



Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

HANSARD VERBATIM REPORT



No. 1 — January 18, 2021

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

Hon. Randy Weekes, Chair
Biggar-Sask Valley

Ms. Carla Beck
Regina Lakeview

Mr. Terry Dennis
Canora-Pelly

Hon. Jeremy Harrison
Meadow Lake

Hon. Everett Hindley
Swift Current

Ms. Vicki Mowat
Saskatoon Fairview

Ms. Nadine Wilson
Saskatchewan Rivers

[The board met at 09:01.]

The Chair: — We should get started. We have quorum. Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the meeting. I'd like to introduce the members of the board. The Hon. Jeremy Harrison will be a little late. He'll be here a little later. Hon. Everett Hindley, MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Nadine Wilson, and MLA Terry Dennis. And from the opposition, MLA Vicki Mowat and MLA Carla Beck.

As you know the protocols, please wear your masks. Motions are placed at the front of the room and are arranged in order. If you move a motion, please go to the front to sign the motion. You have individual pens as well.

I would like a mover to approve the proposed agenda for this meeting. Mr. Dennis moves the motion. Seconder? Carla Beck. Carried. I need a motion to approve the minutes for the meeting of May 2020. Mover? Mr. Dennis. Seconder? Beck. All in favour? Carried.

Okay. I would like to table a number of items, so I will go through them. Item no. 1, the Legislative Assembly Service *Year-End Report on Progress* of 2019-2020.

Item no. 2, the first and second quarter financial report 2020-2021 for the Legislative Assembly Service of Saskatchewan.

Item no. 3, the human resource and financial management policy for the Legislative Assembly Service.

Item no. 4, the first, second, and third quarter financial report 2020-2021 for the Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth.

Item no. 5, the human resource and financial management policy for the Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth.

Item no. 6, the Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Saskatchewan first and second quarter financial report 2020-2021 for the Chief Electoral office, Elections Saskatchewan.

Item no. 7, the human resource and financial management policy for the Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Saskatchewan.

Item no. 8, the first, second, and third quarter financial report 2020-2021 for the Office of the Ombudsman Saskatchewan and the Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner.

Item no. 9, the human resource and financial management policy for the Ombudsman Saskatchewan and the Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner.

Item no. 10, the first, second, and third quarter financial report 2020-2021 for the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Item no. 11, the human resource and financial management policy for the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Item no. 12, the first, second, and third quarter financial report 2020-2021 for the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and the lobbyist registrar.

Item no. 13, the human resource and financial management policy for the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and the lobbyist registrar.

Item 14, the audit letter from the Provincial Auditor to the Board of Internal Economy.

Item 15, the letter of response from the Board of Internal Economy to the Provincial Auditor.

And item no. 16, (a) MLA accountability and disclosure reports for fiscal year ended March 31st, 2020; (b) Saskatchewan Party caucus audited financial statements for the year ended March 31st, 2020; (c) the New Democratic Party caucus audited financial statements for the year ended March 31st, 2020.

Information and Privacy Commissioner

The Chair: — So I'd like to move on to item 17, decision item, review of the 2021-2022 budget and motion to approve budgetary and statutory expenditure estimates for the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I'd like to introduce Mr. Ron Kruzeniski, Information and Privacy Commissioner, and ask that before he does his presentation, will you please introduce your officials. And you have the floor, Mr. Kruzeniski.

Mr. Kruzeniski: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, Happy New Year to you and the board members, and congratulations on your election or re-election to the Legislative Assembly, and of course, appointment to this board.

With me today is Ms. Pam Scott. She is the executive director of corporate services for our office and she is responsible for preparing the budget each year and ensuring that we come in on budget each year.

This is my first presentation that I've made with a mask. I've attended many Zoom meetings, but this is the first presentation with a mask and I hope I come through clearly. And in a similar way, I hope, when we get to the question time, I can hear each of you clearly as we're all wearing masks. But I've certainly seen lots of other people speak on television with masks, so here we go.

The budget request today is basically what I call a status quo budget. It is for \$2.297 million. It is an increase of \$60,000, and that's made up of a 2 per cent cost of living increase, which generally has been approved or expected for April 1, 2021, and performance increases, which staff are basically entitled to if they are not at their range maximum or the top of the range. If they're at the top of the range, they don't receive that.

I wanted to briefly review what has happened to our office in the last year, and the story is really told mainly by a series of charts that start at page 8 and go to page 10. And I must say that in this, COVID-19 has certainly been a factor in our year, and I will refer to that on and off as we go through the charts as to some of the reasons why the charts are the way they are.

Chart no. 1, which is at page 8, is files opened per calendar year. And in 2019 we opened 403; in 2020 we opened 280. And you may say, why? Well in part it is the pandemic. I believe citizens, from March on, started to focus on serious health issues and the COVID-19, and that has just caused a shift in focus or concern. I will comment later. I do think as the pandemic is over in 2021 — which we all hope — that people will kind of return to some issues of access to documents or privacy.

The other reason I think for that is COVID delays, and again I'm going to refer to that a couple of times. In our case, last March and April we basically very quickly vacated our office and scrambled to all be working at home, and I think it took us till the end of April to get efficient at it. But I also accept that every other agency where citizens ask for information would have the same issues, the same challenges of kind of getting organized or reorganized to continue as much service as possible, as some people were at home.

We were fortunate that we were pretty well an electronic office prior to the pandemic, so that it was easy for us to work at home. But at the same time, if organizations had a lot of paper and if your staff is at home but your paper is at the office where you shouldn't go or can't go or whatever, that would have caused — and I think of one particular file — some serious delays in getting answers to things. And that will show up a little bit later in our delays.

So we've had an increase in caseload since 2014, a reduction last year. But this kind of provided an opportunity for us to work on the backlog, particularly the 2018 and the 2019 files that were there. Expectation for the future: vaccine rollouts happening and on the way, hopefully activity returning to normal in our province and our country. I think that will sort of result in people asking for information or whatever.

The pandemic itself, I think, has heightened the awareness around privacy. I'm certainly sort of seeing discussions, and it particularly came to the fore when we were talking about contact tracing apps or releasing of information where people . . . you know, which area may have had COVID and which not. So all those factors, the heightened awareness and kind of a pent-up demand. When we sort of get back to normal, I'm expecting that our file opening counts will come back to in the range where they were prior to the pandemic.

The next chart, chart no. 2, is at page 9, and it's active case files at the end of the year. So you open files, you close files, you open files, you close files, but where are you at, at the end of the year? And in 2019 we were at 225 and at the end of 2020 we were at 173. Basically that increase says that we were able to tackle some of the old files from 2018 and keep them moving, so that has been a positive to make a dent in our backlog and get a little closer to getting things out sooner.

Chart no. 3, which is also on page 9, has average files per analyst, and this is by calendar year. In 2019 we were at 32 files per analyst, and in 2020 we were at 29. So you see, marginally because fewer files were coming in, our average caseload per analyst had gone down. So it kind of reflects progress but it does tell you we're a bit far away from where I want us to be. My standard or my target is that each analyst has 15 files. And you might say, why 15? Well if you have that sort of level, when a

file comes on your desk you can work on it sooner. You can ask your questions sooner and you can get your report sooner, which I think is extremely important for citizens of the province and for the public agencies to sort of get the answers to their questions.

So I think there was a little bit of a positive impact there, but we still have a ways to go. At one time we were at seven files per analyst, and now we're at 29. We also had a challenge there that one of our analysts took a leave of absence and the replacement for her didn't stay that long. So we're temporarily down one person until we fill that up. So all those things come into that, but our overall goal is to get us somewhat closer to 15 files per analyst.

[09:15]

Chart no. 4 on page 10 talks about average response time. This is, you know, when a file comes in, the sooner you get it out, the better off we are. And for reviews, where someone has made an access request for information and the public agency has given some of it or none of it, in 2019 we were at 195 days, which is about 6.5 months. In 2020, we were at 226 days. So in one sense, this number is going in the wrong direction, and we need it to get below 195.

And again, you may ask why. Well I think the pandemic was a factor. It certainly was a factor in our office last March and April. It has been a factor for other agencies, just them getting back to us and that sort of thing. So I generally refer to those as COVID delays. Again as we edge our way back to normal, expecting those will go away. The other factor is because we had time to get into our 2018 backlog, etc. When we closed a file, it had a longer time span from opening until closing. So it's kind of upped our number there.

So we're performing at about seven months. We have a target in the office, and we published this in our annual report, of 130 days, which is slightly over four months. So before I retire, my goal is that we are going to get back to, or very close to, 130 days to get a complaint in and get a report out.

The last chart on page 10 deals with average response times for investigations when somebody says, oh look, there's been a breach of privacy and we need to investigate it. There in 2019, we were at 226, and that is about 7.5 months. In 2020, we're at 302, and that's about 10 months. And why? Some of the same reasons that I've given you above: that all of us were transitioning and, you know, when you ask somebody a question, they might have been working at home. The answer might have been on paper documents down at the office.

We had a couple of very big, more time-consuming files. One was LifeLabs, which was a breach all across Canada, but here it potentially impacted 93,000 citizens. The other one is just a report issued recently re eHealth that was released. And that one, even though the report is released, there's probably work to be done in regard to that.

To assist this, we've made some changes. We've come up with an investigations questionnaire, which hopefully makes it easier for a public body to answer our questions about privacy. So I would say at the moment on this, we are challenged and we need to do better. And there's a saying that I said to the board last year

is, if you're not timely, you're not relevant. And obviously I want to be just as relevant as the Legislative Assembly wants us to be.

So in summary, the request for 2021 is for \$2.297 million. That's an increase from last year's budget, approved budget, of \$60,000 that relates to cost-of-living increases and in-range movement. So looking forward to the new year, as we all hope it gets better and better, we have our challenges in order to process things faster and get rid of that backlog and get ready, get poised to deal with when we are back to normal, that activity and complaints and requests for appeals will increase.

So thank you very much for listening to me, and I'll certainly try and answer any questions you may have. And I have a bit of a hearing problem, so hopefully with masks and microphones I'll be able to hear each of your questions. So, Mr. Speaker, that's my presentation. Thank you for the time.

The Chair: — Thank you very much for your presentation. I'll open it up for questions. Ms. Beck.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the presentation, Mr. Kruzeniski. The only question I had — the request here to my mind and my eye seems very reasonable — if you had any significant costs associated with the move to having everyone work from home, or if that was already within your capability within your office.

Mr. Kruzeniski: — In a sense we had two costs. And when March and April came, we were scrambling because we had desktop computers, you know, sort of 18 inches wide by 18 inches sitting on everybody's desk with monitors. And you know, we had to sort of double our efforts to haul all of those pieces of equipment home. And I kind of made a promise to myself that if this ever happens again — I never thought it would last this long — but if it ever happens again, we just need to be more mobile.

So what we did, at some point when we sort of got everything cobbled together, we purchased sufficient laptops so that everybody has a laptop. So in 2022 if we have another stay-at-home, whatever, blizzard or — I don't want to use the word pandemic — staff can just pick up their laptop and go home.

The second thing we did that I don't think it cost us any money, we used to have people having land phone lines and not very many iPhones around the office. And we switched to every person has an iPhone. So the second part of that agility thing is if something happens again, you pick up your laptop, you pick up your iPhone, and you can work at home. I suppose you could work in your car, not that we ask anybody to do that, but we've become much more mobile.

And I guess what happened in terms of going to conferences or travel, that really became non-existent, and I think we just shifted resources that we had in terms of education and training and put it into laptops. And actually I think our iPhones cost us less than our land lines, so that worked out rather well.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Ms. Mowat.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you for the presentation as well. You spoke about the challenges associated with response time and caseloads. And I wonder, it seems to me that the budget increase that you're requesting isn't directly tied to the caseload demand. And I'm wondering about whether you think you have the appropriate resources to get down to your targeted response time. I guess that's the first question: do you think you have the appropriate resources right now to get down to your targeted response time and really make sure that those responses can happen in a timely fashion?

