I'd like to turn the page and go to page 148 now and talk about some of the public satisfaction surveys that the government does. The first one that I'm looking at in particular is "public satisfaction with government communications in priority areas." We see them starting in the 1999-2000 years and projecting targets into the future. We'd like some information on how those surveys are conducted: who they talk to, how the evaluations are done, whether the feedback on the public surveys is anonymous or whether there are some potential tiebacks to the people. We know that that can skew the information that comes forward and what the targets are. The criteria used to develop them, who they're asking, and what are the questions: that kind of data I think is relevant and is able to help us evaluate the effectiveness of the satisfaction.

8:50

Is it global or is it specific in nature? What are the kinds of questions that are being asked there? I think to just put the survey down there and say that 66 percent of the public satisfaction with government communications in priority areas is what was recorded in the '99-2000 year is not very useful if we don't have any of this background information in terms of how the numbers were established or where they came from or who participated in the survey. Those questions relate to all of the surveys that we have in here. So if we could get that kind of background information on each of the five surveys that are listed in these business plans, that would be helpful to us.

I think that's the extent of the first round of questions that I have. I will leave the floor open now for the rest of my colleagues. I've got a secondary round of questions that I hopefully will have a chance to get to a little later in the evening, but for now that's the extent of my questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again, I want to thank the Premier for being here this evening and giving us some insights into the ministry business plans for Executive Council. The goals that are established here on page 169 of the government and lottery funds are certainly lofty goals and certainly are goals that will serve Albertans well if we can achieve them.

In moving along as time is of the essence here and looking at key performance measures, again, I see that the key performance measures here are given in percentages with certainly no explanation as to how these were arrived at, how many people were surveyed, how these results were gathered, and you know, certainly no explanation when we see, for example, that we increased the public satisfaction with government information. From 1999 to 2000 it went from 66 percent to 75 percent as a target. How are we going to be determining whether that target was reached? Again, we'd like some hard-core statistics here, not just straight percentages.

I look down as well to "public satisfaction with RITE and Queen's Printer bookstores," again very, very worthwhile services provided to Albertans, particularly when we look at the RITE line. In my role for the last four years of being the critic for WCB, I saw certainly how well this line is used by Albertans all across this province and how frequently it was used by injured workers to phone and express their dissatisfaction with the progress that was being made in the settlement of their claims. It is certainly a service that I know is well appreciated, and without it many of these people wouldn't have any voice at all in voicing their dissatisfaction.

In moving along here, I notice as well that the operating estimate for program 1, the office of the Premier/general administration is increasing by \$250,000 over last year's budget. In looking at line 1.0.1 of the lottery fund estimates, I have a few specific questions here for the Premier. He can certainly respond to these in writing if he wishes.

My first question then: will the Premier provide the projections for gross operating expenses for line 1.0.1, office of the Premier/general administration for 2002-2003 and 2003-2004?

My next question to the Premier: what is the level of full-time equivalents projected for the office of the Premier/general administration for 2002-2003 and 2003-2004?

Again to the Premier: will he provide a breakdown of the gross operating expenses of \$4.663 million in 2001-2002 for the office of the Premier as well as for general administration? In other words, how much of the \$4.663 million is for the office of the Premier? How much of this amount is being allocated to general administration?

Would the Premier please explain why there is a 4.9 percent, or \$218,000, increase in the office of the Premier and general administration budget for 2001-2002 over last year's preliminary actual? Will the Premier also indicate how many of the full-time equivalents under this vote are employed by the office of the Premier and general administration respectively? Will the Premier provide a breakdown of the \$4.663 million in gross expenses for 2000-2001 for the office of the Premier and for general administration by object; in other words, a breakdown in salaries, travel expenses, wages, advertising, telephone and communications, contract services including professional, technical, and labour services, data-processing services, hosting, and other purchased services?

Will the Premier indicate what the gross expense was for the Premier's southern office in 2000-2001 and the projected gross expense for the Premier's southern office in 2001-2002 and also for the years 2002-2003 and 2003-2004?

Also, will the Premier indicate what objectives, strategies, and performance measures and benchmarks have been established for 2001-2002 for the office of the Premier and general administration? What types of weekly and monthly reports are prepared by the office of the Premier and general administration in tracking the views of Albertans on such issues as public health care, the government's private clinics and private hospitals policy, public education, and tax reform for those Albertans who correspond with the office of the Premier?

Also, along the same lines, could the Premier indicate what steps are taken by his office to follow up on or respond to concerns expressed by Albertans through these monthly and weekly reports? How much of the \$4.663 million in gross expenses of the office of the Premier and general administration in 2001-2002 will be allocated to policy co-ordination and business planning?

Now, as well, I thought the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie covered the office of the Lieutenant Governor very well. I would certainly echo her praises for the great work that the Lieutenant Governor does in featuring this most important office in the province and what a fabulous job she does in getting out and meeting Albertans of all ages. Certainly she is an Albertan that we all can be very, very proud of.

Now, as well, Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had many questions on the Public Affairs Bureau, and certainly we wish to continue with a few questions that could be covered here with this particular section. What we see here for an operating estimate for the year 2001-2002 is 10 and a quarter million dollars. Now, this is 10 and a quarter million dollars to make the government look good. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold

Bar actually said, he's quite jealous that opposition members certainly don't have access to this ministry as well. Perhaps it's a good thing. We might not be on the opposition side if we had access to that department.

9:00

We do have a few questions here, though, that we would like to ask. My first question would be under the area of public affairs. Why is the budget for public affairs increasing by 12.6 percent, or \$1.144 million, over last year's budget?

Can the Premier provide a more detailed breakdown of the dedicated revenue for 2000-2001? Also, can the Premier explain why dedicated revenue is estimated to increase by 47 percent, or \$800,000, over last year? If the Premier could also give us a breakdown of the \$10.25 million budget for the Public Affairs Bureau in 2001-2002 by object: salaries and wages, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, data processing services, hosting, and contracts to outside vendors.

Will the Premier provide a breakdown of the gross operating expenses of the Public Affairs Bureau by subprogram for 2002-2003, which I see is \$9.946 million, and for 2003-2004, which is pegged at \$10.158 million?

