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8:01 p.m.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Subcom. A: Executive Council

Subcommittee A -- Executive Council

Gordon, Judy, Chairman
Severtson, Gary, Deputy Chairman
Bonner, Bill
Boutilier, Guy
Burgener, Jocelyn
Cardinal, Mike
Ducharme, Denis

Dunford, Clint
Friedel, Gary
Hierath, Ron
Jacques, Wayne
Johnson, LeRoy
Lougheed, Rob
Mar, Gary

Marz, Richard
Massey, Don
Oberg, Lyle
O'Neill, Mary
Pannu, Raj
Sapers, Howard

THE CHAIRMAN: We are going to consider the estimates for Executive Council, and I would certainly ask that we show the same decorum that we did this afternoon. I do appreciate everyone making sure that we got through with the estimates of Community Development.

With that I would call on the hon. Premier to talk about Executive Council.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Madam Chairman and hon. members. I am pleased to be able to appear before this committee in my capacity as minister responsible for Executive Council. Programs within Executive Council include the office of the Premier, general administration, the Northern Alberta Development Council, and the Public Affairs Bureau. I'd like to take a few minutes to go over some of the highlights of these areas, and then I will ask my colleague, the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca, to offer additional information in the area of northern development.

Executive Council's role within government is to co-ordinate the overall direction and agenda followed by the government as a whole. That future direction was clearly defined in my recent televised address as well as in the Speech from the Throne delivered in February of this year and, of course, in Budget '99, delivered here in the Legislature just five days ago.

Executive Council will continue to focus its efforts on balancing fiscal responsibility with the quality of life elements that make Alberta such a wonderful place in which to live. Our upcoming goals are based on what Albertans have told us are their priorities for the future. They include continuing to balance the budget and remaining unwavering in our commitment to pay down debt, maintaining a strong and effective publicly funded health system that meets the needs of all Albertans, working to refine the services we offer to our youngest Albertans to ensure that they are safe, well cared for, and well educated, and working to ensure that Albertans pursue lifelong learning, as well as to ensure that we are in the best possible position to participate in the high technology driven industries of the future.

Albertans also told us that they want tax breaks but only if we can find the right balance between taxes and protection for priority areas. That's why we introduced a prudent and manageable three-year income tax plan that will allow us to meet spending demands for priority areas as well as debt repayment demands. Over the past six years, Albertans have played a significant role in helping us to build our agenda. In fact, it is an agenda rooted in the principles of effective, two-way communication between government and the people we serve. We continue to maintain our firm commitment to asking Albertans for their feedback and providing them with the open and honest facts about progress made as well as plans for the future.

In fact, 1998 marked a record high not only in terms of the number of public participation opportunities offered to Albertans but in terms of the amount of feedback received from the people of this province about the government programs and services that matter most to them. Preliminary public participation numbers from 1998 show us that rates are up significantly over last year due in part to significant consultation initiatives like the Talk It Up; Talk It Out survey. The preliminary results for 1998 include more than 1,150 public meetings, up from 750 in 1997; more than 91,500 written submissions, up from 56,000 in 1997; and some 766,000 calls to toll-free lines, up from 629,000 in 1997. A full public consultation report will be released during the current session.

The programs about Budget '99 currently airing on the Access Network are a good example of this government's commitment to providing Albertans with clear and objective information about where we stand and where we're headed as a province. Just last night the Provincial Treasurer appeared on a live and interactive Access program to discuss the budget and to listen to Albertans' questions and their comments. Last Saturday I hosted my radio program *Talk to the Premier*, which gives Albertans a chance to call in and share their ideas and opinions. In the coming years we will continue to rely on Albertans to let us know how we're doing and to ensure that future programs and initiatives of this government meet their needs.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to discuss how the three areas within Executive Council will be working over the coming year to meet the needs of the people we serve. Those areas are the office of the Premier, the Public Affairs Bureau, and the Northern Alberta Development Council. Please note that the budget for Executive Council and the programs that report to it is \$13.3 million in 1998-1999, with a 1999-2000 forecast of \$14 million. This includes increases for salaries, the same increases by the way that are being seen across government.

The office of the Premier and general administration will remain committed to serving as a key point of communications between Executive Council and Albertans. General administration will also continue to provide cost-effective services to meet the needs of Executive Council, its members, and its committees. The policy co-ordination office will help provide strategic co-ordination of the cross-government issues that affect multiple departments and government as a whole. The budget we are discussing here this evening also includes administrative, secretarial, and clerical services for the Lieutenant Governor.

The Public Affairs Bureau is responsible for helping this government in its ongoing dialogue with Albertans by providing quality co-ordinated and cost-effective communications and consulting services. The budget for the bureau is \$8.3 million in 1998-1999, with the 1999-2000 estimate of \$8.7 million. That spending is offset by 1998-1999 revenues of approximately \$1.5 million.

The bureau's responsibilities include assigning staff to government departments to help co-ordinate and deliver

communications programs for Albertans, operating the RITE telephone system and the Queen's Printer bookstore, helping government departments purchase communications support services including print and graphic design, and maintaining the Alberta government Internet home page and providing Internet-related consultation to government departments. I mentioned earlier that this government will continue to work to provide Albertans with the information they need and will continue to look to them for their thoughts and ideas about the future of our province.

The government's new Alberta Connects initiative is designed to help us build on the information programs and opportunities already in place. Alberta Connects includes a new toll-free number and Internet site designed to make it easier for Albertans to access government information and to share their thoughts and to request additional information and, of course, to ask questions. Bureau staff will also continue working with client departments to ensure that Albertans receive timely communications about all major government programs and initiatives.

Another example of the bureau working to meet public and government needs can be found in the upcoming *Revised Statutes of Alberta* project scheduled for completion in 2001-2002. This much-needed project will provide the first full revision of the statutes since the 1980s, offering a valuable service to Alberta's legal community. Queen's Printer bookstore staff have already begun working with Alberta Justice on the project's preliminary production work. Current spending targets for the bureau cover the cost of converting and publishing the revision, and I would ask the committee members to note that projected sales of the product will more than offset this additional spending.

8:10

Turning now to the Northern Alberta Development Council. As the committee members may already know, the NADC is an eight-member council chaired by the MLA for Athabasca-Wabasca. The budget for the NADC is \$969,000 in 1998-1999, with a 1999-2000 estimate of \$1.3 million. The council members come from all regions of the north and represent the various sectors and communities in the northern area. The NADC's mission is to advance northern development through regional initiatives in partnership with the private sector, community-based organizations, and other government agencies.

The council's goals are to receive input into priority northern development opportunities and issues, promote opportunities and address barriers to the north's development, and increase northern skill levels. The council meets these goals by conducting regional leader roundtable forums to receive northern input into development priorities, working with other government departments and agencies to address priority developmental matters, and sponsoring events, conducting research, co-ordinating projects, and providing advice to government on northern matters. The NADC also sponsors bursary programs, although you'll note that funding for bursaries is included in the budget for Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development.

Madam Chairman, this concludes my introductory comments on Executive Council. With your permission, I would like to call on the NADC chair and MLA for Athabasca-Wabasca to discuss northern development in greater detail.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Premier, and thank

you very much, Madam Chairman. It is my pleasure to make a few remarks about the Northern Alberta Development Council, but first I will provide just a quick overview of northern Alberta to show you where the action is coming from.

Northern Alberta is a unique area of Alberta and even in Canada. In fact it has many development opportunities coupled with constraints and issues that must be addressed. The north has a diverse resource base and is a key contributor to the overall provincial economy. Just as an example, 100 percent of all the oil sands production is in the northern development area, over 70 percent of the timber harvested is in the northern development area, almost 40 percent of Alberta's natural gas production happens in the northern development area, and approximately 20 percent of Alberta farms are also within that area. Like I say, the area is very active. There are billions of dollars of economic initiatives that are either announced, planned, or will be announced in the near future.

At the same time there are constraints to these developments that are planned and some that are ongoing. This region has less than 10 percent of the population. Only 251,000 people live in the area. At the same time, it covers 60 percent of the land mass of the province. Family income and educational attainment, particularly in small isolated and semi-isolated communities, are considerably below the provincial average, and small aboriginal communities often have difficulty yet in participating in energy or forestry or other development opportunities. It is in this context that the work of the Northern Alberta Development Council and the northern development branch is carried out.