Mr. Kruzeniski: — Last year at this board we asked for two analysts and the board approved one. And the approving of one was greatly appreciated. We could have used the other. Certainly in preparing to come in front of you today I thought about that, but frankly with the massive expenditures in the health care sector I thought it was not the time to ask for additional resources.

If the statistics don't get better over the next year, I certainly would feel comfortable coming in next year and asking for that additional analyst. But you know, I keep referring to the pandemic. If it was a normal year, I might have been asking you for an additional analyst. It just strikes me the responsible thing this time around was not to ask, and in fact just double our efforts back in our office to do it better and faster.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Any other questions? Ms. Beck.

Ms. Beck: — So thank you for that answer. Certainly we have some extraordinary expenses in the province right now. One of the things I noted in your report, Mr. Kruzeniski, was the fact that you're spending a significant amount of time with oversight for towns and villages and municipalities. And you also cite within that passage that many of these organizations don't have the necessary resources to deal with issues under the LAFOIP [*The Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*]. I do note that there's a webinar that's being offered to help perhaps educate or provide resources to those entities. Is there anything else that can be done, perhaps not out of your budget but out of other budgets, to help increase that capacity within those entities?

Mr. Kruzeniski: — Yes, I'm glad you noted our webinar coming up February 1st to 4th, and all of you are eligible and invited if you have the time to join. The first day of that webinar is what we call LAFOIP 101. It'll just be an hour and a half, sort of going over the basics. The other important thing about this webinar is one of the presenters is from SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities], another one is from SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association]. A couple are from the education sector. A couple are from the police sector.

Larger organizations seem to, at some point, allocate the resources to have, you know, one person or a half a person, so I never worry about organizations like the city of Regina or city of Saskatoon. They've got a pretty good, you know, sort of set-up. I do worry about the smaller municipalities where the administrator is part-time and, you know, has 20 other things that he or she has to do. And I think if you only get one access request a year, odds are you're going to be stressed out about it, and where can you go. And I think, through this webinar, there are

places that people can go, whether it's SARM or SUMA. I think for the smaller ones, support that can be given to SARM or SUMA might be the answer.

It would take someone more creative than me to sort of figure out how much you might give to an RM [rural municipality] so that they can do LAFOIP requests when they only get one or two a year. But if SARM and SUMA are equipped with the correct talent and resources, then they can be the centre point to do this. And I get the sense at the moment that some of that does happen with SARM and SUMA. And I know it happens with the School Boards Association in terms of their legal unit, that people are comfortable calling in and getting the answers they need.

I guess the only other place is the Ministry of Government Relations, and one of the panellists we have there is from Government Relations. And what's really significant is, in the municipal legislation there's three pieces — for cities, for rural municipalities, and for northern municipalities — the requirements they're to be open. And if most municipalities followed their requirements, they really could minimize the access requests.

So those are the three organizations that I think can help out here. And hopefully, you know, this webinar where all of them are presenting in one form or another will . . . What's the word? You know, those administrators that log in will make notes and say, oh, well if I have a problem, I'm going to call Joe at the legal department here or there or whatever.

[09:30]

And response has been good, which makes me excited. For the first day, for this LAFOIP 101, we're 200-and-some, close to 300, and we think by the time of the webinar, we'll be over 300 people. And you know, one of those silver linings of COVID-19 is, as we adapt, we don't need a conference in Regina where people travel from La Ronge or Meadow Lake. We can put on a session. People have become comfortable with using Zoom or the other platforms, and all of a sudden we have 300 people from the province logging in to a session.

So I've taken this opportunity to promote the webinar, but I hope I've answered your question because the webinar is part of solving the problem.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Mr. Kruzeniski. I appreciate your time.

Conflict of Interest Commissioner Registrar of Lobbyists

The Chair: — We will continue with item no. 18. It's a review of the 2021-2022 budget and motion to approve budgetary expenditure estimates for the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and the office for the lobbyists registrar. I would like to introduce Maurice Herauf, the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and office for the lobbyists registrar. And please will you introduce your officials and go ahead with your presentation.

Mr. Herauf: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, members of the board and Mr. Chairman, I'd like you to meet Sandra Arberry, who is the deputy registrar of lobbyists and the executive operations officer for the conflict of . . . commissioner's office. So many of you will be familiar with Sandra. She pretty well set up the lobbyist registry on her own, so she's the know-it person for that aspect.

And I met a good portion of the members during the competition process for this very job. I don't think I have ever met Ms. Mowat and Mr. Dennis, these two. Ms. Wilson, I met you at a swearing-in ceremony for Mary McAuley a number of years . . . You've probably forgotten because I'm just another face, but yes, a couple of years ago in Prince Albert.

Right, I won't keep you very long, folks. I'll be short and sweet and answer any questions that you . . . or try to answer any questions. Mr. Chair, members of the board, I've already introduced Sandra, but I also want to acknowledge her assistance and the assistance we received from Cindy Hingley and her staff from LAS [Legislative Assembly Service] for their contributions in all of these financial matters.

A bit about the mandate of our office. The mandate of the Conflict of Interest office is to coordinate the disclosure of assets held by members, provide advice on conflict-of-interest issues, conduct inquiries, and provide opinions on compliance with *The Members' Conflict of Interest Act* if requested by a member, the President of the Executive Council, or the Legislative Assembly.

The Conflict of Interest Commissioner is an officer of the Legislative Assembly and is independent of government. In my view, the complete independence granted to the commissioner is essential in the carrying out of the statutory requirements detailed in *The Members' Conflict of Interest Act*.

As commissioner my primary role is to advise members of the Legislative Assembly. Members seek my advice and recommendations about their obligations under the Act. I am authorized to provide advice in the form of general guidelines to all MLAs. I may also receive requests for opinions from individual members, the Legislative Assembly by resolution, or from the President of Executive Council.

Each year members must file an annual disclosure statement with the commissioner. After filing, the member — and, if required, the member's spouse — must meet with me to ensure that adequate disclosure has been made and may seek advice about the member's obligation under the Act. From these disclosure statements, I prepare public disclosure statements and file them with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, who makes them available for public inspection by posting them online.

The issues raised and opinions requested over the past year continue to be interesting and challenging for the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. Many of the complex issues that were raised were public in nature and any feedback on the decisions we made were positive in nature.

Significant amendments to *The Members' Conflict of Interest Act* came into effect on September 14th of last year. These amendments placed a requirement upon former members to provide private members' disclosure statements and to have an

exit interview with the commissioner. This amendment resulted in 15 former members — 11 retirees and four defeated candidates — coming within the scope of the legislation. I'm happy to report that all 15 complied with the requirement to file within the time limits imposed, and at this point all 15 former members have also had the required interview with the commissioner. And I was happy to check on the weekend all 15 public disclosure statements are already online with the Legislative Assembly Office.

Another important amendment to the Act permits former members to obtain advice and recommendations from the commissioner for a period of one year from the date they cease to be a member. I'm pleased to state that this provision has been well received, and at least one-third of the former members have contacted me to seek an opinion. Prior to this amendment there was no authority for the commissioner to provide guidance to former members, although I know for a fact Ron Barclay could never say no. That's the kind of guy he is.

The recent election resulted in 17 newly elected members. Because of COVID-19 it was not possible for me to meet these members to inform them of their obligations under the legislation, information about *The Lobbyists Act*, and the services my office offers. As a result a video was prepared highlighting these obligations and services and put online for members to view. Many of the newly elected members and some of those who were re-elected have sought opinions from me in the past few months. I will continue to emphasize the importance of this provision to ensure compliance with the Act and to prevent potentially embarrassing actions taken by all members of the Legislative Assembly. All opinions are confidential unless the member or former member waives confidentiality. In total 15 members and former members have sought opinions under this provision between May 1st and December 31st of last year.

I also want to express my appreciation to Ron Samways, who many of you would know, who assists me in respect of my duties as commissioner, in particular my responsibilities to the filing by members of their private disclosure statements and preparations of the public disclosure statements. He also arranges my meetings with the members. His contributions are immense and my achievements could not have been possible without his assistance.

A bit about my role as Registrar of Lobbyists. In accordance with section 2(1), (2) of *The Lobbyists Act*, the Conflict of Interest Commissioner also serves as the Registrar of Lobbyists for the province of Saskatchewan. Lobbying is an important aspect of the democratic process. Individuals, associations, and corporations have a right to communicate with elected or appointed government officials. *The Lobbyists Act* is intended to enhance the integrity of accountability of government by fostering openness and transparency about who has influenced decisions made by public office holders.

A bit about the lobbyists website. As you're likely aware, the Saskatchewan Registrar of Lobbyists website was launched on June 1st, 2016. The main focus of the website continues to be education and information to the three main stakeholders affected by *The Lobbyists Act*: citizens, public office holders, and lobbyists. Significant amendments to *The Lobbyists Act* also came into effect on September 14th, 2020. These amendments

reduced the threshold before in-house lobbyists are required to register from 100 hours to 30 hours; defined the meaning of gifts and prohibits lobbyists from providing gifts except in very narrow circumstances; and finally required most charities and non-profits who lobby in Saskatchewan to register and report their activities.

These amendments necessitated substantial modifications to our website and database to accommodate the changes. As well new registrars' directives were prepared and published on the website to highlight the amendments. All of this had to be accomplished in roughly eight weeks. Now that education and promotion of the website has been satisfactorily completed, it is likely time to focus our attention on compliance. This will result in the need for future enhancements to the website and database to provide and capture information on lobbyists who are not compliant with the statutory requirements in the Act. This will be an ongoing project in the next year or two, and we will have a better idea of potential costs that may be required in the next budget cycle.

One of the interesting by-products the registry provides is a summary of issues that are currently topical in the province and Saskatchewan's business environment. On our website under the resource library section, you will find the registry reports button. In that section are a number of reports that are linked to the registry and so provide real-time data on a number of sections in which lobbyists are required to report, specifically the list of ministers and MLAs being lobbied, the government institutions and subject matters, as well as the number of active registrations and lobbyists.

If you look at these reports today you will see there are around 717 active lobbyists, and the most lobbied subjects are economic development, finance, and health, in that order. We continue to receive calls from the media looking for clarification and information on the data posted in the registry.

Now let us examine our budget . . . [inaudible] . . . fewer expended services at this time. There is an overall decrease rounded up to 6,000 in this year's budget. As this will be my first full year as a Conflict of Interest Commissioner, I thought it prudent to go through a full administrative year without initiating any significant costs. For the 2022-23 budget cycle, I will have a clear idea of those aspects of the office I feel need an update or refresh, and I will budget accordingly.

My salary is set by the Board of Internal Economy and it's currently paid at 100 per cent, whereas Mr. Barclay's was paid at 90 per cent. And it's based on the average salary of all deputy ministers and acting deputy ministers, which is a salary of other independent officers. Their compensation is fixed by statute, whereas mine is not. My salary amount has been budgeted in line with other independent officers. The only change in our budget on this line item is the inclusion of the COLA [cost-of-living adjustment] increase this year, in line with the other independent officers.

Under travel and business. Although travel to attend professional development conferences is dependent on our current pandemic environment, we have budgeted to attend the annual conflict of interest commissioners conference and registrar of lobbyists conference, as well as the conference on government ethics and law. You will note that there has been a \$5,000 decrease in this

budget simply due to the location of each of these conferences.

Contractual services. We once again attempted to be as frugal as possible and have decreased our budget requirement in this area. The use of contractor services is for legal services, Ron Samways, and IT [information technology] professionals associated with the lobbyists registry.

[09:45]

Communications. As my opening paragraph indicates, the office is not undertaking any new initiatives or action pieces this year that would require a large communication budget. We have kept the budget this year solely to our annual report and some small additional printing projects for the lobbyists registry. Therefore we show a small decrease in this year's communication budget.