Also, if the Premier could give us a breakdown of the 130 full-time equivalents of the Public Affairs Bureau by subprogram. These would be under the headings of administrative services, communications services, communications technologies, Queen's Printer bookstores, publishing services, and the RITE telephone system. Also, what are the projected number of full-time equivalents in the Public Affairs Bureau in 2002-2003 and in 2003-2004?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar also asked a number of questions on communications services, and I have just a few more here if the Premier could please answer those for me. What initiatives are planned by communications services in 2001-2002 to improve speech writing services and improve the government's internal communication with employees? How much of the communications services budget in 2001-2002 is allocated to subscriptions to Angus Reid, Environics, and other polling and marketing research? How much of the communications services budget is allocated to focus group research on such issues as health care and education?

As well, if we are going to be having a summit this fall, which I understand could be announced any day – and this is about how Albertans would deal with the surplus once the debt is paid off – how many dollars would be allocated from this department to promote or spread the news of this particular summit? As well, how much of the communications services budget for 2001-2002 will be allocated to advertising services?

Just a few more questions here before I cede the floor to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. How much of the advertising budget is allocated to Highwood Communications, Calder Bateman, Hill & Knowlton, and Palmer Jarvis? What types of projects are worked on by such firms during the course of the fiscal year? Will they be working on communication of government policy statements and legislation on surgical services to Albertans?

Finally, my last set of questions to the Premier. Will the Premier provide a status report on the specialized communications training programs for departmental staff in regional offices? Which departments are involved in receiving training for communications, planning, writing and editing print and graphic design, and advertising?

Mr. Chairman, with those questions, I will be ceding the floor here to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I thank you very much for this opportunity.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. At this time I don't know what else I can say about any more questions I have for the Premier regarding the Public Affairs Bureau. The only question I can think of currently is: does the Governor of Florida have a public affairs bureau? I'm just curious, Mr. Chairman.

Now, I have some questions for the Premier regarding communications technologies, line 2.0.3. What further initiatives will be undertaken by communications technologies in 2001-2002 to upgrade the Alberta government Internet home page to increase the relevance and timeliness of posted information? Earlier in my remarks I heard an hon. member instruct me to just visit the home page and I could get all the information on the government that I wished. Unfortunately, that's not true. The Internet home page would certainly provide me and the research staff access to government information if it were made available there. Certainly I find the EUB site worthwhile.

What strategies are being developed to provide information technology support to Executive Council as part of the shared services initiative? What cost savings have been achieved through the shared information technology services initiative between Executive Council and central bureau offices? I can see that the hon. Premier and members of his Executive Council are already diligently trying to provide me with information regarding the Internet.

Now the Queen's Printer bookstore. Long before I came to this Assembly, I used to drive up to Kingsway Avenue to seek statutes that were relevant to my workplace. I believe sometimes this information should be provided for free to those who walk in, but I know that's not going to be the way. There are other people who say that all library memberships should be free as well, but this is not the time nor place. What initiatives are planned by the Queen's Printer bookstore in 2001-2002 to improve its inventory system, including printing-on-demand service for clients and computerized operations, for the Calgary and Edmonton bookstores? What strategies have been developed in 2001-02 to expand electronic commerce – QP online, QP CD-ROM, QP source professional Internet – to allow the Queen's Printer bookstore customers to purchase products through the Internet? What additional partnerships with the private sector are planned by the Queen's Printer with respect to the production of new value-added publications? Why is the dedicated revenue of the Queen's Printer bookstores increasing by \$800,000, or 47 percent?

9:10

The RITE telephone system: in the time I have left I have a few questions about that. What steps are being taken to develop a more user-friendly RITE directory? What are the total number of calls to the RITE system in 2000-2001, and what are the projections for 2001-2002? Are action requests put through from the RITE system to the Public Affairs Bureau to the various departments of government, including the Premier's Office? What initiates the AR, the action request, in the provincial government of Alberta?

I'm very disappointed that our time is up. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call on the hon. Premier for five minutes.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I'd like to thank members of the opposition for their questions, at least for the reasonable questions that were well posed and can be reasonably answered by the officials who are sitting in the gallery this evening.

I would like to take this time to comment on some of the comments, the questions such as: can you provide a detailed breakdown

of the 160,000 telephone calls? I mean, does the opposition think that, you know, we have nothing else to do? We have a government to run. I was flattered, absolutely flattered to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar say he is jealous. Well, he should be jealous. He is outnumbered by more than 10 to 1, and he should be jealous because the people of this province elected us to govern. As they make all of these demands on government for information, I have to remind the opposition time and time again: the opposition is not the government. These people over here and all these people here are the government.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar also alluded to Bill 11, and he alluded to the Public Affairs Bureau conducting a public relations campaign. Well, we had to conduct a public relations campaign. We had to. You know, this is old history. I would remind the opposition that the sky hasn't fallen, that really nothing has changed other than that rules and regulations have been put around the contracting out by RHAs to surgical facilities that do minor procedures, rules and regulations that never existed before. I would remind the Official Opposition that the Health Care Protection Act has as its preamble an absolute commitment to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act, something they opposed.

But we had to conduct a public relations campaign, Mr. Chairman, because of the vicious misinformation. The way that bill was being misrepresented was reprehensible. They talk about how much the government spent. You know, they tabled a flimsy amount of money that in no way, shape, or form reflects the amount of money that was spent by the unions, the Friends of Medicare, and everyone else to spread the misinformation about that bill. I would estimate it was in the millions of dollars. So, yes, we had to mount a public relations campaign to get the truth out, because it certainly wasn't coming out of their mouths; I'll tell you that for sure.

But I would like to thank the hon. members for their participation in this evening's meeting to review the 2001 to 2004 business plan for Executive Council, because that's what it's all about. Open discussions such as this are an important part of the government's commitment to remaining open and accountable to Albertans. Indeed, that is reflected in the business plan of the Public Affairs Bureau. One of the cornerstones of this government has been listening to Albertans and reflecting their needs and priorities and the decisions, actions, and priorities of the government. Mr. Chairman, precisely, that is why we are the government and they are not.