The Northern Alberta Development Council, as the Premier said earlier, has eight members representing various geographic and sectoral areas from the north. An MLA chairs this committee, and there are presently seven private members. I won't go into detail on who the members are and what areas of Alberta they represent. If time allows, maybe we can do that through questions if someone is interested. We have a small support staff of approximately 12 people, and they're situated in the town of Peace River.

As the Premier said earlier, the Northern Alberta Development Council is not a line department. Our mandate is to investigate, monitor, evaluate, plan and promote practical measures to foster and advance general development in northern Alberta and to advise Government thereon.

We do this by identifying and raising awareness of northern opportunities and issues and working to address them through partnership across government, the community, and the private sector.

We co-ordinate regional initiatives by bringing together governments, community organizations, and industry groups to address northern issues and opportunities. We are project based, not program based. An example, as the Premier mentioned earlier, is that the bursary program is administered by Advanced Education and Career Development through the Students Finance Board.

Our vision for the north. Northern Alberta has a tremendous potential for economic growth based on a strong agriculture sector and expansion of the energy and forestry and tourism sectors. Our vision is to build on these opportunities to achieve a strong economic base and improve the standard of living of people living in the north and across the province. Our vision is to train northerners, capture local benefits from resource development, add value-added to commodities, and address key northern issues and barriers to development.

We have three goals, and these goals will help achieve our vision. They lay out our development approach, including the key elements of consultation, acting as a catalyst, facilitator, and co-ordinator to pursue key northern opportunities and issues by providing funding

for northerners and northern students. I'll just quickly touch on the three goals we have. Our first goal is to receive input into priority northern development issues and opportunities. Our second goal is to promote opportunities and address barriers to the north's development. The third goal is to increase skills.

Of course, I'll expand a bit on the increasing of skill levels, because this is, I think, one of the critical areas in order for northerners to take advantage of the opportunities that are coming. One area we concentrate on, of course, is providing student bursaries, matching northern training programs to employment needs.

The other bursary programs we have. We work with Advanced Ed and Career Development in the implementation of our bursary programs, specifically the Northern Alberta Development Council bursary. About 125 bursaries are awarded annually. Return service is required, and the grant is up to \$3,000. The other program we have is the bursary partnership program. This allows industry and the community to partner with us in providing bursaries, and also the industry has the option of choosing their candidate. This, again, provides bursaries up to \$3,000.

The northern student supplement is a new program which is part of the Alberta opportunity bursary, provided by Advanced Education and Career Development. This particular program is a supplement to that program for students living within the northern development area, and this is the first year of implementation of that program. It provides supplements from \$500 to \$1,500 to those students that are eligible for the Alberta opportunity fund. It's available for first- and second-year northern students with high financial needs.

Other activities we do I'll just briefly touch on. We co-ordinate the labour market information for five postsecondary institutions in northwestern Alberta. We will continue to work as required with the child and family services authorities in northern Alberta and other stakeholders on the northern BSW program. The other area, of course, that we're involved in is working with the western ministers in continuing the development of a northwestern Canadian economic action plan. In the past year and a half Northern Development, through other departments, took the leading role as part of the northwestern Canadian economic action plan. The Alberta representatives took the leading role in the development of a northwestern Canadian integrated road plan as part of the overall economic action plan. This plan was approved by the western ministers, submitted to the western Premiers, who in turn approved it and will no doubt continue pursuing it further.

8:20

The other area of responsibility we have is the recent agreement that was signed by the Premier of Alberta and the Premier of the Northwest Territories, again, a memorandum of understanding to do joint development activities between Alberta and the Northwest Territories. The northern development council and the northern development group are taking the leading role in doing that particular portion of the program.

We do have performance measures. The northern development council measures the success of work through, of course, all the economic activity that's taking place out there and the participation that's evolving with northerners in all these programs or job opportunities that are provided. In the case of our bursary program, of course, we measure specific programs, return-service commitment, and the success rate of our students that we support through the bursaries.

I won't go into the budget, because the Premier mentioned briefly the net budget, but I will touch on a couple of parts of it, and that's a breakdown of the \$1,143,000 budget. It's comprised of \$125,000 from the western economic partnership projects, which is 50 percent

of the total cost of the project; \$40,000, a transfer of one staff member and related costs from the closed administrative service centre here in Edmonton; \$50,000 funding for interjurisdictional initiatives such as the Alberta and Northwest Territories MOU, the northwestern ministers meetings, and some staff training. In addition, of course, there's \$4,000 as part of the overall budget for manpower increments.

There's one more area I want to mention here, and that is that the Northern Alberta Development Council was also successful in securing commitment for funding of two projects that I mentioned earlier. They're under phase 2 of the western economic partnership agreement. Our budget increased in that to \$250,000 on these projects, and of course I mentioned the \$125,000. That is what we'll recover from the federal government.

So that is all I have, Madam Chairman. In the members' gallery I have our executive director, who will be taking notes, and any questions that I can't or we can't answer here tonight, we'll have those in writing to you. Otherwise, we'll try and answer the questions when time allows.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Before I recognize Edmonton-Riverview, I do want to thank you for your attentiveness. I think it's one of the quietest times I've seen in the Assembly during committee. You must have a calming effect, Mr. Premier. Also, I would allow you, sir, if you want to answer questions, to please stand.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to rise this evening, actually to rise before I run. I didn't get my workout in today, so I really appreciate the government providing this opportunity for me to scale the stairs in the Legislative Assembly in replacement for that. It won't completely replace the workout, but it'll at least provide a bit of cardiovascular activity.

MR. KLEIN: There are running shoes downstairs.

MRS. SLOAN: I know, but I don't really care to sweat with members of the other party.

On with business, the estimates of Executive Council. I'd like to spend the first few minutes of the time I have this evening speaking about the office of the Premier and general administration. I note in the balance sheet provided that the expenditure is a substantial amount of money every year, \$3,862,000. I believe that is an increase over last year of about 4.8 percent. Now, we aren't provided with a great deal of explanation about that area in the Right Balance document, so I'd like to actually pose some questions and thoughts to the Premier with respect to what services are provided.

It seems to me, Madam Chairman, that there's a bit of a lack of transparency as to exactly what expenditures are accrued by the office of the Premier. However, that's not unlike the offices of the respective ministers of this government where there is one budget line and that usually is a substantive amount of money. We don't get an accounting of how in fact those dollars are spent. I wouldn't be seeking microbreakdowns, but perhaps a breakdown that accounts for administration, salaries, travel, public relations, communication, et cetera, would be of benefit, even perhaps an accounting of legal expenses, research expenses, et cetera, that might be accrued by the Premier.

If we look at the three main pillars of the Executive Council component of the budget, we see that it's really made up of the Premier's office, the Northern Alberta Development Council, and Public Affairs. I found it really quite fascinating that those were the three pillars. It struck me that a recent event that had occurred was

the fact that our Premier publicly chastised a university in the province for their support of a research institute, and there was some question about a report that was provided at a recent conference surrounding the growing income inequity in the province. All that being said, I guess I looked at this and wondered: why is it that the Premier doesn't have a research office of his own? If he doesn't choose to, if he feels critical of other research that well-intended citizens, both Canadians and Albertans, are undertaking, what research are his positions based on? That is not something that's encompassed, at least to our knowledge, that we can see within the Premier's budget.

Further, Madam Chairman, it would seem to me we've had a variety of initiatives that have been undertaken by the Premier and his respective ministers in the last several years -- the growth summit, health summit, justice summit, gaming summit, a variety of events that have occurred around human rights -- and in hand with that, legislation that has not always melded well with the thoughts and recommendations of those summit meetings. It struck me that we don't have, it appears, a place within this government structure where all of that material and feedback and those recommendations are synthesized. So how in fact are recommendations made by the growth summit synchronized by the anticipated recommendations from the health summit, the recommendations from the justice summit, the gaming summit, et cetera, et cetera? It would seem to me that it would be the Premier's office that should be undertaking to do that in a more public and transparent way.

