



Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

HANSARD VERBATIM REPORT



No. 1 — January 18, 2022

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. Alana Ross
Prince Albert Northcote

[The board met at 09:01.]

The Chair: — Good morning, everyone. Welcome to today's meeting. I'm glad everyone could make it in through the storm. I'd like to introduce the government members that are in attendance: the Hon. Everett Hindley, MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Ms. Alana Ross and MLA Mr. Terry Dennis from the government. From the opposition we have Ms. Vicki Mowat and Ms. Carla Beck.

As far as COVID protocols, we're just going to go with what we do in session. If you want to wear your mask at all times while you speak, you certainly can do that. Otherwise you can take your mask off when you're speaking, but otherwise keep your mask on when you're not speaking. The motions are going to be located at the end of the Clerk's table, arranged in order. If you move a motion, please go up and sign the motion.

So first I'd like a mover and a seconder to approve the proposed agenda for the meeting January 2022 be approved as presented. May I have a mover and a seconder, please? The mover is Ms. Carla Beck and seconder, Mr. Terry Dennis.

The second motion is the approval of the minutes from the meeting January 2021 be adopted as read. Again could I have a mover and a seconder? For the next, Ms. Carla Beck, mover, and the seconder, Mr. Terry Dennis. By the way, both of those motions. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Thank you. Carried for both. And now I'd like to table the following items 1 through 24, and they are as follows:

Item no. 1, the Legislative Assembly Service *Mid-Year Report on Progress* for April 1st through September 30th, 2020.

Item no. 2, the Legislative Assembly Service *Year-End Report on Progress* for April 1st, 2020 through March 30th, 2021.

Item no. 3, the third and fourth quarter financial report 2020 through 2021 for the Legislative Assembly Service.

Item 4, the updated human resource and financial management policy for the Legislative Assembly Service.

Item 5, the Legislative Assembly Service first and second quarter financial report for 2021-2022.

Item no. 6, the Legislative Assembly Service *Mid-Year Report on Progress* for April 1st through September 30th, 2021.

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

Item no. 8, the Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Saskatchewan third and fourth quarter financial report 2020-2021.

Item no. 9, the Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Saskatchewan's first and second quarter financial report for 2021 and 2022.

Item no. 10, the fourth quarter financial report 2020 and 2021 for the Office of the Ombudsman and the Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner.

Item no. 11, the first and second quarter financial report 2021 and 2022 for the Office of the Ombudsman and the Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner.

Item 12, the letter from the Ombudsman and the Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner, regarding no amendments to human resource and financial management policy.

Item 13, the fourth quarter financial report 2020-2021 for the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Item 14, the first and second quarter financial report 2021-2022 for the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Item 15, the updated human resource and financial management policy for the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Item 16, the fourth quarter financial report 2020-2021 for the Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth.

Item 17, the first and second quarter financial report 2021-2022 for the Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth.

Item 18, the updated human resource and financial management policy for the Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth.

The fourth quarter financial report 2020-2021 for the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and the Lobbyist Registrar.

Item 20, the first and second quarter financial report 2021-2022 for the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and the Lobbyist Registrar.

Item 21, the updated human resource and financial management policy for the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and the Lobbyist Registrar.

Item 22, the audit letter from the Provincial Auditor to the Board of Internal Economy regarding the audit of 2020-2021 fiscal year.

Item 23, the letter of response from the Board of Internal Economy to the Provincial Auditor regarding the audit of the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

Item 24, (a) MLA accountability and disclosure reports for the year ended March 31st, 2021; (b) Saskatchewan Party caucus audited financial statements for the year ended March 31st, 2021; (c) New Democratic Party caucus audited financial statements for the year ended March 31st, 2021; (d) Saskatchewan Party caucus audited legislature term financial statements for the term ended October 25, 2020; and (e) New Democratic Party caucus audited legislature term financial statements for the term ended October 25, 2020.

Information and Privacy Commissioner

The Chair: — Now we move into our first decision item, item no. 25, review of the 2022-2023 budget and motion to approve budgetary and statutory expenditure items for the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I would like to invite Mr. Ron Kruzeniski, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, to present his budget. Welcome sir, and please introduce your officials in attendance with you today and make your presentation.

Mr. Kruzeniski: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I wish to, although it's a bit late, wish you and all the board members a Happy New Year, hopefully a year where there's no more pandemic and no more snowstorms.

I would like to introduce staff that are with me today. To my left is Pam Scott, who is the executive director of corporate services. I want to take a few seconds here to say that Pam is retiring in March, and this may be the last time she appears in front of this board or prepares the budgetary submission. She has had a long career, first of all with the Legislative Assembly Service itself, also with the Chief Electoral Office, and with my office she's served under the previous commissioner and served with me. She has basically set up the office from the beginning in 2003; instrumental in getting our first website going; has presided over renovations as we've accommodated staff; introduced our first electronic case management system; and when the pandemic hit, was instrumental in making us able to work at home. So it is with some sadness — but it is retirement — that Pam will be leaving us, and I wanted to recognize her this morning.

I'd also, to my right, like to introduce Diane Aldridge who is the executive director of compliance. And Diane has been with this office a long time and has been instrumental with me since my appointment. We've issued some 790 investigation and review reports. And we usually issue about 100 reports a year, and it takes a lot of tag-team work to get that many reports out each year.

And behind me is Tristan Hungle, who is the manager of administration, and he has had a hand in assisting Pam prepare us for the presentation today and the quarterly reports that you receive from us.

We have provided our written submission to you, and I don't want to go through it in detail. We are asking for some additional funding over and above what the board allocated last year.

The first item is the cost-of-living increase, which is 2 per cent and is basically what I believe all public service individuals are receiving. Secondly in the budget is the performance increases. Now those people that are in a range and have not hit the maximum are entitled to consideration of that on a yearly basis. We basically try to file the Public Service Commission rules and procedures in terms of determining those performance increases.

I am requesting funding for one additional analyst, and I want to give you the reasons why. Those of you that have been on the board for a while will have heard some of this before. I particularly want to refer you to page 11 of our submission. And there's some charts there that basically summarize the problem and the challenge that we have been having for a number of years.

And if you generally look at those charts, they all sort of have that upward trend; the odd exception, but they all have an upward trend. And they basically tell the story as to what's happened.

The first chart is the number of files opened, and you'll see that in 2019 it was the highest ever. In 2020 it moderated a bit and I believe, obviously in March of 2020, you know, the pandemic sort of hit and challenges were made, and that certainly impacted people's activities. But I note in 2021 that we're back up to about 370 files open, which is the second highest. And the problem and the challenge that occurs is that once the files are in the system, it takes us a while to get rid of them or process them.

[09:15]

The second chart shows the active files and that's the number of files that we have sort of opened at any one time, usually year-end. And 2021, there it's the second highest, so more files coming in. We have more files active and thus more files that we have to assign to staff to work on. As we assign them to analysts and they have more files, basically it takes them longer to get to the files.

We have some analysts now that are handling over 30 files at any one time. My standard is 15 files. And why is that? Because it allows them to get to a citizen's complaint or concern sooner, deal with it sooner, get the report out the door sooner. So in some instances people are carrying a load that is double what I would consider standard. And the end result of all of that is that citizens of the province get their answers later rather than sooner.

And the third set of charts really emphasizes that, and that indicates the response times that occur, and that's kind of from the opening of a file to when we send that report to the public body and to the applicant. And as you can see, it's going higher. And basically both charts show 311 and 367 days to sort of complete a file.

Two years ago when I appeared in front of the board, we asked the board for funding for three additional staff. The board allowed us funding for two additional staff, and that was greatly appreciated. And if the board hadn't done that, the charts that I showed you would have shown a worse picture. So those two additional staff have certainly helped.

Last year I deliberated whether to ask for an additional staff person; opted not to mainly because of the pandemic. We were in the middle of it and the consequences, and I thought it was not the appropriate time to ask. When I made the presentation, a board member did ask me about additional staff and I gave the answer at the time. It's quoted in the submission but basically was, with the pandemic it did not seem timely.

This year I hope you do consider and accept that it is timely and that I would hope that you give serious consideration to this particular request for funding so that we can give citizens an answer sooner rather than later. And the delays that we're having now of 10 to 12 months, in my mind, is just not acceptable, and we have to do everything with the resources that you approve to just give citizens answers sooner.

So in summary there, asking for salary dollars to fund an additional analyst position. Any other related costs to an

additional staff person will be taken out of the existing operational budget.

Finally I want to talk about Office 365. Last year the Legislative Assembly Service asked for, and you approved, funding for them to begin the work on studying, exploring, planning, and some degree of implementing Office 365. That is kind of a significant shift in how our offices operate digitally, and we are at the stage where the planning has been done and the recommendations of the experts are, you must move to Office 365.

I have noticed, and I'm sure all of you have, that the major companies in the world like to go to a way of providing subscription services where you pay them a monthly or an annual fee, and basically that is what Microsoft has done is basically structured things that . . . The previous things that you bought a licence for, over time, those products are not supported in the same way. And basically they encourage, nudge, or I'm going to say almost give you no choice but to switch to their subscription services. In this case, that's Office 365. So I feel, in discussions with the Clerk, with the IT [information technology] services, with the consultants, that we literally have no choice and are pressed into going in this direction.

The LAS [Legislative Assembly Service], Mr. Putz, who will be addressing you later today, will be talking about this in some degree of detail. The Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner is faced with the same issue, and the three of us are working our way through having to adjust our systems to meet the requirements, the wishes, the desires of Microsoft.

Executive government has already made this move. The Ombudsman and the Children's Advocate have made that move — I don't know exactly when — but were able to make that move earlier. So the estimates there are basically for licensing, but I use that word liberally. It's basically for a subscription service. Most of the fees there will be paid to Microsoft to allow us to use Office 365, use OneDrive and SharePoint and use their cloud. And that unfortunately is a continuing, repeating fee.

So in summary, Mr. Speaker, a funding request that includes a cost-of-living adjustment, kind of standard across the public service; performance increment increase; one analyst to help us do our job and get answers to citizens in a timely way; and finally, the cost of subscribing and maintaining Office 365.

I would be pleased to answer any questions that you might have. I was concerned about hearing in this wonderful Chamber, so I'm going to put on headphones to make sure that I hear your questions clearly. When I think of myself with a mask and headphones, please don't take a picture. I don't think my mother would recognize me. Mr. Speaker, thank you for listening, and I'll certainly try and answer, with the help of Pam and Diane, any questions you might have.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. Mr. Kruzeniski. I'll open it up to questions. Ms. Vicki Mowat.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you. And thank you for your presentation as well as the information provided ahead of time. Are you hearing me okay? Okay, good.

In regards to the request for the analyst, I certainly would agree

that a response time of 12 months seems unacceptable. I'm wondering if you have a best practice that you aim for in response time, or you know, how we compare to other jurisdictions if there isn't an industry-accepted practice.

Mr. Kruzeniski: — In the annual report we report on that, and my target is 130 days and that translates into about four months. And you know, in an ideal world it would be nice if it was even less. But you know, a public body has 30 days to get their work in to us and it usually takes them 30 to 60 days to get the record and their submission to us and then some additional questions, so you know, realistically 130 days.

And if you look at that chart, once upon a time we were there; and then the numbers continued to increase and we're not there now. Other jurisdictions — basically when I sit in on conference calls — they're all behind, and they're all facing volumes that they didn't experience before.

And I can't give you much more than that. I know our target is 130 calendar days, and we were there once upon a time. And before I finish in this office, I'd really like to be back there.

Ms. Mowat: — That's certainly understandable. Adding one analyst . . . Like, you have these detailed charts. Do you have a sense of how these charts would be impacted by adding an analyst? Do you know what you would expect for a change in response times, the amount of files that each analyst would hold? What type of impact would you expect that to have?

Mr. Kruzeniski: — Well for those analysts that are handling over 30 files, it would bring it down, you know, to maybe 27 or 26 files. I don't have an exact number because it sort of depends. You know, we have some analysts who are still in training who have fewer than the 30. It would bring that average down. Would the 10 months be lowered? Yes. How much? I don't know.

And I'd love to give you a more specific answer. But sometimes we look at a file and it maybe has 10 pages of records. I read a report yesterday where there's . . . 480 documents are part of the access request. So we go from the very small to the very large and we don't know today which one of those will be the next one in the door, whether it be, you know, the 480 documents or 10 documents.

So again, it would go down and you would have the opportunity to hear from me a year from now, and I hope I would be able to show, compared to these charts, that it has gone down. But I have to say, that's all subject to how many files come in in 2022.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Mr. Dennis?

Mr. Dennis: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is along the same lines of adding that extra analyst. I see in 2019 you added an analyst and intake officer when the rates were at four oh three and then there was a significant drop. And looking at the charts, some of the times and wait times have gone up and stuff like that. And I'm just wondering, you know, I mean, because of the COVID and the pandemic and stuff like that — and working from home — has this caused some of the wait times to increase over this time?

And you know, maybe the possibility of analyzing this, you know, maybe waiting one more year until we get out of this COVID and pandemic. Not saying no to this analyst or anything like that, but it's just, it's hard to analyze and see, you know, how these two people, the addition of these two people have worked from 2019 to now when, you know, a lot of the work has been from home and just not in a regular course right now.

So just wondering if there would be a possibility of analyzing or holding the line for one more year until we crawl out of this COVID and pandemic and see where our numbers are for next year.

Mr. Kruzeniski: — Well I would ask that the board seriously consider it this year. As addressing the previous board member, an additional analyst will make an impact. It certainly will not get the average of 30 down to what I consider a good caseload of 15. It certainly won't get the 10 months immediately down to four months, but it will have an impact.

The pandemic did and did not have an impact in our office. And the most significant impact would have been March of 2020 and April of 2020 as we, sort of, deployed to go home and, you know, had to make some conversions in the way we operated digitally. Also at that time public bodies weren't in the office so that, yes, getting information from them would have been slowed down. But I think we've basically passed that stage.