Supplies and services. In this line item, the only area with an increase is rent. However, due to savings found in other areas, we have an overall decrease in our budget in this area.

Equipment and assets. There is a \$6,500 decrease in this line area due to no capital expenditures being required. The money budgeted is for fees associated with software and licences related to the lobbyists database.

Our request for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists is for \$576,000. As of this submission, however, the budget for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists has decreased by 1.1 per cent. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Herauf. I'll open it up to questions. Ms. Mowat.

Ms. Mowat: — Thanks for your presentation. It's nice to meet you as well. I'm curious, you mentioned a couple of times that there's no new projects coming forward this year within the office. I'm curious about what projects you might anticipate coming forward in the future. And also you briefly touched on the impact that COVID has had on your operations, but I'm wondering if you've seen any larger scale changes due to the pandemic as well.

Mr. Herauf: — Okay, projects. I think at this point Sandra and I — and well, there's only two of us and the contract position Ron Samways — I think we're pretty well committed to going forward with enhancements to the lobbyists registry, the database.

The last four years since the inception of the registry was basically on education: getting the public and lobbyists and public office holders just used to the thing. And we weren't enforcing the time limits, the requirements of the legislation for them to do a number of things. So we want to enhance our database so that we can trigger some of those issues that we see there's a necessity for looking at. One of those is compliance with the statutory requirements. So that'll be definitely . . . You'll probably hear that from me next year.

On the commissioner's side, we are one of the few provinces that I can see that doesn't have a website for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. It came to light when I told my daughters that I

was applying for this job, and of course they go online to search Saskatchewan conflict of interest and it gets sent to the Legislative Assembly website, where we're mentioned, of course.

But it's just time that we have to look at developing one, and I have already been sort of reviewing my counterparts' websites and those places with dual offices. Like, Alberta has a lobbyists registry and the Conflict of Interest Commissioner under one website where you just click and go to one and the other. It's the same office, just like ours. So I've been looking at that, and I think that's the way I would like to go. And then we just have to sort of get some idea of costs. Those are the two main projects that I see at this point, yes.

COVID, how has that affected us? Well we saved quite a substantial amount last year because there was no conferences where we had budgeted to go to. Yellowknife, I think, and Victoria were the places, and they have just been put over to this year. Hopefully we can go there. So we saved funding on that.

The one increase in the area of COVID is the actual lobbyists registrar has become busier. Our registrations are up quite a bit from the years before, and I think that's a phenomenon you'll see in lobbyists from across Canada. And I just don't know what triggered that; maybe that there's fewer funds or there's more time, one of those two things. I think ours were about 648 and I think the actual run time that Sandra did yesterday is that they're at 720. So it's increased there.

We're still able to manage, just with the two of us and with Ron Samways as a contract position for four months, to deal with the disclosure statements, as he has done in the past. I just want to reiterate how important that position is. I see from my counterparts across Canada how many decisions are made with respect to either MPs [Member of Parliament] or MLAs that don't file on time. And there was just a recent one from my federal counterpart involving an MP who they keep begging to get his financial disclosure. And finally they have no choice but to do an inquiry and a report and file it with the Speaker, and it goes online and everybody sees it.

So I see Alberta has fined a few for not complying. And I see this is the worst in . . . My counterpart in Newfoundland and Labrador actually had to recommend to the Speaker and to the Assembly to suspend a member who hasn't filed back to 2018. So when the two Rons were working on this, Ron Barclay and Ron Samways for the last 10 years, I am delighted to say we never experienced, they never experienced any MLA who occupied these positions not filing on time. And after seeing those reports from other jurisdictions, that makes me feel really, really good. Yes.

So other than that, I don't know if COVID has really affected us. We still go to work. We're a small office of two people. We have spacing. We don't, you know, we generally don't work from home. So we're there, we take calls, we take emails.

I think maybe I'm the new kid on the block. I'm being tried out a little bit more. Sandra says, you're getting lots of inquiries for opinions. Listen, it's wonderful to have the former members being able to do that. And I've talked to them all of course during the interviews, once they file their private disclosure. And to a T

they're delighted to have that option because that's when you actually probably need some . . . when you're going into another field of work and you just want to know if there's pitfalls.

The Chair: — Any other questions? Mr. Hindley.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations, Mr. Herauf, on the appointment. Thank you for the work that you do. Not a super-detailed question, but maybe just a point of clarification of information for perhaps the board members who might not be aware. I was fortunate to serve in the subcommittee, so I remember being part of the process and then getting some of this information.

But just to go back to the salary, the former commissioner, Mr. Barclay, was paid at 90 per cent; yourself paid currently at 100 per cent. Again just for information for the other board members here, it's my understanding that Mr. Barclay had chosen to work at a 90 per cent capacity, and therefore that's the discrepancy, right? Whereas yourself, is you're taking this as a full-time position, correct?

Mr. Herauf: — Yes. I think Mr. Barclay, when he was just doing the conflict-of-interest work, he was paid at 60 per cent. Then when they added the Registrar of Lobbyists in 2016 he went to 90, and that was his choice. He loved spending the winters or part of the winters in Palm Springs. And this year of course he can't, but he didn't want anything to influence that.

And I can say 100 per cent I'm busy, just because of the former members. It's the first year that that's come in. There seems to be more requests for opinions under 27(4). These amendments to both pieces of legislation I'm responsible for have kept us going. But I suppose I always have . . . Maybe when I get to the point where I think I need a month off in Palm Springs I can maybe come and say I'll reduce my salary.

The Chair: — Any questions? Seeing none, well thank you very much.

Advocate for Children and Youth

The Chair: — Next up is item no. 19, a review of the 2021-2022 budget and motion to approve budgetary and statutory expenditure estimates for the Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth. I'd like to introduce Lisa Broda, the Advocate for Children and Youth. And please, Ms. Broda, if you would introduce your staff, please.

Ms. Broda: — Sure. Thank you. Good morning and thank you, Chair of the board and members of the board, for inviting us here today and to present our budget proposal. I'm pleased to be here and appreciate the opportunity. Today I have with me Caroline Sookocheff, our newly appointed manager of finance, who supports our finance and administration functions at the office and is integral in preparing the budget before you today. Of course we'll do our best to answer any questions and provide any supplemental material as required, if required after these proceedings.

With permission, if I may proceed, I'd like to make a few comments to the board before tabling my budget with you. I'd like to take some time too to thank our staff for all their work this

past year and for their co-operation in responding to the pandemic and for quickly adjusting to working in this new virtual way that we are all having to do in this unprecedented time. There's no question it's been a hard year for everyone, and I have deeply appreciated their diligence in the work that they do in serving the children of the province who have been most deeply affected by COVID-19.

I've now been serving as the Advocate for Children for just over one year. In this role I've had the privilege of working for our youngest citizens to uphold their rights, to ensure systems are protecting them and service is provided, to collaborate, advocate, support services that benefit young people at the highest level, and to help these young people live to their full potential.

As an independent voice for children in the province and pursuant to our Act, our office seeks to resolve issues for children, investigate matters that come to our attention, engage in public education and outreach, and work systemically to better services provided to Saskatchewan children. It's imperative that we work serving. The work that we do is impartial and unbiased and fair and in accordance with the mandate under the authority of our Act.

Can't lick our fingers. Geez. The mask is a new thing and it's hot under here, as you all know. Dang it. Yes, you know how it goes.

[10:00]

We do this in an accountable and sustainable manner. When a child enters the . . . Sorry, I need to back up because I can't lick. We work to ensure that governments are held accountable to the highest standard in the services that these entities provide to children. Since my appointment in 2019 of November, I have worked with our staff to set our strategic priorities and goals that include ensuring children have a voice. Their voice is present in the work we do by representing and advancing the perspectives of young people. To do this, we have recently struck a youth advisory committee, which serves to help guide us in understanding the impact of services on children and what these young people need to address the issues they face and from their point of view.

Embedding and advancing reconciliation in our work is also another priority that is stated in our strategic plan. Continuing to build and strengthening relationships with our First Nations and Métis communities, we have created also an elders council with the goal of seeking elder guidance, wisdom, and knowledge to help support the Indigenous children we serve and also to influence systems to embrace principles of reconciliation for better outcomes for children and youth. And that is in accordance with the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] Calls to Action.

We're also working preventatively and supporting systems to do so, turning our attention to research on prevention models that support entities that serve children and working from that prevention paradigm. Public awareness and education, which is one of our main mandated functions as well, is a stated priority. We want to ensure that we're engaging with young people and educating stakeholders on children's rights and current issues.

This work, at the best of times, is challenging. However this year

has been even more so due to the COVID pandemic. Some of the primary issues we continue to see include poor mental health, addictions, lack of supports for families and children, struggling families, and most troubling are concerns or cases of child abuse and maltreatment.

Like everyone, at the onset of the pandemic, our offices had to adjust very quickly to ensure that we can continue to provide our services uninterrupted. While COVID-19 did not decrease our workload pressures overall, we did note a decrease in intake to our office, and we were significantly limited in our ability to be out and do public engagement and service delivery to children, families, and stakeholders across the province.

Through our advocacy and investigations, we unfortunately continue to see that children experience a multiplicity of issues and increasingly . . . that are complex. These children continue to be at the mercy of multiple systems and stakeholders both within and across entities. These children are vulnerable and experiencing significant issues related to poverty, addictions, trauma, and intergenerational trauma for our Indigenous children, all of which impact families and ultimately a child's well-being.

While we know it's important to keep families together, there's not enough resources to meet this consistently and in a sustainable manner. And when a child enters the system, the trauma these children have faced is further compacted just by simply entering the system.

As you will have noted in my introductory comments in our written submission, I'm deeply troubled by the year-over-year increase of number of child deaths notifications to our office. While we're still putting some analysis to these deaths, a noted trend is that over half, or roughly 55 per cent, of these deaths are children under three years of age. We know that zero to five is when a child is most vulnerable of all children, and this is very concerning.

Some of these cases pertain to child abuse; however we are still making determination of what this means. Once we have coroner's information to accurately understand these trends, we use this information to help assist in our investigations of each case. The notifications received to our office serve as a sample of what may be happening in a larger trend, and we can work with the coroner, relevant ministries, or entities serving children to work towards intervention and prevention.

More recently, there are emerging concerns across the country related to anticipated consequences the pandemic will have with respect to these issues. As indicated in my submission, it's expected that the impact of the COVID pandemic related to child maltreatment, mental and physical health, child social skills, and education will be extremely significant for all children, however, even more pronounced for Indigenous children who face barriers in access to services already. UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] Canada, Children First Canada, pediatric association of Canada, and just people who do research in this field are all citing these concerns.

While I'm encouraged by some of the pocket investments into children, more will need to be done to adequately address the impact of COVID on children once the pandemic ends. And we

fully expect our office to be dealing with the subsequent fallout.

Overall I have noted the discussion of children as a focal point in government and entities that serve children to lack a bit of presence. At the conclusion of the child welfare review in 2010, it's recognized we haven't realized the progress that was anticipated in that review. Given this and the impact of the pandemic, I'm going to refocus our efforts in 2021 to bring entities together to see how the child-serving ministries and entities can work collaboratively and proactively to address some of the issues resulting from the pandemic and systemically.

As a result of the pandemic, our office has had limited engagement in the public sphere. However we have adapted to that through virtual platforms where we can. Our presence in the community is critical in reaching children, families, and communities and stakeholder entities, as it sheds significant light on issues happening with children in real time and allows our office to provide advocacy where required when we are out there engaging in public education. We consistently render an increase of calls to our office year over year when we present at conferences, schools, events, or where children and youth are present.

As public education is one of our important and stated mandated functions within our Act and in our current work, I cannot stress enough the implication this pandemic is having on this function. I anticipate that when the pandemic is over and we are out in the communities, we will see record numbers of intakes and issues come to our attention.

