



Standing Committee on Estimates

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES
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The Chair: — I'd like to call the committee to order today — the Committee of Estimates — and I want to welcome all members and I want to welcome all officials here today.

Just a brief outline of what goes on in terms of Estimates. As we do with departments that are Treasury Board departments that are reviewed by the Crown and then in the House through the Committee of Finance, we review those estimates line by line.

Regarding the area of the Legislative Assembly and those independent officers of the Legislative Assembly, we deal with them here through the board of Estimates instead. Because these numbers are not determined by the Treasury Board, these numbers are first scrutinized in terms of the budget proposals put forward by the Speaker through the all-party committee of the Board of Internal Economy and approved there. And then from there go through this committee for presentation and then forwarded as a report to the House in terms of the appropriations of said monies to the Legislative Assembly.

So with that, I would like to call on the Speaker to I think make an opening statement and then from there we will move on to Ombudsman and child advocate, and when that is done we will conduct the vote in that area because it is combined together in the book. And then we will go to Chief Electoral Officer, Conflict of Interest Commissioner, Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Provincial Auditor, and finish with the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: — Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your . . . the instruction to the committee and members of the committee. Good morning. I look forward to the morning. I know the officers of the Assembly do as well.

I'm proposing to the committee that with the exception of the Legislative Assembly budget which I will present and handle questions from the committee, I'll see my role as introducing the officers themselves and then allowing your questions to be put directly to them. I think that's the way we most productively serve our purposes here.

Before introducing the advocate . . . excuse me, the Ombudsman and the Deputy Ombudsman, I'd just like to comment on the printing of the book itself and to pay a compliment to the government and in particular to the Minister of Finance.

All hon. members will recognize that in democracy, there are three branches of government that make democracy work. There's the executive branch, the legislative branch, and then the judicial branch. And those in combination make up our democracy. And if they are working in sync, then they are a great source of security, I think, to people in our province.

And I want to commend the government for representing that more clearly in the way that the budget book is laid out where we have now put into a section by itself the legislative branch.

Clearly the executive branch is the large, large majority of spending because that represents programs for citizens of the province, and the legislative branch then represents those

expenses that have to do with the functions of the legislature and its related interests.

So I want to acknowledge that and commend the Minister of Finance and the government for restructuring it and I hope we'll continue to do that. And I think it actively translates the finances into a picture that represents the structure of democracy.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, what I would like to do is to introduce to you Saskatchewan's Ombudsman, Barb Tomkins and the Deputy Ombudsman, Murray Knoll. And perhaps if Ms. Tomkins would like to make some opening remarks and then I know we'd be happy to entertain your questions.

**General Revenue Fund
Ombudsman and Children's Advocate
Vote 56**

Ms. Tomkins: — Thank you. Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to meet. And I'll start off by apologizing for holding the committee up there for a few minutes. I'm not sure what you want for opening remarks so I thought I'd tell you generally what we do and what's been happening, and I hope to be quite brief.

Fundamentally our office does four things: we receive, review and investigate complaints from members of the public; we review and investigate matters of public interest on my own motion, these could be . . . generally they will be major and systemic investigations; we resolve complaints through alternative processes such as mediation and negotiation; and we undertake public education about the Office of the Ombudsman and the role of the Ombudsman, and direct those efforts primarily to members of the legislature, members of the public, and employees of government.

In respect of the first — the review and investigation of complaints from the public — this is the bulk of our work and this is where the majority of our resources are dedicated. With your concurrence last year we hired two investigators on a temporary one-year term. With their help we were able to reduce our backlog substantially by almost 100 investigations, such that by March of this year we were able to let those temporary investigators go, somewhat regretfully, but with some comfort that we're now in a position that our workloads and timelines are at acceptable levels. And we also believe that we can maintain those levels with the existing resources.

As to own motion investigations, in part because of the backlog we were dealing with for the last number of years, we did not undertake major investigations. We undertook some systemic but nothing major, simply because of the allocation of resources. If we undertook that work, we lost work and time on other work and that would primarily fall to public complaints.

In the recommended funding allocation that's before you this morning there is an allocation which would enable me to hire one Ombudsman assistant who would be dedicated to the undertaking of own motion and major investigations.

We have implemented in regard to the resolution of disputes

through alternative methods, we implemented in '98-99 fiscal year an adjunct of our process — for want of a better expression — whereby in certain cases we will refer the complainant to an alternative case resolution process within our office.

We're still learning how this works, where it best works, but we are satisfied that it's very valuable, and has a positive effect incidentally on some of the other problems that the office faced in terms of workload because the use of ACR (alternative case resolution) affects the workloads of the Ombudsman assistants and the intake desks. I think all of you got a letter about that work in January or February when I went in more detail what we were doing and why we were doing it.

As to public education and as I've mentioned in our past meetings, we have now a strategic plan for communications and public ed, and we're following along that strategic plan again. I think I've sent you some of the materials relating to that work and we intend to continue down that road.

In terms of budget, staffing, and other resources, with the allocation that the Board of Internal Economy has recommended to you, I think I can say that the office will be reasonably comfortable. We won't be flush, we won't be strapped, but with some caution and careful use of the money we will be comfortable.

And with that I would be pleased to entertain any of your questions.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome this morning. A few brief questions and I want to acknowledge before we start that all of these estimates have been reviewed I believe by the Board of Internal Economy and a lot of detailed questioning and information has been received in that format. And certainly I think we've had an opportunity to review the transcripts of that so that I'm not going to hopefully go over the same repetitious sort of information.

A couple of things though. You indicated in your comments that the budget this year allows for you to hire an additional person to, I believe you indicated, to initiate investigations out of your office as opposed to responding to complaints. I'm wondering how that process would work in terms of . . . it's easy to understand that you would respond to complaints that individuals and citizens may have and feel that they've been aggrieved by government process. How would you initiate investigations in terms of choosing and deciding what issues warrant investigations? Would there be things that would flow out of other complaints or investigations?

Ms. Tomkins: — Yes. The undertaking on my own motion is not something new. I should clarify that. It's a legislated power that I have and that all ombudsmen have. And I don't wish to be taken to say that we haven't done that. We have. What we haven't done in recent years is investigations that involve a substantial amount of time and resources.

But own motion investigations generally come as a result of issues that we notice come to the office repeatedly, and we might then want to look at something on a systemic basis rather than dealing with numbers of individual complaints. Perhaps if we look at something on a systemic basis, we can find out if

there are problems and if so, what they are, discuss those with the agency involved, work out some solutions so that those individual complaints don't come again.

So it's dedication of perhaps more resources at the front end with the result that we need less for that particular issue at the later end.

Another way that those might . . . another approach to major investigation might be to take an agency where we receive large numbers of disparate complaints and look at that agency as a whole in terms of their attitude to what we call, in our shorthand, fairness, and how and whether that's incorporated into their policies and practices in their own internal training. That could be the focus of a major investigation.

There are certain issues . . . and we haven't had one, or at least we haven't acted on any. I don't think we've had any before or since I've been in the office. But there are issues that can come to the office that are an individual issue that would be in our terms a major investigation in terms of dedication of time.

And I'm thinking when I say that, using some past examples, of the Bosco Homes investigation the office did some years back; the Principal Group investigation. Those were investigation of a specific complaint that came from numbers of individuals but were essentially an investigation of the same thing, and in a sense became a systemic investigation, but in terms of time and resources were very major compared to an ordinary investigation.

Mr. Gantefer: — Okay. Thank you. I notice in your report that you've tabled that you received, I believe you say, a record 2,283 complaints against government. Is that . . . you always wonder about those type of statistics in terms of, does that mean that things are worse or that people feel more willing and open to report issues? And you know, it's one of those issues that are hard to really get a proper perspective on. I wonder if you would comment how you see it. Are we making progress?

Ms. Tomkins: — I think you've put your finger on it. It's hard to know why. Sometimes the immediate reaction is, oh things must be getting worse. I don't believe that. I think that it comes from a number of things. It comes from, I hope, more awareness of our office. I think it may come from belief in some segments where large numbers of our complaints are drawn that our office is effective.

I'm thinking, and I don't know this to be so but I suspect this is so . . . we've had a dramatic increase over the last year in complaints from inmates. I think at least in part that relates to there's a good grapevine in those centres. I think it relates in part to the fact that we've been achieving some very good results for some. And where there might have been people who said before, I'm not going to bother; they're just another agency. Now maybe the word is getting around that they should bother. I don't know this, I suspect that.

I think there is among members of the public generally, in the last especially 10 years or so . . . When I was a kid there used to be an expression, "you can't fight city hall". You don't hear that anymore. I think the attitude is completely changed. Now we say we will fight city hall. And people expect and are prepared

to work toward gaining the benefits they think they are entitled to and the rights they think they're entitled to. So I think people are more willing to complain now.