[09:30]

And in our history, we can say the pandemic is a factor, but I would say it's not a factor anymore. As I indicated in my introduction, in the last year we produced about 100 reports. We have consistently over the years produced 98, 102, 100 reports. So the end result each year, whether we had a pandemic or whether we are working from home, is that we're getting about 100 reports out a year. So to some extent I'm saying the impact of the pandemic was back at the beginning, and public bodies have in this sense recovered from it and so have we. So I would ask you to consider it.

There's other things that happened during the year, as this board approved additional staff. You know, we had a staff member who went on a leave, and we weren't able to fill that position the way we wanted to just because it's a number of months for training. And we have other HR [human resources] issues that continue to happen and probably will happen in this coming year.

But I have no doubt, no doubt, one additional analyst would help us out. And should we look internally to make absolutely sure that we've got the most streamlined process going? Absolutely. And we sort of have continued discussions on that. And certainly my head, for the rest of my term, is to focus on how we can streamline the process to get those answers out sooner. But whatever we do, we won't get from 30 files to 15 files overnight. But this analyst would help us get going in the right direction.

Mr. Dennis: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Any other questions? I just might ask something about IT. IT is, you know, such an ongoing cost. What would you expect in the coming years? A similar cost for IT every year? Or what would your projection be for that?

Mr. Kruzeniski: — Yes, and I hope, you know, you do ask that question of Mr. Putz and his IT. I would expect . . . I mean I guess the one positive thing about a subscription arrangement is you pay the same amount every year. Microsoft provides the upgrades and the improvements and, you know, better security and all those sort of things. So if the board approves that level of funding next year, it would be in the budget. We're not talking about a one-shot thing, so I would see that 60,000 being there continuously. Our cost of getting Word and Outlook and Excel and iCloud and OneDrive and SharePoint, all of those things that our office and other offices have come to rely on.

The Chair: — Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you, Mr. Kruzeniski, for your report and your attendance, and we'll move on to the next item.

Mr. Kruzeniski: — Thank you.

Ombudsman

Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner

The Chair: — We shall move on to item no. 26, review of the 2022-2023 budget and motion to approve budgetary and statutory expenditure estimates for the Office of the Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner. I would like to introduce and invite Mary McFadyen, Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner, to present your budget. And welcome again, and please introduce your official that's in attendance with you today.

Ms. McFadyen: — Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Chair, members of the board. I'm here today with Andrea Smandych, our director of corporate services. We're pleased to be here today to present the 2022-23 budget submission for the Office of the Provincial Ombudsman and the Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner.

We have a strong record of operating within our means and within budget, and we guide ourselves by the same direction that executive government has received for this budgeting period, which is that the focus should be on recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic with an emphasis on controlling expenditures.

In 2021 like everyone else, we continued to adjust our operations to comply with public health orders and directions related to the pandemic. As the Provincial Ombudsman, we take complaints from residents who feel they have not been treated appropriately when receiving services from a provincial or municipal government organization. With respect to municipal council members, we also have the role similar to an integrity officer, and our Act gives us the authority to take complaints about council member conduct and allegations of conflict of interest. We help to 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 they have been treated unfairly by an administrative action, process, 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. Based on our investigations, we make recommendations to the public body aimed at improving

its decision-making processes and improving public service program delivery.

As the Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner, we provide advice to and investigate disclosures of wrongdoing made by provincial public sector employees. We also investigate complaints from any employee who feels they have been reprisal against for coming forward and speaking out about alleged wrongdoings in their workplace. *The Public Interest Disclosure Act* guarantees those employees with protection from reprisal if they do come forward.

In carrying out those two roles, and as an officer of the Legislative Assembly, we operate independently and at arm's length from the provincial and municipal government entities we can take complaints about. We have provided details in our submission of our past year's accomplishments and activities under both mandates.

Like everyone else, we follow public health orders and direction this past year. While most of our staff continue to work from home, we still managed to receive complaints and respond to them appropriately and in a timely manner.

This past year saw our complaints on the Ombudsman side return to normal levels similar to 2019. We received over 3,800 complaints. Our top three areas of complaints were about the Ministry of Corrections, the Ministry of Social Services, and municipalities.

Complaints about the health system also continued to increase in 2021 like they did in 2020. They were up by about 33 per cent in 2020 to 257 from 193 and increased a further 25 per cent in 2021 to 319. Complaints about health entities came in as number four for us this past year. As well, about 10 per cent of all of the complaints we received this past year had some sort of COVID-19 aspect to them.

On the Public Interest Disclosure side, we saw a slight decrease in the number of inquiries and disclosures in 2021 compared to the year before, but numbers were still high compared to previous years. The Saskatchewan Health Authority was added as an organization falling under *The Public Interest Disclosure Act* in December 2019. Of the 29 inquiries and disclosures we've received this past year, six of them were from Saskatchewan Health Authority employees.

Our biggest challenge in 2021 was our investigation of Extencicare Parkside in Regina and its handling of the COVID-19 outbreak. After receiving a request from the Minister Responsible for Seniors, we determined that we would conduct our own motion investigation into Extencicare Parkside's handling of the COVID pandemic and if it followed provincial standards and requirements. We also investigated the Ministry of Health's and the Saskatchewan Health Authority's oversight and support of Extencicare Parkside.

This was a big project for our office. With a dedicated team of three investigators, we were able to complete the investigation in a timely manner, within six months, and publicly reported out on our findings in August 2021. In my view it was important for the public to understand what happened, what were the actual facts, and how we determined if any actions, omissions, or decisions

made by any entities could have contributed to the mishandling of the outbreak. I feel that the report was fair and balanced and the recommendations, if followed, will improve how long-term care is managed in Saskatchewan.

The authority has accepted the recommendations we made to it and has advised us of its progress towards their implementation. We also made recommendations to Extencicare Canada Inc., which runs Parkside. It has never acknowledged nor advised us if it accepted our recommendations or if it intended to work towards their implementation.

All of our activities and progress and our investigations and recommendations made in 2021 will be reported out in our annual reports which we will table with the Legislative Assembly in April.

Now with respect to the upcoming year, I talked briefly about our Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner role, which certainly is not as busy as our Ombudsman's role, but it can be more complicated. In that role, public sector employees — including employees of the Health Authority — can come to us and speak out safely if they think something is not right within their workplace and make a disclosure of alleged wrongdoing or a complaint of reprisal. However at the end of the last legislative session, *The Publicly-funded Health Entity Public Interest Disclosure Act* received third reading and Royal Assent on May 13th, 2021. It will provide employees of all prescribed publicly funded health entities with the right to seek advice, make disclosures of wrongdoing and complaints to our office.

We do expect that once that Act is proclaimed in force, the number of people coming forward to our office will increase. 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.

Another challenge we have which we have commented on in our submission is that our case management system that we have used since 2016 is becoming obsolete and, as of March 2023, will no longer be supported. We have started looking into our options at what is available that will meet our needs. It may be that we will require additional funding for that project, but at this time we are not requesting anything. We need to figure out what our options are, keeping in mind that costs need to be kept at a minimum.

Therefore for the upcoming 2022-23 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 salary economic increases and performance pay increments, and these amounts are what the amounts are set out in the collective bargaining agreement for in-scope employees and what we expect will be accorded to out-of-scope employees.

[09:45]

I thank you for your consideration, and I'm happy to answer any questions or receive any comments. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you for your presentation. I open it to questions. I recognize Ms. Beck.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, and thank you for the presentation. The question that I had was around the case management system. And in reading your submission and the Children's Advocate submission, I suspect it was the same system that we had licensed out of BC [British Columbia]. Would you anticipate that you'd be sharing a case management system with the child advocate or do you have different needs within your organization?

Ms. McFadyen: — We talked about it briefly because you're right, we both have contracts with BC Ombudsman to . . . Even though we have it separately, we each use the same system, so we've talked about whether or not we have the same needs. We're not sure at this point, but we've talked about if we need to work together we can, you know, to make sure that we get the best price we can. But my understanding in doing this, it's not . . . We'll each have to pay a licence, but the configuring for what we need is probably where the price comes in.

But we're looking at what other provincial ombudsmen are doing. We've talked to the city of Toronto. We've talked to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. They just have a new system. So we're trying to look at what there is because we're trying to keep it simple and keep the costs, you know, within our means definitely.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you.

Ms. McFadyen: — Thanks.

The Chair: — Ms. Mowat.

Ms. Mowat: — Yes, thank you for your presentation. I am quite interested in the inclusion of employees of the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] into *The Public Interest Disclosure Act*. And you had mentioned the six health employees over the past year that had come forward and how you expect that number to grow. Is there a practice of communications out of your office or advertising or something to let folks know that they can come forward with those disclosures of wrongdoing and what changes are in effect? Or is that something that happens outside of the scope of your office?

Ms. McFadyen: — No, we certainly do lots of outreach on both of our mandates. Of course we've not done much in person in the last couple years, but you know, certainly when we got jurisdiction in 2019, we let them know that this is available to them through our office, and you know, we've met with . . . They have internal processes as well, so we've met with their designated officers. And no, we do take steps to make sure that they are aware of what our services are and when they can come to us. And we'll do the same thing when they decide what prescribed public health entities will be under that new legislation, which we expect could be around 110 other entities. So we're just waiting to see what the decisions are on that.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Any other questions?

Ms. Beck: — I did have one more question.

The Chair: — Ms. Beck.

Ms. Beck: — Looking at the section — this is on page 8 — around municipal jurisdiction, there's an indication that there's been work done around educating municipalities and that that has decreased, I think, from about 33 per cent down to 20 per cent. Just wondering how that outreach took place and what, in your view, were some of the education pieces that were particularly effective in that education.

Ms. McFadyen: — I think a couple of things. I think when we first got jurisdiction, we got complaints concerning . . . it was quite a high-profile inspection inquiry under *The Municipalities Act* that Ron Barclay had done. And so we got a complaint about two council members, sort of stemming from that same thing. And those got quite a bit of attention when we issued them, so that certainly got people's attention.

We have done a lot of outreach. I have been to many corners of this province speaking to lots of councils about conflict of interest and what it is and what it isn't. And so we have really worked on that and we're still working on that. And I do think that that has brought awareness to council members in that they do think maybe twice before some of the actions they take that they should not be taking according to the code of ethics. So yeah.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. It was an impressive number. I just thought I'd ask what had contributed to that.

Ms. McFadyen: — Yeah, no, I feel that our office has done a lot to bring awareness to that topic definitely.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Any other questions? Seeing none. Thank you very much, Ms. McFadyen, for your presentation, and we will move on to the next item, item 27.

Advocate for Children and Youth

The Chair: — Item no. 27, decision item (a) Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth, amendment to estimates display mandate statement; and (b) review of the 2022-2023 budget and motion to approve budgetary and statutory expenditure estimates for the Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth.

I would like to welcome Ms. Lisa Broda, Advocate for Children and Youth, to present her budget. Welcome.

Ms. Broda: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Ms. Broda, can you also introduce your . . .

Ms. Broda: — Yes, I will. I have with me today Leeann Palmer, our deputy advocate. Thanks, Leeann, for being here. And also just to acknowledge Caroline Sookocheff, our manager of finance, was unable to attend today.

May I just ask, Mr. Chair, about the description for estimates, and would you like me just to start with that first?

The Chair: — Yes.

Ms. Broda: — Okay, thank you. Well apologies to the board for some of the last-minute changes to come your way yesterday with respect to this. We had noted some errors in the rewording that we were seeking. So with respect to the description of estimates, we had noted that the existing wording was dated, didn't accurately reflect our mandate and our objective. And so we were just, to better articulate that, we respectfully request the Board of Internal Economy to approve the following wording. Would you like me to read the wording? Or is it . . . Okay, thank you.

For the mandate, vote 76, Advocate for Children and Youth:

The mandate of the Advocate for Children and Youth is to promote the interests of, and act as a voice for, children and youth receiving services from a government ministry, agency, or publicly funded health entity to ensure their rights are respected and valued in legislation, policy, and practice.

And Advocate for Children and Youth, subvote (CA01), the objective:

To work toward the best possible systemic outcomes for children and youth through recommendations for improvements to government programs and services for children, and ensuring the rights, well-being, and perspectives of young people are respected, valued, and supported.

And I would respectfully request approval of those revisions.

The Chair: — Thank you.

Ms. Broda: — Is there anything else required from me then?

The Chair: — Sorry?

Ms. Broda: — Would there be anything else required from me to do here in terms of the estimates?

The Chair: — Oh, well if that's your presentation, we'll open it up for questions.

Ms. Broda: — Just for the estimates.

The Chair: — Yeah. No, continue.

Ms. Broda: — Then I'd like to present . . . Would you like me to continue? Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

So again, good morning, Mr. Chair and hon. members of the board, for the opportunity to present also our budget proposal today. We're pleased to be here. We'll do our best to answer any questions that you may have after the presentation, and if required we'll provide some supplemental responses if needed post proceedings. And with permission, if I can just proceed, I'd like to just make a couple comments before tabling our request.

As laid out in our submission, the mandate of the Advocate for Children and Youth is to act as an independent voice for children, to make certain children are placed at the centre of services to which they receive, and to seek sustainable and long-term

systemic change that benefits all young people in Saskatchewan. It's through our advocacy, investigations, public education, and research that we work toward better systemic outcomes to hold governments to account in the services provided and changes required to ensure that children have the best possible outcomes, as is their right.

We do this impartially, unbiasedly, fairly, transparently, and in accordance with our mandate under the authority of our Act. Important and foundational to our mandate is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; children-first principles, which were adopted by the Saskatchewan government in 2009; and Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth, and Families.

We educate governments, agencies, and communities about the rights of children and make recommendations to government — legislation, regulations, and policy, practice — to find best outcomes that align with what is in the interest and well-being of children. The work of our office is crucial, and our staff work passionately and tirelessly towards this end and to bringing the youth voice into matters that affect young people.

The young people who access our office year over year are the province's most vulnerable, who are either in care of the government or receiving services from a government ministry, agency, or publicly funded health entity. Their calls remind us of the critical imperative, that decision makers have the care of children at the fore in ensuring that even their basic rights are upheld, which sadly we did not see much of this this year, particularly when it comes to group home care for extremely vulnerable children.