The other aspect that is linked to that relates to the development of the province's children. We have a variety of information, research on that issue in the province. In fact, recently the Premier wrote a letter to the federal government saying that his government would endorse the U.N. convention on the rights of the child, and I found it odd that that commitment was not in the business plan as it is provided within the budget. And why would that not be something that is included? I acknowledge that there's a joint children's initiative. There's a handful of ministers that have made a commitment there. It doesn't have a budget.

8:30

But if we commit that we in this province are to the best of our ability going to abide by the convention's rights to allow children to live an existence where their survival and development, to the maximum extent possible, is supported - social security; material assistance; nutrition; clothing; education; the highest standard of health and medical care; special care, education, and training for disabled children; a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development; the rights of aboriginal children; the freedom of thought; protection from abuse; prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance -- if all those things are, in fact, things the Premier was alive to in making his commitment to the federal government, how in fact is he going to ensure that that is undertaken on an annual basis? And why not incorporate that in your annual report? It would seem to me that it would be an initiative which the public would highly support the leader of our province in undertaking. But it's not referenced, and that is very strange to me.

Moving then to the second pillar, the Northern Alberta Development Council business plan. There is no question, given the diversity and the sheer mass of the northern part of our province, that this initiative is an important one. There have been many inequities that people of the north have come to know as part of their daily lives strictly because of the geography of where they live. Some things are not as accessible, and therefore their expectations are not the same as those of us who might live within a central urban setting.

The funding in this particular area, if our calculations are correct, has fluctuated about 35.5 percent over its life span. That is somewhat curious to me. I'm not sure, if it is an important initiative, why that funding would not be stable. When I looked at the goals, listened to the hon. member, the chair of the committee, speak about the initiatives, it seemed to me that primarily the focus of that council was economic and development driven. Nothing wrong with that. However, we know that there are other inequities and issues to be addressed for the north, and I wonder why those particular areas haven't warranted more representation within this development council. I suppose if you define development economically, then this plan fits the bill, but if you define development in a human context or a social context in hand with an economic one, for the most part the majority of the goals and strategies do not address those issues.

We know that there has been an incidence in this past year of a child in northern Alberta dying of malnutrition. We also know that there has been an incidence of children in the north suffering from rickets. Not speaking to the specific cases, but what is it that has caused those things to happen? I think as a government we should be looking at those examples and saying: "What are we doing? Are we doing enough to ensure those types of things do not happen again?" I will acknowledge there is a reference under goal 3 to "identify and facilitate the development of stay in school strategies for northern Alberta." That is in part what I am speaking about in my remarks at this point.

I guess the other end of that spectrum, though, is that we know that the incidence of teenage pregnancies in the north is very high. We know infant mortality rates in the north are very high. We know that the incidence of low-birth-weight babies in the north is very high. So in conjunction with this economic push and development, we need to be ensuring that the other end of the spectrum is also addressed. The equation won't bring us the result we want if we leave one-half of the issues unaddressed. I think the initiative is definitely a worthy one. It does in my opinion need to be broadened and some aspects of that initiative enhanced.

We have a bit of a precedent where various departments provide for performance measures. I thought the performance measures for northern Alberta were a bit vague. If I recall correctly, this has been in existence now for -- how many years? About four or five? I guess I would've expected that things would have been a bit more flushed out by this stage, and if there are additional comments that either the Premier or the hon. member would like to provide to enhance that, that would be helpful. Exactly, are there tangible results, and what are those results, and if they're tangible, why not share those types of things with the citizens of this province?

Just touching back on the development of stay-in-school strategies for northern Alberta. There's another opportunity where I think you should elaborate. I don't know what the initiatives are. What are the principles or pillars that they're hinged on? We know that there are problems associated with that. I spoke about teenage pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse being another. How are all those things going to be encompassed within that initiative?

I will just turn now, Madam Chairman, to Public Affairs and speak briefly about the business and areas in that particular category. I found it interesting. Its core business is not to provide a service to Albertans but to provide a service to government departments, to communicate government initiatives, et cetera, and while it's clear that that is the purpose, it seems to me that, I guess to some degree, there's an inequity. I have sat on Members' Services for the last two years, and there have been a number of, in my opinion, very worthwhile initiatives proposed at that committee for the enhancement of education and awareness about not only the

Legislative Assembly and democracy but what role politics and politicians play within the province. Those things haven't been funded.

In fact, we have our program for students to spend a week in the mock Legislature, visiting and interviewing politicians. That is primarily, at its current stage, a pilot project being supported solely by corporate donations. I would respectfully say to the Premier that there's been a big allocation within Public Affairs with, it would appear, the intent that Albertans should be informed, that they should be aware of what the government's initiatives are, but there seems to be an inequity, because when we talk about educating our students about the role of the Legislature, the role of democracy, and the role politicians play, we do not come forward with the same commitment.

8:40

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

MRS. SLOAN: Now, now, now. There are some members, Madam Chairman, that just have no stamina in this Assembly, always wanting to rush for the vote.

The Public Affairs Bureau. I'm wondering if we could, perhaps during the course of this discussion, have some breakdown of that budget also. Again, it doesn't have to be micro, but what are the macroexpenditures: salaries, travel, advertising, insurance, freight, telephone repairs, et cetera?

In addition to that -- because there's a substantive number of employees in the area -- I think it would also be of benefit to know the breakdown in terms of how the 128 full-time equivalents are distributed throughout that component. Again, it doesn't have to be micro, but we may want to provide administrative communication, those types of breakdowns, for people's information.

We note that in the administrative area we've had a significant increase, a 8.7 percent increase, in funding proposed for this budget year, and there's really no explanation as to why that is. Is it for salaries, for compensation? What are the expenditures proposed for? It would also be interesting to note what the level of turnover is within the staffing complement. What's the rate in terms of retirement, replacement? How many resources have been allocated for recruitment and retention initiatives in the last year, and what's proposed for the coming year? And what training is offered under this area for staff, both those who might be in full-time positions and those who might be working in a contract position? I would also like to know what the degree of contract versus permanent positions is within that. Are we contracting out about 50 percent of the work or less than that? What would that be? Those types of specifics are not provided.

In terms of, I guess, the satisfaction measures, the performance measures, again I'm not just a hundred percent satisfied that these provide an actual measure of the public satisfaction. It isn't even indicated what percentage of the population would use RITE or Queen's Printer in a year. We don't know that. So to say that we have a 98 or 99 percent satisfaction rate is a bit of a stretch, Madam Chairman, if we don't even know what the population is that's using it. With that, I will conclude my remarks.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier, do you wish to address the questions as we go along?

MR. KLEIN: Oh, sure. Madam Chairman, first of all, the fundamental and basic question relative to the Premier's office -- and the hon. member did break it down into the three sections. I will address the Public Affairs Bureau and the Premier's office.

In my office, the office of the Premier, general administration includes support to cabinet and the deputy minister's office as well as the office of the Lieutenant Governor. I don't have that breakdown as it pertains to the Lieutenant Governor. But if the hon. member wants me to go into detail relative to the breakdown and the function of each and every person who works in the Premier's office, I'll be glad to. And that will take us to precisely 10 o'clock if that's what she wants.

NADC. I said that the hon. . . . [interjections] No. Fine. We'll go through it all. Right?

Madam Chairman, these questions were posed. Now, I can take them under notice and provide the answers, or I can provide the answers right now. But I will provide the answer to the generic question: what does the Premier's office do?

Madam Chairman, the hon. member alluded to the Premier being responsible and being accountable for, well, myriads of issues. Yes, I am, because ultimately I have to be the spokesman. Ultimately the phone calls and the letters on virtually every issue, thousands of issues, come to the Premier's office. But we do have a number of ministers, we have a number of chairs of committees who respond to these needs.

Sitting beside me, for instance, is the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, who is also responsible for the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, a huge responsibility, Madam Chairman. And I assign that responsibility to this hon. member because I think she is competent to carry out the duties of that particular function.

In a normal day of the Legislature the front benches are full of ministers. Sometimes some of them are missing, doing business elsewhere. I don't know at every minute of the day, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks of the year what each and every member of this marvelous 64-member caucus is doing, but it all comes together sooner or later.