Certainly, generally in the midst of . . . sometimes one hears cynicism about government. In my almost five years in this office I've been impressed quite the reverse. We see — and I don't think those who've been with the office longer would say different — we see in government a civil service which tries very hard. But given the millions of contacts they have with individuals through the year, given human nature, human failings, just plain having a bad day, there are going to be times that things aren't done as well as they could be done. And those are the things that we find.

I don't see uncaringness by government generally. I don't see certainly, intentional or malicious actions by government. No, my view of government and its intentions is generally positive. I think sometimes there is a lack of understanding of the balance of lawfulness and fairness. But I don't see that as an uncaring thing. I think it's simply a lack of knowledge and it's something that's part of our public education obligation to try to impart to that part of government that doesn't understand that.

Mr. Gantefer: — I certainly think that part of the extra caseload is indeed awareness. Certainly from my office as a MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and I think in many other offices that we find that when we've tried to resolve issues, whatever they are, that to refer them finally to your office, if that seems appropriate, is a very positive thing to do. And the comments that I've ever had back were very, very positive in terms of the fairness and the professionalism with which your office have dealt with some of these issues.

Ms. Tomkins: — I appreciate your relaying that.

Mr. Gantefer: — So I wonder do you . . . are you receiving an increased referral from MLA offices? Is there indeed increased awareness from MLAs themselves and their staff to access your office?

Ms. Tomkins: — Again these aren't things that we count. We have had discussions about . . . as part of our process and people contact us asking people how they came to hear about the office or be referred there. It's something we have considered doing and are still considering doing. The reasons why . . . sort of there's enough going on without now will you do a questionnaire for us, for our staff and for them.

So I can't say statistically or with certainty but my impression is that we are getting more referrals from MLAs. And, Murray, you do all the review, you would know better than I.

Mr. Knoll: — I think over the years we've always had a significant number of referrals and I think that's continued. Perhaps it's a little more widespread and that you know typically there would be a group of MLAs who you would expect to get referrals from regularly. And I think that group is perhaps a little broader than it used to be, they might come from anywhere now.

And any MLA might be referring a client or two but they're not referring 10 or 20 each they're . . . you know it's a . . .

individual complaints here and there but I think that's continued and perhaps spread out a little bit more so that all MLAs are referring . . . or more MLAs are referring to us.

Ms. Tomkins: — Another thing I think I see among MLAs, and I can comment on that as well, is my impression years back was — I don't mean this as impolitely as it's going to sound — but my impression was that MLAs would dump people on us that they weren't able to obtain a result for themselves. Whereas now I see people saying . . . MLAs saying to people much earlier on, you know this is a resource that's there for this purpose and referring people to us at the front . . . much nearer the front end then when they've been frustrated and basically they're giving up and so they're passing them over. I think I see a difference in when they're coming, and I think that's positive too.

Mr. Gantefer: — Great, thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Anyone else? If not I want to thank the Ombudsman for their presentation and thank you for coming down today. And I will move on to the vote on the clause — I refer to page 126 under *Estimates*, and to the estimate (OC01) the sum of \$1,328,000. Agreed?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Thank you, again. We'll now move on to the child advocate.

Ms. Tomkins: — Maybe just before I leave, I would mention that we tabled our annual report yesterday, and if people want additional copies of any of our materials, if they let me know or call the office, we'll be happy to send them.

The Chair: — Thank you.

Ms. Tomkins: — Thank you.

The Speaker: — Mr. Chairman, the members of the committee will recognize also under Vote 56 then is the Children's Advocate, and here from the Children's Advocate office is the Children's Advocate herself, Dr. Deborah Parker-Loewen, and assisting her here as well today is the office administrator, Bernie Rodier.

And I think if the Children's Advocate would just perhaps make some introductory remarks, and then take questions from the members of the committee, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — Thank you. Our office is now four years old so it's still a relatively new office. But I think we're feeling we're into, into our work in a significant way. Saskatchewan remains the jurisdiction in Canada with the broadest Children's Advocate mandate, which means that we're still the only Children's Advocate office in Canada that looks at issues of children across all government departments and agencies, not just specific to children in foster care. So we're still the only, still the only province in Canada that has that broad mandate.

We're continuing to break new ground in that way because the office is significantly different from other offices in Canada. And I think we're feeling like we've made significant progress in terms of the set-up and development of the office in the last four years.

I think some of you may be well aware that our budget when we first started was \$342,000 annualized. And it's now, the proposed budget for this year is eight thousand forty annualized, with an additional amount for some one-time project funds. So our budget has increased significantly since our office opened.

And I guess, I've been thinking a bit about what does this growth mean and how do we account for that and what does that mean in terms of the future. And I think the growth in the office is certainly reflecting some of the public's concern about children and families in our province. And I think we see that in our office on a daily basis.

We had a 44 per cent increase in the files opened in our office from '97 to '98. And so we're continuing to grow in terms of a number of different areas.

The growth in our office has actually not been unanticipated. The initial proposal for the office was still substantially more than what the office is currently functioning at. And so the office has not yet grown to what the original task force report recommended to government. And that task force came from a series of public consultations that occurred throughout a full year's process.

So we have not yet grown to the projected and recommended level of the office for the province, given the significant mandate that we have in our legislation.

The complexities of the issues that we've also taken on were not all anticipated. And I'm sure you're aware that I've undertaken in our office to carry out some specific projects and some specific activities which weren't initially considered when the office was developed.

For example, we have now taken on responsibility for reviewing the deaths of children who are receiving government service. And that's been a significant task that we've taken on with quite a bit of thought and planning, and certainly a lot of our resources have needed to go towards that activity.

This year we are undertaking a comprehensive of the needs of children who live in foster care. We're just about to embark on a public consultation process, and we have a panel of about 20, 25 key community members who are advising the review process. And so by the fall, that panel of key community members will assist me and my staff in preparing recommendations, which would be given to government sometime in early . . . of the year 2000.

We see that as one-time money that was requested in this year's budget to finalize this project.

I thought we would complete it last year; however, the information and the feedback we received, particularly from First Nations people, foster families, and from young people

was that they wanted to be more included in the consultation and in the development of recommendations, that they didn't want that to just come from within our office or from a file review. And so from that is how we've launched into this larger public process.

We're becoming more and more involved in concerns of youth in conflict with the law. And, if you had a chance to look over our annual report which was tabled yesterday, you'll see that that's a significant area of work in our office. And while it's a small number of files, they take a significant amount of our time.

A couple of exciting things that have happened in our office and that we've requested additional funds for this year is the development of a provincial youth delegation. This is a round table of approximately 25 young people who have gathered from throughout the province and are working to change, to create a more public . . . positive public image of youth in our province.

And they're a very exciting group of young folks that our office is facilitating getting together, and they're beginning to develop some thoughts about how they, from their perspective as young people, can make some suggestions and recommendations around what would be positive for the youth in our province. So that's a very kind of exciting activity that we've undertaken this year.

So in terms of the work of our office, we continue therefore to fulfill our legislative mandate, which is to do public education to improve understanding of the well-being of children and youth in the province. And so a lot of our initiatives are directed to that piece of our mandate.

We also receive review, try to resolve through negotiation where possible, and investigate concerns regarding services children receive from government. We also have a mandate to involve ourselves in research related to the well-being of children, make recommendations to government with regards to any of those aspects of our work — public education, investigative role, the mediation role, and the research role that we have.

So with that, I won't prolong but I'll welcome your questions or feedback or comments.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome this morning. I noted in going over your report briefly yesterday that you make comment that an ongoing concern that you have is the issue of the children as they come in contact with the justice system, and I am sure that there are a number of dimensions to that.

Again a similar question as I posed before. I believe you said the caseload was up 44 per cent or something of that magnitude. And again those kind of statistics can potentially be misinterpreted.

How do you see these issues? Are we making again progress? Are we resolving and finding solutions to some of these issues or are we finding a lot of repetitiveness?

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — With the issues that come into our office, I think we've seen progress in some systemic pieces. What we have tended to do in our office is take forward system issues to government and recommend changes to practice or policy as it reflects towards groups of children.

We've seen some changes as a result of some of that work. For example, two, three years ago policies regarding services to 16- and 17-year-olds were inconsistent across the province. They were applied differently from one Social Services office to another. And they have just, in December of '98, produced now a provincial policy which we're anticipating that they will implement fairly and consistently with 16- and 17-year-olds throughout the province.

So I think we are seeing from our office's perspective some positive changes in terms of policy change and in terms of implementation of those policies. I think we still need to monitor some of that and to keep our eye on how the implementation piece works.

You asked another piece to your question. I feel like I've missed it.

Mr. Gantefer: — The question of the relationship with the justice system.

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — What I think has happened— and this is simply an impression — the numbers of files have increased, the numbers of contacts from young people have increased. So I think that young people have a greater awareness that they have the right to contact the Children's Advocate office.

These are young people who are in conflict with the law and receiving some kind of government service, so they would typically be in an open custody or a secure custody facility. We've made a great effort to assist those young people in understanding how they can contact us and what kinds of issues would make sense for them to contact us about.