Unfortunately we continue to see issues related to struggling families, the impact of residential schools and intergenerational trauma, a deepening of mental health and addiction issues in children, and overall lack of supports for young people. The issues children and families face are substantially complex and require intense commitment by our office to work towards finding resolution. Often we need to work collaboratively to resolve matters or make substantive recommendations for change to the ministries that serve children.

As expected, the ongoing pandemic has been extremely challenging for families and children. Children's lives have been altered due to the many changes of the pandemic, and children of all ages are affected. Already vulnerable families and young people have become even more vulnerable due to suspended or reduced services in the social realm, health, and education on and off throughout the past two years. Through our individual group and systemic work, we see children and youth at risk and families moving through crisis cycles; however, this has been exacerbated due to the consequences of the pandemic.

The disruption in education on and off over the past two years, social isolation, the increase in depression and anxiety in children, poverty, child maltreatment are amongst the factors that are and will continue to negatively affect the mental health of children. And this harmful impact will be felt much more for disadvantaged and marginalized young people.

There's no question the effects of the pandemic have impacted

significantly and disproportionately to children across the province. Our office continues to monitor this regionally, provincially, and nationally as it pertains particularly to their mental well-being overall. This will require a commitment, investment of resources and supports now across sectors and well into the coming years to address the issues born out of the pandemic.

To do our work, we continue to work within the priorities set out in our 2019 strategic plan that include ensuring children and youth voice is present in the work we do in advancing the perspectives of young people. Last year we spoke of the creation of our youth advisory council; however, due to the challenges of the pandemic, it took some time to fully implement. The youth advisory council's now been fully up and running and been integral to our work. Bringing youth voice to our work has been significant for so many of our projects where the perspective of young people is key to those initiatives.

[10:00]

We also are working towards the advancement and support of reconciliation as the path to addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the system. This past year we evolved and fully implemented our elder advisory council, whose knowledge, wisdom, and guidance has been vital to our work. And we worked to embrace diversity and inclusivity within our organization, within and outwardly, by working to influence systems to embrace the principles of reconciliation and the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] Calls to Action.

This work helps us increase better outcomes for Indigenous children because we're listening; walking alongside of Indigenous children, families, and communities; and amplifying their voices. We continue to support governments to work towards increased protection of Indigenous children against human right violations that are often found in the systems.

Our office also continues to support and challenge government services to work preventively and proactively. Turning to research and prevention models to support entities serving children working from a prevention paradigm framework is crucial.

And with respect to our public education that we do, which is another major arm of our mandate, we continue to see an increase in requests for in-person presentations and speaking engagements to speak about our office and on children's rights. While the pandemic has continued to limit our in-person meetings, which our office really relies heavily on when we're corner-to-corner in the province, we continue to work primarily in a virtual way. We do anticipate an increase in these presentations in person when the pandemic wanes.

However the challenges again of connecting in geographical regions persist when we're working virtually. As you all know and appreciate that there's many issues with the North, remote and rural communities, when it comes to connectivity. So making it difficult to connect with those families virtually is a challenge.

With respect to our advocacy and investigations functions, we unfortunately continue to see that children experience a multiplicity of issues that are increasingly complex, and they are

always at the mercy of many stakeholders and systems within and across entities. We have been deeply troubled by the poor quality of service and child maltreatment in group home care.

In March of 2021 we publicly released an investigation report into group home care, and in November a follow-up progress report that revealed the same issues persisting over the months since our original recommendations for better oversight. We will continue to meet with the ministries responsible for updates and monitor the group home care model overall.

With respect to child deaths and injuries, we're pleased to note a downward trend this past year in both categories. We have yet to put full analysis to the current numbers, but a noted trend in some of these deaths are due to medical fragility, unsafe sleeping related to younger children, and youth who die by suicide in the older group. Related to critical injuries, violence and suicide attempts were notable.

While critical injury numbers were lower this past year, starting this calendar year we will be seeing an influx of notifications of critical injuries which we have not historically been notified. This will allow our office to further examine and put some deeper analysis to the issues we are seeing in the child-serving systems related to injuries to children. What is important here is that all notifications we receive are a sample of what may be happening in the larger picture as it pertains to any specific trends we note provincially or nationally. The increased notifications on critical injuries we expect to see going forward will add pressure to our resources; however it's necessary work to better understand what's happened thematically in this regard.

Our systemic work allows our office to monitor these trends and make important recommendations to child-serving governments toward systemic change related to their legislation's policy practice to better serve children overall. We do this in a variety of ways in our consultation on policies: investigating or researching matters that affect children; making systemic recommendations to government; and ensuring the voices of children are, at minimum, recognized.

Foundational to supporting the success of every child to live to their full potential, as is their right, is a strong and stated commitment by decision makers that adequate and appropriate resources be made available to young people and their families across sectors. Our office is committed to bringing people and institutions together to problem solve the challenges children face, and continue to assist ministries to see the benefit of early intervention, and use proactive mechanisms to get ahead of the issues before they become a threat to children's safety and protection. Children deserve nothing less but the best quality of life possible.

Although this last year and into 2022 we continue to face the challenges of the pandemic, we have been able to maintain the core of our work serving the children of Saskatchewan. I would like to thank our staff for their perseverance, dedication, and passion each brings to this work and to fulfilling the mandate of our office. We continue to act diligently in managing our workload volume within current staff complement and remain accountable, working efficiently and responsibly within our current financial resources. The identified pressure points laid out in our budget submission, particularly related to a new case

management system, will require strategic efficiency and navigation to make certain we can fulfill our mandate.

Approving this budget request will secure necessary requirements to fulfill our mandate current priorities, goals, and to support our operations in doing the work that serves the children of Saskatchewan. Given our current pressures and anticipated expenditures in the coming year, less than full funding compromises our ability to meet our statutory obligations pursuant to our Act.

It's a tremendous honour to hold the position of the Advocate for Children and Youth and to work with such a committed team. And it's with gratitude we serve the children of Saskatchewan. With that I respectfully request that the Board of Internal Economy recommend to the Legislative Assembly an appropriation for the Advocate for Children and Youth, vote 076, \$2,978,000, a 1.7 increase for the fiscal year 2022-23. As noted in our submission, we'll be absorbing performance pay increases the next fiscal year.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. And I'd be pleased to take any questions at this time.

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

Ms. Beck: — Thank you for the presentation and for being with us today. You touched briefly on this but — I'm paraphrasing — but the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on children and your expectations for increased utilization of your services in the coming year. I'm wondering if you could just expand on that.

I know, I think it's the UN [United Nations] has suggested that COVID for children will be potentially a generational catastrophe if we don't address it. I just wanted you, as I said, to expand on what some of the case pressures you expect to find in the next year. You mentioned in-person meetings and reconnecting with communities that you haven't been able to connect with. I just wonder, what are some of the other activities that you anticipate?

Ms. Broda: — Thank you for that. Well first I think we don't know yet because we've had limited ability to be out in the communities. And when you can't connect with, you know, marginalized communities or young people and their families, then you don't necessarily know except what's being said in the literature around COVID impact right now. I think we're going to see . . . When we're out and about, our calls, our files go up substantially because people know, young people and families know about our office.

And so with education around the province over the last couple of years, you know, we're in school, we're out of school; some are online, some are remote. You know, we do hear children, you know, and they're doing online work, and so how are they connecting? Like, there's an isolation piece there, and what's that impact? So I think there's going to be . . . I would look at it like more of a ripple effect that's going to be something we all have to pay attention to in the coming years because, I mean, our grad rates are going to tell us something about that especially around the disruption to school and where that occurred, how that occurred.

And so we just want. . . We're going to monitor and, you know, I was just looking at an article on that yesterday. It was just released in October of 2021 just in relation to what the anticipated impacts and what already has been found about that disruption alone. So I think, and we do know from our work on our mental health report that children . . . what has come out mostly is around depression and anxiety that young people have reported feeling an increase in.

And so we talked to about 150 young people, but we talked to also almost 500 stakeholders across the province for that report we'll be releasing in March. And I think that's going to be really telling as well in terms about the impact.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Yes, thank you for your presentation as well. Just going back to — I think we're allowed to go back to this; yeah, we're still on this item — the wording around the description for estimates. My read of these changes is that this wording would more accurately reflect the scope of the work that your office is doing, not that there's any intent to change the work that your office is doing. But I just wanted to check in to see if that was your perception of it as well. It just seems to sort of update the language as far as I'm concerned.

Ms. Broda: — That's correct, yes.

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

Mr. Dennis: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a comment and just a thank you for all the work that you do, especially during these trying couple of years and everything else.

My comment is, you know, I mean I know you're relatively new to this job and thank you again for all that you do. But from last year — and the lockdown and really hard on the children and no activities and stuff like that — to this year us opening up, do you see somewhat of an improvement in the children, seeing as they're back in school more on a regular basis and activities, sporting activities, other activities? Do you see a change in their attitude?

Ms. Broda: — Yeah, you know, I don't know if we could speak directly to that in terms of change overall because, you know, we haven't . . . But in the conversations we have had with young people for the mental health report and just I think in subsequent, you know, looking at different documents, like from across . . . nationally, provincially and nationally. But Children First Canada, the pediatric association of Canada, the UN, you know, UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund], all of those bodies are monitoring pretty close what's happening now.

And you know, there's no question children . . . Like you know, the pandemic's been a fluid process, and decisions have to be made as you go along and in the best way possible, hopefully, for young people. But I think that, you know, what is clear is all children have been affected, whether in school or not, just due to the sheer nature of the pandemic itself and the anxiety that that's caused children across the board, and adults for that matter.

So I think, you know, we don't have a metric to answer that exactly, but I think what we will find out is when we're back out in the community, you know, when the pandemic wanes and we can go start visiting corner-to-corner in person, we do learn those things. Our call volume goes up substantially and our file types, and we learn those things. And we can look at that thematically in a more concrete way, at least from our perspective. So I think, you know, I'll probably have more to say next year about that. Thank you for the question and also for . . .

Mr. Dennis: — Thank you very much.

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

Ms. Beck: — I do have one more question. And I'm trying to be mindful of your scope. But one of things that continues to come up and has over the last couple of years — speaking particularly with the education sector, but more broadly — is this belief or evidence that there are children who simply have dropped out of the education system. And of course, that is a narrow scope and there would be other systems potentially that those children are connected to. Also interprovincial migration may be part of it.

But I just wonder if that is something that has been discussed, either at the provincial level or with other advocates in other provinces, and if that's an area that will continue to see some interest and investigation as hopefully we move out of this very strange time in the next few months.

Ms. Broda: — Yeah, I don't think I can . . . You know, I would be remiss to speak to that if they're dropping out. I don't know that for sure, like in terms of the provincial picture. You know, we'll monitor. I think we'll look at things like the grad rates in the next year or two, too, just to kind of get a handle on how has this impacted, look at StatsCan data, look at just data and literature that might help us understand that picture better.

I think kids struggling, no question. I think we all know that, you know, kids are all different places with respect to the pandemic and how school has gone for them. And I think just more to come and remains to be seen as we still are navigating it.

You know, we get a bit of a breather and everybody's in school and the numbers are down and it's been . . . For us, we look at it too through a . . . You know, you want children to be in school if they can but also you want to keep them safe and protected. But from a rights point of view, that's a competing right. And so, you know, if we have cases that come to our attention, we try navigate as best we can through that right and those competing rights. But again to the overall picture and the trend, I couldn't speak to it at this point.

Ms. Beck: — And maybe just to clarify my question — and I appreciate I'm asking for some tea-leaf reading — but not necessarily children who have dropped out of school, but children for whom their cumulative file has never been picked up, for example. But, you know, perhaps in two years they haven't been picked up by another school division. So I'll leave it there. But I was just curious if that was a topic of discussion at all in . . .

[10:15]

Ms. Broda: — Topic of discussion, absolutely, now provincially and nationally. We talk about all the, nationally, all the impacts that are happening right now for children when we roundtable with our national counterparts, so it's definitely on our radar.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much, Ms. Broda, for your presentation, and we will take a health break. We'll reconvene at 10:30.

[The board recessed for a period of time.]

Conflict of Interest Commissioner Registrar of Lobbyists

The Chair: — We will reconvene now with item 28, a decision item review of the 2022-2023 budget and motion to approve budgetary and statutory expenditure estimates for the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and the lobbyists registrar. And I would like to invite Mr. Maurice Herauf, Conflict of Interest Commissioner and lobbyists registrar, to make your presentation and please introduce your official.

Mr. Herauf: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. Members of the Board of Internal Economy, before I introduce my budget, as usual I want to acknowledge the presence of Saundra Arberry, the deputy local registrar and executive operations officer for the conflict of interest office. Saundra's assistance to me is always invaluable. So there may be questions that I don't answer. I will turn them over to her.

And I also want to acknowledge the assistance we receive from staff from LAS for their contributions and assistance in all our financial and IT-related matters. It's very important to us.

And I won't be very long today, hon. members. Saundra and I survived COVID with little change in our work routine. Early on we elected to come into the office every day. When people were working from home, there may have been two additional people on our floor at most, so it was very quiet and very private.

On the commissioner's side, we went through the election in 2020 and a number of significant amendments to *The Members' Conflict of Interest Act*. As I mentioned, this past year, but would like to reiterate, that the most significant amendments required former MLAs — 15 who retired or were defeated — to complete a final disclosure statement and have an exit interview with me. No problems whatsoever with this.

Even more importantly, the amendment that permits former members — once again there were 15 — to utilize the services of this office for opinions and guidance for a period of one year from the date they ceased to be a member was very well utilized. For those former members going into other occupations in the workforce, there can be pitfalls. I was not surprised that many former members sought my advice. In fact two senior members who had retired after decades as MLAs both sought my advice for the first time, even though they had never requested an opinion from my office when they were sitting MLAs for decades.

The financial disclosure process went well again this current

fiscal year. Since we had 17 new members and it had been five years since the previous election, we decided that all 61 members must complete the long-form disclosure statement. This was done with very little opposition and once again all statements were filed on time.

Here I would like to acknowledge the able assistance of Ron Samways who spearheads this process and sets up all meetings. Letters have now gone out regarding disclosure for '20-21, and we will be able to complete the short-form disclosure if there had been minor or no change from the previous disclosure statement. At this point we've already got eight filed, so people are utilizing the short form.