This is a \$16 billion operation. For this member to suggest that I should be accountable for every cent of this operation and that I should know second to second, minute to minute, hour to hour, day to day, week to week how every dollar is being spent is absolutely ludicrous. It is ridiculous. It is beyond comprehension, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, within my office there is a budget for staff salaries and support services for my offices in both Edmonton and in Calgary, for communications staff who work with me to keep in touch with Albertans' concerns, for my deputy minister and his staff. In addition, there is a modest budget to support the office, as I've mentioned, of the Lieutenant Governor. That's what we're here to discuss, that particular budget.

Now, relative to the breakdown of the people who work in my office, I'd be glad to go through that, and I'd be glad to mention all their names and all their functions. If the hon. member would like me to take that under notice, I will do as I did last year and provide the hon. member with that particular information.

Madam simple -- Madam Chairman. My office is a simple office. Right. I'm sorry; my thoughts got ahead.

AN HON. MEMBER: They were simple thoughts.

MR. KLEIN: No, Madam Chairman. You are a very talented individual, a wonderful person.

But my office is a simple office, a simple office with a modest budget to respond generically and globally to all the needs and the concerns of Albertans. But I will . . .

MRS. SLOAN: Talk about children.

8:50

MR. KLEIN: Well, I'll talk about children, yes, because I get lots of letters about children. I get lots of letters about health. I get lots of letters about every single issue that is raised every single day in this Legislative Assembly. And, yes, I have a correspondence unit. I have seven people in that unit to literally respond to hundreds -- and I'm talking about hundreds -- of letters each and every day that come from citizens across this province and elsewhere who ask myriad questions relative to a multitude of issues. Seven, Madam Chairman, to respond to those queries, including all the questions that are posed to me by the Liberal opposition, including all the FOIP requests and all the things the Liberals want and the NDs want, not to mention the requests of Albertans who simply want information. We do that with seven people. Seven people.

I would invite the hon. member to my office one day, if she would dare enter my office. I know she doesn't want to go down to the gym. You know, the former leader of the Liberal opposition used to go down to the gym all the time. He didn't mind. I mean, I used to see him in the full monty all the time. He didn't mind. He didn't mind exposing everything that he had, and neither did I. We used to have some good chats down there. I know that it would be difficult with the existing leader of the Liberal opposition, but she can go next door and she can share the treadmill. There's no problem, because we put politics aside in the gymnasium, Madam Chairman, and it's there for all members and for all people who work in this wonderful establishment of ours. So I would invite her to use it one of these days. Really. [interjection] No. Come on. Come on down and jog with me. You know, do your three miles on the treadmill.

AN HON. MEMBER: We have more questions.

MR. KLEIN: Well, no, no. There was one more.

There was a comment that was made relative to the transparency and about the secrecy and the mystique of cabinet and our caucus and the way we do business. I don't recall ever, ever in my life being invited over to a Liberal caucus. Never. You know, I don't recall ever being invited to examine or to investigate the mystique of the Liberal Party and how it operates. I've never been over to the Liberal Party to examine the \$75,000, when they're talking about communications in the Public Affairs Bureau. [interjection] I've got it in my briefing book. I'll show it to the hon. member tomorrow. Seventy-five thousand pieces of Liberal propaganda at taxpayers' expense that was sent out. We don't set up a system within the schools, within the public schools of Edmonton to have the boys and girls, the young children act as runners for the Liberal Party. If we did that, we'd be absolutely crucified, yet they can spend thousands of dollars to put in systems to have young schoolchildren act as their runners.

MRS. SOETAERT: A point of order, Madam Chairman.

MR. KLEIN: Oh, point of order. Oh, right. Okay. Well, if they aren't doing it, have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods deny that he's collecting the petition and he's organizing this . . . [interjection]

THE CHAIRMAN: I haven't recognized you yet, hon. member.
The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman, because under 23(h) the Premier's making allegations against the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, and I find that quite . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: You, of all people. I'm astonished.

MRS. SOETAERT: And probably stunned you are too.

However, Madam Chairman, the point is that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods did not organize that petition. A group of very concerned parents, who happen to know about the realities of what education is going through in this province, organized that petition. They came to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods so that they could get the proper format. He provided that for them as a public service, which might have been difficult to get from somebody on the other side. Now, if those parents ask for help organizing, then it is incumbent upon any MLA to do their part and serve them in that capacity. Instead of waxing eloquent here about treadmills and pouting that a member from this side . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chair is going to interject. Number one, neither the chair nor this table heard anything about the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods mentioned. Number two, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was the one that in the beginning talked about having to run, et cetera, and the gym or the workout room downstairs.

Now, let us get back to what we are doing here, and that is the budget of Executive Council. Please, Mr. Premier, continue with the budget of Executive Council.

MR. KLEIN: Madam Chairman, I'm not apologizing to anyone. And yes, indeed I did mention the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. I did. If he's not sponsoring it, he certainly is part of the co-ordination of this effort. If this government were to do that, I'm telling you, we would be crucified. We would be absolutely crucified. Up to his eyebrows in it and proud of it. I wonder if we can get an accounting from the Liberal Party. Is this costing any money? Is he using his constituency office? Is this costing any money? I would like to know.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier, can I ask if we can focus in on the budget within Executive Council.

MR. KLEIN: Well, if they will, I will. They raised the issue. [interjections]

MR. SAPERS: A point of order. Madam Chairman, this is ridiculous: if he will, we will. I mean, I hope that Albertans listen to this nonsense. This is the opportunity for the Executive Council to be queried by private members, and the Premier, if he spent more time here, would be familiar with the rules. [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, please. Now, I am going to ask everyone in this room, especially those that are speaking, if we can concentrate our remarks on the Executive Council, the operating expenses and the figures that are right in this book here. This is what we're debating, budget estimates: dollars and operating expenses.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Madam Chairman, I agree with you a hundred percent. But, you know, the hon. member brought up the rights of the child, the international convention on the rights of children, in relationship to my budget. Well, this is not a money item. This is a statement of principles. Then she alluded to all of the things as they relate to the Northern Alberta Development Council, and I will have the hon. member respond to those particular issues. But with respect to the United Nations declaration on the rights of children, yes, I sent a letter to the Prime Minister . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: For 43 cents.

MR. KLEIN: Well, I think it was 43 cents. We probably get plus GST and a government rate. Well, that leaves it at 46 cents probably now.

And I said, yes, we support the convention, but we still have reservations and concerns relative to articles 13 and 15 of that particular convention.

She talked about the Premier's research department. Why doesn't the Premier have a research department? Well, we draw on all the resources of the government, including the input of the Liberal Party, but the largest research department basically is the people, the people of this province. They are the people who tell us what's right and what's wrong, what we should do and what we shouldn't do. They're the bosses, so I don't need a research department. Yes, to research the administrative details as it pertains to the day-to-day operations of government. Yes. The various ministries, agencies, boards, and authorities have a research department, as do the opposition Liberals, as do the opposition NDs, and that's what it's all about. That's what makes their questions so insightful and so provocative and pointed. It keeps us on our toes every day in question period. But as far as the Premier's office having a research department, no, we don't. The people, the ministries, the agencies, the boards, authorities, commissions, all of them are part of the research as it pertains to the Premier's department.

9:00

Madam Chairman, the hon. member also alluded to the Northern Alberta Development Council. Her lead-in or prelude to that particular situation was the UN convention on the rights of children. Then she went on to ask a number of detailed questions, and I'm sure the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca has the answers to those questions.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca, do you wish to answer now, or do you wish to wait until the end?

MR. CARDINAL: I'll answer now, quickly, and whatever we don't answer, then we'll do it in writing.

Thank you, Mr. Premier, and thank you, Madam Chairman. The comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview in relation to activities of northern development, of course, we need to look at very closely. She agreed that the activities done on the economic development side, economic promotion and skills development, are working well, and I think it's in *Hansard*.

The item she mentioned, of course, is in the area of the social support programs, and it's something I will discuss with the Premier in the future and may be something we will bring forward to our next council meeting to see if the Northern Alberta Development Council should expand a bit and work maybe a bit closer in my department with the departments that are responsible for those particular areas. I don't think that's too much of a problem. I think it's a good suggestion.

In relation to our government and the overall work we do on the social development side of our province, I think we are to be commended. This government, I think, under this Premier since 1993 has done more in the development of the northern people than any previous government or any previous Premier. Restructuring has taken place on the social support side, in education for an example -- and that's just one example -- with equity in funding. Under this Premier we moved forward with changes in there which saw a very positive change in how dollars were made available to our students in northern Alberta.