Having said that, all feedback is valuable when it's offered up in the best interests of the province and the people we are here to serve. So I would like to thank all members of the committee for the time and thought they put into the process and for their feedback, and we will provide the answers to the reasonably posed questions.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Executive Council, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$15,169,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$1,000,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

### Government Services

THE CHAIRMAN: We'd call on the hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and committee members. Good evening. It's my pleasure to present the business plan and the estimates for Alberta Government Services.

I'd like to introduce some folks in the members' gallery tonight that have helped me put this together. I'm taking them in order, they are our deputy minister, Roger Jackson; Susan Bohachuk, our chief financial officer; Laurie Beveridge, our assistant deputy minister in charge of registries; and Dave Keto, my executive assistant in my office here.

I would like to take this opportunity to provide you with an overview of our business and financial plans and upcoming initiatives. Following my overview I will be pleased to accept questions and respond in written form.

Alberta Government Service's vision quite simply is to provide Albertans with "secure access to government information and services and a fair marketplace." While this past year has been filled with many successes, we are now looking ahead to new opportunities to further improving the services we provide to Albertans.

Our five core businesses are described on page 227 of the estimates, and briefly they include supporting a fair and effective marketplace, which has a twofold mandate. A fair and effective marketplace ensures a thriving entrepreneurial economy, but it also protects consumers from unethical operators. By continuing to promote and enforce Alberta's award winning Fair Trading Act, we will educate and protect consumers and provide a level playing field for all businesses. Key legislation for the upcoming year includes the Internet sales contract regulation and various other regulations pertaining to real estate, debtors' assistance, travel clubs, cemeteries, and personal property.

Consumer complaints will continue to be investigated. Last year over 1,600 investigations were completed, which recovered more than \$700,000 for Albertans. Twenty-one percent of our budget, or \$10.8 million, is dedicated to this core business.

Our second core business is to provide secure, timely, and high-quality licensing, registration, and information services.

MRS. NELSON: And you do a great job.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you.

These services account for 12 million transactions provided each year through Alberta registries. These services range from registering vehicles, registering land and land-related documents, and licensing businesses to securing loans. A further 6 million transactions support government programs such as maintenance enforcement, farm fuel, and transportation and safety, and over 14 million transactions are conducted for local municipalities and law enforcement agencies, amounting to a total of over 32 million transactions per year. These transactions take up 68 percent of our resources, or \$34 million. In return, these services generate revenues in excess of \$245 million for the general revenue fund.

9:20

The third core business is leading the cross-government, one-window initiative to provide Albertans with easier, faster, and more direct access to government services in a secure environment. In effect, Albertans will be able to access whatever services they

require through whatever method they choose, that being telephone, Internet, fax, mail, or in person. Long-term resources have not been identified for this initiative, so as an interim measure we have deployed funds from other programs. These funds represent 4 percent, or \$1.9 million, of our budget.

The fourth core business is to co-ordinate Alberta's regulatory review process and administer the governmentwide records management function and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. These services comprise about 7 percent, or \$3.5 million, of our budget.

Finally, the fifth core business is to deliver economical and efficient support services to all government departments through the Alberta Corporate Service Centre. ACSC provides transactional services in the areas of finance, human resources, information technology, and administration. Its net budget is \$129.6 million, and all costs are recovered by charge-backs to the 24 ministries. As a result, the net expenditure is actually zero, as shown on page 226.

In order to remain effective and efficient, we continued to look for better ways to operate. Our performance measures, shown on page 230, are one tool we use to monitor how well we're doing. Many of the measures relate to client satisfaction, where we have set most of our targets at 85 percent. We far exceeded this target, for example, when it came to Alberta's satisfaction level with registry services. About 94 percent of Albertans who used our registry services indicated that they were satisfied, and maintaining this kind of customer service record has become a significant priority.

Other measures set targets for reducing telemarketing fraud, for competitive fees, and for timely service provisions. In the year 2000 Alberta saw a 47 percent reduction in telemarketing fraud. Fees for licensing and registration transactions continued to be far below the national average. As well, we will be collecting baseline data and setting targets for some new performance measures so that we can continue to provide quality services and maintain our high performance levels.

Changes in expenditures. I would like to give an overview of changes to our budget. You will note on page 219 of the estimates that our operating budget has significantly increased from last year. We account for this increase largely through nearly \$130 million that was designated for ACSC, which was recently added to the ministry. These funds will be fully recovered through charges back to various ministries, so for the overall government of Alberta budget these expenditures and charge-backs will net out. Our ministry's share of these charge-backs is \$9.1 million, as shown on page 222, shared services. To avoid double counting, this amount is excluded from ACSC's budget, outlined on page 226.

Returning to page 222, the ministry support services budget increased overall because many of the components listed here are consolidated for efficiency rather than including separate program budgets. This explains, for example, the reduced budget for licensing, registry, and consumer services programs on page 223. Also within this program it is noted that the amortization declined as a result of reduced capital expenditures. As well, resources were reallocated to help provide a base level of funding for the one-window program, and we will continue to seek out partnerships from across government to supplement our contribution.

Finally, turning to page 225, the government support services budget shows a decrease due to a small net reduction in staffing in the information management and privacy area.

I'd like to shift gears for just a moment to discuss the revenue side of our budget, as reflected on page 232. Of the \$385 million, \$129.6 million represents the recovery of ACSC's costs from ministries as dedicated revenue. The remaining \$225 million relates to various fees and licences, the bulk of which are for motor vehicle services.

It is in this area that we anticipate most of our revenue increase as the demand for commercial and passenger vehicle registration grows. Forecasting a revenue increase seems unlikely given the estimate of \$54 million in savings passed out to Albertans following the registry fee reductions of last year. However, the revenue growth is due to the higher transaction volumes that are linked to a thriving economy, where the demand for services is increasing.

I mentioned earlier that the revenue generated from our service goes into general revenues. As a result, the funds needed to offset the additional costs of keeping up with higher service volumes must instead come out of our base budget. One example of this is that we have reduced our capital funds and diverted them towards operational requirements. Our capital requirements, however, have not been diminished.

One significant challenge for our ministry is the need to redevelop our Legacy systems, which were built in the 1980s and will soon require new technology to continue to deliver these services. Again, we will seek out partnerships from across government to help address this need.