With regards to lobbyist work, the requirement that charities and non-profits must now register has increased the amount of registrations and interactions with this office. I have to say that the amendment requiring registrations for these groups caused very little negative feedback. Thanks to Sandra Arberry, all lobbyists were provided with advance notice and information of the upcoming changes, which we feel assisted greatly in the rollout and acceptance of these changes. We have also received positive feedback about the timely and efficient responses our office provides to inquiries. I have yet to hear any concerns raised with me from lobbyists about the registry and/or problems with our office.

I am pleased to announce that with the encouragement and co-operation of staff with Provincial Archives, we were able to develop and implement a records retention classification and disposal schedule for our office. Prior to this we had retention and disposal policies which were developed by various commissioners. Since we retain many confidential documents from MLAs such as private disclosure statements and opinions, we felt that it was important to have a policy that was in accordance with the Archives legislation and is fully transparent.

Two final comments about work we are doing this year before I switch to the actual budget request. With use of some budget savings from areas such as travel, legal fees, etc., we have started work on a website for the COIC [Conflict of Interest Commissioner] portion of the office. We are one of the few jurisdictions in Canada without a stand-alone website and the only statutory office in Saskatchewan without one.

We recently signed a contract with Engineered Code Consulting for this purpose. Engineered Code Consulting developed a lobbyist website and registry approximately six years ago. They provide great support for the registry and we have a very good working relationship with them. Because of these factors we determined that it was a logical move to retain ECC [Engineered Code Consulting Inc.] to develop and support the COIC website.

We have also begun the migration process to Microsoft 365, which I assume you've heard about from other presenters this morning. Again because we are a small office, we hope to accomplish most of the migration in this fiscal year with funds already in our budget. As an aside, the lobbyist registry which was launched in 2016, has been relatively free of any significant issues, however the move to Microsoft 365 will necessitate some major changes, upgrades, and costs to the lobbyist registry and website in order to migrate the entirety of these two pieces into the cloud.

This upgrade will be an ongoing project over the next two years. We have incorporated a small portion of the estimated amount for this project into this year's budget, but the majority of the expense and work will be submitted in our 2023-2024 budget in order to complete the upgrade.

Now let us examine our budget. Over the past four years, the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Registrar of Lobbyists has largely maintained a status quo budget, increases largely accounting for salary adjustments and the occasional one-off event. This year is no different.

[10:45]

My salary, as set by the Board of Internal Economy, is currently paid at 100 per cent based on the average salary of all deputy ministers and acting deputy ministers, which is the salary of the 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. As I am not eligible for COLA [cost-of-living adjustment] increases, my salary this year remains the same. Sandra is eligible for the COLA increase, and her salary has been adjusted accordingly.

Travel and business. Although travel to attend professional development conferences is dependent on our current pandemic environment, we have as usual budgeted to attend the annual conflict of interest commissioners conference, registrar of lobbyists conference, as well as the conference on government ethics and law. The budget for this item remains largely the same.

Contractual services. This year the increase in contractual services is directly related to the Microsoft 365 migration we are undertaking along with the LAS and Privacy Commissioner. As you will have read in our budget proposal, we now require our own firewall, antivirus protection, as well as a backup solution, which we will contract with SaskTel to provide.

These were previously provided by LAS IT services, and we are thankful for their assistance and guidance over the years. On that note I wish to express my appreciation in assistance and information received from Darcy Hislop and his staff as we work through the details of the migration.

The budget amount for using Microsoft 365 is an estimate based on quotes and the information received from various outside sources who are familiar with Microsoft 365 and its operating requirements.

We have no change to communications, as we have limited ourselves to printing our annual report. The lobbyist website and database upgrade — which, as I've mentioned, will begin in fiscal year 2022-23 but the majority of which will be budgeted for and completed in '23-24 — will require some communication prior to launch. We will budget for that in next year's proposal.

As you will note, we have found some savings in the area of supplies and services, and when we look at equipment and assets, there is a 13,300 increase in this line area. As outlined in the budget proposal, we have allocated money for the purchase of new office furniture, but the amount is offset with savings realized due to prepayment and renegotiation of the licensing fees associated with the lobbyist website and registry. Money

was allocated for new furniture in previous budgets, but due to extenuating circumstances was moved to cover off other expenses.

We have a capital asset policy which sets the lifespan of office furniture at five years. Mr. Barclay purchased the office furniture I am currently using upon his appointment in 2010. Some of the drawers do not close and the desk is not ergonomically functional for me. And I should just add as an aside — I should have taken pictures — it's veneer covering pressboard and in many places the veneer has peeled off, and I use my trusty little brown marker pen to touch it up every so often. But there is such a big mark on the tabletop of my desk where the veneer is off that I have to keep it covered up with papers. And so it's in need of it. And the drawers, they're just warped because I think it's the age of the furniture and stuff like that.

The other expense in this category is for licensing fees for the COIC website. These fees will be continued in future budgets.

So our request, the final budget request for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists is 596,000. As of this submission, however, the budget for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists has increased by 3.5 per cent.

That is my submission, Mr. Chair. Questions?

The Chair: — Thank you very much. I'll open it to questions. Any questions from members?

Ms. Beck: — Just a question of clarification.

The Chair: — Ms. Beck.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you for the presentation. And we trust you about the desk. We don't need the picture of it. The question I had was around the database upgrade. And I believe that you said that we are the only jurisdiction with a Conflict of Interest Commissioner without a website. Was that correct?

Mr. Herauf: — We are one of the few jurisdictions. We're the only independent office like, that doesn't have our own website in Saskatchewan like, I mean, the Children's Advocate, the auditor, the CEO [Chief Electoral Officer]. Yeah, so we sort of stand out. And we're able to do the majority of it this year with some savings in our budget. So we have ECC working on it, and we're developing logos and appearance and how it looks. And Saundra and I are working on the content. So hopefully that will be up and running in the next few months.

Ms. Beck: — And the launch, the money for communication for launch, you'd expect to be in the next budget year?

Mr. Herauf: — Yes.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: — Any other questions? Okay, thank you very much, Mr. Herauf.

Mr. Herauf: — You're very welcome, Mr. Chair.

Chief Electoral Officer

The Chair: — We will now go on to item 29 and 30. I'd like to welcome and invite Michael Boda, the Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Saskatchewan, to present your budget on item 29 and item 30. Item 29 is tabling a discussion item, tabling of CEO order '20-21, assisted telephone voting and associated correspondence from the Chief Electoral Officer dated December 7th, 2021 concerning the Athabasca by-election in accordance with the advisory recommendation of section 5.1(4) of *The Election Act, 1996*. And item 30, a decision item review of the 2022-2023 budget and motion to approve statutory estimates for the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Saskatchewan.

And given the call of the by-election, I would ask leave from the members to make an amendment to the agenda to allow Mr. Boda to speak to the by-election by presenting a supplementary estimate dealing with the election a little later today. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Leave is granted. Mr. Boda, please introduce your officials and please go ahead and make your presentation.

Mr. Boda: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. And it is certainly an eventful morning given the order that I received to send the writ to Athabasca in order to begin the by-election up there, along with road closures around Regina, and of course we have other challenges as well. But thank you for inviting us here today to discuss Elections Saskatchewan's '22-23 budget estimates with the board.

I have with me here today Jennifer Colin who is our deputy CEO for corporate service, electoral finances. Jeff Kress is here. He's the deputy for electoral operations. And Aaron Thompson is with us as well. He's our director of finance.

With your permission, I'd like to take about 20 minutes to introduce and overview the budget estimates document as well. But before doing so, Mr. Chair, I haven't had the opportunity to thank you and the members of the board for your decision to appoint me to a second term as Chief Electoral Officer. No matter where I've been in the world — Saskatchewan, I have always called it my home. I will always call it my home. And I just want to say what an honour it is to be in this role and to be entrusted with working with voters and political stakeholders to shape our election system and ultimately to prepare the province to conduct elections in a safe and sustainable way that will support our democracy in the 21st century.

This coming June 1st is 10 years since I was first appointed as CEO. And I must say that this board and the co-operation between government and opposition has been fundamental to any success we have had over the past decade, and I look forward to that continued collaboration working together.

I also want to draw attention to the team that we now have at Elections Saskatchewan. This team was not with us in 2012 when I arrived, and the fact is they have done the heavy lifting to move our elections system in the direction that you are seeing, and I am genuinely privileged to work with such a great group of

professionals. And I want to acknowledge our leadership team that's here today and our team members that are at our head office and across the province.

So again, thank you for continuing to place your confidence in me. I don't take this responsibility lightly. For me this is not a job; this is a vocation. And I think I can speak on behalf of my entire team at Elections Saskatchewan when I say that we will continue to provide secure and accessible elections to the people in the province.

Although it's important to highlight that an election management body must consistently be thinking of what needs to be achieved in each year of the electoral cycle, we're here today to talk about year two. That's '22-23. At the outset, I think it's important to describe some of the challenges we're currently facing as an election management body and to highlight what we are doing to address and mitigate those challenges. Now we outline some of those on pages 5 through 8 of your submission. I hope that you'll take a look at those. I'd like to highlight some of them today.

Our first challenge I want to mention however is the continued overlap of provincial and municipal elections. This past summer I released a discussion paper outlining some of the problems this causes, and offered a solution. My solution was to move our next full set of municipal elections to May 2024 and then hold them subsequently in May every four years following, and this would provide a full calendar season between these two sets of events.

The proposal has been supported by the mayor of Regina and council in Regina, endorsed by the leadership in Saskatoon, as well as a number of smaller centres across the province including North Battleford and Humboldt. I'm very hopeful that this issue can be resolved, as it has clear benefits for not just voters but for candidates and for election administrators.

The second challenge that I want to emphasize is that the proposed modernization that we're preparing for in 2024 is most likely to require extensive and comprehensive legislative change to allow for a different way of serving voters. In the months ahead, before your fall sitting, I will table volume 4 of my report on the last election, offering a wide-ranged set of recommendations for legislative reform. Some of those recommended changes will seek to allow modernization in our processes, while others will aim to alleviate long-standing issues for voters and for stakeholders. As we did with their initial set of legislation, I'll be asking to move away from the prescriptiveness of the past election legislation and to allow for more flexibility in implementation.

A third challenge is one that you've heard me talk about before: potential uncertainty in election timing. The date of our next election is set by legislation for October 28, 2024, and given that fact, that is the date that Elections Saskatchewan must and is planning for for that election. This is an issue I will continue to raise, because the board must be aware that public speculation on holding an early election would force me to direct Elections Saskatchewan to make tremendous adjustments to its planning position, incur significant costs, but mostly, it can undermine the success of the event when such major changes are under way, leading to an undermining of the people's confidence in the election system.

The fourth and final challenge I will mention is not unique to Elections Saskatchewan, but has an ongoing impact, and that's COVID-19. It's been challenging. In the fall of 2020, we were at full capacity in our building, delivering a general election at a time when many were working remotely. COVID-19 has taught us many lessons, and a key one is that we have learned that we can be effective regardless of where we work. In fact significant work has been taking place to prepare for the Athabasca by-election from our home offices.

Given the rate of the Omicron variant spreading, it's possible that our head office team will administer most of this event from their homes. For this reason I'm exploring options that would provide our staff with the ability to work remotely for portions of the election cycle before returning to head office in years three and four of the cycle. This would provide flexibility to our staff but also ensure that we can fulfill our mandate.

Having highlighted most of our pressing challenges, I'd like to look closer at our budget numbers and our priorities for the coming year. This is year two of the cycle. Board members who have received our budget in the past may recall that we have, since our 2013 budget, differentiated between two types of costs. The first of these costs are ongoing administrative expenses — so office, rent, staff salaries, utility bills, so on. And then the second type are those directly related to administering the electoral event. It's these event-related expenses that rise and fall with the election while ongoing administration costs are relatively flat year to year.

As we move into the '22-23 fiscal year, the single biggest change in our ongoing administration budget is an expected increase in accrued vacation liability. In the last year's budget, we budgeted for a reduction in vacation liability, but for the coming year we are anticipating an increase there. And by the rules contained in the province's financial administration manual, we are required to include this cost in our budget.

Our vacation liability issue traces back to the administration of the last general election. When an early election call became possible in early 2020, we were forced to adjust many staff members' vacation plans. The impact of that, combined with the changes and additional work felt because of the pandemic election, are still being felt. In the long term we have a plan to alleviate vacation liability, but it will take the full cycle to manage it while also ensuring we are able to fulfill our mandate.

The remainder of the increase is primarily salary increases, which are required to provide to our out-of-scope employees aligned with government compensation policies, and there's also a small increase due to software licensing costs.

Let's transition to our key priorities for FY [fiscal year] '22-23, all of which relate to our planning for the next general election, and all have been assessed against our strategic plan that we put forward a number of years ago. I'll focus primarily on two items: voter services modernization first and then the election management system replacement.

Earlier you heard me say that we want to deliver Saskatchewan residents a 21st century democratic election.

[11:15]

I'm aware, I'm well aware that we had elections in '03, '07, '11, '16, and '20, but all of those events were administered using 20th-century plans and 20th-century legislation. It's time for the voters of this province, as well as our candidates and registered political parties, to understand what voting and what democracy can look like in the 21st century.

Now to be clear, the plan does not involve voting over the internet or voting by computers, but focuses on introducing technology that makes administering voting easier and offers political stakeholders real-time access to data on who has voted. This means laptop computers for election workers. They will no longer be required to write by hand in poll books. For most voters, they'll instead be able to scan a barcode on the voter information card. There'll be a barcode there. It means tabulators, ballot tabulators, so workers don't need to count ballots by hand at the end of a very busy day. This means faster and more accurate results.

And by introducing technology, we can offer convenience to voters that quite simply was not possible before. This includes vote-anywhere locations. A vote-anywhere location is one that can serve any voter from any constituency. If a person's in Moose Jaw, works in Regina, they can vote at one of these locations, and their ballot will be counted in their home constituency.

For more information and for ideas on what I envision as part of this initiative, I would encourage you to have a look at the white paper I released in August. It is on our website. And you can certainly give us a call. We will provide it to you.