The restructuring of the health care system is more efficient and more effective now than it's ever been in northern Alberta.

The issue of Advanced Ed and Career Development. Our offices, co-located with Family and Social Services and the federal manpower, provide all sorts of career development programs, student support programs, guidance and counseling, and provide the actual training that's required.

Justice is another one that's very active in northern Alberta in seeing that changes take place.

I think one of the most critical areas that is done through our leader, our Premier here, is some of the changes in not only building a strong economy but changes in the social support programs that were in place too long. I'll give you just a quick example. You know, when you look back prior to 1950 in the northern development area, the majority of the isolated and semi-isolated communities were occupied by native people. These people were completely independent and self-sufficient for thousands of years. Changes started taking place -- some industrial development, forestry development, oil and gas exploration, tourism, guiding and hunting -- and the area changed completely. People living in those areas were no longer allowed to live off the land the traditional way.

One of the biggest mistakes we made -- and I was fortunate to be involved in some of the changes -- was in the way programs were provided through Family and Social Services. I'm not blaming the people that initiated those programs, because I think they were done with good intentions, and I'm not blaming the people that participated in accessing those programs, because I think they thought it was the right thing to do. But we know now, after three generations of welfare and individuals living in poverty, that you do not attack poverty by providing more welfare programs. You have to have a strong economic base. You have to provide the support programs so people can make that transition from welfare to becoming independent and self-sufficient.

I think when you look at our government, the direction we are going in in restructuring, first of all having a strong economy, a very attractive place to start businesses, and the changes we've made on the social support side -- in fact, the '99 budget will show you that a greater percentage of our budget is going towards the social support side again. I think our Premier should be commended because that is what Albertans are telling us, that this is where we need to go.

But, you know, we do still need a lot of work. We still have a lot of people that live in poverty. We have a lot of people that still require the training, still require the jobs. In fact, when you look at the First Nations in the area of child welfare, because child welfare is mentioned, half of the caseload of children in our system are First Nations children. It's not because these people are worse parents than non-native people. It's because of the poverty our people continue to live in. Until we create that individual independence and self-sufficiency, that issue of child welfare, the poverty, children being apprehended, will continue. Our government is working very closely with the First Nations to ensure that wherever it is possible, opportunities are provided to these First Nations, in fact utilizing federal legislation for child welfare and federal dollars, to take over that delivery system.

That will come. It's a matter of time. We have to provide these people the vehicle to be able to do it, and a strong economic base is one step in the right direction. We definitely do have a lot of work to do in that area yet, but I think that within our time, with the direction we are going in with our Premier and the interest he has and the knowledge he has in the areas of poverty and the First Nations, we will succeed. We are making big steps forward, and I think our government has to be commended for that area.

In the area of the performance measures, what I will do with that

because of the time is forward that in writing in detail as to how we do measure our performance in those three areas.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. When I was listening to the Premier give his introductory remarks, I was struck by a couple of things. One, the tone of his comments: reasonable, fairly monotone for the Premier in terms of presenting them, but straightforward information. Some of it I agreed with; some of it I thought was a little torqued. But I was pleased because, you know, the Premier seemed to be taking his time to present the rationale for the estimates presented to the Legislature. My intent was to stand up and be grateful to the Premier for taking the time and taking some thought to make those comments. Unfortunately that goodwill disappeared during . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Let's get on to the budget itself.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Chairman, you certainly gave lots of latitude, and I'm going to enjoy the same latitude.

The goodwill seemed to disappear . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Glenora, we have been here; we went through two speakers here. We are deliberating the Executive Council budget. Now, I'm asking: let's talk about the budget, the ramifications of the budget, the dollar amounts in the budget, and the budget itself, not on delivery.

9:10

MR. SAPERS: That's precisely what I'm doing, Madam Chairman.

As I was saying, the goodwill dissipated with the Premier's rather defensive responses.

THE CHAIRMAN: I just said that we're not talking about delivery and your concept of it. I want to talk about Executive Council and budget.

MR. SAPERS: So do I. That's why I thought we were here.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Let's go.

MR. SAPERS: Since we are under such duress in terms of the time that we have available, the fact is that in one of the Premier's responses to a question put about his budget, he said: well, I'll take perhaps till 10 o'clock to answer the question. I heard that very much as not just a threat but in fact a confirmation of the concerns the Official Opposition have about this budget process, where it's clear the government can manipulate the process and abuse it in any way they choose to not withstand the scrutiny of questions about their budget plans.

So if the Premier wants to continue to show such disregard and contempt for the process, that's his . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I think we had this discussion about the length of time and the format of these subcommittees all yesterday afternoon and last evening. We are right now talking about Executive Council while upstairs they're talking about Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs.

Can we please look at this? Would you please premise your remarks and your questions in relationship to this document?

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Chairman. So if the Premier wants to continue showing such disdain and disregard for the process, that's his . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, this is the third time I have interjected. We have now taken six minutes.

MR. SAPERS: I know. You keep on interrupting.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I'm saying that I want you, please, to stick to the document, ask questions. I'm sure the hon. Premier will either answer your questions or get back to you in writing, but let's move on here, please.

MR. SAPERS: Well, it's hard to get going when I keep on being stopped. I'll do my best. I've only done this six times.

MR. MAR: You could start with a question.

MR. SAPERS: That's an odd noise coming from the Minister of Education.

Anyway, aside from the threats, then, perhaps I will start with a question about the . . .

MR. MAR: A question.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Chairman, I notice you're not interrupting the Minister of Education and getting him to stop interrupting proceedings. I'm curious about that.

Anyway, the Premier . . .

MR. MAR: You of all people. The irony is so delicious.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Minister of Education.

There. Carry on.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. I feel redeemed.

The Premier mentioned in response to an earlier question about research that the Premier's office doesn't have any research. I take him at his word, but I do know that the Public Affairs Bureau contracts with a lot of polling firms, does focus groups. So I'm wondering if the Premier can tell us: if that's not research, what is it? If it's done through the Public Affairs Bureau, why aren't the results made public? It seems to me that one should follow from the other. Exactly how much money has been spent with how many various public opinion research firms in the past, and how much is being planned to be spent in the coming fiscal period? I think the Premier would acknowledge that that is in fact research.

While we are talking about the Public Affairs Bureau, I'd like to ask the Premier: where exactly am I going to find in the Public Affairs Bureau budget the line items that will describe the amounts of money that are being spent to combat racism and intolerance in the province of Alberta? I think it's particularly timely for the Public Affairs Bureau to be dealing with racism and intolerance when we have intolerant statements uttered by members, not just of the front bench, but we have racist venom being spit from members of the back bench as well. So I think that we should have . . .

MR. RENNER: Point of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. member on a point of order.

MR. RENNER: Madam Chairman, the comment that was just made

is contrary to Standing Order 23, and it was aimed at one specific member for a specific comment that was made. If I remember correctly, the member withdrew that comment, apologized to the House, apologized to another member the comment had been directed at. The apology was accepted, and it is a time-honoured tradition in this House and in every Legislature that a member's word is the law. So when a member withdraws a statement, offers an apology, the apology is accepted, the issue is over. For this member to bring this issue back up at this point in time is a disservice to this Legislature.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader is absolutely right. You have been in this Assembly long enough that you know that is so.

MR. SAPERS: Well, I'm certainly not going to retract my comment. You don't eliminate racism simply by apologizing for it or trying to sweep it under the rug. So I'm sorry. It was a racist statement. It was uttered in this House, and I don't care whether he apologized for it or not.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, this has nothing to do with the budget estimates that are before us. We are talking about Executive Council.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Chairman, thank you. The question was: how much money is the Public Affairs Bureau spending to combat this kind of racism? I'm curious to hear that answer.

I also noticed in the Premier's remarks that he mentioned the number of consultations and he mentioned the Access television shows about the budget, and I think there were a couple of other media campaigns that the Premier mentioned in his remarks. But he made no mention of ensuring that he dealt with public broadcasters that provide equal free time to the Official Opposition. You know, the architects of *Pravda* would be proud to see how this kind of use of the press is being accomplished.