I want to thank everyone for the few moments I had to introduce our budget, and I will now turn the floor over to you, Mr. Chairman, to accept any questions that may come from the committee.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the Minister of Government Services for his overview of his department.

Now, this is again, Mr. Chairman, a major department of the government. It's so important because it has the capability to investigate and enforce consumer protection legislation, use enforcement mechanisms to deter dishonest business practices, license and bond regulated businesses, encourage more consumer awareness and self-reliance, and provide regulatory framework.

[Mr. Klapstein in the chair]

Now, recently there have been some higher profile cases in the media of a minister that is willing to enforce, Mr. Chairman, the statutes that are available to protect consumers, and I would encourage the minister to continue this trend and rigorously enforce the legislation. For the longest time, in my view, in this province consumer protection has taken a backseat to public relations, contrary to what other people may think. I look no further than the issue of pine shakes.

I at this time would encourage the minister to look into these complaints that I'm getting, all of them, of course, from Calgary. I don't know why they're phoning Edmonton-Gold Bar, but they are. These are prospective home buyers who are asking me, "What's with these pine shakes?" I would encourage the minister to check this out. They're being told, "Oh, pine shakes don't rot in Calgary, and if they do rot, you only have to replace one or two on the entire roof and the problem is solved." I don't think that is accurate, and I'm astonished at this sort of behaviour.

Now, maybe these phone calls are not coming through on the RITE line, because they're not indicating what phone calls they're getting on the RITE line and what issues are being discussed. Perhaps they don't have the technology to do that. If they had the technology to do that, these phone calls could go right from the RITE line to the Ministry of Government Services.

Now, certainly, to say the least, that is dishonest, because everyone in this Assembly knows that the pine shake rots, and it rots in seven or eight years. This year may be a little drier year. There

may not be as much rain, and the fungus won't grow as quickly, but it will. We need to encourage more consumer awareness. That is one of the most important aspects of this department, and again I would encourage the minister to use all members of his department to ensure that consumers are protected.

9:30

We look at the whole issue of gas, and I'm certainly hoping, Mr. Chairman, that somewhere in this budget is money to protect natural gas consumers. This whole idea of exit fees: I want the minister to show strong leadership and indicate to all consumers of gas, particularly ATCO customers, that if there are to be any exit fees at all to be charged to a natural gas consumer by a natural gas provider, then the amount of those exit fees if you decide to leave, if you were to have the choice and you were to go to another gas provider – I believe very strongly that in the minister's department regulations exist so that the minister can tell the gas companies to inform the consumers right on the bill that there will be a \$40 or a \$60 or an \$80 exit fee or, if you're an industrial consumer and it's going to be based on the volume of gas used, what that exit fee will be. If we're going to be encouraging consumer choice in this province, the consumers have to have all the information before they make the choice.

As I understand this whole idea of exit fees, ATCO Gas has been given permission by the EUB to charge an exit fee. I think it should be right on the bill so that consumers can have that information so they can make a choice. Again, had consumers had that information in the past, there's not a consumer in this province, if they had known that the pine shake was not thoroughly tested before it was authorized and promoted by the current government, who would have brought that product. No one in the community of Leduc, no one in the community of Cochrane, no one in the community of Edson, no one would have bought that.

Now, we need to have a strong and competitive marketplace in Alberta with confident consumers, but we also need, as I said, adequate information. The legislation under the command of the hon. minister is there, and it is up to the department and the minister to utilize it. There's still much that could be done to inform and protect Alberta consumers and businesses, but I think the hon. minister is off to, as they say in southern Alberta, a real good start.

There's also the issue of plain language, and all legislation should be written and presented in a way that is understandable to all Albertans.

Should all legislation and regulations be tabled and published for public and stakeholder comment to ensure that Albertans are aware of changes prior to passage and enactment into law? [interjection] Now, I just heard the comment from another hon. member that they do that at the federal level. This used to be the occasion in this Assembly, and I'm going back to 1974. When a Progressive Conservative government instituted the Natural Gas Rebates Act, I read in *Hansard*, Mr. Chairman, that incredibly all the regulations concerning the Natural Gas Rebates Act were circulated to the members of the Assembly – and there was quite a sizable opposition of Social Credit members at that time – so they could have a look at them before they were presented, and I thought: wow.

Earlier this evening we heard the Premier in his remarks concerning Executive Council describe old history. Well, Mr. Chairman, that wasn't even old history, but it's the history of this province. I would encourage regulations to be routinely published for public and stakeholder comment, not set aside in the Legislature Library downstairs.

Now, consumer legislation should be created that includes government services and not just private goods and services.

I'd also like at this time to talk a little bit about registries. Registries, of course, include registrations of birth, marriage, and death, land title transfers, registration of corporations, vehicles, liens, et cetera. The former Member for Calgary-Buffalo was very, very concerned about the protection of personal information, and I certainly hope that the department is vigilant in the protection of personal information, that in these private/government partnerships there isn't a breakdown in the system. There were, as I understand it, over 12 million transactions in the year 2000. There are 220 registry outlets across the province, and for that information to fall into the wrong hands would be very, very disappointing. Applying and enforcing the FOIP Act to private registries and their employees is of great concern to the minister, I'm sure.

There's a Regulatory Review Secretariat, and it's like everything else in this government. Allegedly it's at arm's length, and it's an initiative to reduce, simplify, and eliminate regulations. Well, which regulations are going to be eliminated? Are they safety regulations?

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I need to interrupt you for a moment.

Hon. minister, no exhibits.

Carry on.

MR. MacDONALD: Now, regulations for safety. We've already seen in the last eight years this concept of voluntary compliance with occupational health and safety, and we saw injury rates and accident rates and WCB files opened at a far greater rate than the expansion of the workforce. At that time, it was fashionable for legislators to think that any regulation or legislation was bad, that it was just an impediment to business.