Are we making progress there? There's a huge crowding issue in the youth justice system generally which has created other . . . kind of a ricochet effect through the system. I think we're seeing different layers of problems, so that we're seeing more complex issues come through.

Earlier in my tenure, I think the concerns we heard were around food or around clothing being lost, or concerns or questions around visiting policies. We're now hearing different kinds of issues from these young people: more around transfer, lack of access to family, disciplinary practices that from the young person's perspective don't appear respectful and they don't understand.

With crowding, for example, comes . . . there's limited time for staff to explain rules to young people when they enter into the facility and so then they get confused about that.

The Chair: — Just I'll stop for a moment. I'd like to introduce some guests that we have today. We have some representatives from the state of North Dakota that are here on an exchange in terms of shadowing of fellow MLAs in Saskatchewan, and it's their opportunity here today to see the operation of this

committee.

And for their information, this committee deals with the expenditures of the Legislative Assembly directly in terms of the administration of the Assembly and those costs. Also those officers that are independent offices of the Assembly, and that includes our child advocate, our Ombudsman, our Privacy Commissioner, and also our Conflict of Interest Commissioner, which deals directly with MLA responsibilities, and our Provincial Auditor and our Chief Electoral Officer.

So certainly welcome you here today to our proceedings. And with that we'll move on to Mr. Gantefer.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much. I'm wondering . . . You know, it's perhaps coincidental but there seems to be — at least reported — increased frustration with young people. And some of that has been manifested in pretty horrific outbreaks of violence.

Do you have an increased sensitivity or are you getting increased caseloads from young people who are feeling really frustrated, very angry, very concerned about their future? Or is this something that is just a flash that has happened, and coincidentally we see these horrific outbreaks of violence? Or is there an increased level of frustration and concern among young people underlying this all?

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — Thank you for the question. I wish I knew the answer. I think, you know, you're raising a huge societal question that doesn't have a kind of clear answer. I can give you my impression.

I think that as a society we need to find a way to value our young people in a way that includes them in a meaningful way. This is from very young children to older adolescents. And that in many ways, many young children feel — across society, across all economic groupings — feel neglected by us in many ways. They don't feel meaningfully included in our society. We have a hectic pace as a society; we have many demands on us as adults; and I think we need to find ways to give our children more attention, more valuing — in lots of ways, not in any one simple way.

And this does . . . and there's fairly good literature around this, that it goes across economic stratas; that we need to find ways to value our children, and include them again in our world. We exclude children in many ways. We have adult functions that don't include our kids. We have all kinds of activities that aren't child-friendly.

And I think as a society — this is my personal view — we need to find a real way to bring children back into our day-to-day lives.

Mr. Gantefer: — In terms of some of the children involved in — I'm not sure of the exact, correct terminology — in the open custody or in the homes under supervision that are in our communities, do you work with the Department of Social Services, I guess, and these adults that are responsible for these children to provide guidelines or parenting skills or supervisory skills? Does your office work at all in terms of setting standards or assisting in standards for the care of these children?

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — I have raised for three years the need for clear standards of care for young people in open and secure facilities which would include community homes.

Two years ago there was a person within the Department of Social Services assigned to develop standards and to work with staff to develop standards and a quality assurance mechanism. That process has not moved forward very quickly. And there's still a need for clear standards around care.

There's also a need for facility standards, physical standards for how the facilities are managed. Activities like attending school; participating in recreation; access to medical . . . mental health counselling; addictions counselling; visitation with families when you've got young people from the far north being brought out to, if they're lucky, North Battleford, perhaps to Regina. So you've got someone from Beauval being brought out to North Battleford, P.A. (Prince Albert), or Regina.

There are a number of issues around standards that really do need to be addressed. And I think I've made that appeal and I think government is interested in doing that. There's a whole resourcing question attached to that for them.

Ms. Stanger: — Welcome, and thank you for the work you're doing, and for the information you sent me after last year's committee.

The Lieutenant Governor from North Dakota is here and she's particularly, she tells me, interested in your work. I'd like you to explain that special project that we're doing where we've given additional funding to the consultative process, and why you've included some of the people that you have and why you've extended that out to the public in general. Because I think that's really interesting and it's important. And it ties in to what you just said where you think youth must be included in our societies.

And, you know, I taught children for 23 years. And even children at six- and seven-year-olds, children are very wise. I mean they are. They're not cluttered with all the things in their minds that we're cluttered with.

And you ask my seven-year-old granddaughter a question, she'll give you an answer that just knocks you off your feet.

So I believe that children and youth should be included. I'd just like you to explain this. Because I think if we could even push this more, maybe we'd get, as a society, to some of the answers. And it isn't material things that are important for children, it's the caring and the loving that's important. And I think in North American society we've put too much emphasis on material things.

A friend of mine just lately that had a child die said to me in her thank you note to me, she said one of the things I've learned from you, Violet, is that you said to me that we just don't take the time with kids. We buy them things. We don't spend the time with them.

So I don't know. I didn't mean to say all that but I guess it's something in my heart. But I'd like you to explain because I think our visitors would appreciate . . . because we learn from

each other. When we go down to their legislature, we learn from them. I think we can all learn from each other because this is a problem across North America, obviously.

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — Well as you know we're undertaking a review of the needs of children who live in foster care. In Saskatchewan that's around 3,000 young people.

When we looked at how we would do this review I could have chosen a traditional review model which would have been to look at the literature, look at the files, and to interview some people and then to make some recommendations.

And when you look at our statistics in Saskatchewan, 58 per cent of the children in foster care are treaty Indian children. They have status. And another 15 to 20 per cent are Aboriginal children, non-status. And so we have a large number of Aboriginal children in our foster care system in our province. That does not include the children who are in care with Indian child and family services agencies, which is another group of young people.

So it seemed important to me that we involve people for whom these children are valuable in the process of making recommendations to government about how we could improve the future for children in foster care.

So the vision for this project is to look at making recommendations to government about the future for children in foster care. We're not really looking at a lot of historical issues.

We have established a panel of community members. About half are Aboriginal people. Four or five are young people who have been in foster care or who are now currently in foster care. And others are service providers or representatives of various service agencies — a physician, a legal person, someone with a mental health background, etc. And they are assisting us in preparing a background paper which will actually be publicly distributed in the next week or so. And then once we do the consultations they will assist us in forming the recommendations.

It's been an interesting process because we have at our table people who have historic competing interests — foster parents, young people, First Nations leaders — who historically haven't all agreed about what children who come into care need, or even why children come into care. And so it's been an interesting and I'd say challenging process to bring these folks all together.

But we're seeing some positive things right at the table in terms of the discussions we're having, and I think that bodes well for the future of the kinds of things that we might be able to recommend which would . . . What we're looking for is what are our common interests. And clearly our common interests are these children that live in foster care and what can be done to help them live in stronger families, really.

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you for your work.

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — Thanks.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you. And I also am encouraged by the

work that you're doing.

I take a special note of interest, you know, in relation to the Aboriginal problem. I don't think there's any question that there are certain challenges and certain needs that need to be addressed, and I would encourage you to continue consulting with the Aboriginal folks, both the Metis and the treaty and the other off-reserve Aboriginal folks that may be facing some of these challenges, especially with the children.

One of the questions that was raised to me as an MLA back home in Ile-a-la-Crosse is that . . . I've got two pre-teenage girls and I just can't wait for them to get older so they'll be able to look after themselves, you know, better. But people tell us that when they get to be teenage years, they get to be more trouble. So I hope that's not true.

A Member: — Trust me, it is.

A Member: — Think back, Buckley.

Mr. Belanger: — I was told that once they turn 14, they do their own work and they do well in school and they clean up their own room and they pay rent.

A Member: — What planet have you been living on?

Mr. Belanger: — One of the parents back home had suggested through a letter to the editor that in these northern communities often children that are seeking attention or having trouble at home or in school, they'll tend to want to leave the smaller centres and hitchhike out of the northern communities and go to P.A. or Saskatoon or other points.

And she had suggested trying to formalize some kind of provincial strategy to form a network of parents, concerned parents from these communities that in the event that my young daughter at 15 all of a sudden is missing one day, that we'd be able to phone a collection of people in a collection of communities and say, have you seen my child in that particular community hanging around with so and so? Because a lot of the communities are inter-related, and she also went so far as to suggest that it should be illegal for people to pick up young children that may be 12, 13, 14 out hitchhiking. And we often see that. They're obviously not out there with their parents' permission.

So in essence, you know, if it's an emergency and the middle of winter, you know there's also kind of a discretionary use of stopping to help people in that instance. But she was going to suggest that they make it illegal for people to pick up young children that are obviously hitchhiking out of these communities. Have you done any work in that area and is there any other ideas that you have at these past few years?

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — Well that's certainly not an issue that has come to us. I would welcome having discussions with parents like that one to see if there's something our office could do to be supportive or helpful. We're really interested in community development work, and assisting and promoting the well-being of children. That is the direction in our legislation. And so . . . and I believe that many solutions come out of community and a community understanding, so a mom like this

one would probably have a stronger sense of what her community needs than I would but we could certainly have a dialogue.