Then the Premier went further to talk about documents produced by Liberal office research, and I believe he labeled it as propaganda. Now, if you want to talk about propaganda, all you have to do is take a look at what the government is doing with their budget. The Talk It Up; Talk It Out campaign I think is another accomplishment that the Premier seemed to be particularly proud of. Of course we know that that wasn't a particularly scientific effort, but we do know that it was highly manipulated effort. Unfortunately, many Albertans believed that the government would fairly represent what they wrote in, and I guess that hasn't been the case.

While we're still talking about the Public Affairs Bureau and the Premier talking about the hard work they do on behalf of the government, not necessarily the people of Alberta, I'd like to have this page delivered to the Premier. Unfortunately, I don't have enough to table for the whole Assembly, but I'd be happy to bring some in. What it is, Mr. Premier, is a photocopy of the cover page of Budget '99: The Right Balance, but it's also a photocopy of the cover page of the March 1997 fiscal plan of the Official Opposition, the Alberta Liberals, entitled A Balanced Approach. In 1997, two years before. It's striking to me the similarity in terms of both the language and the style. I'll send it over to the Premier, and . . . [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members.
Continue.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. Now, still staying with the Public Affairs

Bureau, I have a couple of other questions under administrative services. I noticed that there is a \$69,000 increase in the line item 3.0.1. I'm wondering if the Premier can tell us what criteria is being used by his administration working in conjunction with branch managers to adjust their resources to ensure that the communication staffing levels meet the requirements of the client departments. What is it the client departments are telling Executive Council? Maybe while he's at it, he can talk to us about the secondment positions and the temporary positions. My colleague was just beginning to refer to those.

The other issue that I wanted to deal with here under Public Affairs is: what recommendation or recommendations did the Premier receive from the Auditor General which has resulted in the Public Affairs Bureau discontinuing the private-sector supplier satisfaction measure? If the Premier recalls, there was a measure of supplier satisfaction that's been discontinued. I'm wondering about that. What plans does the Public Affairs Bureau have to establish a comparable measure for the coming year?

Under the line item of communications services, which is in -- which vote is it? I don't have a note of that here, but I know that it's forecast to go up 2.3 percent. I wonder if the Premier can give us some details about the strategies that are being developed to support government communication around the 2005 Alberta centennial celebrations.

9:20

I'm curious about the strategies that have been developed by the Public Affairs Bureau to work with the personnel administration office to build in recognition of the Alberta public service as an employer and perhaps an employer of choice. That's a question I'll have for the minister responsible for career development as well.

I'm curious to know what criteria is used by the Public Affairs Bureau to determine the ad agencies that are contracted for media buying for the various client departments.

Mr. Premier, one of your performance measures is down. Why has public satisfaction with government information declined from 69 percent in '95-96 to only 66 percent in '97-98? This is particularly troubling to me because I notice that the target of 75 percent remains on the books, and it's going downhill, not uphill. I'm wondering what specific strategies you have to deal with that.

Under communications technologies I'm wondering what further initiatives will be undertaken by communications technologies in '99-2000 to upgrade the Alberta government Internet home page to increase the relevance and timeliness of posted information. Are there additions anticipated to the Internet site in '99-2000?

While I'm on the Internet, I'd like to ask the Premier if it costs extra money to post those audio clips on the Internet? I don't know whether you've accessed it yourself, Madam Chairman, but you can now just not only get the benefit of the news releases by accessing the government's home page, but selectively you can get audio clips of the Premier's very own voice telling people things if they want to listen. I notice that the Premier got very excited before with some of my remarks. But, you know, it's not unknown for the Premier to use some very colourful and inflammatory language, like the messages he sent home from Portland. Those audio clips were posted on the government's Internet site. So I'm just wondering how much money that costs.

MR. KLEIN: Oh, absolutely. Will be again too.

MR. SAPERS: The Premier's threatened to call me names again. Well, gee, it's like a schoolyard; isn't it, Madam Chairman?

THE CHAIRMAN: Through the chair, hon. member, please.

MR. SAPERS: Well, I said Madam Chairman. I think you heard that. Yeah. Okay.

I want to ask some questions under the general administration vote in program 1. These all come out of the Auditor General's report. I'll run through these relatively quickly, and I would ask that the Premier undertake to respond in writing before the end of the budget process so we can have the information before we are required to actually vote on the estimates he is requiring.

The first question, Mr. Premier, is: what steps are being taken by Executive Council in '99-2000 in conjunction with Alberta Treasury to meet the recommendation of the Auditor General to provide a greater emphasis "on creating the third year of the government and Ministry business plans"? That was on the Auditor General's report on page 16, for your reference, Mr. Premier.

What steps are being taken by Executive Council in '99-2000 in conjunction with other ministries to "provide a longer-term context for business planning by setting and communicating longer-term strategies"? The Auditor General's report, page 18.

I'm curious if the Premier can tell us what steps are being undertaken by Executive Council in '99-2000 in conjunction with other ministries to ensure that "targets set in business plans in relation to goals . . . are challenging and attainable." That's the language found of page 19 of the AG's report.

I'm wondering if the Premier can tell us what steps are being taken in '99-2000 in conjunction with other ministries to ensure that "ministry business plans include forecast information on factors which could significantly impact the successful implementation of their business plans." For your reference, page 21 of the current Auditor General's report.

On page 22 of the Auditor General's report there is a recommendation about common components. I'm wondering if the Premier can tell us what steps are being taken by Executive Council in conjunction with other ministries to ensure that

all ministry business plans provide information on a common set of components and that the plan's financial information be presented in a form similar to the rest of the plan.

Mr. Premier, what steps are being taken by Executive Council in 1999-2000 in conjunction with other ministries to ensure that more emphasis be placed on discussing the reasons for variances between planned . . . and actual performance, and that analysis of financial results be included in management discussion and analysis in ministry annual reports.

Mr. Premier, that's on page 23 of the Auditor General's report.

With all the interjections, Madam Chairman, I'm not sure how much time I have left. Could you give me an indication?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Six minutes.

MR. SAPERS: Six minutes, thank you.

Mr. Premier, what steps are being taken by Executive Council in 1999-2000 in conjunction with other ministries to ensure that "organizations accountable to ministers be provided with clear written guidelines for the preparation of their annual reports"? That's on page 24 of the '97-98 Auditor General's report.

What steps are being taken by Executive Council in '99-2000 in conjunction with other ministries to ensure that "client satisfaction survey methods produce valid and reliable results" and that "standards be developed for reporting survey information"? Page 25 of the Auditor General's report.

What steps are being taken by Executive Council in conjunction with other ministries to ensure that year 2000 risks to the province are identified and appropriate plans are developed to mitigate those

risks? That does not flow from the Auditor General's report, Mr. Premier, but of course the Auditor General made significant reference to the Y2K problem throughout his report. One thing that I have still not been able to come across is a provincewide, governmentwide risk assessment regarding the Y2K problem. I know that the government has made some strides, and I'm actually quite pleased that the government is taking this problem with some seriousness, but I'd like to know if a risk assessment was done. If so, could it be made public? If a risk assessment wasn't done, on what basis was it decided to do department-by-department management of this problem as opposed to governmentwide?

Mr. Premier, the last concerns I have have to do with freedom of information requests and processing. The Privacy Commissioner has recently issued a report which found some things that were rather disturbing in the Premier's office in regards to a freedom of information request regarding documents related to the government's involvement in the financing of West Edmonton Mall. What the Privacy Commissioner found is that there was inadequate records management, inadequate training, inadequate staffing, and an inadequate search, a search in fact that failed to meet the test of section 9 of the act, the Premier's own flagship freedom of information bill.

The Privacy Commissioner's concerns were well noted in that report, and the comment has been made that some remedial action has been taken. Now, I don't know what that remedial action is. I don't know whether it's increased training, increased staffing, a new records management system, all of the above, none of the above, some of the above. I would ask the Premier to take us through that and describe the training that was put in place that resulted in the inadequate search and then the specific steps that were taken that were remedial to ensure that staff were adequately trained and that the Premier's office would never again breach the government's own legislation regarding access to information.