As indicated we have been creative in trying to connect with these groups. We will continue to do this in the new fiscal year and it will require different, creative resources to do so. While not our first preference . . . Using virtual platforms to reach children is not ideal, as there is many issues with connectivity and does not allow for that direct interaction that children and youth require. This is particularly noticeable in the North, rural, and remote, where there is limited connectivity or technology to engage people and communities. We anticipate there will be a significant increase for invitations once COVID wanes and the restrictions lessen. But there is no question there is a digital divide between our urban and rural and remote and North communities.

As noted previously, our office works systemically to promote and support services and work from that preventative framework I mentioned earlier. At the ministry's request and of our own volition, our office provides extensive consultation on legislation, on policies, regulations related to children so that we can ensure children's rights are recognized within those documents, those doctrines. In 2021 we will continue to work collaboratively to influence change and hold systems accountable. In doing so my office will bring research and best practices and creative methods to help do that and that will help lead to addressing issues that lead to negative outcomes for children.

Our current initiatives in the area of mental health, suicide, child placements will bring gaps in service to the fore and result in important recommendations to government. As well we fully expect in the coming year that we will continue to see an increase in these requests from all ministries that serve, and we are

fortunate to now have a specialized position to focus our efforts in providing a rights-based lens and be proactively advancing our systemic work.

We are now one year into the newly enacted legislation *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, and while the pandemic has somewhat stalled full implementation of the Act for those Nations ready to move forward, our offices still need to be prepared to adjust to any challenges of implementation, as well as fully understand this new legislation in terms of how it's operationalized, implications of transition, and our role within all of this.

As referenced earlier, there is no doubt we have been experiencing added pressure in regard to the increased child deaths and the nature and complexity of issues we face — we see from stakeholders who call our office — and anticipate the impact of COVID-19 on children will intensify the pressures on our resources. We continue to manage our workload volume creatively and within these current resources, and continue to streamline for maximum efficiencies where we can. The identified pressure points I anticipate in the upcoming year require us to continually navigate and ensure we can fulfill our mandate.

I respectfully request the Board of Internal Economy recommend to the Legislative Assembly an appropriation for the Advocate for Children and Youth, vote 076, 2.929 million, 2.9 increase for the fiscal year of '21-22.

As noted above, our office will be absorbing performance pay increases for the next fiscal year . . . sorry, as noted in our budget before you. This will ensure the necessary requirements to fulfill our mandate, our current priorities and goals, and to support the current operations to serve the children of Saskatchewan. Less than full funding may compromise our ability to meet our statutory obligations.

While this last year has been unique and challenging due to the pandemic, I would like to convey to the board that it's such an honour and privilege to serve as an Officer of the Legislative Assembly and to work on behalf of Saskatchewan children. Thank you for the opportunity to present, and I'd be pleased to take any questions.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Ms. Broda. I'll open it up to questions. Ms. Beck.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Ms. Broda, for your presentation and for your work. It's concerning to have you reiterate many of the concerns that certainly I've been hearing as the Education critic, but there's some comfort in your presentation and the grasp you obviously have of the problems that are in front of us and the plan that you have to do everything that you can with your office to address some of those concerns. I note particularly the plan that you outlined to deal with the child-serving ministries and planning to mitigate or address some of the concerns that are particular to children as we move through the pandemic.

One of the things that I just wanted to ask you about — if there's been any plan with this regard — is the number of children who simply have dropped off the radar in the province right now. They're not attending school; they're perhaps registered or not

registered at all. And this is something I'm hearing in the North and even in the cities and even in rural areas. I'm just wondering if there's a plan.

Of course, you know, when things get back to normal, many things will come online. Unfortunately in the meantime there are a number of children in the province who we don't have any eyes on, and I know that that's concerning for many in the sector. I'm just wondering about plans or current actions, as much as you can report in that regard.

Ms. Broda: — Thank you for your question. Yes, I think the problem here is that it's sort of unknown. Because as you say, you know, I know at the beginning we've had . . . I mean, not recently but at the beginning of the pandemic and well into fall for sure when school kind of got settled, we knew that there was a number of students that were still — we were waiting to hear — to be registered. And you know, we wouldn't have a solid number of who's doing what whether it's online or in school. You know, and of course it's a large ministry but we're trying to follow it. We do get advocacy calls around that and we'll manage that, and it gives us a bit of a barometer about where things are.

I think it's more the anticipated consequences of this pandemic that are going to rear its head when you start looking at, you know, graduation rates of this next year, for one. And I think, you know, we're doing some research and we'll be collaborating with all the ministries about, you know, these issues and have been really along the way, the ones where it's really acute. And you know, while we respect that the pandemic has, you know, put a lot of real, real pressures on the governments to have to respond, you know, children are the most vulnerable in our community — well children and elderly — so you know, we want to keep our hand on the pulse of what's happening.

There's no question that in the literature there's, you know, people who are the experts in education or who are in medicine, pediatricians who are saying, you know, here's what we can expect to see. The police have called me; you know, they have expressed concerns about — even on the onset of the pandemic — having regular abuse reports and then having none. Like what's that about? So we really have to, you know, keep our hand on the pulse of it. And I think bringing the ministries together as I said, you know, to have some conversations about this is important and we'll continue to do that.

Ms. Beck: — I know you will, and thank you for that. I guess one more comment. Less . . . because I know you're very much aware of it. Maybe just in support of the work that you do and will have to do in the upcoming years as we move through and assess the impact on children. Just that, you know, for adults if we miss a year that has less impact on us, you know, missing school or missing socialization. As you mentioned for children who are getting ready for school, who are going through their schooling, the impact there is exponential for them so it may take extra resources in order to mitigate some of the gaps and the impact of this pandemic on children. I just wanted to say that in support of your work and thank you very much.

The Chair: — Ms. Mowat.

[10:15]

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you for your presentation as well. You had mentioned the fact that legal expenses have been quite a challenge for your office, and I wonder if you could speak to whether you see this being like an abnormality or something that you think needs to be sort of re-evaluated in the future. You know, is this a sustainable way of doing things? I sort of got the impression from reading the report that maybe it isn't, and I just wanted to get your perspective on that.

Ms. Broda: — Sure. Often our advocacy and investigation files require specialized legal lenses, and so that's a piece of it. Over the years, I mean, we do high-quality investigations and like you get a situation where . . . I mean, you know, this goes back to the Lee Bonneau case. Like it's a public case now. So I mean, in that case, you know, we had to get a lot of legal advice on navigating through the waters of that investigation.

There's other things, you know, on child rights or complex cases. You know, I have one right now we're investigating that we're concluding, but I need legal advice on. We need representation sometimes when it comes to jurisdictional disputes, if there are any, and we have had those over the years, no question.

So the legal fees, it's been a sustainable expense that we've endured and absorbed. It's certainly not going to go away. Because you know, we need the advice and to make sure . . . whether we're interpreting other legislation pertaining to ours, or our own legislation for that matter, to try to uncover if there's a jurisdictional issue that comes to our attention, and you know, we're compelling but we're not getting a response. We need legal advice there, and action. Sometimes on occasion we have had . . . On consultations with legislation, of course, Bill C-92, that's going to take . . . We're going to be navigating that over the next several years, so we're definitely going to be needing some advice for that.

It's been ongoing, and what I did was average the 10 years, the last 10 years of our expenses pertaining to all of these things, and sort of rendered the average of that to be the amount I'm requesting from the board.

The Chair: — Anything else? No? Any other questions? Okay. Seeing none, thank you, Ms. Broda, for your presentation. So at this time we will take a 15-minute break, so let's be back at 10:35, please.

[The board recessed for a period of time.]

**Ombudsman
Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner**

The Chair: — Welcome back, everyone. Item no. 20, review of the 2021-2022 budget and motion to approve budgetary and statutory expenditure estimates for the Office of the Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner. I'd like to introduce Mary McFadyen, the Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner. Please introduce your official and make your presentation, please.

Ms. McFadyen: — Okay. Thank you very much. Andrea Smandych is with me today. She's our director of administration. I think most of you already know her from previous times here.

Good morning, Mr. Chair, and members of the board. We're happy to be here to present our 2021-22 budget submission for the Office of the Provincial Ombudsman and the Office of the Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner.

As we have done every year, we've been thoughtful in preparing our submission. We have a long-standing track record of conducting our operations in a prudent manner and within budget. And while we operate outside of the executive branch of government, we do guide ourselves by the same direction that it has received, being mindful of the government's emphasis on controlling expenditures.

Like everyone this year, we adjusted our operations in March 2020 to comply with public health directions. We are in the business of taking complaints from Saskatchewan residents about provincial and municipal government services under our Ombudsman mandate and from provincial public sector employees under our Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner mandate.

We were able to adjust to allow most of our staff to work from home and still manage to receive complaints and respond to them appropriately and in a timely manner. Under our Ombudsman mandate, we ensure that provincial government entities and municipalities are carrying out the duties given to them under legislation in a way that is fair and reasonable, and according to that legislation. Any citizen who feels that they have been treated unfairly by an administrative process, action, omission, or decision of a provincial government organization or a municipal entity, or has a complaint about a council member's conduct, may contact our office and make a complaint.

Our first step is to determine if the person is aware of the available appeal process to deal with their complaint, and if they have not yet used those processes, we refer them back to process. If they have availed themselves of those mechanisms, we will then see if we can resolve the complaint if that is possible. But if that is not appropriate or does not work, we have wide powers under *The Ombudsman Act* to conduct thorough investigations. Based on those investigations, we make recommendations to the public body aimed at improving its decision-making processes and improving public service program delivery.

As Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner, we are mandated under *The Public Interest Disclosure Act* to give advice and to receive and investigate allegations of wrongdoing from provincial public sector employees. The Act provides public sector employees with protection from reprisal if they do come forward. If they feel they have been reprisal against for coming forward, they can file a complaint with our office and we can investigate.

In carrying out these two mandates, and as an Officer of the Legislative Assembly, we operate independently and at arm's length from the provincial and municipal government entities that we can take complaints about. No one can tell us what to investigate. We have provided details in our submission of our past year's accomplishments and statistics under both mandates.

In 2020 our complaints on the Ombudsman side decreased by about 10 per cent. This was in part, we feel, due to the pandemic. Complaints about certain services and programs that we

normally receive more complaints about decreased. For example, SaskPower complaints were down because in March it suspended collections and disconnections for nonpayment, many things that we get complaints about. SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance], there was further cars on the road, and as a result, there were fewer claims and accidents. So we had less complaints about how SGI treats people in dealing with insurance claims. The pandemic also resulted in the types of concerns being brought to our office being different. Overall, 14 per cent of our complaints were related in some way to COVID-19.

On the Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner's side, since we received jurisdiction in 2012, the number of inquiries and disclosures we have received has remained steady and quite low. We have averaged about 16 cases a year over the last five years. However, this year the number increased substantially. In total, we received 41 inquiries and disclosures of allegations of wrongdoing. This was in part due to the Saskatchewan Health Authority being added to *The Public Interest Disclosure Act* in December of 2019. We received nine inquiries and disclosures from SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] employees in 2020, which amounted to about 22 per cent of all cases we received. Also of note, of the total cases we received, 12 — or 30 per cent — were related to COVID-19.

While we continued to do public education and outreach during 2020, we did change our approach. Once March happened we started doing all presentations and training by video conference. And that has worked quite well, although I do feel my staff is itching to get back out on the road and do more face-to-face presentations and interviews. But for now we will have to wait, as my goal is to keep everyone safe and healthy as best we can. All of our activities and progress and our investigations and recommendations made in 2020 will be reported out in our annual reports, which will be tabled at the Legislative Assembly in April.

As I mentioned earlier, in 2020 we did have an increase in the number of inquiries and complaints we received under *The Public Interest Disclosure Act* due to the addition of the Saskatchewan Health Authority to the mandate. Currently, Bill 20, *The Publicly-funded Health Entity Public Interest Disclosure Act*, has received first reading before the legislature. Its goal would give employees working at all publicly funded health entities in the province the right to disclose workplace wrongdoings and be protected if they come forward. If this legislation is passed, we do expect that the number of people contacting our office will probably increase in 2021. However, at this time we are not requesting any additional funding, and we will attempt to handle any growth in our workload within our appropriation.