Now, we look at the environmental regulations and we look at consumer protection and safety. I can look at the three of those, Mr. Chairman, and the immediate event that comes to mind is Hub Oil. After all these regulations were downsized or removed, we saw with the issue of public safety, we saw with the issue of environmental protection for the southeast area of Calgary that no attention was paid. Consumer protection would apply in this case as well, because the oil that was left over at Hub Oil was being sold to asphalt plants throughout the province. Once again, I'm glad I wasn't a worker at one of those asphalt plants, and sometimes as I drive up and down the road, I wonder just exactly what is in that asphalt. I would encourage all hon. members of the Assembly to have a close look at the explosion at Hub Oil and the events that led up to it. We need strong regulations, and we need them enforced. We don't need to eliminate them.

We look at the first Bush administration in America, and the Vice-President at the time, Mr. Quayle, chaired a commission that behind closed doors eliminated thousands of regulations that businesses didn't like, including workplace safety, environmental protection, consumer protection. A favourite ideological initiative of conservatives, no matter where you go, is to unshackle business, and revived by the current occupant in the White House, I hope this is not the model that Alberta is going to follow, because there have to be regulations and legislation and the will to enforce them.

9:40

I'm pleased that the current Minister of Human Resources and Employment recognizes this. The minister through his actions recognizes that voluntary compliance does not work and has made initiatives to hire more inspectors. Also, the call centre that was initiated hopefully is going to reduce accidents, and people are going to be able to understand the regulations better.

I don't know how the call centre works there, Mr. Chairman, but

I would be interested to know if the minister is considering expanding the call centre for consumer protection and also to inform consumers of the Fair Trading Act and their rights under the Fair Trading Act. Is there going to be a better or an increased public awareness or information system regarding the Fair Trading Act? I was present in this Assembly when the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake introduced that legislation, and I can say at this time that I'm pleased that there's at least an attempt to enforce it.

Now, FOIP. The FOIP Act supposedly enhances access to information, and the Premier earlier in remarks regarding Executive Council talked about openness and accountability. But I have to repeat this again, Mr. Chairman: isn't it true that the opposition is entitled to that information as well? Now, there have been month-long delays, in some cases over a calendar year, and high fees have been charged to myself and other members in the Alberta Liberal caucus, over \$50,000 in three cases. Fifty thousand dollars: gosh, I could have fund-raisers at a fishing lodge and I couldn't come up with that kind of money.

On a pine shake timber permit request, \$624,000 for that alone, and that's still being discussed as we speak. These fees are excessive, and in my view they're just a veiled attempt to keep public information from members of the opposition. I'm sorry; this has gone on and on. I can remember when I was first elected the former Member for Calgary-Buffalo explaining to me in a seminar about FOIP and FOIPing. I must say that the former Member for Calgary-Buffalo was absolutely right, and I'm glad I attended his seminar that day.

Regardless of whether it's information on the Canada/Alberta labour market agreement, whether it's concerning timber permits, whether it's concerning pine shakes – concerning the pine shakes, a week after the election I received 175 documents that mysteriously appeared. They're very interesting documents because they indicate that in 1994 there was – now, there are several cabinet ministers present here tonight and they would know better than I, but whenever there's a ministerial review of an issue, I think that's of high-level status. Now, I don't know whether they have one- through to five-level status ministerial reviews, but there was a ministerial review conducted on the certification of pine shakes. This information didn't come to light until a week after the election. The minister of labour at that time – it used to be the old department of labour – was none other than Mr. Stockwell Day, who has gone onto bigger and better things in the nation's capital.

Now, the one-window initiative under Ministry Challenges on page 177 is described as this, Mr. Chairman: "This implementation represents a significant time and resource commitment from both the government and private sectors." What is the expected expenditure in this in the next five years on the part of government and of the private sector?

Further on in the challenges there's a discussion on technology, information, and application architectures that must be defined and aligned across departments. Again to the minister: what is the expected expenditure in this in the next five years by the department to develop and set standards in order to implement this?

As I understand it, here also there are "significant pressures on our computer systems that support the land titles, motor vehicles, and personal property registries. Re-investment is necessary." Well, I'd encourage the minister to come to our caucus and see the computers that our researchers are working with if they think there are significant pressures in their systems. But, again, Mr. Chairman, how much reinvestment is required and over what time frame?

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Now, there is a discussion on the need to explore creative ways to secure resources, Mr. Chairman. To the minister: what is meant by that, and what creative ways are being considered or are already planned?

The Alberta shared . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] I'll maybe get some time later. Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to participate in the second set of estimates this evening, this time talking about Government Services.

Government Services, Mr. Chairman, to my way of thinking, is really the ministry of user fees. When we take a look at the funding that comes in here and where this ministry goes in terms of being a new ministry and the responsibilities that it's assuming, it's really user fees that we're addressing. That is a regressive tax, in our opinion, and something that we don't support.

This is a ministry that in essence we don't support in terms of that kind of a mandate. We supported the manner in which various organizations and areas that this ministry deals with were handled before by government. I thought that they were quite efficient. I'm a strong believer that there are some things that government does better than private industry. I think that in many instances what's covered now in this ministry falls within that purview.

I just want to spend a moment or two adding some comments to those of my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar when he talked about some of the issues that are before this ministry. He talked about legislation and regulations that should be tabled and published for public and stakeholder comment to ensure that Albertans are aware of changes prior to passage and enactment in law. This isn't a new idea, Mr. Chairman. I'd certainly like the minister's feedback in this particular area. No doubt this province used to have some version of that in the past. Edmonton-Gold Bar talked about that.

Certainly the federal government still participates in what is really a very open and accountable and I believe progressive system when it comes to regulations. What they do is come forward with their regulations and immediately consult key stakeholder groups. Those would be people directly affected by the regulations, any groups who may be asking for their regulations to be enacted, and all parties in Parliament, Mr. Chairman. I think that that is a progressive way of getting some of the very best regulations in place.

I think that nobody wants more rules, but there are some times when rules need to be updated or conditions change and rules need to be implemented or put forward, particularly in a world where we're seeing such vast changes in technology and the way we deal with global markets. We need to make sure that we're on top of this particular issue. This is a government that doesn't support regulations of any kind. A former minister here, Steve West, was a strong supporter of zero regulations and reducing all. Well, that's fine. We don't want more paperwork where it's unnecessary, but sometimes it is necessary. So how do we get to the process where we ensure that regulations being brought are timely and necessary and useful?