It seems to me, Madam Chairman, that the tone for government can be set by the Premier and the Premier's office and that if it's okay for the Premier's office to do an inadequate search, if it's okay for the Premier's office to have inadequate records management, if it's okay for the Premier's office to fail to train people, then I guess it must be okay governmentwide. At least that's the message that unfortunately the Premier may be sending to other members of Executive Council. So it would be of interest to me to know exactly what the Premier has done to right those wrongs and what assurances he can give us that proper and adequate funding for records management is in this budget for the Executive Council office.

9:30

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Madam Chairman, going from the last question and to answer that first, relative to FOIP, as far as I know, all of the recommendations of the Information and Privacy Commissioner have been accepted and are being put in place. Relative to the mechanics as to how all of this is being done, I will take the hon. member's questions under notice, and we will attempt to provide him with the information.

But I really take exception to the suggestion that this was deliberate, because the Information and Privacy Commissioner in his statement said quite clearly that this was something that was innocent. It was identified as a deficiency in what is comparatively new legislation, Madam Chairman, and we will do what we can to make sure that these deficiencies are overcome and that they are addressed completely.

Relative to Y2K I think remarkable progress is being made through the chief information officer's office to address these issues. The hon. member brought up some specific questions relative to this very complex issue, and again I will take his questions under notice relative to the intricacies and the specifics and try to provide him with an answer.

That also applies to all the issues related to the Auditor General's report, which by the way, Madam Chairman, have absolutely nothing to do with my budget, maybe indirectly in some way, shape, or form but not as it directly affects the day-to-day operation of my office. A number of questions were posed, and again I will attempt to provide the hon. member with the answers to those questions.

Again, relative to the criteria for the retaining of advertising agencies under the Public Affairs Bureau, I don't know what the criteria is. I would suspect that if they're a good ad agency and they'll provide a good service at a reasonable cost, then they'll be in the mix and they'll be adjudicated with their peers, and the best proposal will win.

On the 2005 centennial celebrations there was a volunteer citizens committee with resources provided by the Department of Community Development to prepare some recommendations. This has now gone to an MLA committee, and in the fullness of time, I guess, some recommendations will be made to government as to what projects we will fund and what projects we won't fund and what community endeavours we will sponsor and partnership with as we lead into Alberta's centennial year in the year 2005.

Private-sector supplier satisfaction. The hon. member raises a good point. That was indeed alluded to in last year's report from the Public Affairs Bureau. Why it's not there this year I don't know, but I will attempt to provide the hon. member with an answer.

Line items. Again as they relate to the Public Affairs Bureau, I simply don't have that information in front of me. I have almost the same information that you have. So, again, I'll attempt to get that information and provide it to the hon. member.

I will take exception to this illusion that public broadcasting, i.e. the CBC, is free. It's not free. It's not free at all, because if we were to take that time offered by the CBC, not that we fear that the Liberals or the NDs would have equal time -- no, it's not free time at all. It's taken away from the advertisers, and it's picked up by the Canadian taxpayers. It's a taxpayers' expense no matter how you look at it. You know, I always allude to my old friend, long since passed away, John Kushner, who sat in this Legislative Assembly, was on city council, and he said: there's only one taxpayer, you and me.

Basically the taxpayers pick it up one way or the other. What we tried to do -- and I'm sure the Liberals, if they were over here, would try to do the same thing -- is attain the largest reach. The simple fact is -- and there are no CBC reporters up there, and there are certainly no camera people up there because they're all on strike -- that of all the television stations in the province the CBC has the lowest ratings. They do. They have the lowest reach. So we want to get our message out, the people's message, the government's message, to as many people as possible and at the least possible cost.

I know I acted with some anger relative to the hon. member's remarks as they pertain to racism. There's no one who feels more strongly than me and all members of my caucus relative to this particular issue, and all you've got to do is to look at the cultural diversity of this caucus to know and to understand and to appreciate that this is not a racist government, not by any stretch of the imagination.

Indeed, with respect to the issue itself that the hon. member raised, the issue as it relates to racism and what is being done by the Public Affairs Bureau to combat racism, again there are numerous divisions

within the bureau that are assigned to various departments, and I am sure that within the PAB there is a person or persons assigned to the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, and I will attempt to get the hon. member some answers as to what that commission is doing in conjunction with the PAB to combat the terrible manifestation of racism.

Polling. [interjection] Well, no, they don't win on polling. I thought this question was going to come up -- and it's a valid question -- because we do poll. We have to get a sense of what the people are saying and what they are feeling, and I'm sure the Liberal opposition polls people as well. But government polling is a little bit different, because ultimately it's the government that is responsible for the welfare of this province. Yes, it is the role, the rightful and dutiful role, of the Liberal opposition and the ND opposition to question and to challenge the government on our policies, but we have to get a feeling from the public. We have to be able to feel the public pulse. Yes, we try to get out from under the dome as much as we possibly can to find out face-to-face from the people what they are thinking, but it's not always possible to do that at all times, and therefore we must do polling.

9:40

But relative to the suggestion that that polling is secret, that is absolutely wrong. In anticipation of this question I asked my communications director: what do we do about polling and how do we release the results? She informed me that she has invited a Liberal researcher on a number of occasions -- I believe his last name is Kaplan -- to come to her office to pick up the results of pollings and to ask her any questions about polling results or the methodology of polling, and he has never bothered to come to the office.

MRS. SOETAERT: That's not true.

MR. KLEIN: Well, that's what I hear. Whether that's true or not true, maybe we'll have that discussion, but I understand from my communications director that on a number of occasions Mr. Kaplan has been invited to examine the polling results, all the polling criteria and data, and he has never bothered to show up. Now, that's the information I get. But if Mr. Kaplan wants to come over and look at it, he's perfectly welcome. As a matter of fact, I extend an open invitation for him to come over to Faye Orr's office and have a look at all the polling data, polling results, and everything that he wants. It's all there for him. You can come along just to make sure he does his job. I'm speaking to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MRS. SOETAERT: Through the chair of course.

MR. KLEIN: And through the chair.

So with the exception of those questions I've taken under notice, I think I've answered just about everything the hon. member has asked.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's nice to see so many of my colleagues here tonight dealing with the NADC, the Northern Alberta Development Council, especially my friend to the left and in front and in other parts of the north.

Two questions I pose tonight. The Premier mentioned earlier tonight what the factors are that pertain to the Queen's Printer, the bookshop. What factors are really being considered in the

development of the products and the services within the Queen's Printer bookshop?

The second one perhaps is directed to the chair of the NADC. I'm interested in the breakdown of the NADC bursary program for helping young northerners.

Those are my questions, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Did you want to answer that question? Go ahead, Athabasca-Wabasca.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. The Northern Alberta Development Council of course has a number of bursaries, and I touched on, not in detail though, as to how they function and the number of dollars provided. I mentioned a bit earlier that the northern student supplement, which is a new program that's only started this past year, is tied in with the program provided under Advanced Ed and Career Development, the new Alberta opportunity fund. Some of the students that are eligible for the Alberta opportunity fund that live in the northern development area will automatically, if their income level qualifies them, be eligible to get a northern student's supplement.

In the '98-99 school year 346 students received supplements for a total of \$379,500. The average award per student is \$1,097, and that's a supplement. That's not to be repaid. The selection that is done for those students is basically for the first- and second-year students and students that are of high financial need as determined through their student loan application process. So that's one program that works very well in seeing that more of our students, which in turn, no doubt, will become self-sufficient and independent, participate through the postsecondary education and technical schools.

The northern development bursary itself has been around a number of years now, and during the 1998-99 education year 122 students have been selected to receive that bursary, and the total awarded on that is \$375,000. These bursaries are \$3,000 for a full year of studies, and students receive \$1,500 for half a year of studies. In this particular package we require a return service commitment, and to date the return service has been approximately 76 percent, which we feel is very reasonable.

The selection criteria used for those particular students is again through the bursary selection committee, and again emphasis is placed on students studying for an occupation that's in high demand in the northern development area. That could be in the area of social work, education, health care worker, possibly even in the area of government administration for First Nations and Métis settlements, et cetera.

The other ones that are considered highly are the ones that are closer to graduating, some of those that are in their third and fourth year of training. Again, of course, the criteria are the same: financial needs, they have to have some northern experience, aboriginal from within the northern development area, and knowledge of northern employment opportunities. I guess basically that is the area.