For the upcoming 2021-22 fiscal year we are requesting the amount as set out in our submission on page 14. We are only requesting an increase in our funding to cover increased salary costs. Those amounts represent the amounts set out in the collective bargaining agreements for in-scope employees and what we expect will be accorded to out-of-scope employees as well.

I do want to end by saying that in these uncertain times it is important for the public to be able to reach out to the

Ombudsman's office free of charge and have someone assist them if they feel they have been treated unfairly by government. Thank you very much for listening to me, and I'm happy to take any questions or comments.

The Chair: — Thank you very much for your presentation. I'll open it to questions. No questions? You're going to get off easy. Okay. Okay, well thank you very much.

Ms. McFadyen: — Thank you.

[The board recessed for a period of time.]

Chief Electoral Officer

The Chair: — Okay colleagues, we're back for item no. 21, the review of the 2021-2022 budget and motion to approve statutory estimates for the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer. I'd like to introduce Michael Boda, the Chief Electoral Officer. And please, Mr. Boda, introduce your officials and make your presentation please.

Mr. Boda: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair, for inviting us here today to discuss our '21-22 budget estimates with you as a board. And I may get to see my notes in a minute's time as soon as the fog goes away.

I have with me today Aaron Thompson who is our director of finance at Elections Saskatchewan. Jennifer Colin could not be with us today. Jeff Kress is here as our deputy CEO [Chief Electoral Officer] in charge of electoral operations.

So with your permission, Mr. Chair, I'd like to take about 15 minutes to offer a brief review of our budget document to highlight some of our plans for the coming year as we set the stage for the 30th general election in the history of our province, scheduled for October 2024.

Before I do that I do want to take just a minute and look back on the 29th general election held on October the 26th. I've been involved in elections around the world and in challenging circumstances, but I've never encountered anything like trying to administer a general election during a pandemic.

The administrative success of that event reflects well on Elections Saskatchewan and the strength of an organization that has been built over a number of years. And I want to recognize the work of our entire head office, and in particular . . . Jeff Kress is with me today. I have to say I could not have done this without our deputies. So Jeff Kress is one of them; Jennifer Colin is another. I could not have done this without the assistance of our senior staff and our management team. So I would like to just recognize them today. I'd like to recognize our field leadership team and the more than 10,000 election workers who helped us make the event possible.

We offered access to the ballot to more than 840,000 eligible voters, served more than 445,000 who chose to vote, and worked with 236 people who put their name forward as candidates for the election. And I do want to emphasize how important this category is to the viability of our democracy.

Having competitive races in which so many candidates offered

diverse ideas in an environment where candidates remain convinced that the ballots that are cast will be counted is integral to the success of our democracy. I'm very proud of the fact that we organized this event under very challenging conditions and that we did so safely for workers, for our voters, and for candidate representatives who scrutinized the process.

I also want to publicly and personally, quite frankly, thank Dr. Saqib Shahab, Dr. Denise Werker, and the team at the office of the chief medical health officer for their assistance both in advance of the election and during the writ period. They offered us timely advice on how to best serve voters, given COVID-19, and they did so while trying to manage so many other competing priorities.

While I'm here, I also want to acknowledge the tremendous support we received from other public sector organizations. We simply couldn't have done without the SHA, for example, the provincial ministries of Health, Social Services, and Corrections, Policing and Public Safety, among others. And then finally, the school divisions. We worked very closely with our directors of education and the Ministry of Education, who hosted many of our polling stations during a uniquely challenging time during this pandemic.

Now given that we have a new Legislative Assembly and a substantially new board, I want to offer some insight into how Elections Saskatchewan plans its work and how that impacts our budgeting process. Fundamentally the work of an election management body is different than other public sector institutions. We are not focused on an annual budget, but rather on a four-year cycle that aligns with each general election.

This means that spending for a healthy election management body follows a fairly standard template: lower in year 1 and 2 of the election cycle, with an increase in year 3, and then a marked increase in year 4, when direct election costs such as political reimbursements and election official wages are recorded. By ramping up spending in this manner, Elections Saskatchewan can better lay the foundation for a future election, planning for spending and procurement methodically to best take advantage of efficiencies and economies of scale.

[11:15]

I would also note that this type of budgetary arrangement has not always been the case for Elections Saskatchewan. Prior to 2012, funding for Elections Saskatchewan was extremely low in the non-election years and then grew significantly in the year of the big event. This caused a great deal of problems, not the least of which was that it meant a very small core staff needed to scale up and manage this huge machine in the year of the election, and the fact is it didn't work very well.

Now to the credit of the board members, current and former, who sat on both sides of this room, the capacity that has been built at Elections Saskatchewan, while permitting the institution to pursue best practice in election administration, allowed us to avoid a real disaster in 2020, when our election system experienced pressure on it like never before in our history. So thank you. Elections Saskatchewan's current approach allows for planned spending and a methodical approach to addressing key

challenges while taking advantage of opportunities that present themselves.

One final point which adds important context to our budget is understanding that we have, since 2013, differentiated between two types of costs. The first of these costs are ongoing administrative expenses, so office rent, salaries, utility bills, and so on. The second type of expense are those directly related to administering an electoral event. It's these event-related expenses that rise and fall with the election cycle. Ongoing administrative costs are relatively flat from year to year.

Now that I've offered some background on how Elections Saskatchewan manages its budget, I'd like to transition to providing a brief overview of our priorities for the coming year. And these priorities of course help to set the stage and lay the foundation for a successful delivery of the next general election.

Elections Saskatchewan's FY [fiscal year] '21-22 budget submission lists four key event priorities in your document there. All of these priorities relate to the administration of a general election, whether that be the one we administered last October or the one the institution is preparing to deliver in 2024.

The first priority listed in our budget relates to completing the closeout of the province's 29th general election. Now for many, an election is over shortly after the vote has been counted and the winning candidates have been declared. You as MLAs and former candidates know that this is not the case. In fact all of you along with your business managers have a key deadline coming up — so just a reminder — that being the submission of your candidate election expense return, which is due three months after election day. So that's January 26. I see someone's writing that down. That's good. I see that. Registered political party returns are due three months after that on April 26.

That's the political finance side, but there is a great deal of other work to be done before it's all over. We're still fielding a few questions from workers who have questions about their pay, or polling locations which have issues with their rental payments. And in the next few weeks, we'll be transitioning to preparing and issuing T4s for the more than 10,000 election officials who worked for us during the election.

There's also the matter of election materials, an entire warehouse full here in Regina. As of the end of November, as it approached, we shipped materials from our 61 constituency returning offices to the warehouse location. All of that material needs to be sorted. Some items including ballot boxes must be securely stored for one year by legislation before it's destroyed. Other items such as office supplies are catalogued and put away for future by-elections or general elections, and likewise signage and accessibility products are stored, and anything that can be used again is put away for future events.

And finally there is a significant amount of reporting that needs to happen and information that needs to be made public. Consistent with Saskatchewan's last election, I will be releasing my post-election report in four volumes. Volume 1, the statement of votes will be released this spring and will include final turnout numbers, poll-by-poll results, and analysis of voter participation. I know your parties are very keen to get this information. I know you're keen to get this information, and I've already been in

touch with some of the parties who are looking for it.

Volume 2, administrative review will be released shortly after volume 1 and it will look at how well Elections Saskatchewan administered the election and will include survey data and general observations of the process.

Volume 3, that's the statement of expenditures, will be published this fall and likely toward the end of October, early November, and will capture the four-year cost of our most recent election.

And then finally volume 4, the CEO's recommendations for legislative reform is scheduled to be published next year, spring of next year. This document will outline the legislative recommendations needed to finalize the modernization of our election processes.

Our second key priority for the coming year is ensuring that we are event ready. In the immediate term, that means getting ready for by-elections and being able to administer a by-election if needed. A by-election is an electoral event held on demand, and of course, we don't know how many of those will be required. During our last election cycle, we ran six of them. The cycle before, we ran just one. As a matter of principle, Elections Saskatchewan is typically ready to administer three simultaneous by-elections at any time. And of course, we can scale up from there.

Another component of event readiness involves beginning to get ready for the next election in 2024. In year one of the election cycle, our preparations for the next event are very high level, and now can really be tied into the next two priorities that I'm about to discuss.

Some board members may be familiar with our AVSM project. That was the advance voting services modernization project. Moving forward, you will hear Elections Saskatchewan talk a great deal about VSM, voting services modernization. VSM is a plan to bring Saskatchewan's election system into the 21st century. At the moment, Saskatchewan elections are really not all that different than when the province was formed. And if you look at some of what's unfolding south of the border, that's not necessarily a bad thing.

The voting system that we have is simple, it's reliable, and it can be easily verified by candidates and political stakeholders. But it's also extremely labour-intensive and no longer meets the expectations of the voting public. Thirty years ago, most voters in the province had absolutely no choice on when or how they would vote. They voted on election day at their assigned poll, and there really were no other options. But now in a modern world, our voters are demanding choices, options, and greater flexibility in how they vote on election day — advanced voting, vote by mail, homebound voting, and so on.

The general public has far higher expectations in terms of service and convenience than they did 30 years ago. Elections Saskatchewan needs to change how we administer elections if we are to preserve the people's faith in the system and be able to work with other stakeholders to increase public participation.

So what changes are envisioned when talking about VSM, voting services modernization? That vision is still being developed.

Since the return of the writ, I have returned to look at what you as stakeholders had agreed we should pursue — in volume 4 of my report from the 2016 election — as part of phase 1 of that plan and have returned to it to think through what could be achieved in 2024.

I've been carefully considering with our senior team what was achieved in 2020 as part of phase 1 of that plan and have returned to think through what could be achieved in 2024. I've also begun to work with your registered political parties to talk through how we might most effectively proceed in the weeks and months ahead. And we've already begun to consider the lessons learned during our last election, especially in the area of vote-by-mail and determining what changes should be made to best serve voters and other key stakeholders moving forward.

In the end, this is a decision that will be made by you as legislators. And I will continue to work with you and with your parties to determine how we might most effectively modernize but also reinforce our democratic traditions moving forward. Of course for this journey to be successful, it needs to be set early in the 30th electoral cycle. And our goal is to be able to shape the type of system that preserves integrity and security controls that we currently have and which we place a great deal of value on, while also taking advantage of the benefits of technology and offering better services to voters and political stakeholders.

Our fourth and final organizational priority is to continue to work on a long-term replacement of our election management system. Again long-term board members or anyone who's reviewed our past budget presentations may be familiar with that term, election management system or EMS, or even our existing product which is called ESPREE [Elections Saskatchewan permanent register of eligible electors].

For background, an EMS really is the software tool that allows a modern election management body to function. An EMS should manage securing and tracking poll locations; election worker management, including assigning workers to specific polling locations; candidate information, including elements of the nomination process; the entry and tracking of election results; along with a host of other functions which, quite frankly, have to talk to other software which will allow us to bring data into the EMS. It really is the one system that holds everything together and allows for an efficient and secure election to take place.

Quite simply, our current product, ESPREE, is no longer a functioning EMS. During October 2020, that election, we had to abandon it for some activities managed within it. It could no longer meet our needs, and we reverted to using simple spreadsheets and manually managing certain processes. And as my staff knows well, I have been increasingly concerned about what an EMS created in the year 2000 means for our cybersecurity risks. Overall, use of our current EMS has increasingly had a negative impact on our efficiency, and it also brings forth a great deal of organizational risk, both to the election process that we manage but also to the integrity of our election event.