9:50

The process that the federal government has with its different layers of review prior to those regulations being published for additional review is good. Sending out to stakeholders, involving all parties in the review is good. Then what happens is the regulations are gazetted, and there's a further opportunity for people to take a look at them and review them. In fact, who are the first keen observers of those gazetted regulations? Well, Mr. Chairman, wouldn't you know? For the most part it's those companies who

have registered with the lobby registrations legislation at the federal level, because they are in many cases the eyes and ears of key industry players and stakeholders throughout this country.

So two really good ideas that the federal government has, not that were enacted by a Liberal federal government but have been in place for a long time, supported by the Progressive Conservative government, too, in the past. This is a good process, Mr. Chairman, and we would encourage this minister, who I know is open to good ideas, to review and to report back to the Assembly in terms of progress that we could make in this area.

What we're looking for here is a process that is most accountable to the people. I think that the process they have at the federal level works very well. We would like to see some form of that enacted here and see that as an excellent challenge for this minister to undertake throughout his mandate, to bring forward a system that is going to, I think, better provide for the needs of Albertans and be more inclusive in its implementation.

The next step from that is something that I'm not asking the minister to undertake, because I know it certainly isn't at this stage on the horizon of issues that his party wants to deal with. That would be all-party committees for decision-making. I want to put it on the floor for discussion. I would be interested in hearing what his feedback is on it, but I think it's perhaps a discussion better held with the Government House Leader. It's something we're going to continue to push for during this particular Legislature, the 25th Legislature. I think that it is a progressive way for governments to govern, and it is certainly something that could be tested here in terms of the regulations. Anyway, if the minister would consider that, that would be helpful.

Just one comment on registries before I move on to the Auditor General's report, and that is that I'm beginning to be lobbied by registry owners to increase the fees, Mr. Chairman. I would like some feedback from the minister on that. Is that on the table for discussion? Is his ministry being lobbied in this same regard? What would the process be for a review of that fee structure? When can we expect some sort of public reference to this? I think that that would be good information.

We see from the budget documents that costs have significantly increased in this area. I missed the minister's opening comments on the reasons for that. I don't know if it's because of additional volume or what. So if he could just review that for me again, I would appreciate it. It seemed significant when I took a look at the numbers when I was reviewing this particular ministry. Yes, the gross expenses were 12 and a half million dollars up from \$10.8 million, it looks like. So some information on that. It's an increase but not all that significant. Is it just volume that we're talking about there? If you could give me that information on registry services, 2.0.2, that would be helpful.

Okay. Now I want to spend a little bit of time talking about the Auditor General's report with regard to Government Services. The Auditor General did have some comments, and we would like to know what the minister has done in terms of addressing those. He talked about the responsibilities for this ministry and talked about the core businesses being registries and consumer affairs and the financial results, but he had reservations on the financial statements.

I'm always concerned when the Auditor General has reservations on financial statements, because it generally means that there are some significant shortcomings in what's happening here. Even in a new ministry I just don't see that there's room for that kind of an issue. With the kind of support services available to ministries through the executive committee and the public services bureau and the wealth of expertise available in the ministries themselves and the flexibility of the support workers, it's hard to believe that the

Auditor General could come up with reservations, but in fact that is what happened here.

The one that he talks about here is that additional work is needed on the key performance measures in terms of applying specific audit procedures. So if the minister could tell us what has happened in that regard and what his reservations were there, how they have specifically been addressed. Will we see a similar reference to that in the next year's report?

The Auditor General goes on to talk about the joint audit of Alberta Registries and that most of the recommendations have been implemented. That's excellent. Happy to see that. But five of the recommendations haven't been implemented; more time was needed for them. Those were in terms of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, applying that "to the motor vehicles registry services or adopting fair information practices equivalent to the FOIP Act." So could we get an update on what's happening there?

The training of private registry agents. Certainly I think that that is an issue, Mr. Chairman. This is the kind of business that's easy for people to enter into with little training. I know there have been investigations in terms of the operations of some registries, and some of that may be in terms of training, and some of it may be in terms of manipulation of information or the potential for manipulation of information. I would like to know how the minister handles complaints and inquiries particularly with regards to registries. Who does the investigations? How are they initiated? At what point would they be turned over to police services? What would the process be for that? How many of those kinds of inquiries were there in the past year? Did any of those result in actual charges being laid? So if we could have some information on that, it would be helpful.

One of the other recommendations was the "elimination of deficiencies in control procedures at the service bureau responsible for the operation of the motor vehicles and driver licensing systems." So what were the deficiencies and have they been addressed?

Another one was that assurance was "needed annually on the control procedures of the service bureau responsible for the registries' computer systems." You know, this questions also the confidentiality of the information recorded in those computer systems. So if we could get some feedback on that.

Then monitoring of the private registry agents. That probably ties into my questions with regard to how those are policed, but if he could comment on that I would appreciate it.

10:00

Another discussion the AG had was in terms of the current status of recommendations not implemented. They've developed new standards within the ministry, which is good, to identify who can have access to motor vehicle information and a plan for implementing these standards. Very critical information, Mr. Chairman, in terms of protection of privacy. So we'll be happy to hear the update. We'd like to monitor the status of those in addition to what the Auditor General is doing. Those are my comments with regard to that.

I will go back to questions on the business plans. Maybe I'll pick up where my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar left off. He was about to talk about the ACSC when his time expired. I think he was going to talk about this in terms of it being a new initiative. It's been discussed as being a new initiative that maybe requires several years to reach its full potential. Could we find out? Could we get some feedback from the minister on why it will take several years? The question I think is: how carefully has the government looked at the real costs and real benefits of this new outsourcing scheme? Are

we seeing some benefits for it, or is it going to be one of those trial balloons floated that ultimately pops? I think of what happened in tourism as an experiment that didn't work very well, perhaps because of lack of planning or perhaps because of the lack of ability of the people to have the skills to implement it. I'm hoping this won't be the case here.