The youth delegation that is working with our office right now, the young people have actually identified some similar issues and have begun to formulate some ideas for recommendations they'd like to make to decision makers, policy-makers, and elected officials such as yourselves. And one is around the need for recreation in remote and rural areas. It was very interesting to me.

We had two young fellows from Thunderchild and two young women from near Estevan on our panel, and you know, they have absolutely similar issues. Their concerns are that there's not much for them to do and they need more free non-judgmental access to recreation programs, and this would keep them occupied in a positive way. And these are young folks that are clearly thinking about what would help them in their community. So we've got two very different communities on the surface, but the young people themselves are feeling and experiencing very similar things.

The other thing they want is that they think their parents need some help in dealing with some of their own issues so that they are more able to give their kids support. Kids don't always feel safe at home.

Mr. Belanger: — I just wanted to share that with you because the friendship centre in Ile-a-la-Crosse is really beginning to look at how they can improve that. And it was one of the staff persons that did come out there and mention some of these ideas about having these children that are hitchhiking out of these communities, something to stop them. Not that they're trying to stop their kids from expressing some of their problems but having them leave, hitchhike out of town, is not the solution either. So there's got to be some repercussions they figure to try and discourage that type of activity.

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — One of my staff was able to participate in the youth camp at Ile-a-la-Crosse last summer and I think he's planning to go again this summer. It was a very good experience for him and for our office.

Mr. Belanger: — Yes, so if you need to get a copy of that letter I could arrange that . . . (inaudible) . . . she wrote it.

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — Yes, thank you.

Mr. Belanger: — And see if there's anyway that you could help.

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — Sure.

The Chair: — Thank you very much and thank you members for your very in-depth questions.

We will move on now to the report on the vote 56, page 126 in the *Estimates*, Child advocate (OC02) for the sum of \$951,000. Agreed?

A Member: — Agreed.

**Supplementary Estimates 1998-99
General Revenue Fund
Budgetary Expense
Legislation — Vote 21
Ombudsman and Children's Advocate**

The Chair: — We will now move to *Supplementary Estimates*, page 7, under vote (LG07) Ombudsman and child advocate. Child advocate — the sum of \$37,000. Agreed?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: —

Be it resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2000 the following sum:

For Ombudsman and child advocate \$2,279,000

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — And moving on to the *Supplementary Estimates*:

Be it resolved granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 1999, the following sum:

For Legislation — Ombudsman and child advocate the sum \$37,000

Do I have agreement? Thank you.

**General Revenue Fund
Chief Electoral Officer
Vote 34**

The Chair: — Mr. Speaker, we will now move on, I think, to Chief Electoral Officer. And I would just like to just add to the committee I think this is the first time for the Chief Electoral Officer to be present to this committee, one in her capacity as the Chief Electoral Officer and also in her capacity as the first independent Chief Electoral Officer that was selected by an all-party committee and now an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly. So I welcome the Chief Electoral Officer here today.

The Speaker: — Thanks for that, Mr. Chairman, and before the child's advocate departs I just want to advise the committee that I have passed on the appreciation of the committee. She and Ms. Rodier were watching the sun come up this morning while they were making their trek down to Regina from Saskatoon and we appreciate very much their diligence in hitting the road very, very early in order to get here in time for the committee to receive their estimates this early. So I just wanted to pass that on to the committee.

And I want to just reinforce the significance of what you've said about the Chief Electoral Officer. This is the first time that the Chief Electoral Officer is before this committee because this has been the first year that her estimates are approved by the Board of Internal Economy.

Combined with the fact that there was an earlier decision in 1998 to include under the Board of Internal Economy approval

of budgets as well for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and the Information and Privacy Commissioner, it now means that all of the officers of Legislative Assembly have their budgets determined by the Board of Internal Economy and therefore come for scrutiny in *Estimates* to the Estimates Committee. And so I think that's worth acknowledging and commending as well the actions of the government and the Legislative Assembly.

Everyone I think here has already met Jan Baker who was recently selected after an all-party committee unanimously recommended her selection to the Board of Internal Economy, which was ratified as you'll know earlier in the session in the House. And I'll ask that Ms. Baker make brief opening remarks. And then I know she'll be happy to entertain your questions or comments.

Ms. Baker: — The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer provides for the administration of provincial elections, by-elections, enumerations other than during an election, and provincial election finances under The Election Act, 1996. The office is also responsible for and periodically conducts referendum plebiscites under The Referendum and Plebiscite Act and time votes under The Time Act.

The principal mandate of the office is to provide impartial administrative and financial practices to ensure public confidence in the integrity of the electoral process for the Saskatchewan electorate.

The office's 1999-2000 budgetary estimates include expenditure forecasts prepared in the context of the office's functions — annual operations including proposed new office initiatives and potential annual electoral-related activities specific to a general election, constituency by-election, non-writ period enumeration, referendum and plebiscite, and time vote.

If in fact the province were to experience one or more of the enumerated electoral activities, their associated expenditures would have to be included with the office's operational estimates in order to achieve an accurate expenditure picture for the 1999-2000 fiscal period.

Funding for the Office of the Chief Electoral office is based on statutory provision and is, as you are aware, presented annually to the Board of Internal Economy. As many of you know, the office's first budget as an independent office of the Assembly was presented and approved December 9, 1998.

I would be pleased to answer any questions that you have at this time. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you. Any questions?

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much. And first of all let me congratulate you, Ms. Baker. It certainly is I think a very historic and important move to have your office moved from being part of the executive government and moved to the Assembly. And certainly the process of your selection, I think, is both noteworthy in terms of the process, but also noteworthy in terms of your success in being placed in that position indicates how much respect members of this Assembly have for your work in the past.

I'd also like to acknowledge the very helpful proactive type of initiatives that you're taking. For example, you participated in forums for our caucus and candidates to explain how the Act and legislation works, which I think would be not only helpful for those of us that have a little bit of experience but certainly most helpful for new people. So thank you very much for those initiatives. And if other caucuses have not taken advantage of that I certainly would recommend it for new candidates. It's particularly useful.

I believe your requirements have been scrutinized and gone over by the Board of Internal Economy. And I don't see in here . . . And I believe that the funding for a general provincial election comes under a separate item and not under your department, is that correct?

Ms. Baker: — Yes, that's . . . (inaudible) . . . that the budget forecast was provided in context of the office's functions and done as a base and non-base activity. If in fact the operations and new initiatives is, I believe, what has been approved and if in fact we have an election-call or by-election call, etc., funding that has been identified, the costs associated to conducting those activities would be appropriated and the associated costs would be added to my total . . .

Mr. Gantefer: — Would that include enumeration?

Ms. Baker: — Yes. It's statutory — I'm sorry.

Mr. Gantefer: — In terms of enumeration, are we moving towards an electronic or a permanent voters' list in the province or are we going to stay on the traditional enumeration methodology? Or could you update me on how that would work?

Ms. Baker: — At the present time, and as you aware, the office has undergone major electoral reform. One of the new provisions in the legislation is the conduct of enumerations other than during a provincial election. I am of the view that that purpose would allow us the opportunity of sharing electronic data with other jurisdictions, etc., and conducting enumeration outside of the writ period with the notion of establishing a permanent voter registry.

Mr. Gantefer: — So that is something that you perhaps are moving towards but certainly is nowhere near to being in place for the likelihood of the next general provincial election.

Ms. Baker: — At the present time — and my office has spent a good deal of time attempting to establish the gathering of the names electronically — however currently in the province, we do not have corporations' technical expertise — hardware, software, human resources — that would allow us to do a centralized data entry of voter information given the period of time of the writ, which is a maximum 34 days to a minimum 28 days.

However, I did think it was extremely important that we take steps towards introduction . . . introducing automation, not only to the political parties but to the electorate; also to the administrative side or arm of conducting elections. And in the event of an election call, the office has developed a very rudimentary data entry program which would be controlled by

our 58 constituency returning officers. And it would be passed, soft copy would be passed to candidates at the time of the election.

Because of the timelines following a provincial election, my office would undertake developing a program which would provide us a much more elaborate and more usable . . . (inaudible) . . . file which would be provided to political parties a year following provincial election.

Mr. Belanger: — I just wanted to, first of all, again congratulate you on your new position and also to commend your man, I guess so to speak, in the North, Mr. Desjarlais that takes care of the Cumberland, or not — sorry — the Cumberland, the Athabasca constituency. I think he does a very good job.

The one question I asked him last time is that because of the language problem a lot of the elders only understand only Cree or Dene and because of the isolation, I had suggested that there be more of a concentrated advertising on the local radio stations in northern Saskatchewan. At that time he instructed me that there is no advertising as to the actual election date itself on the radio. And I don't know whether that was a rule or that they just didn't do it.