In the months ahead, as I said, I'll release volume 4 of my report on the last election that will outline a plan legislatively to make this possible. I have been in close communication with the executive directors of your political parties and all political parties on our plans to date, and I will continue to do so.

The second of our two key priorities of the year is continuing to oversee the development of our new election management system. For background, an EMS [election management system] is a software tool that allows modern election management bodies to function. An EMS should manage securing and tracking polling locations; candidate information, including elements of the nomination process; election worker management, including assigning workers to specific polling locations; the entry and tracking of election results; along with a host of other functions.

Over the past 10 years, we have made substantial progress on our . . . I'm sorry. Over the past year — not the last 10 years, but the last year — we've made substantial progress on this. We will be testing a number of modules in the current Athabasca by-election. And by the end of the current fiscal year, several other modules, including one that manages voting locations and returning offices, will be complete.

And in the coming year, we will see development work substantially complete on the EMS. We expect that there will be some minor development work that pushes into year three of the cycle, '23-24, but the bulk of the work related to the initiative will be complete by the end of the '22-23 year.

Finally, we've outlined some other priorities for you in our

submission which I'll only mention briefly. Early in the presentation I discussed the upcoming Constituency Boundaries Commission. Elections Saskatchewan is ready to support the commission, but I want to be clear that our current budget request does not include any funds to support the operations of the commission. If asked, we will prepare a supplementary request to allow the commission to complete the work.

We will also begin recruiting our field leadership team, the returning officers who administer voting for our next election. As you can imagine, finding qualified candidates who are interested and available from across the province takes a considerable amount of time, which is why we begin that hiring process early in the cycle.

From past experience we know that it will be important to work to renew relationships with key stakeholders in the coming year, well in advance of 2024. Administering a general election just isn't possible without co-operation from a whole range of stakeholders. And frankly we have learned that, significantly over the last decade, that we need to work with others in government. We need to work with others in Crown corporations, First Nation communities. The list is very, very long. Co-operation is always easier when all parties know what the other expects and needs. Not only do our key stakeholders need to know what I might ask of them, but I need to understand the constraints on them so that I can work more effectively with them.

The last priority I want to mention is that we will need to develop a new strategic plan early in the coming fiscal year. At Elections Saskatchewan we have it as a point of pride that a strategic plan doesn't just sit on the shelf. It really is the document that guides us on a day-to-day basis and from election to election. And so with that in mind, I'm currently planning that our next strategic plan will chart our path just past the administration of the 30th general election in October 2024, after which we'll work on a new plan to guide us towards 2028.

So, Mr. Chair, the last several budgets from my office have included "advancing electoral excellence" as part of the title. This is something that I am truly passionate about. I want Saskatchewan to continue to be known for the quality of its democratic elections. I want people from across Canada to say that we lead the nation in implementing fair, secure, and transparent elections that provide everyone with the opportunity to participate. Over the past several years we have been innovative, and we have persevered in some tough times, but we have to continue to pursue this goal. And this is why I believe that the time is right to introduce Saskatchewan voters to a 21st-century democratic election and a 21st-century voting experience.

I don't think that I'm being radical when I say that democracy is important. Most everyone would agree with that, I think, particularly in this building where we know a lot about democracy. But around the world and yes, here in Saskatchewan, democracy is under threat. We've not seen more than 60 per cent of eligible voters cast a ballot in a provincial election since 2011, and that year we snuck in at 60.8 per cent. Our last three elections have not topped 54 per cent. It's a bad sign for democracy when just over half of eligible voters participate despite having the most accessible voting processes we have ever had.

I think we are all too familiar with the issues that surrounded the United States 2020 election, but I'm not sure that everyone is aware of the extent to which election officials in that country have faced threats of violence. An investigation by the media organization Reuters found 850 threats received to election officials in the United States; of those, 110 of them rose to the level of criminal threats.

Now thankfully that is not where we're at in Canada or in Saskatchewan. But sadly I believe that we may not be immune to such issues in this country unless we anticipate the problems moving forward. As we prepare to modernize the way that we vote, I'm convinced that we also have to be proactive in communicating to our voters and to you as political stakeholders so that we can anticipate what to expect, that we are following election legislation, and we are always acting in a way that is consistent with best practice in election administration.

Even now during year two of the election cycle, we are beginning to prepare the messages we will share and how we will communicate them as we lead into the 2024 general election.

Democracy is not just about ballots or ballot boxes; it's bigger than that. As an election management body, Elections Saskatchewan is responsible for a portion of reinforcing democracy. As elected officials, you are responsible for a portion of it. Your registered political parties, they own another portion; and the media, civil society, thought leaders, and others still more. All of us need to re-evaluate how we can work together to reinforce democracy and how we can preserve the traditions that we have here in our province in the decades ahead.

So, Mr. Chair, Elections Saskatchewan's budget request for '22-23 continues to balance an ongoing commitment to providing the highest levels of electoral integrity while remaining mindful of the broader economic conditions in the province. I would ask that the Board of Internal Economy recommend to the government that the allocation of \$5,544,995 be approved for fiscal year '22-23. Mr. Chair, I'd be pleased to take some questions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Boda. Would you like to also speak to the supplementary estimate that we've put on the agenda as well, for the by-election or anything around the by-election?

Mr. Boda: — I can certainly do that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you.

Mr. Boda: — Mr. Chair, as you know, my office received an order from the Lieutenant Governor in Council just this morning, just before I arrived in the House, to ask me to send a writ to the constituency of Athabasca to our returning officer in order to begin an electoral process up there for a by-election. We had obviously been anticipating that, and so as a result, we have been preparing. We have a team in place, and they are already beginning to work; however we must send the writ to them, and we are working on that right now.

Before the end of your meeting today, I anticipate providing to you a supplemental estimate in order to fund that by-election, and the amount that I would request is \$452,000.

The Chair: — Thank you.

Mr. Boda: — I am happy to answer questions on the by-election as well in terms of the costing. Moving forward, we have certainly gone through a process of determining how to be more cost-effective in the context of some of the challenges that Athabasca brings, given that it's in the far Northwest of the province.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Boda. I'll open it up for questions. Ms. Mowat?

Ms. Mowat: — Sure. Thank you for your presentation as well as the explanation about the by-election. I think I'll start there. I'm curious about the difference between the funding that's required for Athabasca versus a by-election in, you know, a city riding.

Mr. Boda: — Sure. Well thank you for the question. The funding of by-elections has been something that we have been focused on over the last decade in fact, because in 2012 our by-election processes were significantly underfunded and did not reflect actual costs. And we have been able to adjust that so that there's been a consistency across the last six by-elections that we have run as we have provided supplemental estimates.

Now there are differences between constituencies and we have learned that. In the Athabasca context, really there are three things that we had to account for as we were developing the budget — and we'll finalize the budget before this afternoon — and that is that there's a lot of geography up in the Northwest that we have to account for. And in the North we actually have to use airplanes in order to get our workers trained and to access them. So we do have to use an airplane, unlike in any other constituency in the province. So geography is something that's very important.

COVID is something that is unique to this situation and so that has meant that we will incur additional expenses in that context as well.

And then finally, the weather is something that we always are accounting for. Normally we don't have by-elections in February, however, so we have to account for that, and a morning such as this morning is evidence that we have to account for some challenges. It doesn't mean we will have those challenges, but we have to account for them, and we have to have backup plans in order to make sure that weather won't affect us. So those are the three things.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you. In terms of the telephone voting, do you think that will decrease some of the costs? Or it won't be widespread enough, I suppose, with the criteria that are required, to have that impact?

[11:30]

Mr. Boda: — Sure. Perhaps I could back up just a little bit to talk about assisted telephone voting for you. You will know that according to legislation the Chief Electoral Officer has the ability to implement a pilot, and I have put that forward to you today in an order so that we can move forward with piloting telephone voting.

So the origin of the pilot voting, or sorry, of the telephone voting,

it was really first to consider how we might be able to bridge the gap for some voters who may possibly be in quarantine during the upcoming by-election. This was an issue during the last general election, that legislatively Elections Saskatchewan and the Chief Electoral Officer had no ability to introduce new approaches to voting that would allow those who were in quarantine to vote. And so as a result — of course the Chief Electoral Officer will follow the legislation — there were potentially some people who were unable to vote at the last moment.

To address that issue, we wanted to address what we're calling gap voting, that individuals who cannot physically get to a polling location or cannot make use of vote-by-mail. After that we have a system by which we can courier, in the South, ballots to people who are unable to get to the polls. We are piloting telephone voting. So that's one of the purposes of telephone voting.

The second is to test it. And this really is a test, a test for 2024, so that I can come back to you as legislators and indicate whether it was a success, what were the challenges, and how we might be able to move forward. So that's the purpose.

In terms of eligibility, I want to get back to that because really this telephone voting is not intended to replace or to be as a backup to in-person voting or vote-by-mail. It simply does not have the capacity to do that. We could not develop that capacity in time. It is a pilot; it is a test. And we are anticipating — at the time I sent the order over to you on the board we did not have a lot of COVID in the North — and we are anticipating that there may be more COVID in the North, and as a result, telephone voting may be principally for those who are in quarantine. So I just want to express that very clearly that we are expanding the ability to vote, but this is not intended to replace in-person or vote-by-mail.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you for that clarification as well. And I don't have the right page in front of me right now, but I believe it is just set up for election day as well. Is that correct for the telephone voting?

Mr. Boda: — That is correct.

Ms. Mowat: — Okay. I wanted to go back to something you mentioned around funding for the Boundaries Commission. I was wondering if you could just clarify this: you said, if asked, there could be additional funding allocated to the work of the Boundaries Commission. Can you clarify what has happened in the past and what you are expecting to happen?

Mr. Boda: — Certainly. Thank you. During the last Boundary Commission it had been created just before my arrival on June the 1st of 2012. So it was already under way, and essentially there wasn't a lot of clarity. The legislation says that the commission can ask Elections Saskatchewan to act as a secretariat and to support the Boundary Commission, and that was in fact what was happening.

The challenge at that time was that the Boundary Commission was drawing off the Elections Saskatchewan budget, while individuals who were focused on the coming general election should be focused on what they're supposed to do in order to

prepare for the coming general election. So over the past decade we have offered significant clarification with respect to our budgets.

As you know, we have an ongoing budget. We have an event-related budget. And all of those funds are very specifically allotted to activities that we have articulated to our stakeholders that we will achieve by the time the general election arrives. So as a result, we have to be . . . we have separated out the Boundary Commission. We are prepared and have been preparing to support the Boundary Commission, but we have to make sure that there is funding that allows for that support, and that's why it's separated out.

This has not been done before, but the commission itself is a separate entity and needs to be able to fund itself. We have been working to prepare a budget in that context. We would be ready if we were asked at any given time, and we will prepare in that way.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you for that clarification. You know, I think we can all relate to your comments around democracy and declining voter participation. And you know, I certainly appreciate all of the efforts toward modernization, all of the projects that your office is taking on. Is there an expectation that some of these efforts will work to increase voter participation as well? And I suppose if not, you know, how do we get those numbers up?

Mr. Boda: — Sure. It's a good question, and one that I addressed following the 2016 election in the media and in a number of different ways because of my concern about the turnout rates in the province. That said, I want to be explicitly clear that turnout is not the responsibility of Elections Saskatchewan. I tried to allude to that in my comments. The legislation does not have me focus on turnout rates. It has me focus on reducing barriers. It has me focus on implementing better electoral processes, and to regulate registered political parties as well.

So as a result, I am part of a broader team, which I alluded to in my comments. I remain concerned about the turnout rate. I think all election administrators have that concern. And why would they have that concern? As I said, this is a vocation; this isn't a job for us. We truly believe that people should be participating in the democratic process, but as a result we have to work with a broader community of individuals — whether that's political stakeholders, whether that's thought leaders, it's civil society — a broader group of stakeholders in order to address that problem of turnout.

And so I brought that up in my comments because I'm just beginning this term. And this is something that I, as Chief Electoral Officer, believe is very important, that I be working with stakeholders to ask the questions, ask the important questions of why is turnout so low. It is broadly, not just across the country but in many Western democracies. We have a problem with turnout, but how can we address that uniquely in Saskatchewan? And I want to be asking those questions over the course of this coming cycle and that's why I mentioned it. And it is something that I intend to be proactive on.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you. And I suppose, you know, whether it's explicitly outlined in the legislation or not, like it is a guiding

principle and something, you know, it makes sense that it is something that we're sort of all focused on increasing. And I imagine it is also challenging to measure success of whether we have successfully reduced barriers to voting without using these as some form of metric.

Mr. Boda: — There is a challenge when you get into the business of measuring success. How do we measure success? Well one of the things that was very important to the institution early in the last cycle and at the end of the cycle before that was that we wanted to establish a strategic plan that took our vision, our mandate and said, how do we actually implement that? How do you actually do that? And that's what a strategic plan is about. It lays out the objectives for achieving the mandate.

So as a result, we established that strategic plan which had measurements within it. And if you look in our annual reports, we report back on whether or not we have been achieving those objectives over the course of the past two cycles.

But measurements, that's a tricky business. And when it comes to voter turnout, that is not overtly what we are trying to do, and that is to increase voter turnout. We're focused on reducing barriers for all voters across the province, which is more consistent with the legislation that we have here in the province. Other provinces, it may differ.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you.

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

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. And congratulations on your reappointment and thank you for your presentation. I'm just digesting what you just said in terms of the mandate specifically of your office and that one piece in reducing barriers. But also thinking of what you said around the importance of relationships with stakeholders and watching what's going on in the US [United States] and trying to put steps in place to be proactive, to steer us away from some of those . . . the reality that we see there.

I'm just wondering if you could expand on some of those proactive steps that you've been taking, perhaps not to direct anything outside of your office or your mandate, but what other stakeholders, what other steps outside of your mandate you would like to see as we move to 2024 and beyond.

Mr. Boda: — Well I want to be clear that the role of an election administrator is a pretty complex one, and the role of a Chief Electoral Officer can be a very complex one. But if you boil it right down to it, it is really about implementing the election legislation that the province has. And so no matter what, that is what our focus is on doing. Our focus is on implementing an election which is consistent with the election legislation which we've been provided with.