If we could have some information on what we can see as the real cost savings and benefits of this program. Is it really going to save taxpayers' dollars in the long run? What are the reasons, the justifications the department has for that expectation? Does it expect to reach the target of a 10 percent saving in this budget year and 20 percent in the next? We'd need, I think, more than just token assurances on that. If you have some data to back that information up that you could share with us, that would be excellent.

I'd like to go to the goals and key results for core businesses on page 180 if we can. The key result is the "elimination of unnecessary regulations." Can you define "unnecessary" for us and give us some examples of the regulations that have been eliminated? Who exactly is making those decisions? That would be a question I wouldn't mind being answered.

Another one is that "Alberta businesses are prepared for private sector privacy legislation." Were you referencing federal legislation here? If not, is there similar legislation being prepared in Alberta? That would be an interesting question. If it is, when will it be introduced? If it's not, then if we could find out why it isn't, that would be excellent. So those were under regulatory review on page 180 in *The Future* book.

Then going to the ACSC, the key result is innovative and economical delivery of all those services defined there. Has the outsourcing commenced? How many positions will be eliminated of the 1,100 employees that have been brought together across the ministries? How many more employees do we expect to be transferred to the ACSC this year? Is there a projection for each of the next five years? That's a question I have there.

Now, when we take a look at the issues management process, there seem to be so many discrepancies between departmental needs and the services provided. This process has to be set up. So my question is: why is the customer buy-in and approval only sought and not obtained prior to implementation? I think that's a legitimate question that needs to be asked here in view of what's been happening. It seems very strange to have the discrepancies between service needs and provision. There should be a better correlation or tie-in with those.

Can we have the information on how many cases proceed where there is a discrepancy, given that only exceptional cases where special or significant discrepancies occur go to the CEO's review or to the department minister's counsel? This looks like it could be a huge mess. If we could have some clarification on that, that would be very helpful. How many exceptional cases have there been? Maybe the question also is: how many cases in total? I think that's a fair question. There just seems to be all kinds of problems with the ACSC, and it doesn't look like it's been proceeding smoothly at all. So we really need to know how this is an improvement over the previous practice.

What measures have been taken to address the negative impact on public service morale? Certainly there's got to be some concern about uncertainty and fear of job loss as a result of this process, and there's got to be, I would expect, general dissatisfaction within the department in terms of what's going on there. Nobody wants to go to work and be involved in messes and in an inability to provide needs for people, to have discrepancies pointed out all the time. I think that could be a huge problem. What's the turnover been with this staff that are supporting this particular initiative? It would seem to me that there are probably some concerns around there.

Those are my questions at this stage. Perhaps I'll have an opportunity to ask a few more. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to make a few comments and a few observations here and ask the minister a few questions and, at the same time, thank him and his department for being here tonight to field our questions on Government Services.

Certainly in looking over the business plan and line items here, it is quite an interesting ministry, certainly one that is changing rapidly and one that does have some great pressures placed on the ministry and on the minister himself in order to stay current in an ever changing and rapidly changing world. I had the opportunity here a few years ago to listen to a futurist by the name of Frank Ogden. Frank was analyzing some of the technological equipment that was available at that time, and he ran a statistic by us that still amazes me today. I would think that perhaps this statistic is no longer current, that things are changing even quicker. He was telling us at that time – and this was only maybe five, six years ago – that any new piece of electronic equipment that arrived on the shelves of stores in Tokyo had a shelf life of 90 days because at that point something new had come on-line that was certainly more advanced and could do the job better.

This seems to be the whole idea in our technological services, whether it happens to be here at the Legislature or whether it happens to be in schools or business or wherever it is. It can be a black hole. It can eat up so much of our budgets, and again, by the time we get it implemented, there's already something better out there. So there has to be some prudent planning. There has to be, certainly, an eye to the future as to what is going to serve our short-term needs in the next three to five years and, as well, what sort of course of action we're going to take over this time to stay current and be able to serve the public and also serve business, because we know that so many of them are keeping up with this.

10:10

I was quite impressed here just the other day. My son is heading to Seattle this weekend to watch the Yankees and the Mariners, and he ended up with a couple of extra tickets, so he put them on eBay and certainly sold them to people down in Seattle in a matter of hours. That's something we would have never dreamed of even five years ago. So certainly there are significant challenges when we look at this area of technology.

Now, then, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar certainly did cover this area fairly well on technology, so what I would like to do is keep moving on here. I see that the Alberta Corporate Service Centre is a new initiative that may require several years to reach its full potential. I see here that there are clearly defined and understood service level agreements. These will be the key to success in working through the change process. Again, if the minister could please outline some of the reasons why it will take several years to work through the change process. Are these strictly financial matters? Is it the harmonizing of different levels of technology? Is it trained staff that we require to operate these systems? Just why is it that it will take several years in order to implement this?

Again, what I would also like to ask the minister is: how carefully has the government looked at the real costs and real benefits of this new outsourcing scheme? Will it save taxpayers' dollars in the long run? I think that's really the one question all Albertans would like to know. I certainly know that those people that are looking at technologies and whatever certainly don't only want to be well

served by new technologies. They also want them to be cost-effective.

Also to the minister: will the Alberta Corporate Service Centre really reach its target of a 10 percent savings in this budget year and 20 percent the next? Again, that's a very lofty goal and certainly one we sincerely hope he will reach.

Now, then, looking at goals and key results for core businesses on page 180. I'm looking at number 4, the regulatory review. The key result here is the "elimination of unnecessary regulations." Again, this brings to mind many different parts of our population. I guess the first question I would want to ask on this key result is: what is defined as an unnecessary regulation, and who is it unnecessary to? Is it unnecessary to bureaucrats? Is it unnecessary to business? Is it unnecessary to the general population? These are questions that I would like more clarification on. As well, if the minister could even provide some examples of regulations that have been eliminated because they were unnecessary.

As well, a key result under regulatory review is that "Alberta businesses are prepared for private sector privacy legislation." This refers to federal legislation. Is similar legislation being prepared in Alberta? If not, why not? If this is being prepared, when will it be introduced here in the Legislature?