I think he has done a good job, and I was just wondering for clarification, has there been any discussion in terms of advertising in northern Saskatchewan because of the language problems and because of the isolation factor? A lot of people, quite frankly, don't read a lot of the notice of election. Word of mouth is good to a certain extent, but if they listen to the radio stations on a regular basis, and a lot of these stations control the whole communities, like in Ile-a-la-Crosse, the local radio station — everybody listens to it.

So if it were advertised locally in the Aboriginal languages, I think we'd have a lot more awareness in terms of when these actual election dates are.

Ms. Baker: — Right. Well it's certainly something I am very conscious of and, having had a recent by-election in Athabasca, was made aware of it through my constituency returning officer, whom I agree is extremely competent. I do believe that it is something that, given the province's election cycle, it's not something that I am going to be able to address thoroughly prior to a provincial election call or a constituency by-election call.

However, one of the areas that I was not aware of was the local media that you have just made mention of, and something that we had not initiated previously was authorizing our returning officers to go live and inform the electorate of the various stages in the electoral cycle. This time I'm going to encourage Mr. Desjarlais to undertake that exercise.

And I do hope . . . the only other provision we have in the legislation at this time to address your concerns is the ability to hire or use interpreters during the polling process. But I do hope and guarantee that it will be an initiative that we will undertake in addition to addressing other concerns of the north in the future.

Mr. Belanger: — Yes, I'd certainly point that out because, you

know, sitting back there and watching this guy coordinate all these activities and certainly having people fly in from Stony Rapids and Black Lake and to coordinate polling boxes and to hire planes to go pick them up, it's just an amazing task. And I think he's been doing a really good job.

And I just feel that more awareness on the local radio and TV station in the Native languages would be of significant help in not only letting people know when the election date is but to also allow them to know what the process is. So I just offer that as a kind of suggestion.

Ms. Baker: — Yes, I agree. I certainly apologize. I have been in the electoral office for some time and I am also of the view that the North has been ignored, and that is not my intent in the future.

Mr. Belanger: — You don't need to speak on your behalf — I can do that.

Ms. Baker: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Well thank you very much, Ms. Baker, and thank you, members, for your questions.

This is a statutory vote, so it doesn't require the formal resolution. But I will refer you to page 116, Vote 34 (CE01), and ask for your agreement in terms of that we've covered off this area as the committee. And the sum is \$580,000. Agreement?

A Member: — Agreed.

General Revenue Fund Conflict of Interest Commissioner Vote 57

The Chair: — Thank you again, and we will now move on to the area of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. Now I understand the commissioner isn't here today, but I don't want to make it him angry either . . .

The Speaker: — I think you're looking at his substitute here, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: — And what he holds over the rest of us.

The Speaker: — That's right, that's right. With thanks to Ms. Baker, if I may offer to the committee to substitute for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner as well as the Information and Privacy Commissioner who are the same person, as you know, in the review of estimates of Derril McLeod's budget here.

Mr. McLeod is out of the province and unable to be here. And if Ms. Borowski as our director of financial services would assist me, we'd be happy to entertain any questions you may have. We may or may not be able to answer them, but if you do have questions that we cannot answer, we'd be happy to commit on behalf of the commissioner a response in writing to the committee if that's acceptable.

So if that has the okay of the committee, we'd be happy to

proceed. If not, then we'd have to try to reschedule, I suppose . . .

The Chair: — Is that acceptable by the committee? Okay.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much. Not so much a question, I guess a comment more, Mr. Speaker. I hear from members fairly regularly the desire for the conflict of interest process and reporting mechanism to be simplified as much as possible. Because I think most comments I hear anyway is that it's very repetitive from year to year.

In many instances where you may have business interests or things of that nature by the fact you remove yourself largely from that, it may not change substantially from a previous reporting period, and that, you know, a system whereby you could simply say ditto almost, from last year, would certainly simplify things.

So certainly the encouragement to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner to continue to work towards simplifying the reporting system, recognizing that information is necessary and required, but to make that as simplified as possible.

The Speaker: — I can respond to that, Mr. Gantefer, on behalf of the commissioner. I know that he is well aware of the sentiment. And I would say to you as well that I think he shares a fair amount of that sentiment.

I believe the commissioner is of the view that he may be somewhat limited in freedom by legislation in order to redraft the reporting format that would permit members to simply say same as previous but identify changes to previous report.

It's also fair to say that the commissioner is at the end of his term and this may be an appropriate matter dealt with by a new commissioner, whether it's a renewal or a new person, in consultation with the minister responsible for the legislation.

But I will ensure that your comment in written record of this committee comes before the commissioner's attention and will, on your behalf, as I think it's . . . I saw several nodding heads here, urge again that this process continue to be reviewed and moved forward in the interest of simplicity but without sacrificing accuracy.

The Chair: — Thank you.

Mr. Belanger: — Yes, one question I have in terms of the actual form itself. It asks for your loans and with which bank and how much, and I was just wondering if there's any reason for that. Like obviously you want to indicate that you are dealing with a certain bank, and that I can see. But to get to the, you know, minute details and saying, oh, exactly how much you owe, you know, I question that as well.

The Speaker: — I'll ensure that comes to the attention of the commissioner. The rationale for that, I believe, and that will be in the portion of the commissioner's information that's received that is never ever made public but is available only to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and is therefore information available to him should a complaint be made about a member, and the member's indebtedness may be a factor affecting the

awareness of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner in reviewing a complaint made about a member's conduct.

And I think sometimes members do feel a little nervousness about being a bit uncertain when filling out the forms as to just exactly which of this is public information and which of this is private information available only to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. And perhaps — I think I've seen some nodding as well — it would be appropriate to have some indications on the forms to give members a level of comfort when filling those out.

Mr. Belanger: — You know, a benchmark of less than 50,000 as opposed to giving the exact amount; between 50 and 75,000. Because even in the event . . . You know, I've been dealing with banks for years and they've never done me any favours. So you know, in terms of you owing them money and giving you special deals, I've never seen that. So I just make that point.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Stanger: — Yes, a couple of years ago I have to admit, Mr. Speaker, if you just pass this on to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, I was quite agitated when I saw in the media an investment, Canada . . . Saskatchewan bond investments, and there was a certain figure given. And I went straight to our chief of staff and I was just really upset.

Not that I care — if I want to tell everybody what I've invested, it's okay. But I was under the impression that that was confidential. And there's some people that feel very strongly about that.

So I don't know what happened but just impress on the Conflict of Interest Commissioner that I'm . . . we don't feel hesitant to give all the information that we can, but we don't like to see in a reporter's column about whether we have invested in something or haven't invested in something. I don't think that's to the public interest to that extent. And I have no idea where that person got that but I was very agitated at that time.

Last year was fine, but again, I'm like Buckley. I just . . . And like Mr. Gantefer. You know, the purpose of it is, is to make sure that we are not in conflict with our jobs to serve the public interest. The purpose isn't for people to comment on whether we've invested in something or not; that really blew my mind. I mean, is it Murray Mandryk's position to say whether I have invested in Saskatchewan bonds or not? I mean this makes no sense, does it, Mr. Speaker?

So anyway, I just wanted to pass that along.

The Speaker: — We'll ensure that that comes to the attention of the commissioner. Thank you.

The Chair: — I'd also like to remind members too, and also to remind our caucuses, that each individual member does meet with the Conflict of Interest Commissioner to review their forms, and that's certainly an appropriate time too to raise those kinds of concerns with him, in terms of how to deal with the drafting of the form and with complications with it.

I just raise that for members to take back to their caucuses.

The Speaker: — I think that's very prudent advice, Mr. Chairman, for members to take back to their caucuses. And also I just reinforce for members the significance of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner is to provide an avenue of political protection so to speak. And I know that the Conflict of Interest Commissioner feels very strongly about that as well.

Certainly the Conflict of Interest Commissioner is there to receive complaints, but is also there to provide advice to members who may have questions as to whether they, if they make a decision, whether they'll find themselves in conflict of interest or not, and is always available to provide that advice to members. And I urge members to take advantage of him in that way.

Ms. Stanger: — I'm glad that you said that, Mr. Speaker. Because even though he isn't here, I want you to pass on to him that I have found, in my dealings with him personally, him to be very fair, open, accessible. And it isn't a criticism to him — it's just the whole process. I think he's bent over backwards to accommodate members.

Because I think, like you mentioned, he feels this way too, that he just wants to do his job. So just pass on our thanks. I'm glad you mentioned that because I certainly feel that way.

Mr. Jess: — Yes, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to add too that any reason I have had to contact the commissioner, the prompt response has been very much appreciated, and just more or less on a point of information as to what we can do and what we should do. And it's very much appreciated, his co-operation.

The Speaker: — Thank you for your remarks.

The Chair: — I refer the members to page 118 in the *Estimates*, under vote 57, Conflict of Interest Commissioner, (CC01), the sum of \$91,000. Do I have agreement?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Moving on the resolution:

Be it resolved it be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2000 the following sum:

For the Conflict of Interest Commissioner \$91,000

Do I have agreement?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Before I move on to the Information Privacy Commissioner, some of our guests had asked, in terms of the detailed budgeting that takes place, some of our guests weren't here earlier on, I just wanted to let them know that when it comes to this budgeting process, another committee deals with these budgets in a much more detailed fashion, basically on a line-by-line by expenditure basis by which then it's determined exactly what amounts are spent through an all-party committee that is open to the public.