Now outside of that, we are election administrators and there is electoral best practice. Now most of you know that I've worked around the world before coming back to Saskatchewan in 2012, and really, there is electoral best practice that supports democracy. And so one of the things that we need to do as an election management body is consistency — to look at whether our legislation and how we're implementing elections is consistent with electoral best practice. And if it isn't, I believe

that it's my role to offer good advice to you as legislators, to recommend how we might shape the election system moving forward. And as you know, I've been doing a lot of that. I'll produce white papers. I will produce recommendations for you. And I want you to be well equipped as legislators in order to move our election system into the 21st century.

So that is the part of my mandate where I'm making recommendations to you as legislators, but I do not expect that I'm making the decision. You've asked me to come here to Saskatchewan to give you good advice and that's what I want to do.

So moving forward, it will be a matter of me working together with other stakeholders. So you asked the question about who would the stakeholders be. Well I can tell you first of all that the executive directors of your parties are a group of people that I work with significantly over the course of the year in order to determine how we can be effective together, how we can collaborate together, because I want our parties in general to be able to run effective campaigns that can connect to our voters. And if I'm an election administrator who's undermining that, then I'm not doing my job properly. But those who are in the political parties also should want to support democracy, and I have found that to be the case in Saskatchewan. And so working together with those registered political party executive directors is one very important happening.

There are others. The media is very important. As you know, they need to be informed and we need to be transparent about the processes that we are using. We're hiding nothing. We want to be consistent with election best practice and the legislation, and if we're not, we want to hear about it. But we also need to work with the media in order to allow the public to understand that we are running good democratic elections in the province. And if they're not onside, then we have a problem.

Thought leaders are others and academics are others, working together with them in order to assess and evaluate how we're doing elections in the province and to address the problem of turnout. Political scientists are very important in this equation. The public policy school Johnson-Shoyama is extremely important to this process so that we can reach out to them and be able to offer good assessment, working together with them in order to provide you with good information so that you can make good decisions moving forward. Does that answer your question?

[11:45]

Ms. Beck: — It does. Thank you very much for that answer. It's an important consideration and it's evident the thought that you put into it and that your team brings to it, so thank you for that.

I have some questions that are perhaps a little more narrow in focus that I'd like to ask. First, this is looking at the letter dated December the 7th with the assisted telephone voting. So I'm looking at the second page and the last bullet point, which notes that a voter in a circumstance that the Chief Electoral Officer determines ATV [assisted telephone voting] would be required, but specifically the last portion of that — or is necessary operationally to ensure the viability of the pilot.

My question is, is there a number of those voting this way that

would be necessary to be able to glean results from the pilot? Is that what you're referring to there? Is there a number?

Mr. Boda: — It's a good question, and as I mentioned earlier, it was December the 7th when I submitted this order to the board. And December the 7th was a very different time than today, and things can change very quickly, and they have. And we monitor very closely data from not just in Saskatchewan regarding the pandemic, but across Canada. And in fact we started with South Africa, moved to the UK [United Kingdom], New York, Washington, and moved back to Canada in order to see what could possibly happen with respect to our COVID numbers.

And so in writing this I think, in terms of my lens, was early December. It wasn't today. And looking at this more recently with respect to the eligibility, I think that bullets 1 and 2 are extremely important, and we have shifted our planning position so that we are focusing very much to ensure, working with SaskTel, that those who are in quarantine would have an opportunity to vote. And that's the gap voting that I was talking about.

At the time of writing, I was somewhat concerned that we would not have enough people participate in order to make the pilot worthwhile, and so as a result, those additional items were there. Number 3 really had to do with our PCFs [personal care facility] and making use of PCFs in order to test this, have the option of testing, get our numbers up.

And then the last bullet is really focused on having the CEO's ability to have, as a very last resort, through no fault of an individual, that they be able to vote and that we would be able to find other ways in order to increase the numbers so that we could have a viable pilot.

In light of that, what I've recognized is I'm going to issue an addendum on this to clarify operationally how we will use this eligibility moving forward. I did mention at the beginning very clearly that the intention of telephone voting is not to replace those other primary ways of voting, and as a result I can tell you that we are already working for backup approaches when we run into a problem with in-person voting or with vote-by-mail, because vote-by-mail could be challenging. So we are really working on backups in that regard, but the answer is not to go to telephone voting, because we do not have the capacity to do that.

Ms. Beck: — Right. I guess the question that didn't occur to me when I was reading this last night, but just did, is around a voter who's self-isolating due to COVID-19 that . . . I guess the question is whether a rapid antigen test would be sufficient in order to make someone eligible to receive this service, I guess, or be a part of the pilot. And perhaps . . . I'm not sure if that's something you've anticipated yet or not, but it's a question that's been raised other places.

Mr. Boda: — We haven't had a discussion on that. What I will say is that my plan is to . . . for operationally, that's what we often do. Operationally we will be specifying exactly how we will move forward in terms of operational, the people that are on the phones. At present we are working very closely with stakeholders that frankly, we . . . Before COVID, I couldn't have told you a lot about the Sask health system, but now I feel like I'm a bit of an expert with respect to the institutional arrangement and how it

works with the chief medical health officer and others. I'm sure you feel the same.

But we are working with our stakeholders and working very closely with Dr. Shahab and the chief medical health officer in order to move forward. But one of the things is, Sask health is the one that receives information on who has COVID, and we will be working with them on how we can most effectively message to them that they can contact us.

Telephone voting will not be advertised however, but if individuals call us and they're outside of the health system and they have COVID and they've indicated that they've tested positive, we want to figure out how to work with them as well.

Ms. Beck: — I appreciate that. Thank you.

The Chair: — Any other questions? Yes, Mr. Dennis.

Mr. Dennis: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to add on to that, you know, about telephone voting and that. You say in event of COVID. Are there going to be any additions to possibly . . . like a recent hip replacement surgery, could they . . . and you know, they can't make it to vote, could they telephone in? Are you going to be expanding it other than COVID, the phone-in ballots? Or voting . . .

Mr. Boda: — It's a good question that has regularly come up. And again, thinking in terms of capacity, that's not the approach we would take, but we do have other options available to an individual who knows that they're going to have hip surgery. As you know, going back in time there was really one opportunity to vote and that was on election day. And we have expanded that and our plan is to expand that even further. And in that particular case, there would be an opportunity to use vote-by-mail, which is certainly something that I have been talking to your executive directors about, and they are on board for pushing vote-by-mail in this particular by-election. And so that would be probably the best option for the individual to use that. And that's available today.

So again I'm being cautious because of the capacity issue. We're actually expanding past the general election, but we want to maintain a certain number, or a minimal number, so that we can make sure that we deliver on our promise.

Mr. Dennis: — Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a quick question. I'm interested in the progress on the voting services modernization and the elections management system replacement, and just noted your comments about, you know, how this will help make it convenient or more convenient I think for the voter obviously. But just curious to know, is that perhaps something that you also have heard from, you know, your local returning officers and elections workers, in and amongst all of the constituencies in the field, that this will help make their jobs easier in terms of . . . Just curious your thoughts and comments on that.

Mr. Boda: — It's a great question. So let's talk about the election management system side of the equation. And on that side of the equation, this is something that has proven to be problematic for

many, many years now. We have been using an election management system — every election management body needs one — but our current system goes back to year 2000 and it's outdated. And we have had to patch and work around the EMS in order to move forward. And in 2020 we did make use of elements of that, but we had to use other elements in order to move forward.

So our workers that are out there, and as you know there are about 11,000 workers who depend on the EMS, but we have a field leadership team of about 150 people located in 61 offices for 61 constituencies, and they are saying very positive things about the EMS and we are involving them in the creation of the EMS. We're depending on them to tell us what those needs are.

Now I'm going to turn to Jennifer Colin because she is doing a lot of work on that EMS side, and maybe talk a little bit about how we're involving others in order to shape the EMS.

Ms. Colin: — Sure. So to your point, we did hear very clearly and have in fact heard very clearly from our election workers — so the 11,000 people in the field as well as our field leadership team — that the technology that we are providing them to use is complicated. They're confused about which system to go to. Is it a spreadsheet? Is it in a system? Is it a Word document? So we've really created this patchwork-quilt kind of system which we are looking forward to transitioning to a single point of entry for all of our election workers.

We have a team of about 12 to 15 ROs [returning officer] and SROs [supervisory returning officer] who are very, very involved in both the requirements development, testing, as well as providing ideas for future enhancements for a lot of the functionality that they will be using.

We are also involving political parties in elements that will affect them. We've done some development on a portal for both political parties as well as candidates so that that will allow them to access information about poll activity and strike-off information. We're looking forward to engaging political parties further on elements of developing a candidate nomination portal and transitioning to that piece of work.

And we've also entered into a fairly unique partnership with Elections Alberta who is going down the same path that we are with the same vendor. So we've been able to collaborate on a lot of the different modules. Our legislation is a little bit different in some areas, but the fundamental components of the system that we require are fairly consistent. And so we've been able to leverage ideas that they have had through working with their internal stakeholders to help us make better decisions about the system that we're going to implement. And as well, that partnership has allowed us to reduce the overall cost and timeline for expected completion.

Mr. Boda: — The collaboration between election management bodies across the country has been proven to be very effective over the last decade, and we have particularly rich relationships with Alberta, with British Columbia, and with Ontario. Ontario, you will know, we have been working closely with them in terms of our voting services modernization effort because we intend to work closely with them, and potentially in the last election we had been planning to make use of some of their equipment. And

so we're trying to figure out how to collaborate together most effectively.

Jeff Kress is leading that, the voter services modernization side of the equation. But maybe could you just articulate how this is effective for the individual worker who's on the very front line during an election process. How is it more effective for them as opposed to what they've done since 1905 at the polling location? And how are things going to change and be more efficient moving forward?

Mr. Kress: — Yeah, absolutely. Certainly some of the challenges that we have within the current system are how do you train someone to do a job once every four years, that is very detailed, prescriptive, and highly manual? And so first and foremost, the introduction of technology allows us to put different controls in place within the equipment to make sure things are going to be filled out.

So for example, you're busy, long day. Things could get left off a manual form. Things may not get signed. It's the nature of what's happened in every jurisdiction around the world. When you put things onto a computerized set-up, you can put those controls in place to make sure that everything's complete. You can have edit checks for things like addresses. You can improve the quality of what you're doing.

The other major advantage that was highlighted relates to efficiency. So we've actually done some checks and said, all right, I'm going to come up to a poll. I'll provide my identification. We have a manual poll book, and someone will go ahead and they'll start writing it down. And you can track how much time that actually takes to serve an individual voter. It takes time for the worker, but it also adds to extra lines which might mean extra resources and things that we need to put in place.

When you're looking at something as simple as putting a bar code on a voter information card to look at, somebody can scan it almost like what you do when you go to a store. Pulls it up. It'll make sure that you have the exact, right person who has that voter information card. It will automatically strike them off the list.

So we've done some benchmarking in terms of the amount of time that it takes to serve a voter, both under what I'll call the traditional model versus the modernized model. And there are large savings which in turn results in large cost savings, because you need fewer teams to serve the same number of voters over the same given period.

[12:00]

Mr. Boda: — Thank you. So going back to, you know, how this is going to affect our field leadership team, how this is going to affect the individual voter, I would argue that there is significant change, yes, but it is going to impact them in a very positive way moving forward.

And going back to our strategic plan that came out of our legislation we put forward, innovation was part of that strategic plan and accountability was part of one of the key values in that strategic plan. And basically this allows us to be more effective as election administrators because the legislation says you will take certain steps to ensure that there's integrity to this process.

It will allow us to ensure the integrity of the process more significantly as we move forward. So it's a great question. Thank you.

The Chair: — Any other? If not, I have one item I'd just like to raise. Your comment about training officials once every four years, that also applies to campaign managers and business managers for many of the campaigns. One of the concerns that . . . You made some changes a couple election cycles ago about auditors in that, in my case, disallowed the auditor that I was using. But this last cycle, and I had other campaign colleagues raise this, that there's sometimes a difficult time to get the return into your office given that you have to pay bills and get people to supply the information so that you can pay the bill. And I'm just wondering, were there any remaining campaigns that were late in getting their return into you? And were there financial penalties or repercussions from being delayed?

Mr. Boda: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, for your question. I would like to begin by . . . When concerns are raised such as those, Elections Saskatchewan takes them very seriously. I take them very seriously. And on that regulatory front, we have stepped back and done an assessment of the entire electoral process which you saw in volume 2, which I submitted. But that was really focused on the element of the implementation of the election itself. Volume 2 really focused on that.

Volume 3 will be focused on costs and will be coming out in the next number of weeks, and within it we have done an evaluation as well. So a continuation of volume 2, we've done an evaluation of how the political finance side of the equation went. And so I encourage you to have a look at that volume when it comes out because there will be some evaluation that's there.

Now as to your specific questions, I'm going to let Jennifer answer those.

Ms. Colin: — Sure. So just to get back to your comment about the auditor, the impact of the amalgamation of the three accounting professions — so the CAs [chartered accountant], the CMAs [certified management accountant], and CGAs [certified general accountant] — into a single accounting profession did have a significant impact on who would be qualified under *The Election Act* to perform those audits, because they actually now have to be licensed to do public practice audits, which before, the only qualification required was that they be a professional accountant.

So yes, we do appreciate that that was a significant concern, and we have worked very closely with CPA Saskatchewan [Chartered Professional Accountants of Saskatchewan] to try and make it easier for business managers and candidates to determine which audit firms are actually qualified to perform audits. So we do appreciate that comment and are working to address that.

To your other question about late returns, yes, we did have candidates whose returns were late. We did receive several requests for extensions, which we granted a small number of those, but a handful of returns were late, and we did assess administrative penalties. A total of 16 out of 268 candidates, returns were filed late, which means they were beyond the deadline and did not have an extension. And so administrative penalties were assessed, and we did have some of those 16

candidates whose penalties were assessed at the maximum rate of \$750.