So does this impact our stakeholders as well? Sure. The best example I can provide is one that might be familiar to you all. Let's talk about strike-off data or information on who has voted at an advance poll. I know that you and your parties have a

significant interest in knowing who has voted at advance polls. It allows you to focus on those supporters who have not yet voted and ensures that you don't spend time trying to contact someone who has already cast their ballot. A modern, fully functioning EMS combined with some process changes introduced under the VSM initiative would allow candidates and parties to receive information on who has voted in real time.

Work on a new EMS began several years ago and certain elements have been funded in past election budget submissions. All EMS-related work took a pause last summer and fall due to COVID-19 and then the work of directly administering the October election. With the completion of many election activities, work has resumed on the EMS project. Our goal is to have our new EMS substantially completed well in advance of the 2024 election, allowing for significant testing and training to take place before the system has been used in an election event.

Now I am nearing the end of my prepared remarks, but I do have a few more items that I need to cover. One is trying to get ahead of what I feel is an obvious question to you all: for every election management body at their first budget after the election, what did it cost? And for now my answer has to be, I don't know yet. As I said earlier, we're just beginning to approach deadlines for candidates to file their election expense returns, and parties still have more than three months before they must file their expense return. As we did in our last election, I'm committing Elections Saskatchewan to offering the full four-year cost of this past election when it's available, and these costs will be captured in that statement of votes volume 3 in my post-election report that I mentioned. And I expect that report will be tabled in the Assembly in October.

Very briefly, I've spent time discussing our organizational priorities. I also want to spend a few moments looking at three clear organizational challenges that we will face in the coming year, and which I'd like to raise with the board for future consideration.

[11:30]

The first challenge I want to raise has to do with the timing of general elections. In Saskatchewan by legislation we know the date of our next election. It's October the 28th, 2024. That is the date we are preparing for and are using as our guide. But the way by which things unfolded last spring have led me to conclude that we have to have further discussion and greater clarity with respect to the potential for an election call before that date. Given the impact that any early election would have on our eventual delivery of the election, particularly during a time when introducing modern approaches that change the way we have administered our elections since before 1905, we will have to closely examine how we can best prepare for such an eventuality and what impact that would have on our budget.

In the short term, our FY '21-22 budget has not been impacted by the possibility that our next election could be held earlier than October the 28th, 2024. But that will not be the case next year, and our '22-23 budget will need to include additional funding should the possibility of an election be on the table.

The second challenge — and I am in active discussion with the province's city clerks so that we can better understand how things

unfolded in October and November — is the continued closeness in election period overlap between Saskatchewan provincial and municipal elections. In 2024, Saskatchewan's provincial elections will be held on October the 28th. Municipal elections, they'll take place on November the 13th. While we did not have an actual overlap in voting times between provincial and municipal elections in 2020, these events were held very close together. And as I've been very public about, stakeholders; voters; candidates, especially municipal ones; or service providers such as hospitals, personal care homes which must arrange for voting for residents, are not well served when election dates are so close together.

Of course we had a significant blizzard on the same day as our municipal election which caused major issues, most notably in Saskatoon. While there clearly will not be a blizzard every year, the fact remains that mid-November is not a time when in Saskatchewan we can confidently count on the weather co-operating to carry out an event such as a municipal election. Even with normal winter weather, there are a host of accessibility and access issues caused by typical November weather. Again I am working with the city clerks to determine how best to move forward, and I expect that we will be reaching out to decision makers in the near future for further discussions.

The third challenge that I'd like to raise to the board is to offer a reminder that our provincial constituency boundaries are up for review this cycle. Admittedly, this item is not addressed in our current budget submission, but it is something that Elections Saskatchewan will be monitoring and considering over the coming year. The last Boundary Commission convened in 2012, and by legislation a review must take place every 10 years, meaning a new Boundary Commission will need to be formed next year in 2022.

In the next few months I'll be offering an assessment of the past boundary-setting process in the province and a number of recommendations for how that process could be improved next year. And I undertook this review upon request from the Chair of the previous Boundary Commission.

Elections Saskatchewan has traditionally served as a secretariat for the Boundary Commission and offered resources including GIS [geographic information system] expertise to the commissioners, and we are prepared and are preparing for such an arrangement to continue. But I would note that our current budget for '21-22 does not contain any money related to early preparations for next year's review process. Next year's budget submission will more closely examine the assistance we offer to the commission and incorporate a funding request where required.

Elections Saskatchewan's budget for the '21-22 fiscal year continues to balance an ongoing commitment to providing the highest levels of electoral integrity while also remaining mindful of broader economic conditions in the province. I would ask that the Board of Economy recommend to government that the allocation of \$4,654,911 to Elections Saskatchewan be approved for fiscal year '21-22.

Mr. Chair, before I conclude I again want to say that I'm grateful for the co-operation of this board and the co-operation you have shown me personally and to our team in the past few years and

for its continued support as we turn our attention to preparations for the next general election. This has been a trying year for the province, for the country, and for the world. And with continued news of the distribution of vaccines that fight COVID-19, I hope that we will soon find ourselves on the other side of this pandemic. So thank you for your leadership and, Mr. Chair, I'd be happy to transition to some questions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Boda, for your presentation. Just before I open it up to my colleagues, I just want to make a comment and one question. I look forward to whatever recommendations come in the future to increase voter turnout. But specifically there was an out-of-constituency poll put in Biggar for people that live just outside of Biggar from Rosetown-Elrose, and I really appreciate that because there was a lot of people had concerns about that type of situation. So I thank you for that.

Just a question, and if you don't have it with you it's fine, submit it some other time. But how many out-of-constituency polling booths were there in this last election?

Mr. Boda: — Jeff may have the exact number, but I do know that there was an increase in out-of-constituency polling locations that were implemented. I know that I was asked about that within this body in the past. And keeping in mind that I have to use emergency authority in order to do that, it's not something I can just do automatically. I have to use my authority to do that. But under COVID conditions this was something that was really important for us to pursue.

Jeff, do you know the number?

Mr. Kress: — I don't have the number offhand, and we can provide that. But I was just going to say that we did work very closely with our GIS team to try to identify where voters would be going to. And that's how we went ahead and decided to put polls in places that were outside of their constituencies.

The Chair: — Thank you. Well I just would encourage, I guess this is for this body and government to make that more of a commonplace event. I'll open up the questions. Yes?

Mr. Boda: — May I also say that really in the context of voting services modernization, this is something that we would want to pursue. There has to be a rationality to how the polling locations are laid out, and we're looking for a more effective way to do this. And so restraints such as not being able to place a polling location where it makes sense have been challenging in the past, but I think this is something in a modernization context that we would consider carefully.

The Chair: — Thank you. I'll open up for questions. Minister Harrison.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. And not a question per se, but more a comment. I just want to say thank you very much, Dr. Boda, for the excellent job that you and your team did in administering an election in very challenging and unique circumstances. I appreciated very much as well from the government's perspective, the very close working relationship that existed, you know, as a part of the board and with Dr. Shahab and yourself as well, in going through that

process and spending a great deal of time and making sure that we could conduct an election in an appropriate and safe fashion in that unique and trying circumstance. So I want to say thank you for that.

Also, you know, I've been on the board here for 12 years I think now, which is frightening. But you know, seeing the evolution of Elections Saskatchewan over that period of time from — which I think you laid out diplomatically — a difficult position when you became Chief Electoral Officer to what is now, I think and I think others believe as well, the premier election management organization in the entire country. Really an example that others can and will be following going forward. So all that to just say thank you.

I look forward to the further recommendations on modernization of voting, which I know is being done with a great deal of thought and consideration. You know, I thought the long-term plan when laid out is very, very positive as a directional document, being in a position now to have got through the first phase of that but looking forward to the next phases, up to phase 4, and how we can work with your office to make that a reality. So I just want to say thank you and look forward to continuing that.

Mr. Boda: — Thank you very much.

The Chair: — Any other questions? Ms. Mowat.

Ms. Mowat: — Yes, I'll echo Minister Harrison's comments as well. And you know, I understand that there were a lot of opportunities for collaboration in the lead-up to the election. So thank you for that.

I have a question about resources. So in the budget there's sort of a year-over-year comparison between last year and this year, but you also identify that this is a four-year planning cycle. So I'm curious about how this budget compares to year one of the last cycle. So how it compares to 2017, I suppose, is probably the comparable year, and if there are any marked changes between those two.

Mr. Boda: — With respect to the details, I asked Aaron to have a look at that, because as time goes on and we're able to justify or look more scientifically at the numbers and how these cycles operate, what we did see was that there was a consistency between year one last cycle and what we're expecting year one this cycle. There certainly is a consistency in terms of the ongoing administrative budget, which you're seeing that we have been able to flatline. In this particular case, it was a negative 5 per cent. But essentially we have a grasp of that.

And that's not something that was done before 2012 when I arrived. It was one big budget; it wasn't broken down into what's the ongoing administration. And we want to manage that in a way that we can demonstrate that we're being effective in how we're pursuing it.

In terms of the event side, I think there would be a difference on the event side based on what initiatives are being pursued. And so I think you would find that the event budget is higher in this particular context because we are intentionally pursuing the VSM side. The majority of the money is going to be spent on the EMS in this particular budget year because we are prepared and

ready for that. We prepared in advance during the last cycle, and we are essentially trying to finish that up. I think the numbers are around 900,000 for this particular budget year and the total budget is around 1.3. So this is higher on that level.

On the VSM side, we have to understand what the vision is for moving forward. And I'm not going to do that unilaterally, I'm doing that by working with you as stakeholders, and particularly the registered political parties, so that we can determine how most effectively to move forward.

So what you will find though, is it will ramp up in the same way that year one will be a relatively low level of spending. Year two in terms of events, might be lower than year one, but in year three and four it will increase. And it will increase because we will be implementing. We will be purchasing equipment. We will be changing things. So you always see that in a professional election management body that runs over a four-year cycle. It will increase. But to answer your question specifically, I believe that the last cycle is quite reflective of what you're seeing for this in year one, and what we anticipate throughout the course of the cycle.

And your first comment that you echoed, I just want to reiterate how grateful I am for the opportunity to be able to work in a jurisdiction where both sides of the House are working together on the issue of elections, democracy, and good governance, and that I'm able to work with all of our parties so that we have a level playing field for all our candidates and all our parties moving forward.

And as you know, I've worked in a number of countries over the years, and that is not the norm. It is not always the norm. There are some places where there are successes. Some of those places are places where, Ghana for example, where I saw great success. But there were a lot of challenges. And I have just, particularly in the past few weeks, been particularly grateful that we have this environment in Saskatchewan where we can work effectively together, when I have been observing what's been going on south of the border. Thank you so much.

[11:45]

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you. I appreciate your answer. I'm also wondering in terms of the challenges that modernization presents. Obviously it's something that we're all very interested in happening. I know I heard from countless constituents on the doorsteps about how much they crave modernization in electoral processes. But you know, presenting at the same time the fact that there are very real challenges associated with that, we have to make sure we're being cautious about that process.

Given all of those challenges in what you've presented today, do you feel that you have the resources to be able to tackle those challenges? Like do you feel confident that you're adequately resourced for this?

Mr. Boda: — I do. I have felt, since early in the last cycle, that there has been agreement that we do need to move in a different direction here in Saskatchewan. And so if this was just me, I would be concerned about it. But I do feel that there is support for moving forward in a methodical way that allows us to modernize. So we don't want to abandon our democratic

traditions in the province, and I am very cognizant of that. And I understand those traditions, having grown up here. I value those traditions, and I don't want them to be pushed to the side simply for some easy way of voting.

But at the same time I understand that we have to reinforce the way that our voters are thinking. And just because we're modernizing as well, to your point, Mr. Speaker, there are issues with turnout. Just because you modernize doesn't mean that the turnout goes up, and that's what the literature tells us. We understand that. So it's a very complex circumstance in which you need to modernize, but also allow people to re-engage in their electoral process and their democratic process.