And those expenditures are reviewed and then brought forward

again to the Board of Estimates. But normally that is, as the Speaker would indicate who chairs that committee, I would think would be normally a two-day process in terms of reviewing that budgetary process.

**General Revenue Fund
Information and Privacy Commissioner
Vote 55**

The Chair: — Moving on to the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

The Speaker: — Again, we'll be willing to entertain any questions you may have and respond to them as best we can on behalf of Mr. McLeod. And if we're not able to, we'll assure that you'll receive the responses in written form.

The Chair: — If no questions, we'll move to page 120, vote 55, under Information and Privacy Commissioner (IP01), the sum of \$63,000. Do I have agreement?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Moving on to the resolution:

Be it resolved that it be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2000, the sum:

For the Information Privacy Officer \$63,000

Do I have agreement?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and Ms. Borowski.

I wonder if the committee would like to take a short 10-minute break? The Chair would appreciate a short 10-minute break. We will break till 10 o'clock and then return to start the Provincial Auditor.

The committee recessed for a period of time.

**General Revenue Fund
Provincial Auditor
Vote 28**

The Chair: — . . . to the area of the Provincial Auditor. As it was stated today, the Provincial Auditor had to attend a family funeral today, and we certainly send our regrets as a committee in deepest sympathy to him and his family and certainly understand why he was unable to attend today. But with that, I understand we have — the proper title would be Assistant Provincial Auditor?

The Speaker: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, if I may introduce to you the Assistant Provincial Auditor, Fred Wendel, who I think is familiar to all members of the committee. And seated to his right is the principal of support services, Angèle Borys; and at the chair over by the wall is the manager of administration, Sandy Walker.

And perhaps if Mr. Wendel would make some brief opening comment to the members of the committee, I know that he and their delegation would be most happy to entertain your questions or comments.

Mr. Wendel: — Well thank you for the opportunity to meet with you this morning. We provided you our 1999-2000 *Business and Financial Plan*. We have extra copies if you need them. We also have extra copies of our '97 and '98 *Annual Report on Operations*. We tabled that in the House last June. Our 1998-99 *Annual Report on Operations* will be published again this June and we will make that available to you.

We try each year to improve the contents of our plans and reports as we expect others to do the same.

This *Business and Financial Plan* that I have here has four main components. The first component begins on page 5, and in there we describe what we do and why, as well as our financial proposal for this year, next year, and the next three years.

The second component, appendix I, of our plan begins on page 31 in which we provide independent advice on a request for resources. Our auditor has provided assurance that our financial forecast is reasonable to carry out our operating goals, objective strategies, and action plans.

This appendix also provides more detailed financial information. We include a five-year summary of spending as well as more detailed information about our work plans.

The third component begins on page 59 in which we provide answers to questions previously posed by this committee as well as by the Board of Internal Economy when it reviews our estimates.

The fourth component begins on page 79 and contains our suggestions on how you can obtain advice of an independent nature to help you assess our requests for resources. And of course one of those suggestions was for us to obtain the independent assurance that we've set out in appendix I.

On page 5, we state that we request an appropriation of \$4.442 million. This is about \$128,000, or about 3 per cent more than last year. For 2000, we face significant cost pressures totalling nearly \$300,000, or 7 per cent, caused by the need to audit new government organizations, our decision to do more work at SaskPower, and increases to our salary costs resulting from economic adjustments given to public servants of 5 per cent. We are trying to absorb the increase in costs related to salary increases.

On page 14 of the business plan, we describe our organization. We have a staff of about 60 organized into five groups. At any time, we have 15 to 20 articling students working towards their professional accounting designation. We have about 35 professional accountants in the office. Our average age is about 35, and 50 per cent of our staff are women, and 50 per cent are men. And Angèle Borys here is in charge of our recruiting and training programs.

At the end of November four of our five candidates passed the uniform final examinations to become CAs (chartered

accountant). And this compares with the national average of 65 per cent — so we're quite proud of that.

And with that, that concludes my opening remarks, Mr. Chair. And I'd be happy to answer any questions or try to answer them.

The Chair: — Thank you.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good morning and welcome.

Certainly I think that over the years the Office of the Provincial Auditor has done a great service to the province in terms of suggesting ways to get the affairs, the financial affairs of the province in a more transparent, accountable, and meaningful methodology for all of us as legislators, and the public in general, to understand the affairs of government. And I think your office has done a very commendable job in assisting that process.

I wonder if you could suggest, are there any areas that you feel need considerable effort yet? Or is now a question of further consolidation and refinement of the processes that you have in place?

Mr. Wendel: — Mr. Chair, as we say in our business plan, we have three key goals and one of them is to foster well-managed government. Some of the initiatives we've got going on that are good project management . . . we're working very closely with organizations that have . . . may be putting in larger systems or having large capital projects to make sure they have good project management systems in place as they get going.

Some of examples of that are recently we've done a lot of work at SaskPower Corporation. They're putting in a new computer project. I think it's called the Delta Project. We did a lot of work at the Saskatchewan Health Information Network corporation getting it . . . when it got going. And second on the issues of contracts, we're continuing to monitor that to make sure that project gets underway well.

And I recall a few years ago when the province went into the video lottery program that we were quite involved with the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority to make sure that got up in a good way. And it did. And we were quite happy with that progress.

So those are the kind of things that we're working on. I don't know if that kind of answers your question?

Mr. Gantefer: — Yes, thank you very much. Certainly one of the ongoing standing relationships is between the Committee on Public Accounts and the Provincial Auditor's office. And having served on that committee, I can certainly say how important the relationship is and for the first time in recent memory the committee has actually reviewed all of the outstanding auditor's reports and we're to a situation where for the first time in memory we're awaiting an auditor's report, rather than being about three years behind in reviewing it.

So I think that that as well has been a very positive effort that has been made so that when the committee is likely reconvened

after an election, there's not going to be a large backlog of work and the work can be done in a much more timely fashion. So I think all of those initiatives are very, very important and your office should be commended for your role in that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Any other questions? If not, for the Chair I would simply like to express my appreciation to the Provincial Auditor and the staff. I think it's a . . . we don't recognize the work that has to be done in terms of conducting the audits and testing those audits and I think the other thing too that makes it difficult is that there are different items, I guess one would say, within the item . . . in terms of government and things are changing all the time. And so your skills as auditors have to change and recognize those changes that take place when things are created or things are done by government.

So again I commend you for your effort. And I refer you to page 128, vote 28 under Provincial Auditor (PA01) the sum of \$4.442 million. Do I have agreement?

Be it resolved be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2000, the following sum:

For the Provincial Auditor..... \$4,442,000

Do I have agreement?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. We will now move onto the final segment of the committee report.

Mr. Wendel: — I would like to thank the committee for their support and kind remarks. Thank you.

General Revenue Fund Legislative Assembly Vote 21

The Chair: — We'll move onto the area of the Legislative Assembly. I think now we can truly put the Speaker in the hot seat.

The Speaker: — Mr. Chairman, if I may begin by introducing some people who I suspect are familiar to all of the members of the committee, but probably more officially to put it on the record to introduce the officials of the Legislative Assembly who are here to assist in the scrutiny of the Legislative Assembly budget.

Everyone will know, of course, the Clerk of the Assembly, Gwenn Ronyk, to my right. And to my left, Marilyn Borowski, the director of financial services. To her left, Linda Kaminski, the director of human resources and administration services. And to her left, Patrick Shaw, the Sergeant-at-Arms. To Ms. Ronyk's right, Marian Powell, the Legislative Librarian. And seated at the chair behind me is Gary Ward, director of broadcasting services. And also beside Gary, to his right is the Speaker's assistant, Margaret Kleisinger.

So having introduced those to you, Mr. Chairman, I would

propose — if it's acceptable to you — to outline some of the accomplishments and challenges that face the Legislative Assembly that we've been dealing with and will be, as well as to just make some general summary comments regarding the fiscal picture that you find under Vote 21.

In the category of what I would call accomplishments over the course of the past year, members will recognize that much has been happening in the Legislative Library, that the mobile shelving project has been completed and is installed. And I was over to see it a couple of weeks ago, and encourage all members to take a look at it particularly those of you who were involved in the Board of Internal Economy and I know much interested in the review of that. Marian tells me that what we have over there now is a shelving that would store five point . . .

A Member: — Five point six.

The Speaker: — Six. Five point six. We have 5.6 kilometres of books. Now I know that this is of great interest to you, members of the committee, and so while driving in from Moose Jaw the other day, that's equivalent to coming from the Trans-Canada Highway down and across the front of the Leg building and around the building one time, and all that while . . . all that while seeing nothing but books by the side of the car as you go along. When you stop and think about it, that is — I'm not sure why you'd want to do that but — but when you reflect on that it is an amazing amount of material that is collected in our Legislative Library, and of service not only to members but to the province as well.