Mr. Boda: — Thank you. Could I just end by indicating or just making clear that over the past couple of cycles, the past couple of elections, we have been doing something which is not done in any other election management body in the country, and that is that while we are implementing, we have had a team of assessors evaluating what we have been doing as an election management body to work with me in order to provide you with an assessment of the election.

And this past election . . . We did it in 2016. And in 2020 I was working together with Dr. Michael Atkinson — some of you will know him from formerly of the University of Saskatchewan — and Dr. Keith Archer, who is from the University of Calgary. Two social scientists who were working with me in order to conduct an evaluation of the polls, and in order to evaluate our approach to implementing elections so that they could create and write with me volume 2 that I provided to you here in the House.

I have done the same with volume 3. Dr. Keith Archer's working with me in order to do an assessment of how we approach political finance. And the reason for doing this is because I wanted good social scientists to work with me to offer an outside voice so that I could provide good information to you on how the election was run rather than me simply doing it on my own.

And so that has proved to be effective in '16 and in '20. That's something that we expect to continue in '24, and it is unique to the country. And I believe that it has allowed us to improve on an ongoing basis at Elections Saskatchewan and get better at what we do. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Colin: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Any further questions or comments from the board members? Seeing none, thank you very much, Mr. Boda, for your presentation, and to your officials as well.

And to the members, we will now break for lunch. There are take-away lunches provided to my right, outside the Chamber, for board members. And we will reconvene at 1 p.m.

[The board recessed from 12:07 until 13:01.]

Legislative Assembly Service

The Chair: — Welcome back. So we'll continue item no. 31, review of the 2022-2023 budget for the Legislative Assembly Service: (a) decision item, motion to renew Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund; (b) decision item, motion to approve expenditure for the Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund for projects; (c) decision item, motion to approve budgetary and statutory expenditure estimates and revenue estimate.

And I would like to invite Greg Putz, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, to present his budget, and please introduce all of your officials that are in attendance today.

Mr. Putz: — Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon to members of the board. So with me here this afternoon in the Chamber is Dawn Court, our chief executive officer, member and

corporate services, sitting behind me. She's only there because she doesn't initially have a speaking role here this afternoon.

To my right is Sonya Leib. She's acting principal director of financial services. And I would just announce that this is Sonya's first meeting of the board. She's filling in for Cindy Hingley while Cindy participates as the Assembly's representative on the government's enterprise business modernization project, which for those of you who don't know what that is, that's the plan to look at replacing the old MIDAS [multi-informational database application system] legacy system for the government in Saskatchewan, which of course the Assembly has utilized since day one.

And to my left is Darcy Hislop, principal director, information and technical services. And outside the Chamber are the other members of our leadership team. They're on standby to assist in answering any questions the board might have about our budget if there's any component part questions.

So I'd like to begin as usual by providing some brief introductory remarks about our proposed 2022-23 budget, and then I'm going to hand it off to Sonya so she can walk you through the details. Darcy will then address our IT initiative, including the continuing support that we provide to the Privacy Commissioner and the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

So COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause uncertainty. We all know that because we're living it together. For the LAS, the second year of the pandemic has highlighted for us the importance of adaptable and sustainable service delivery. So I again want to take this opportunity, like I did last year, to put on the record my appreciation to all members of the LAS for responding to the organizational challenges that we faced through 2021.

The 2022-23 fiscal year, the LAS will stay focused on ensuring the continuity of services to members of the Assembly while at the same time working to modernize service delivery. You'll find our key goals and actions in the first section of the budget document as usual. A quick reminder to all members that all of our lines of services are catalogued on the members' portal.

So getting to the budget on page 11 of our budget book, you'll see the principles and assumptions that we use. These principles are developing a budget that is fiscally responsible and mindful of the information provided to the board by the Minister of Finance; and the renewal of our Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund, known as RARF for short.

Under budget development assumptions, we used an estimated increase of 2.9 per cent in the consumer price index. This affects members' indemnity, additional duties, travel, living allowance, caucus resources, and constituency service expenses.

Our next assumption is that our base funding for salaries incorporates cost-of-living adjustments, in-range progression, and flexible benefit amounts in parallel with what the public service employees receive. And finally, our budget is based on the standard 65 sitting days of the Assembly's calendar and the ordinary times of meetings and adjournment.

So in summary, the overall budget represents an increase of

\$264,000 or 0.88 per cent from last year. Sixty-five per cent of our budget is statutory, which includes services for members. The non-statutory portion represents 35 per cent, and includes funds for the LAS and the Office of the Speaker.

Total statutory funding for 2022-23 decreases by 138,000 to \$19.369 million. The decrease in funding is due to the reduction in the transition allowance payments, which more than offsets the increases to members' payments and expenses for this coming fiscal year. The non-statutory portion increases to \$10.657 million, which is an increase of \$402,000. This increase primarily covers salary pressures offset by anticipated savings in goods and services.

Before I ask Sonya to take you through the numbers, I'd like to briefly turn to our IT modernization initiative. Last year the board approved RARF funding for the LAS to begin migration of our Microsoft server-based computing systems to cloud-based computing through the deployment of Microsoft 365, commonly referenced as M365.

We are doing this because Microsoft is moving the world to cloud-based computing and when our legacy systems reach end-of-life in a few years, there simply will not be other viable options to us. M365 is well suited to our needs because it gives us continuing access to the Microsoft suite of products: Word, Excel, Outlook, etc.

The pandemic, though, has also shown us that the ability to work remotely and collaboratively are essential. The LAS as well as the officers we support will benefit from M365's collaboration and automation products like Teams and Forms. Through phase 1 we identified challenges concerning compliance, security, and licensing requirements. These matters have a significant impact on how we support the Privacy Commissioner and the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

Earlier today, it's my understanding that Ron and Maurice noted their challenges with implementation of Microsoft 365. Both have assessed the implications of M365 on their operations, and they advised you that their offices must have separate tenant agreements with Microsoft, pay the association subscription and data storage costs.

Their preference and our proposal is that LAS continue to support their offices with ordinary IT support such as hardware procurement but also consultative assistance with their M365 vendors, M365 implementation, and facilitating a joint M365 support agreement. The support would consist of a combination of direct LAS helpdesk support when possible and outside vendor support otherwise. Vendor support is particularly important during the first years because of our own lack of experience with Microsoft 365.

The proposal is that LAS would budget for and manage the M365 support agreement for all three organizations. This arrangement is more effective and beneficial to the officers than separate support agreements. Darcy will have more to say on M365 and answer questions you might have on how it affects the LAS and officers. I just wanted to highlight the importance of the initiative to LAS and to support the commentary that you heard earlier from Ron and Maurice.

I now pass the presentation on to Sonya, who will take you through the numbers of our proposed budget. Sonya.

Ms. Leib: — Thank you, Greg. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and board members. As Greg has already mentioned, our budget submission provides for an overall increase in LAS expenditure of \$264,000 or 0.89 per cent. The budget is made up of four components shown in the chart on page 12 of the budget document: members and Office of the Speaker, with a requested budget of \$19.527 million or 65.03 per cent of overall funding; Legislative Assembly Service operations, with a requested budget of \$10.083 million or 33.58 per cent; the Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund, with a requested budget of \$350,000 or 1.17 per cent; and interparliamentary associations with a requested budget of \$66,000, which represents 0.22 per cent of the budget.

I'll now direct your attention to pages 14 and 15 as I focus on the details of our budget request. On page 14 you'll find item (a) members and Office of the Speaker recommendations which break down as follows. Using the 2021-22 budget as the starting point, we have decreases of \$560,000, which includes \$530,000 for a reduction of transition allowances that was provided to outgoing members following the 2020 election, and \$30,000 return of funding for recruitment for an officer of the Legislative Assembly. Our increases include 319,000 for consumer price index increases to member payments and expenses as outlined in the directives; \$73,000 to reflect economic increases for constituency assistants.

Next is item (b) Legislative Assembly Service operations. Our increases include \$276,000 related to economic increases and in-range progression; 138,000 for additional resources required to participate in the executive government's enterprise business modernization project that Greg spoke of earlier; \$85,000 to hire an additional IT analyst; \$73,000 to cover contract increases — 61,000 for IT and 12,000 for security.

Those increases are offset by \$105,000 in savings primarily due to broadcast distribution, and \$20,000 return of funding provided for the twenty-ninth legislature composite photo.

On page 15 you'll find item (c) Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund or RARF. RARF was established to support improvements to the LAS and Legislative Assembly's facilities, replacement of furnishings and non-capital equipment, and major capital asset acquisitions.

From 2007 to 2022 the BOIE [Board of Internal Economy] has approved 55 RARF projects. The board last approved RARF for a five-year term that ends with the 2021-22 fiscal year. We are proposing approval of funding for another five-year term at a value of \$350,000 per fiscal year in order to continue making improvements to the LAS and Assembly's facilities.

If approved, we're proposing three projects for the '22-23 fiscal year, totalling \$350,000: 150,000 to research IT infrastructure options to enhance LAS services and processes; 125,000 to optimize LAS IT hardware and software, a continuation of the work that began in '21-22; and \$75,000 to continue the conservation and digitization of rare items in the Legislative Library collection.

Each of these proposed projects is outlined in detail in the RARF section of our budget document beginning on page 19. As Greg mentioned, Darcy Hislop will be providing an overview of our IT initiatives at the end of my presentation.

[13:15]

Finally item (d) is interparliamentary associations. This year we have a small reduction of \$15,000 due to the planned withdrawal from International Legislators' Forum.

Page 16 provides our summary of appropriation and expense by subvote including our breakdown between statutory and non-statutory amounts. This summary is presented in the format used in the Ministry of Finance's estimates display.

Page 18 identifies our revenue estimate as \$10,000 for the upcoming fiscal year, which remains unchanged from last year.

In closing, I believe this budget highlights our commitment to balancing the need to manage resources prudently in these uncertain times and providing adaptable, sustainable service to members and the public. The Legislative Assembly Service remains dedicated to serving the Assembly and the people of the province effectively and efficiently. I would like to thank the board for your consideration, and now I'll invite Darcy to speak about our IT initiatives.

Mr. Hislop: — Thank you, Sonya. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and the rest of the board for the opportunity to provide some insights into our RARF initiatives this year. I'm going to be speaking to our first two proposals: researching new information technology to enhance LAS services and processes, and optimize LAS IT hardware and software. Both of these proposals can be broadly categorized as digital transformation initiatives.

Most people have probably heard of digital transformation, or the modern workplace, but I'll start with a brief definition. Digital transformation is the integration of digital technology into all areas of a business, fundamentally changing how you operate and deliver value to customers. It's also a cultural change that requires organizations to continually challenge the status quo and experiment.

Our first RARF proposal — researching new information technology to enhance LAS services and processes — is about exploring how the LAS can innovate and update our IT systems to meet the needs of the Legislative Assembly and its citizens. We will research current and emerging technologies and digital publishing with an aim to create more integrated features, easier navigation, and improved accessibility. We will also be researching potential technologies to replace outdated applications. Our legislative tracker application, which facilitates the collection and analysis of data related to legislative proceedings, is based on outdated software and will need to be redeveloped.

Our second RARF proposal — optimize LAS IT hardware and software — is the second phase of our work to migrate our IT services to Microsoft's M365 environment. And you've heard comments from Greg and Sonya related to that. Moving an organization to M365 is truly a digital transformation. This change in how organizations work is the most significant change

in IT in the last 20-some years.

In order to be successful and effective, organizations need to embrace the idea of transforming their processes and leveraging new tools within this technology. Employees will need to become proficient with these new tools, and organizations will need to be open to reworking existing processes.

We've identified four primary benefits of migrating to M365: reduced future capital expenditure on IT infrastructure, increased security, reduced administration and maintenance of IT infrastructure, and increased collaboration and automation capabilities. In the interest of time, I have some examples of that if you are interested, but I'll carry on from here.

As we come to the end of this fiscal year, our efforts have been about learning this new environment, planning and configuring our new M365 tenant. The LAS is targeting to have our email migration and deployment of Teams for video conferencing and instant messaging complete by this fiscal year. For the OIPC [Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner] and COIC, they are looking to be migrated into the M365 environment by the end of this fiscal year.

My team is the current IT service provider for OIPC and COIC, and have been working closely with the statutory offices in our M365 and around their migrations as well as our own migration activities. And we'll continue to provide support for them as they embark on their M365 journey.

That concludes my remarks and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: — I'll open it up for questions. Ms. Beck.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will take you up on your offer of providing further example, Mr. Hislop.

Mr. Hislop: — Sure. So under reduced future capital expenditures on IT infrastructure, some examples of that: organizations don't need to purchase IT hardware like email servers or disc storage for services provided by M365 like email or SharePoint or OneDrive. With M365 we pay a monthly or an annual subscription cost per user rather than having to plan and purchase the IT infrastructure. A little side note, we still need workstations, we still need network switches, we still need firewalls, and another range of peripherals. But some of the larger heavier stuff, we can eliminate that capital expense.

On increased security, IT security incidents can be paralyzing to organizations. I'm sure everyone's heard of ransomware attacks across the private and public sectors that have serious consequences for organizations. Many of these attacks occur through vulnerabilities in software code that manufacturers have released patches for but organizations have failed to implement. With M365, Microsoft's responsible for updating the software for their M365 services. M365 has been designed and built with security in mind. Microsoft data centres are actively monitoring for security incidents 7 by 24 by 365. Security controls like geofencing enable organizations to control where logins to their tenant occur from. So for ours, we will only allow logins from within North America. So we've eliminated 7.5 billion out of 8 billion possible entry points.

Multi-factor authentication, conditional access policies, and a zero-trust security model help ensure an organization's data is safe. Data loss prevention policies enable organizations to ensure that classified data is handled in the way that the organization wants.

On the reduced administration and maintenance of IT infrastructure benefits, not having an email server or file server means we don't have to procure, install, configure, or update server hardware or software. We don't have to manage the life cycle of that hardware or worry about capacity planning. With M365, we can add additional servers or additional disc space in hours or days versus months, and we only pay for the computer resources we use.

We currently spend a significant amount of time performing updates, patching, and updates of our IT infrastructure. With limited IT resources, this reduces the availability of IT resources to assist branches in developing and deploying new and improved services.