So to answer your question, I do believe that we have the resources right now to move forward. My biggest concern would be that we, as an election management body, need to be able to plan forward four years. It's one thing to run a traditional election in the province because we've done that a number of times. But when you're trying to transition properly it's a very delicate process. It's a very delicate system. And people have to be able to maintain trust in the system as well. And so that is of significant concern to me, that we be able to methodically plan this and essentially land at the appropriate time and make sure that we're not cutting corners because the trust in the system is extremely important.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you. And in terms of the timing of the elections, you mentioned the challenges with the overlap with municipal elections. I think we certainly heard a lot of that as well. From an Elections Saskatchewan perspective, were there unique challenges around recruiting staff in light of that?

Mr. Boda: — There were, and I'm sorry if . . . Maybe you weren't hearing the radio as much as others were. I'm sure they were absolutely sick of hearing from me because I was in the media a lot asking for people to consider working for us who had not worked for us in the past.

Yes, overlap was an issue. And I was working with my city colleagues on that very issue. We were supporting them. We went first. We have more resources. We're able to help them.

But there was a broader issue of COVID, and COVID was extremely difficult in the sense that some of our traditional workers who were older, I understand that they could not work for us. And we did not want to pressure them to work for us. But at the same time, we did reinforce the fact that this was a safe election. We had pursued the proper protocols. We had worked carefully with the chief medical health officer. I wouldn't have said the things I said if I wasn't confident that those voting locations were going to be safe. So I not only had to emphasize to the voters that it was safe, I had to emphasize to the workers that this was going to be a safe process. And in the end, we were able were able to get the workers that we needed.

But the EMS is also part of this, the recruitment process. It's extremely important because what we're trying to do, we've introduced a program called Take Part, in which we're maintaining an ongoing relationship with about 15,000 people in the province who are interested in elections. And the EMS will allow us to continue to take that to a new level where on a regular basis we're touching base with them, not just for Saskatchewan

provincial elections but for the municipal elections, because we can target. For the federal elections, we can work with them because they are having recruitment problems as well.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you. I definitely saw a lot of ads on my telephone as well. I appreciate your time. I think my last question here is, you mentioned the challenges that COVID presented and also that you don't have a breakdown on cost yet, which I think is certainly understandable. I wonder if you can speak to, anecdotally though, where COVID added additional cost pressures for Elections Saskatchewan so that we can get a general sense of what this looked like.

Mr. Boda: — Sure. Well there were clearly costs related to COVID-19. You will recall that we were able to present a budget in January of last year before COVID really struck. And I have to admit that was another kind of a two-cycle goal in that context to be able to establish a budget that was essentially flatlined. From 2016 to 2020, we had inflation involved, but basically we had a flatline election. If you go back in time, elections across the country had been increasing 50 per cent each time. And first of all in 2016, we wanted to get control of the budget and then in 2020 we wanted to flatline. So we had a flatline budget from which we can do a comparison for 2020.

You're talking specifically about COVID. I can tell you, I think the number for PPE [personal protective equipment] was around \$1.2 million. Is that correct? Yes. So just on the PPE front, it was about \$1.2 million. But it was not just about PPE. It was about the way we had to arrange the election, rearrange the election in order to run it safely. So working together with Dr. Shahab, and we also had a consultant who worked with us on these very issues as to how can we conduct an election safely according to protocols, in which the coronavirus may be present, but will not be spread. And so there were a lot of costs in that regard. You heard we had many more poll locations than we had had in the past that we had to take advantage of. So there are other costs that are there. And so if you look back in the reports that I gave with respect to budget, we had been budgeting over what we said we would spend in January.

The Chair: — Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you very much, Mr. Boda.

Okay, colleagues, we're going to break for lunch. So there's lunch boxes that are placed at the back of the room. Each member has their name on a box, so please pick up your own lunch. And we will reconvene at 1 p.m.

[The board recessed from 11:53 until 13:02.]

Legislative Assembly Service

The Chair: — Colleagues, I'd like to reconvene. Item no. 22, a review of the 2021-2022 budget for the Legislative Assembly Service: (a) is a motion to approve expenditures from the refurbish and the asset replacement fund for projects; and (b) a motion to approve the budgetary and statutory expenditures for the estimates and revenue estimates.

I'd like to introduce Greg Putz, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. Please introduce your officials.

Mr. Putz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The two LAS managers joining me today are Dawn Court, our executive director, member and corporate services; and Cindy Hingley, director of financial services. But given the arrangement of this room because of pandemic measures in place, we have others who are not present in the room waiting in the hall — sufficiently physically distanced — to assist in answering any questions you might have that the three of us can't answer this afternoon because we aren't acquainted with necessarily the fine detail of every operation. But we'll do our best to answer all of your questions today.

So with that, you have the budget document. So I think what I plan to do is to simply provide a broad summary of the main points of our submission. Like past years, the budget document is again organized into two main parts: goal and key actions for the legislative service for the next fiscal year, and the vote 21 budget. Just a reminder, the purpose of providing our key actions is to identify the priorities we hope to address in the 2021-22 fiscal year.

In 2021-22 we hope to make a strategic migration of our IT infrastructure to cloud-based desktop applications and to continue the ongoing process of preserving our historic assets. You might well know that we did miss some of our key actions in 2020 and these will make a return appearance in this budget with respect to the LAS office workstations. And the reason for that is well known: as with every organization, the Legislative Assembly Service experienced the unexpected in 2020-21.

I do now want to take an opportunity to put on the public record just how proud I am, as Clerk, of how the Legislative Assembly responded to the many challenges of 2020. It wasn't always easy, but we adapted and we found a way to provide nearly all of our services during and after the lockdown of last spring. This included support for a truncated spring sitting. We were election ready at dissolution and provided post-election induction services to the new and returning members. And we worked with the House leadership to support the opening of the twenty-ninth legislature. I do also want to thank the House leadership members generally for the many, many kind words for the LAS. The acknowledgement was and is very much appreciated.

So going forward I want to point out that some of our key actions are influenced by our experience with the pandemic. I mentioned the cloud computing, but others improving our capacity if we are to have to endure limited number of people in the office with our ability for our staff to meet remotely. But generally our main focus in the next fiscal year will be to maintain our services in response to the public health conditions however long those may last. In essence this is a status quo budget. We prepared the budget cognizant of the government's commitment to controlling its expenditures with a focus on recovery.

I'll now turn to the vote 21 budget. As I mention every year, the four components of vote 21 are framed by the Assembly Act and the directives of this board. They are members of the Legislative Assembly, principally the payments and allowances to the members for the operations of their constituency offices; Office of the Speaker and the Board of Internal Economy; caucus operations; and of course, the Legislative Assembly Service.

Broadly, vote 21 has two components: statutory and

non-statutory estimates. Sixty-six per cent of vote 21 is the statutory component which, for the most part, includes services for members. The non-statutory portion represents 34 per cent and includes funds for the LAS and the Office of the Speaker. The percentage differential is consistent with previous budgets.

Our budget proposal represents an overall increase of \$250,000 or 0.85 per cent from last year. Detail on how we arrived at this figure is found on pages 15 and 16. Just a quick summary of the numbers. Within members and the Office of the Speaker, you'll see that the budget has increased from 19.489 million to \$19.695 million, which is a \$206,000 increase.

This increase is made up of the following: \$149,000 for members' transition allowance; 114,000 for annual members' indemnity and allowance related to filling of two seats that were vacated prior to the October 2020 election; \$107,000 for the annual consumer price index as stipulated by the directives, and the CPI [consumer price index] increase this year we're budgeting on the basis of 1 per cent; \$72,000 to reflect economic increases for constituency assistants; \$30,000 to support the Board of Internal Economy in the competition recruitment process for an officer of the Legislative Assembly; and finally, \$8,000 to increase the \$10,000 term provision to reflect 61 members for the new legislature.

Those increases were offset by 274,000 related to return of one-time, election-related funding, which includes \$171,000 budget for constituency assistant transition allowances paid in 2020-21; 61,000 related to caucus operations for information technology resource grants paid following the general election; and \$42,000 related to member website design renewal costs, also immediately following the election.

Page 16 is item (b) in our budget book. That's the Legislative Assembly Service operations. Our LAS budget is increased from \$9.445 million to \$9.636 million, which is an increase of \$191,000. The core budgetary increases include \$149,000 for cost-of-living salary adjustments, in-range progression, and flexible benefit amounts for those who are eligible. These employment benefits parallel those applicable to the public service, which as you know is a requirement of our Act. The board is aware that the LAS is an employee-based organization, so the largest annual cost is our employee salaries and benefits which comprise approximately 69 per cent of the total LAS budget.

We also have a \$21,000 increase for the Corps of Commissionaires security contract. It is up and they are asking for a 2 per cent increase. And \$21,000 for security maintenance renewals, and that basically encompasses a three-year scanner maintenance for our entranceway scanners, a two-year camera maintenance for our surveillance system.

Item (c) outlines our proposals for six Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund projects totalling \$350,000. Our annual allocation for 2021-22 fiscal year is \$350,000, and the fund was approved as much for a five-year period ending March 31st, 2022. So this year the projects we've proposed for refurbishment asset replacement are included, as I mentioned, as part of our key actions which are outlined in the opening portion of the budget document, and then in greater detail beginning on page 19.

So just in summary, the fund's allocation is broken down into 110,000 to optimize our hardware and support resources. That's what I mentioned. The Assembly is wishing to move to a cloud-based desktop application, Microsoft 365, which will assist us going forward. If we have more need for people working remotely, that'll assist somewhat in that regard.

\$108,000 for collection preservation activities in the Legislative Library. This is an ongoing project for the deacidification of our collection.

\$50,000 to replace a video storage area network that reached the end of its life; and \$40,000 to improve the video conferencing in room 8. This is what I mentioned to improve our capacity to conduct meetings between LAS employees who remain in the office and those working from home.

And 25,000 to complete the transition of LAS office suites to active workstations. This is the one that I said is making a return appearance. It was put off because of COVID. It was an approved budget in our 2020-21 budget that was delayed, as I said, due to the pandemic.

And the last one is \$17,000 to complete the first phase of repairs to certain composite photographs in the Assembly's collection. Those are the composites that hang in the hallways outside. It's the picture for posterity of the members in each of the legislatures. Those belong to the Assembly and it's our responsibility to maintain and preserve those, and some of them are starting to deteriorate quite badly. Obviously if you have more questions, I'll get Iris in here. That's her area and she's done a report on what needs to be done going forward over the next number of years — pictures fading, the frames falling apart, that sort of thing.

So finally item (d) on page 16 is interparliamentary associations, and this year we have a reduction of \$150,000 to the annual CPA [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association] grant. The reason for this — and it's no surprise because some of you are on the CPA executive as well — is because the pandemic caused cancellation of all the professional development events and opportunities in the last year. At this point we can't predict when professional developments will be resumed, so for this reason the CPA Saskatchewan branch executive decided not to make a request for 2021-22 for the grant.

Fees for the membership of the various organizations the Assembly belongs to, there's a modest increase this year leaving the overall amount that we're requesting in this category at a decrease of \$147,000.

Page 18 identifies our revenue estimates; again it's \$10,000 for the upcoming fiscal year. And as I said, this remains unchanged from previous years.

So in closing, the LAS, I think as Clerk, has worked very diligently to develop a budget that is economical and fair by refining our expenditures and returning one-time, election-related funding. And as we continue to navigate through the uncertainty of the pandemic, we have built a budget that we hope the board agrees is fiscally responsible, mindful of the province's current fiscal situation. So with that I'd like to thank the board for listening to my rambling on in this opening

presentation. And if you have any questions, we'd be pleased to answer those at this time.

[13:15]

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Putz. And is there any questions? Ms. Wilson.

Ms. Wilson: — Thank you. That was very well researched. Do we have any projections if we continue on this way, working from home, as to further expenditures?