Now, moving right along and looking under goals and key results for core businesses, number 5, for the Alberta Corporate Service Centre. A key result under number 5 is "innovative and economical delivery of financial, administration, human resources and information technology services that are responsive to the needs of departments." According to the Customer Reference Guide published by the ACSC, approximately 1,100 employees have been brought together from across the ministries, and here I'm referring back a few pages. Has outsourcing commenced for this particular ACSC? How many of the 1,100 positions will be eliminated when this particular service centre has been introduced? Another question I would like as well on this key result is: how many more employees will be transferred to the ACSC this year and in each of the next five years?

The issues management process on page 24 of the Customer Reference Guide is what I'm going to refer to next. Apparently, many discrepancies between departmental needs and the services provided have occurred, that this process had to be set up. Why is consumer buy-in and approval only sought and not obtained prior to implementation? How many cases proceed when there is a discrepancy given that only exceptional cases, where special, significant discrepancies occur, are escalated to the ACSC chief executive's office review or to the Deputy Ministers' Council? How many exceptional cases have there been to date? As well, it appears that the ACSC has not been proceeding smoothly at all. How is it an improvement over the previous practice? What measures have been taken to address the negative impact on public service morale of the uncertainty and fear of job loss as a result of this process?

Continuing along under strategies on page 181, I see that there is to be consultation with stakeholders "to review and amend the tenancies legislation." Who are the stakeholders of this legislation, and what is the goal and expected outcome of the review? Which legislation would be co-ordinated with other jurisdictions under the agreement on international trade? Again, I think this is critical when we start looking at international trade, particularly at our ever increasing north/south development of the trade corridor as well as with our huge increases in trading with the United States and particularly Mexico as a new player that's coming on-line.

Now, then, as well under strategies on page 181, one strategy is the "periodic inspections of regulated businesses". If the minister could please provide us with how many inspections were conducted this year. Do they have any sort of target amounts set as to how

many they would like last year? If he could also, in looking at these two, provide us with a percentage of the businesses that can be expected to be inspected this year. That's quite a mouthful, particularly at this late hour.

As well, on strategies, under the second point here, does the department have enough resources to conduct sufficient inspections to effectively protect Alberta consumers? Again this is an issue where the speed at which and the variety of ways that consumers in the province have to get products certainly is increasing and becoming more and more complex and certainly harder to track. So again a huge challenge for the ministry.

The provincial investigative strategy to focus on the most serious violations. If the minister could please tell us what violations would be defined as serious and what will they be doing with these violators when they are deemed to be caught. I'd also wonder if the department is restricting its efforts to only the most serious violations. Or does it have sufficient resources to properly protect Albertans?

10:20

Now, as well, I see that the department is developing "a framework for exemption requests from foreign controlled corporations for intensive livestock and agri-forestry operations." If the minister could please provide us with: what is the goal of this framework? Is it to facilitate an increased number of ILOs or to restrict or to set regulations? Exactly what is the framework? Certainly this here is a major issue. I know that when the Minister of Municipal Affairs was at the AAMD and C conference, this was a huge issue for all those rural people, particularly the fact that they're very, very concerned about the water quality and the air quality in this province. This was certainly before our latest scare from North Battleford.

As well, when it comes to the intensive livestock operations, certainly the various counties in the province wanted to have some control as to what was being built in their particular counties, yet they also wanted a set of guidelines that would be provincewide. Again the whole question of intensive livestock operations in this province continues to be of great interest and concern to many Albertans.

Now, on page 182 I noticed under strategies that the department is going to "analyze our costs of providing services and ensure our fees are appropriate." This certainly is another one of the pieces of legislation that we did pass in this Legislature, that fees would remain reasonable. What sorts of safeguards do Albertans have that any increase in fees is going to be equal to the cost of the service and certainly isn't going to be just another way to enhance revenue? It's certainly something we want protection for. You know, we want to say often that we are the lowest taxed province in the country, but at the same time they don't want our lower taxes augmented by a great number of user fees. So again a very, very big concern for Albertans.

Now, as well under strategies on page 182, I see that we are going "to develop legislation that will permit the creation of limited liability companies." How would this creation of the new limited liability companies differ from current limited liability corporations governed by the Business Corporations Act? Again, our whole focus here as legislators is to keep away from cumbersome legislation, from the overlapping of various acts that all do the same thing. It's quite interesting at this time, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has pointed out, that really our flagship bill this year, Bill 1, we don't have any need for because of – which act is it?

MR. MacDONALD: The Natural Gas Rebates Act.

MR. BONNER: Yes, the Natural Gas Rebates Act, that we currently have in this province. [interjection] Yes, there are many different acts that already control the distribution and rates of natural gas in this province.

So this again is not a case where we want to see more cumbersome and burdensome legislation that also crosses different ministries. Certainly I know the minister will be taking a very close look at this particular issue.

Now, on page 183, goal 3, I see under Strategies: a one-window gateway. A question here is: what is the expected cost of establishing and operating on an annual basis the program management office for the one-window gateway? Along the same lines, what is the expected model and cost of the proposed public/private partnership service delivery model? Also, what percentage of the cost will be covered by government and the private sector respectively?

With those comments, I think my time is almost up, unfortunately, and I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar also has some comments that he would like to make at this time. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar will not be making comments. That was the time for the whole hour.

We now call upon the Minister of Government Services to make his five-minute concluding remarks.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the members opposite for their interest and their questions. We'll be providing them with written responses in the very near future.

I just wanted to briefly say that this is a system where the infrastructure is handling a tremendous load. You know, the revenue for the fees and the licences, as Edmonton-Ellerslie said: how do you justify that? Increases are based on projections of a good economy rather than population growth. Particularly, motor vehicles, commercial vehicles, and passenger vehicles have increased, and that's again an increase to the economic viability of Alberta. As well, land titles: up \$3 million, which is 11 percent. That's due to the growth of our province and escalating property values.

So we're faced with some challenges. We will continue to explore any opportunities to ensure that we deliver the high quality of service that Albertans have come to rely on from Government Services, and I thank you very much for your participation this evening.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and

proposed estimates for the Department of Government Services, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$181,335,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Yes. Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

10:30

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. KLAPSTEIN: 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, 2002, for the following departments.

Executive Council: operating expense, \$15,169,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,000,000.

Government Services: operating expense and capital investment, \$181,335,000.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:31 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