Application software is becoming more complex, and newer versions are coming out faster and faster. It is increasingly difficult for small IT environments to keep up with that pace of change. Staff need to be trained on the new products before they can develop plans to implement, and then there needs to be the time frame to properly test and implement. With M365, Microsoft schedules and rolls out new applications and versions, and organizations can simply use them.

On the increased collaboration and automation capabilities benefits, M365 offers a large array of additional productivity software and templates for organizations to use applications like Power Apps, Power Automate, and Forms to provide opportunities to automate routine processes. Many third-party developers offer their applications within that Microsoft M365 Azure environment. Microsoft Teams product combines instant messaging, video conferencing, and document collaboration sites into a single interface. Users can have easy access to all their work or project groups.

The OIPC has seen increased interest in using M365 utilities from client organizations to send and receive data related to investigations. Often that can involve thousands of files. Improved data analytics will be able to provide timely information to assist in decision making.

And finally, the M365 environment will provide opportunities to enhance and automate our records management processes, providing flexible, robust capabilities to ensure compliance with legislation. You got the long version.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. So my question, and perhaps this is a very naive question, so please indulge me. We're migrating all of this data and have this contract with Microsoft. If at any time, I mean, they started to increase their fees year over year or, you know, there was something that we weren't happy with, what does migration back look like? Is that onerous as well or is this . . . Like how long does this tie us with . . .

Mr. Hislop: — I'm sorry. I guess my hearing's not so great.

Ms. Beck: — So the migration of . . . or using this contract with

Microsoft, the M365, how easy is the uncoupling if it was to be decided that that was something that was no longer meeting the needs?

Mr. Hislop: — It's a great question. So under Microsoft's agreements, the data is always yours. And in the event, for example email, they have utilities built in to migrate up to their servers, and the same way you can migrate that from their M365 servers to an on-premise server again. Any data migration that would move, whether it be a network file share or an email or a SharePoint repository, they have utilities built to move it into their environment and those same utilities can be used to move it out if you wish.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. I assumed that was the case, but I just thought if it was occurring to me I should ask. Thank you.

Mr. Hislop: — Some companies have found that some applications may not necessarily be suited to the environment for a variety of reasons. And so there have been examples where people have made cloud-based applications and then reverted back to on-premise.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Thank you.

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

Ms. Mowat: — Yes. Thank you for your presentation. I particularly appreciated the budget recommendation details which compared the two fiscal years and the changes that are assumed. I do have a question though just to make sure that I'm reading this right. So the assumption with the 2021-22 versus 2022-23 budgets, what are the assumptions around member travel being different, or you know, is there any change in those numbers?

Ms. Leib: — There has not been any change. Travel has been reduced, obviously due to the pandemic, and we keep anticipating that it will resume at some point. So that funding is still there. We haven't reduced that.

Ms. Mowat: — Okay. That was my read of it, but I just wanted to confirm, and I think that's sort of the boat we're all in. You know, we'd love for the pandemic to be over, but recognizing the fact that there are still a number of travel limitations in our daily realities here. So that was my first question.

As we look through the updates, you know, perhaps I'm a unique individual but I'm interested in hearing a little bit more about the progress of the digitizing and preserving the Legislative Library collection. I wonder if someone could speak to what that process looks like, where we're at.

Mr. Putz: — Melissa's just outside. We'll get her in. So the question, Melissa . . . well maybe Vicki can save me interpreting what the question was.

Ms. Mowat: — I'm just looking for an update on the process of digitizing and preserving the rare collection and what that looks like.

[13:30]

Ms. Bennett: — Okay, I did bring some stuff with me. So we've actually been doing the preservation since 2014 and have gotten through about, I would say, half of our Saskatchewan government publication collection. That's the process to take the acid out of the paper in that collection material. So we have completed pretty much half of that collection and are aiming to complete the whole collection, given that it's our primary mandate to accession Saskatchewan government publications and preserve them in perpetuity.

So that amounts to, so far, roughly 16,065 items that we've de-acidified to date. And I can't recall if you were on the board when we first brought forward our proposal to de-acidify materials. So do you want me to give you a bit of a background on what that process is?

Ms. Mowat: — I did read in the documents, so I've got a bit of background already about what the process looks like. My understanding is that this wouldn't be a process going forward with new publications. Like, this is a feature of older paper?

Ms. Bennett: — It is, yeah.

Ms. Mowat: — Okay.

Ms. Bennett: — Yeah, and I won't get into too much detail on that point. Paper that's produced today, for the most part, has less acid in it and so for the most part is . . . We're better assured that those publications will be in better shape and not deteriorate in the same manner that these older publications are doing.

That said, we do have some tools to test the quality of paper and sometimes are disappointed with even some of the more current materials to find out that they do have some levels of acidity in them. So I think there is some rigour actually that does need to be undertaken when you're printing material to ensure that you are getting your printer to use a high quality permanent paper. So that can still be an issue today. I don't want to suggest that it's a non-issue now in terms of quality of paper, but our focus is retrospective primarily.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you. I don't know if anyone else has questions for you in particular, but . . .

The Chair: — Mr. Hindley.

Hon. Mr. Hindley: — Yes, just on the same topic, just further to Ms. Mowat's question. So the project started about 2014, 2015. We're about halfway through in terms of the volume, I guess. So are you anticipating about another seven or eight years to do that? Or was the front end of this project perhaps a little top-heavy? Just curious on how many more years you think you'll . . . And that's maybe an unfair question. I'm just curious if you have any estimation as to how long it will take to do the remaining pieces.

Ms. Bennett: — Yeah, I think it really does depend on how much money we devote every year for it. The very first year was top-heavy, as you say. We did 4,000 publications that year. But that was 13 shipments to the vendor who does this work, and it was very demanding and labour-intensive to get 13 shipments out that year. So subsequent years, we've done more around two to three shipments every year and have averaged around, I would say, about 2,500 publications every year. So I think it could take us a

little bit longer to finish the second half than it did that first half. But I think, you know, seven to eight years would be a good estimate.

We have other sections of our collection that I would say are historically significant that we might also consider for de-acidification, that we would consider queuing up in addition to Saskatchewan government publications, but we're not looking at nearly the same number of material for that.

And did you want an update on digitization? That was something that we just started this past fiscal year with our RARF project last year. And we did do a small outsourcing of that work that we are really excited about, so I think we would anticipate increasing the amount of funds toward the digitization piece in the future. So we basically did a small run of early-Saskatchewan government pubs this past fiscal year, and they're with a vendor who will be finishing that off this month, actually.

Ms. Mowat: — That's great to hear. Yes, thank you so much for the update there. I suppose my other question in terms of changes I don't see in the budget is around security services at the legislature. I know there's been a lot of talk of this sort of politically on the floor of the Assembly. I'm interested in what contemplation has been made within the LAS in terms of, you know, if and when Bill 70 passes, what impact does that have on the budget for security services at the legislature?

Mr. Putz: — Sorry, I couldn't tell whether my light was on or not. Hopefully that won't be an indication of the quality of my answer here. The Sergeant-at-Arms' office in the Legislative Protective Service constitutes I think about \$1.1 million per annum. Sonya or Dawn can correct me on that. Bill 70, you're correct, is before the House, and at some point it will become the will of the Assembly if it passes. We have not been presumptuous in this budget as to the outcome. We know full well that, you know, if it is the will of the Assembly we'll proceed.

So there's the date when the bill passes, but then there's going to have to be a transition period. We don't know how long it'll take for the government to have its security apparatus in place to supersede what exists now. So we have not budgeted any less or any more. It's basically a status quo budget, not increasing security and not decreasing it. So if, or more likely when, that happens, then the bill will have to be proclaimed at some point. We don't know when that will be. It could be at any time in the next fiscal year. So we just thought it prudent not to do anything with our security budget until that point in time.

Ms. Mowat: — Okay, thank you. Yeah, that was my read of it, was that you were going with status quo for now and then when, if and when it passes, it will be reassessed at that point. So one of the other thoughts I sort of have in that vein is, you know, sometimes we have groups that come forward with additional funding requests. Like was there any additional funding requests that were coming forward through the Sergeant-at-Arms for security purposes this year that sort of were put on the back burner as a result of the current situation?

Mr. Putz: — None made it into this budget. At one time there were discussions about, as there are every year, about security enhancements. Sometimes they make it into the budget, sometimes they don't. So anything that might have been

contemplated of course was . . . we did not go forward with because when Bill 70 was introduced, it was a moot point.

Ms. Mowat: — Okay, thank you.

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

Ms. Beck: — I'm just going to acknowledge . . . Not wanting to put anyone in a difficult position and having concerns, you noted no increase or no decrease to the security budget.

Of course we are set to return to session on March the 6th. And it needs to be said that there are people that work in this building every day whether members are here or not. I wonder if it was contemplated if there was assessed to be an increased risk in the building, whether there are measures that might have been brought forward had the bill not been in front of us, or measures that could be taken or need to be taken. And just to put this plainly, we hear that there was, you know, some level of increased risk that necessitated this.

And perhaps my question is better directed at the members of Executive Council that are here or not here today. I guess what I'm wondering is if that level of risk has decreased and therefore we see no additional measures, or we see no additional measures because the bill is in front of us. I'm sorry if that's a very difficult question, but are there measures that might have been contemplated if there was an increased risk?

Mr. Putz: — I think what I can say about that is that what we had as security in the fall remains the security apparatus as it exists today. And I think it's a matter of public policy debate on the level of risk that exists, and so I think our preference would be not to say anything that is a matter of public debate on the matter at the moment.

Ms. Beck: — No, and I recognize that, and I honestly, sincerely don't want to put you or anyone in a difficult position. And you know, we'll express the frustration that, you know, this has been said that we should bring this here to this body and we don't have the opportunity to discuss those risks here. And that is not directed at any of the officials. So I'll leave it there.

The Chair: — Any other questions or comments? Seeing none, thank you, Mr. Putz, and your staff. And for the board, as there's no other business, but we should go in camera now to discuss each item individually. So could I have a mover and a seconder to go in camera?

Mr. Dennis: — I move that we go in camera.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Let's just take a 10-minute health break while we transition, please.

[The board continued in camera from 13:43 until 15:01.]

The Chair: — Okay, colleagues. We're back at 3:01. We will deal with each item. We'll need a mover and a seconder and a

vote on each motion.

We'll start with agenda item no. 25. I need a mover and a seconder:

That the 2022-23 expenditure estimates for vote 055, Information and Privacy Commissioner, be approved in the amount of \$2,520,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 2,281,000; statutory, 239,000; and further, that such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

A mover and seconder? Ms. Mowat moved. Secunder? Ms. Ross, Alana Ross. There's two Rosses.

Agenda item 26:

That the 2022-23 expense estimates for vote 056, the Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner, be approved in the amount of 4,452,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 4,213,000; statutory, \$239,000; and further, that such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

A mover? Mr. Hindley. Secunder? Ms. Mowat.

Agenda item 27(a):

That the mandate statement for the Advocate for Children and Youth, vote 076, that is displayed in the main estimates document, be amended to read as follows:

Advocate for Children and Youth, vote 076

The mandate of the Advocate for Children and Youth is to promote the interests of, and act as a voice for, children and youth receiving services from a government ministry, agency, or publicly funded health entity to ensure their rights are respected and valued in legislation, policy, and practice.

Advocate for Children and Youth, subvote (CA01)

Objective:

To work toward the best possible systemic outcomes for children and youth through recommendations for improvements to government programs and services for children and ensuring the rights, well-being, and perspectives of young people are respected, valued, and supported.

Someone like to move that? Ms. Beck moves. A seconder? Mr. Dennis.

27(b):

That the 2022-23 expenditure estimates for vote 076, Advocate for Children and Youth, be approved in the amount of 2,978,000, as follows: budgetary to be voted, 2,739,000; statutory, 239,000; and further, that such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

I ask for a mover and a seconder. Mr. Dennis, mover. Secunder, Ms. Mowat.

Agenda item 28:

That the 2022-23 . . .

I should ask if everyone is in favour of all those motions, shouldn't I at some point? Maybe we should start. Do we have one vote right now for the previous ones? Everyone in favour show your hands please.

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Agreed. They're all carried.

Agenda item 28:

That the 2022-23 expenditure votes for vote 057, Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Registrar of Lobbyists, be approved in the amount of \$596,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 596,000; and further, that such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

A mover please? Ms. Ross. Secunder? Ms. Mowat. All in favour? There we go. Carried.

Agenda item 30:

That the 2022-23 expenditure estimates for vote 034, Chief Electoral Officer, be approved in the amount of \$5,546,000 as follows: statutory, \$5,546,000; and further, that such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Mover? Ms. Mowat. Secunder? Minister Hindley. All in favour? Carried.

Agenda item 31(a):

That the Board renew Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund (RARF) for another five-year term ending March 31st, 2027 at a value of \$350,000 per fiscal year.

A mover, please? Mr. Hindley. Secunder? Ms. Beck. All in favour? Carried.

Agenda item 31(b):

That for the 2022-23 fiscal year, the following Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund projects be approved: research new IT infrastructure to enhance LAS services and processes, 150,000; optimize LAS IT hardware and software, 125,000; conserve and digitize rare items in the Legislative Library collection, \$75,000; for a total amount of \$350,000.

A mover please? Ms. Beck. Secunder? Ms. Ross. All in favour? Carried.

Agenda item 31(c):

That the 2022-23 expenditure estimates for vote 021, Legislative Assembly, be approved in the amount of 30,026,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 10,657,000; statutory, 19,369,000;

That the 2022-23 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.

A mover, please. Mr. Dennis moves it. Seconder? Ms. Beck. All in favour? Carried. And the last item, agenda item 32:

That additional funding for vote 034, Chief Electoral Officer, be approved for the 2021-22 fiscal year in the amount of 452,000, and further, that the set amount be transmitted by the Chair to the Minister of Finance for approval as a supplementary estimate by January 25th, 2022.

A mover, please. Ms. Mowat. Seconder? Ms. Ross. All in favour? Carried.

If there is no other business, I will entertain a motion to adjourn. Mr. Dennis moves. All in favour? Carried. We're adjourned. Thank you very much, everyone.

[The board adjourned at 15:10.]