Mr. Putz: — Maybe I'll get Dawn to come up and we can talk a little bit about what we faced in the last year. But expenditures probably isn't a big issue for the LAS. It's organizing our work to get the job done from operating under different means. For instance, when the pandemic hit and we did have a lockdown, we had no choice but everybody working from home. So at that time we had a limited capacity for people to work from home, which involved using virtual private networks. We had limited ability to do that, a limited number of machines. And eventually we incrementally took steps to build up our capacity, initially beginning with critical and emergent matters that had to be dealt with. We were at year-end for our fiscals and that was a priority. We did know when session was coming back. That was still off, so we weren't too concerned with that.

But it was developing all the human resource policies to enable people to work from home, and that was quite a complex process. And eventually we built up the capacity to support, in effect, 90 or 95 people working from home. That isn't just LAS because we support the Information and Privacy Commissioner as well, and they were also working from home.

So we developed all this capacity, and then when it was decided when we'd come back for session, that was the first thing, was we had to then build in policies and procedures and physical arrangements to make sure when staff came back into the building they operated with hazard mitigation and physical changes to the office, and we only had the staff that were available here to begin with that were necessary for the operation of the sitting.

Then eventually we made a decision that we'd attempt to bring 50 per cent of our staff back, and we had an incremental plan to bring more and more back, but then when we had the second wave, that was rolled back. So it's a long answer, Nadine, to your question, but I think we've built the capacity and we have the policies and we're in a position to be able to effectively operate from home if necessary. And as the pandemic lifts, we'll have more and more ability to have people return to the workplace. But we monitor every day. We have a pandemic response committee that's made up of the senior managers of LAS and other key staff on that. We monitor what's going on every week, or daily if the need be, what's going on in government, and we make adjustments accordingly.

So I think we're well positioned. I don't think that there's . . . other than beginning this migration. And it's partly COVID, but I should also say that that's the way the world's going. It's increasingly difficult because that's the way our software vendors, Microsoft in particular, they want to sell you subscriptions. They don't want the software on your desk; they

want it in the cloud. So we're going to have to move in that direction anyway. It's just the pandemic awakened us that some of this stuff we're moving a little faster on because of our experience last year.

The Chair: — Ms. Mowat.

Ms. Mowat: — Thanks for your presentation as well. I guess one of the things I'm most interested in hearing about is the plan for the video conferencing system improvement in room 8 here. And you know, certainly understanding the need to conduct business virtually, I'm looking for a little bit more clarity on what the use would be of that system, whether it could be used for committees as well and what exactly needs to physically change to make room for that.

Mr. Putz: — Dawn, maybe in case I miss something, get ready to talk about what our LAS plan is. But maybe I'll begin, Vicki, with the part that you ask about supporting legislative committees. That's, I presume, what you're saying. What we're proposing will not accomplish that. I would suggest that if the Assembly wants to move in that direction . . . We have done a little bit of work on it, but it didn't seem to be a focus through last fall or before to do anything about it for this coming spring session. That doesn't mean we can't do it. But the only reason I say that is the technology part probably is an issue for us from the perspective of integrating, say a Zoom meeting environment with our legislative broadcasting and Hansard systems, which are more or less automated. So that adds a level of complexity to integrate all of those things into it.

My suggestion is that if the House is interested in this, we should get the House Services Committee together, at least the House Services Committee steering committee, because we need to know what the objective is. Is it all members? Is it some members? Is it officials? And then how does that relate to our rules and procedures? If we know that, looking at other jurisdictions who have done this, there's all sorts of technical issues with dropped signals, internet bandwidth, audio. Some places, Hansard complains it's almost an occupational health and safety issue of not being able to hear. Fortunately we don't have the translation aspect to that because we're not a bilingual Assembly.

But all of these issues I think need to be discussed as far as rules. What is the Chair's authority when there is a technical issue? Does that count against your time on our legislative tracking? You know, our bills and our estimates, that's time. So if we're trying to get somebody back online for 10 minutes, what do we do? Does that count against the time, or what is the Chair supposed to do in those situations?

Then there's the other practical issues where the Chairs, I think, need to be trained to operate these systems because they're basically at a switchboard trying to recognize people. And then there's issues possibly of quorum and voting that we'd have to take a look at.

So it's not just putting a Zoom system in place, is what we're proposing for our staff here. What that in essence is, we'd use this room but we could have five or six people in here so we could share documents and that and they'd be on a larger screen. It would be possibly the basis for something for committees, but

it's nothing as complex of trying to integrate it in with our Hansard and broadcasting systems. And then we need to set the parameters and rules around that when something does go wrong, which inevitably it will. And we've had our committee Clerks looking at every jurisdiction to see what's going wrong, and they report there is no perfect system. So we need to be prepared and build into our procedures what we do in those instances.

The other point is most of those jurisdictions don't have rules like we do where everything is timed. And then we don't want any disputes over what happens to all that dead air time. And like I said, are ministers here? Are officials here? Or is it just members, some members, all members? That sort of thing.

The Chair: — Ms. Beck.

Ms. Beck: — Well I'm going to follow up on Vicki's questions. I'll leave it back to you if you have more questions. So I understand the answer that you've provided so far, and thank you for that. And belatedly, but sincerely, thank you to yourself and your staff for all of your work and the work you will continue to do as we move through this period.

With regard to those questions that you've just raised, I understand, I think a little better now, that this isn't just a hardware issue. It's integration with Hansard and the broadcast folks, as well as procedurally establishing those rules. What is a reasonable amount of lead time that would be required to have that system operational? Let's say that there was a House Services meeting and those parameters were effectively set. What would be the time we'd be looking at, reasonably, within existing resources to make that happen?

Mr. Putz: — I suppose that depends on what the objective is. As I said, it would be easier to do if it was a finite of members, maybe one or two members joining. We still have the complexities to work out, the integration, but that's probably manageable. But if there is a problem it's kind of exponential if you have every member involved, and not knowing which members are going to be involved. And we have our substitutions as well for committees, which other jurisdictions don't necessarily have: who's going to be on, who's there.

And then another complexity that we have is it possibly is a hardware issue. Because unlike places like House of Commons or some of the larger jurisdictions that the Assembly provides a standard suite of equipment, they can control and make sure that you have the equipment on your desktop, whether you be at home or in your constituency office to connect.

We've found New Brunswick is the latest jurisdiction, that they're more like us where members can go out and buy their own, and there's a hodgepodge of equipment out there. And then something breaks down and for some reason they think that the Assembly is supposed to resolve that. But they can't because there could be 10 different, you know, systems or internet service providers, and all of these different complexities.

So definitely if we had fewer members participating, it might be a possibility. But again I suggest that we kind of sit down and see where members want to go and . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh yes. Dawn the accountant tells me, yes we'd have to tender something, likely. And the availability of equipment as well.

Iris and Kathy are out in the hall, and they're the ones who have been kind of looking at this more. Either we could continue that here . . . I could ask them in here. They might have a better handle on what it would mean as far as in the short term. I mean in theory, we're like six weeks out from session possibly, unless the House decides otherwise.

The Chair: — Members, would you like to . . . [inaudible].

Ms. Beck: — Well, I'll confer. I guess what I would say to that, Greg, is I do have a lot of questions about this but I don't think anything that impacts my ability to vote on the budget that we have in front of us. So we can save that for another day.

Mr. Putz: — Dawn just reminded me of another thing as I'm rambling on here again. This budget is for next year, and if we're going to do something before session it's still this year, and Dawn says we don't have the money. So we'd need a special warrant too, depending on what it is.

So I don't mean to be a naysayer, but I think we need to be realistic and look at what the framework for all of this is going to be, whether it's a broad or a narrow framework, and just what it is, the objectives of members in this. And then we can kind of build something based on that.

Ms. Beck: — I appreciate you're being candid, and I mean I think it's important for us to know what we're up against here.

The Chair: — Ms. Mowat.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you. Thank you for clarifying that. So my initial question I guess stands — maybe I had too many questions in there — of what specifically are these dollars allotted for in the video conferencing system improvement?

Ms. Court: — So those dollars are really to help us put in a camera in this room so that we could have four to five people in the room, and being able to pull up documents and collaborate on those documents. The other use that we'd be using it for is that we do meet with our colleagues across the country and share information that way through conferences. So we would find that valuable as well. So primarily it's some hardware costs and just the ability for us to communicate with our staff and with our colleagues across the country.

Ms. Mowat: — Okay, thank you.

[13:30]

Mr. Putz: — If I could just add to that. I mean, we could use that equipment also for board meetings. The board doesn't have television; it does have *Hansard*. We'd have to figure some way to integrate it. But potentially it could be used for the board which has lesser requirements, and we wouldn't have to integrate the House rules for committees and all of our timed events into it.

The Chair: — Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you, Mr. Putz, for your presentation.

Mr. Putz: — I have to say, having talked a little bit with a mask on, I have a new appreciation for members in the House. Holy cow. I'd hate to be in a filibuster having to . . .

Thank you very much.

The Chair: — Thank you. So by mutual agreement, the board will not move in camera, so we'll go to voting off the motions.

Mr. Putz: — Oh, so you're not kicking us out then.

The Chair: — You can stay if you like. So the first one is item no. 17, and I will read the motion:

That the 2021-22 expenditure estimates for Vote 055, Information and Privacy Commissioner, be approved in the amount of 2,297,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 2,058,000; statutory, 239,000. And further that such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Would someone like to make that motion please? Mr. Dennis.

Mr. Dennis: — I so move.

The Chair: — Secunder? Ms. Beck. And, Mr. Dennis, would you go and sign. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — I'm making an assumption here.

Item no. 18:

That the 2021-22 expenditure estimates for Vote 057, Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Registrar of Lobbyists, be approved in the amount of 576,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 576,000. And further that such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Mover please?

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — I'll move.

The Chair: — Minister Hindley. Secunder? Ms. Mowat. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Minister, please sign it.

Item no. 19:

That the 2021-22 expenditure estimates for vote 076, Advocate for Children and Youth, be approved in the amount of 2,929,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 2,690,000; statutory, 239,000. And further that such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Mover please?

Ms. Wilson: — I so move.

The Chair: — Ms. Wilson. Secunder? Ms. Beck. Ms. Wilson, please sign the motion.

Ms. Wilson: — Is it carried?

The Chair: — Carried. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Item no. 20:

That the 2021-22 expenditure estimates for the vote 056, Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner, be approved in the amount of 4,354,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 4,115,000; statutory, 239,000. And further that such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Mover please? Mr. Dennis.

Mr. Dennis: — I so move.

The Chair: — Secunder? Ms. Mowat. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. You get the next one.

Item no. 21:

That the 2021-22 expenditure estimates for vote 034, Chief Electoral Officer, be approved in the amount 4,655,000 as follows: statutory \$4,655,000. And further, that such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

A mover, please? Ms. Beck. Secunder? Minister Harrison. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Item no. 22(a):

That for the 2021-22 fiscal year, the following refurbishment and asset replacement fund projects be approved: hardware and software optimization, 110,000; Legislative Library collection preservation, 108,000; video storage area network replacement, 50,000; video conferencing system improvement, 40,000; active workstations, 25,000; historical composite collection maintenance, 17,000; for a total amount of 350,000.

Someone like to make that motion? Ms. Mowat. Secunder? Ms. Wilson. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Item no. 22(b):

That the 2021-22 expenditure estimates for vote 021,

Legislative Assembly, be approved in the amount of 29,762,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 10,255,000; statutory, 19,507,000.

That the 2021-22 revenue estimates for vote 021, Legislative Assembly, be approved in the amount of \$10,000 as follows: revenue to be voted, \$10,000; and further, that such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Mover, please? Minister Harrison. Seconder? Ms. Beck. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. If there is no other business, I would entertain a motion to adjourn. Mr. Dennis.

Mr. Dennis: — I make the motion to adjourn.

The Chair: — We don't need a seconder. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Thank you, everyone.

[The board adjourned at 13:39.]