The shelving project actually came in, I'm pleased to say, at lower than original estimates. And also members will be I think interested in knowing that with the staff relocation to the Walter Scott Building, that in my judgment, it is functioning well. And that's been necessitated by the restoration here and I think it has not impeded the service to members in any way.

Secondly, in the broadcast services areas, you'll recognize that we had significant improvements intersessionally taking care of the robotics, the necessary upgrade for the television; and that I'm pleased I've had no reports of glitches in the system and that each of you, when you stand up to give those pearls of wisdom, are being picked up as you should ought to be automatically. And the signal is being reported across the province, and I would add to more communities than ever before.

You will recognize that in the 1996 session — I said this last night at the meeting but let me repeat it — in the 1996 legislative session the broadcast of the legislative channel from the gavel to gavel, as we do it here in Saskatchewan, was carried in only eight communities in the province, and that in 1997, we moved to 38 communities which ensured that the largest community in every member's constituency had coverage. Last year we moved to 68 communities, and as we meet today, it's now 88 communities and there are another nine that Gary Ward is working on. And we have some hope we'll bring the number to 97 shortly.

So I'm very, very proud of the significant expansion and access to the proceedings of the Assembly available to our citizens through the work of broadcast services.

This has all been done at basically no extra cost due to the switch from fibre optic to satellite distribution and the renegotiated contract with SaskTel, and I want to acknowledge their co-operation and support for us in that.

In the area of security, the Board of Internal Economy has approved a new card access system which you will see happening under the direction of the Sergeant-at-Arms. This has been necessitated because our system we have is not Year 2000 compatible. And it would have meant that some version of . . . January 1 of the year 2000 you would be able to not get in the building except coming through the front door. But we will take care of this, and we'll have a new system installed in this year, before the end of the year, that will be up and running and will ensure the ongoing access to all the doors appropriately by members and others who work within the building.

I think one of the highlights of this past year is something that occurred in this building last week, and that's the first Saskatchewan Social Sciences Teachers' Institute on Parliamentary Democracy. As I think you are all aware, the teachers who came here — all of them social sciences teachers from grades 4 to 12, from I think about 23 constituencies across the province so they were from all over the province, and you have a pamphlet there that outlines very briefly — came, saw the parliamentary practice of parliamentary democracy and went away just feeling so much more informed and so much more enthusiastic about the institution and their motivation to teach it and teach it well to the young people in their classrooms. Also with the commitments to improve the system of teaching parliamentary democracy by contributing through their professional development to increasing resources or making presentations to other teachers.

I just want to report to you that they expressed to me over and over again the appreciation for the input of all of the members and in all of the meetings the frankness, the forthrightness, the high respect for their professionalism — and it was professional. And over and over again I was told that the more they came to understand the institution and the people within it, the more confidence that they had in the institution that it's working well.

And so I want to commend that to you and I will be recommending to your caucuses that we continue this initiative again in the year 2000, and so we will be connecting with your caucuses with that recommendation. Clearly this cannot work without the support of the caucuses. That's the absolute essential ingredient in order to make the thing fly. And I highly commend the members for your efforts in that regard.

Now some challenges that are upcoming. You will note that we have been increasing our parliamentary exchanges and visits. And in fact we're very pleased to have some example of that sitting in the room with us today with some of the legislators from North Dakota.

In my judgment this is an extremely important part of what happens in order to enable elected members to do their jobs effectively. As you've heard me say before, not a single one of us has ever graduated from politicians' school. We all got elected for reasons that had to do with individual motivations and with a wide variety of competencies and experiences.

And many of us came here without good knowledge or understanding of the processes and with many areas of issues of importance that weren't strengths of ours. And it is through the exchanges that is, in my view, the most effective way for elected members to engage in professional development to become better at doing what they were elected to do.

What has been happening, as we all know, is in addition to our relationships with other Commonwealth provinces in Canada and other Commonwealth nations who have similar practices and the same principles, that we have been increasing our contacts with the midwestern United States.

Flowing out of the Free Trade Agreement, I think, has been an increased awareness of the importance of understanding — not only of issues but also of the political milieu in which those issues are dealt with — that is good for our members when considering decisions and the interests of Saskatchewan.

It's also I think good for legislators in the midwest, from their perspectives, and with the north, increase in north-south emphasis. And the political dynamics, I think this is something all of us support. And in fact we have substantially increased our exchanges, and I predict we will continue to not only maintain but to increase those exchanges.

We've had the members go to Minnesota. This year, as you'll know, North Dakota is here right now. Montana has expressed some interest; we may develop an exchange there. We have the German exchanges with the state level of Germany going both ways: them coming here, and us joining with other Canadian provinces to go there.

And it is, as you will recognize, increasingly happening that in addition to all of these things, we will have contacts from other nations, particularly Commonwealth nations who are coming here as part of their review of procedures. Many of these things occur when the House is in session. And our circumstance to date has been this, is that the coordination of these exercises has been entirely through the Clerk's and the Speaker's office.

Now I think we're very fortunate that we have some very competent and highly energetic people who don't need a lot of sleep sometimes and who are very effective at dealing with these. But the reality is that while it will always be necessary for the Clerk's office and the Speaker's office and the Clerk and the Speaker to be involved in these things, that the logistics don't necessarily need to be involved in order to be done well.

And I think we've been fortunate in that we've not been tied up with logistics . . . or with complicated procedural matters before the House at a time when logistics to manage the exchanges are necessary. And I just simply want to alert to you that in my judgment I think what we need to do is to move to where some other jurisdictions are, and that's to assign at least a part of a position to the coordinator of parliamentary visits, handling both incoming and outgoing visits as a part of our ensuring that we are continuing this professional development, this important professional development, to assist our members to do their jobs.

In the broadcast services area we will continue to experience occasionally some ongoing sound problems in the House, in the

gallery, sometimes for *Hansard*. And what we are looking at in the future is moving to a digital audio system, taking advantage of advances in technology.

This will I think improve the quality of sound both within the room — which we hear a number of complaints about from visitors in the gallery, sometimes when they're on the floor — on television but also it will permit members who have their own Web sites then to be able to take advantage of this in your own . . . in establishing your own Web sites.

For example you could take clips of your remarks to put on your own home pages and your Web site so that that could be part of what members who are starting to use technology more and more in communication with your own constituents. So this a multifaceted, I think, advantage and something we're looking at doing.

On the restoration project, the next phase of the restoration will be to deal with necessities having to do with disability access. So you will see at the front, there will be at the front of the building wheelchair accessible access coming in there. And you're also going to see a substantial number of changes related to fire safety. If you stop and think about it and you look around and you say, where are the sprinklers around this place, the answer is nowhere. And so how do you feel about that?

And so I just simply point out to you and ask you to pass on to your caucus members that these fire safety lines and stuff, they don't just pop in the middle of the night and come out of the sky. So everybody has an absolute guarantee that some time in the next year you're going to be significantly inconvenienced as a result of this necessity to deal with fire safety.

Also as part of the restoration, as you know, the library — some of the library services — and *Hansard* have relocated to the Walter Scott Building. I was over to *Hansard* here to the Walter Scott Building a couple of weeks ago I guess it was, and I think the system is working well. People are functioning effectively and happily.

Also computer, in the wonderful world of computers and their use for members, the Board of Internal Economy has requested that we do undertake a major review of computer equipment and support for caucuses and constituency offices and constituency assistants, as well as the Legislative Assembly. We will be doing that and making a recommendation.

The board is also interested, as is the Communications Committee, in looking very, very carefully at the place for computers in the chambers themselves, at the desks of the members. And so I think this will be part of what we'll be looking at as we look to the future — the use of technology to meet the communication needs of the whole function of the institution. And we will certainly be looking for input. That will be a significant report. We'll have significant expenditures attached to it.

We are in this regard certainly not among the leaders in the nation. There are other provinces that are certainly ahead of us. That's the bad news.

The good news is we can take advantage of their experiences

and cost-effectiveness that flow out of that. And I'm optimistic that in the next year or two we'll be able to make some substantial decisions that will assist the members here in this building but also back home and with support for the people that are working in your offices to use that technology.

So in summary, I think it is fair to say that I have a positive outlook about this place and what we're doing and how we're going about it. The budget, I think, continues to serve the members well and in my judgment serves even more importantly the public well in terms of their access to what's going on in this place.

We will continue with our efforts to educate and expand the knowledge of the parliamentary system and appreciation for democracy through our broadcast coverages, through the Internet Web site that we have also — that not only the Assembly has but the caucuses have; you contribute to that — through the continued educational outreach of the Speaker's parliamentary outreach and parliamentary democracy.

I report that the Speaker has been to in excess of 50 constituencies, has made 214 school presentations to approximately 9,600 students in 156 different schools. And it would certainly be my recommendation that that should continue, as well as the annual Social Sciences Teachers Institute on Parliamentary Democracy.