The final one we have is the bursary partnership program done jointly with private industry, again matched by our government. We have 119 students qualified through that particular program, and there are about 40 sponsors.

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to ask some questions about Executive Council. I wanted to, if I could, focus on the public affairs section of the

business plan and their relationship to the budget. I would like to ask some questions, if I may, about the client satisfaction surveys that are conducted by the department. I guess my first question would be: what did the survey cost? There are four performance measures, and I'm not sure if they're part of a larger government survey and these questions are included, but my questions are about those. What did they cost?

I'm going back to the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General under Executive Council made some extensive recommendations about the client satisfaction surveys. I think the Auditor General was speaking about all government departments, not just Executive Council, but certainly some of the questions that were raised by the Auditor General pertain, I think, to this particular department.

I think the caution at the beginning is one that we would be wise to heed. On page 25 under Executive Council the Auditor General says that "there is a risk satisfaction surveys may be used to manipulate or 'window-dress' reported performance." Then he goes on to indicate how important it is for those surveys "to provide meaningful information," and he also sets up some criteria that he suggests we use in judging those client satisfaction surveys.

One of the points he makes is that he recommends that there be strong links between the goals and the strategies outlined in the business program for the department and the satisfaction measures. If you look at the strategies under goal 1 in the business plan for Executive Council on page 153, the goal is to "make government information more accessible to Albertans." Then you look at the one measure. The measure is a satisfaction with that information measure from -- I'm not quite sure where that satisfaction measure comes from, and I'll get to that in just a few minutes.

9:50

It would be interesting -- and I think this is what the Auditor General is recommending, that there be some measures, some testing to see how Albertans view the timeliness and the clarity of the information that's provided. It's a considerable amount of money spent by the Public Affairs Bureau as a line item in the budget, so I think the kinds of measures that assure Albertans that that money is being well spent are important. Of course the whole notion of the business plans is basic to the government's strategy, and it's something that's been lauded elsewhere as a move in the right direction.

I think if you look at the measures, the Auditor General indicates that there should be some indication of who was actually polled. We have no information. For instance, under Public Satisfaction with Government Information, we're given the information that it has moved from 65 percent in 1994-95 to 66 percent of people satisfied with the level of information they receive. But who was asked? I think the Auditor General asks for that kind of information. What was the size of the sample? How valid is this question in terms of what it purports to measure? The Auditor General talks about the sample size being "representative of those who actually use the services." It would be interesting to see what kind of follow-up there is on people who get information from the government and how they have arrived at this decision of 66 percent. So I think the Auditor General asks that the client population be defined.

The reliability. There are no reliability measures indicated here in terms of the measures. How much confidence can we have in the 66 percent overall satisfaction with the information that we see here on this page? Again, the Auditor General recommends in his report that the reliability of the survey should be established. It should be "determined in advance." I hope I'm not reading too much into what he says, but I think he indicates that that information should be

reported so that people reading this have some confidence in the measures that are to be put forward.

He talks about the response rates being "high enough to provide accurate results." Again, the Public Affairs Bureau business plan gives us no indication of the response rates to the questions that they've asked about Albertans' satisfaction with the information.

The Auditor General talks about all of the surveys across all of the departments, including Executive Council. They should be asking questions about the "quality and value of services, and the competence, responsiveness and courtesy of the service provider's staff." We have a client satisfaction scale, but it really gives us very little information about the kinds of things that the Auditor General has laid out in terms of: how satisfied are people with the treatment they get on the telephone? I'm sure all of us have been subjected to calls from constituents who aren't satisfied with the answers that they get. They don't call us obviously, most of them, when they are satisfied, but we do get some of the complaints.

There was a complaint today about the answers that a constituent received from the office about the new performance program. The citizen thought that the person on the other end of the telephone line was more interested in defending the government's position than answering questions by a citizen who just tried to gather some information. So I think the quality of the service, as the Auditor General indicates, is an important criteria, and it's an important measure when we look at something like the kind of information that the Public Affairs Bureau supplies.

It would be interesting to have something from the Premier or from the Treasurer, wherever the satisfaction surveys are funded from or put together, in terms of how the questions are asked, the format of the surveys. The Auditor General indicates that the layout and the wording of the questions are very important in terms of the kind of information that they actually yield, and it would be I think useful for members of the Legislature in considering all the estimates, not just this particular department, to have some indication of the kinds of questions that are actually being asked and the format that they're being surveyed in. He indicates that they should be less than 30 minutes for people to complete them and indicates that they're pretested.

One of the questions I have had from a couple of constituents interested in this particular area is the whole notion of the government setting up an independent body to do the surveying, to look at the performance measures, and then to report publicly in terms of the performance of the government and that being an alternative to government departments, who obviously have a vested interest in good results, making judgments about the questions, about the populations that are going to be asked, and about the specific questions.

If you go back to the goals as they appear and then again the performance questions that are being asked, goal 1 seems to be a goal that all Albertans would be interested in in terms of trying to make more information accessible to Albertans. It really is an external measure and I think an important one, whereas goals 2 and 3 seem to be aimed and directed more at the internal operations of the government itself and of the department itself. For instance: "Create a model for the ideal communications branch and work in consultation with departments to achieve the model across" the province. That seems again to be an internal concern for the department, and I wonder if that's as important to Albertans as, say, goal 1 in terms of the kind of information that they're trying to access. "Work with the Personnel Administration Office . . . to build recognition of the Alberta Public Service as an employer," again an internal concern, along with goal 3, "Improve the efficiency of communications across government." Half of the goals of the Public

Affairs Bureau seem to be directed towards internal improvement. I'm not denying it's important, but I think in terms of Albertans reading business plans and looking at the line expenditures of Executive Council, those two goals must play a much lesser role in their minds. The concern with quality of communications that they have with the government -- how good those communications are, how quickly they're responded to, the manner in which they're responded to -- I think are really important issues.

10:00

One of the other things with the Public Affairs Bureau business plan and their operations is the concern that the bureau is operating in a nonpolitical fashion, that it is concerned with legitimate operations of government. Although communicating government programs is important to Albertans, I think there could be some measure to assure the independence of the way the Public Affairs Bureau conducts its business. That might be some comfort to Albertans. They might feel this is a bureau that is independent of political influence and providing the straight goods in terms of government programs to the population.

The Auditor General also talked about making cross-department measures. I referred to the ideal of a communications model being designed by the Public Affairs Bureau and that plan being disbursed or being shared with other departments. There is no measure. We see no indication, and the Auditor General indicates that this is a fault. We see no tracking of those cross-department initiatives and no indication of the success or nonsuccess of those particular efforts.

If you go back to a couple of general questions about Executive Council. A couple of years ago the personnel department was moved out of Executive Council. I guess there's a question that's been asked before, and that is the reason for the inclusion of the Northern Alberta Development Council in this particular budget. I wonder what the rationale is for, first of all, moving the personnel department out of Executive Council and for the continuation of something like the Northern Alberta Development Council. One might have considered that this could be included in the Department of Economic Development or one of the other departments that are concerned with economic development. It would be interesting to find out why this particular council remains with Executive Council. That's not in any way to indicate that it's not an important thrust for the government and an important issue that has to be addressed.

Just a couple more comments about the performance objectives. Again, the question was previously raised about the year 2000 preparation, and there are no performance measures in this budget I can find that in any way evaluate the progress that the government has made in that area. I know that the Minister of Health in his estimates for the last couple of years has talked about that department's year 2000 efforts and the kind of expenditures they've made. But, again, there are no performance measures. There's nothing here that can assure Albertans that the year 2000 concerns they have for government are being addressed. The Auditor General takes several pages to address his concerns in that particular area.

Maybe it's just unfortunate it ended up under Executive Council, but the Auditor General has commented extensively on business plans and the plans of government and, I think, has made some suggestions for improving them. I think they're improvements that will make the government's reporting better and more understandable in terms of public expenditures.

With those comments, thanks, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Like the previous

speaker for the opposition Liberals, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods alluded to a number of recommendations contained in the report of the Auditor General. I will undertake to take his comments and his questions under notice and to provide the hon. member with the appropriate answers.

In light of the time, Madam Chairman, I move that subcommittee A now rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: It has been moved by the hon. Premier that subcommittee A now rise and report. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: It is carried.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10:09 p.m.]