And also our visitor services which I think are increasing in their effectiveness to be attractive and to be inviting to people, and with particular emphasis for the children of the province.

So if I can move your attention to the financial matters and just make some summary comment there.

Members of the Committee, you will notice that in summary the budget overall proposes an increase of \$520,000 which is, in percentage terms, 3.55 per cent. This includes the statutory as well. And that includes of course your constituency offices and your constituency staff, not just the Legislative Assembly.

I point out to you — maybe if I can anticipate some of your questions — that the budget represents an increase in personnel of zero. There is no increase in personnel in this budget. And there is no increase in the non-personnel side of the budget. In fact in the non-personnel side of the budget there is actually a decrease, a little decrease.

The changes in the budget occur largely because the Legislative Assembly, by legislation requirement, is doing what is happening parallel to within government related to personnel, having to do with the reclassifications, which is an ongoing process, as well as some budgetary catch-up that was necessary on cost of living agreements that have been put in place for the Public Service and needed to be caught up in this budget for the Legislative Assembly staff. There is some pay equity impact as well as the normal increments.

There is a significant decrease in the computer portion of the budget. Our computer portion of the budget is actually down \$100,000. But that's offset, in my judgment, by the fact that the board has asked for a major review of what we're doing and where we're going and I think wants to avoid making any

expenditures that we can right now until we've done a review. And then try to move forward in the . . . as cost effective a way as we possibly can. However, giving notice that that will be a significant expenditure by its nature if we're going to make progress in that area.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, I'll be happy to entertain any questions or comments you may have.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Speaker. I have a, sort of a diverse number of topics and I'm not sure if they have to be anyone's expense category, and in no way they relate to importance.

First of all I received some comments as well from the initiative on the social studies or social science teachers' initiative and they were extremely positive. And I found interestingly — from the individual that I knew personally and the comments they evolved through the program — initially the individual came here with a fair degree of cynicism, and left very enthusiastic for the understanding of the institution and its processes. And this was coming from an individual who is fairly knowledgeable about parliamentary democracy; teaches it. It wasn't, you know, a person that's just off the street.

So I certainly commend your office in this program. And my question is — there was a registration and a registration fee that was very reasonable — were there more applicants than you were able to accommodate? Or how are you going to deal with that in the future? I think it should be something not only continued, but expanded potentially.

The Speaker: — What we'll do is review that question among others. The steering committee had four teachers this year who served as a steering committee for it. Ultimate responsibility for decisions rested with the Speaker of course, and would continue that way.

Two of those steering committee members will retire and we'll select from teachers who are here, two who will come onto the steering committee for two years. So we'll have that rotation. And we'll do an evaluation of the institute to try and define any changes we'd like to see.

The number . . . the question about numbers will be part of that. And I will be interested in hearing what they have to say. There certainly were indications in their evaluations that there is a difference between when they met in a total group and when they broke into the subgroups meeting with caucuses simultaneously.

And I simply . . . it's too early to say. I had some nervousness about the figure 24, was our original target number. We did accept 24 and then one of the people who was accepted ended up having to cancel. The number of applications were actually just very minimally over that number, but it worked out coincidentally they were nicely spread across the province.

I anticipate that if we continue with it and that's my recommendation, based on the experience, that we'll find that we will have a substantial increase in the number of applications next year.

Alberta has started this year a similar program, structurally quite different, but with similar objectives. And they didn't get as many applicants actually as we did here. I think their's was also well received. And the way these things usually work is if they're well received and thought to be professionally useful, that the applications will increase. And we'll see where we go. I'm nervous going beyond the number of 24 just in terms of the logistics.

To me the key of the Social Sciences Teachers' Institute was that, as I said to them Sunday night, they are responsible for their own learning. We're going to provide an atmosphere here that will give you the ability to see how this place works from the inside and we'll provide people who are there. They're the actors, they'll give you information, but most of the time in every session will be questions from you. So you be in charge of your own learning — and these are professional teachers — and they did. And I think that's why the dynamic that you refer to took place.

Now can you do that with 36 or 48? I feel a little nervous. Was it effective with 24? I think we'll probably find that it was but we'll wait and see.

But the thing that I do want to maintain is that whatever number we see when we continue, if we do, is that the teachers who come here would in fact have the same characters as this group. They'd be spread from those who are teaching at the grade 4 level to the grade 12 level, and they would be urban and rural, and that they would be geographically spread throughout the province.

And that in fact was characteristic of this group, and I think it's extremely important that in selecting, when you have larger numbers, that you would do it with that intended. And in fact this . . . we did have a system set up that would have in my view ensured that happening, if it didn't happen all on its own.

Mr. Gantefer: — I would like to turn to the broadcast service in terms of the reach-out to the communities. I understand now that the system is basically available to communities that have cable systems.

One of the things that I see in my constituency — and not just in the rural components of the constituency but even in the towns that have cable — is an absolute outbreak of the small digital satellites. They are certainly not only on the farms but they are also in the towns and cities. And I wondered, is there any possibility or any thinking forward to being able to look at that media — Starchoice, First Choice, whatever the systems are — is there any looking forward to the possibility of delivering the system over in that media?

The Speaker: — The answer to your question is that we have been anticipating this. There is one cable company that is . . . or one television that is not the wire, that is wireless now, with whom we have been speaking. And we do anticipate that into the future that . . . And we are certainly open to discussing with and negotiating delivery of the signal through other wireless systems.

So this is something that we intend to work with because ultimately our goal is this: our ultimate goal is to be as

accessible in the homes of the people of the province to the highest extent that the technology will permit us to do.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you. And when you talk about wireless, I'm thinking that it would be the direct broadcast digital as opposed to or in addition to the image wireless, which is a different technology. I'm assuming you're talking about the satellite system as well.

The Speaker: — That's correct.

Mr. Gantefer: — Okay. Thank you.

In the computer system . . . And it sort of goes to another topic and it sort of overlaps and the issue is direction first of all for new members. At some time within, you know, the reasonable future, we're going to have a general provincial election and it is absolutely true that there will be some new members.

One of the things that in reflection, looking back to each to us when we were first elected — I'm sure the experience was the same — when you're a new member, the day after the election you're ready to go 110 miles an hour and you're not quite sure in what direction or where, but your engine is revving and you're ready to go.

And one of the most frustrating things is sort of then the advice that, hurry up and wait. And that comes, you know, from caucuses; it comes from experienced members who would rather have a two-week holiday and put their feet up for a while than sort of running at 110 miles an hour.

And I certainly recall and appreciated very much the orientation programs that the Assembly office provided for new members. In reflecting on it, I think perhaps it might have been something that we might have done sooner after the election because there was that drag of frustration or wondering what's going on.

So the question a bit is, are you planning . . . I'm sure you're planning to do orientation, but suggest that the calendar for that would be looked at as soon as reasonably possible after the election.

And a part of that would be then is some sense about where the Assembly's going with technology, and it leads to the computer thing. I know in some of our members' cases — and mine in particular — I was perhaps a little more computer literate than others so I wanted to get something going right away. But I couldn't find what was going to be sort of requirements of compatibility where everything was going and all those sorts of issues, so you just sort of had to shoot in the dark.

And with this major review of computers, you know, I guess that the two sort of link together. But first of all let's talk about the orientation process, in terms of when you're going to have it and also is there a thought of perhaps using experienced members as part of that because there is sometimes anecdotal information that might be useful?

The Speaker: — On the matter of orientation, Mr. Gantefer, I wasn't part of the organizing of the orientation last time but am advised that the orientation that was done by the Legislative Assembly was within 10 days. And it would certainly, and I can

pledge to you as Speaker now, be my intention that as soon as expediently possible — which is a little difficult to define not knowing what dates are but the 10 days seems to be a reasonable thing — that we would want to be providing an orientation to members.

There has been some discussion — and on this point I welcome input from members — about the value of expanding it from what you would have received, which was your basic kind of administrative orientation, to something that included more of the practical, political survival skills, I guess we might say. But including . . . not including advice on partisan, the partisan . . . you know, partisan activities — that's clearly for caucuses to do. But for some of those things having to do with becoming attentive to these new, complex demands on your time and your families and those sorts of the very, very real and practical aspects of becoming a member of the Legislative Assembly.

And I can certainly commit to you that I am very open to perhaps expanding to a two-day orientation. Maybe you can do that in such a way that one day is the practical administrative, nuts and bolts, what you need to know in order to get your funds and know what the rules are and all that kind of stuff; and maybe an optional second day or something. That might be something we can look at.

But I would certainly welcome the comments of members and particularly now because we have a good number of members who are finishing their first terms. Your orientation — you're one of them — is fresh in your mind and any practical advice you'd like to offer would be received with gratitude actually.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think it would be useful. There's sort of two things happen. One is that you're very enthusiastic, anxious to happen, and then all of a sudden there is just all of this information. I mean I think many of us after four years are still . . . you know I mean we get calls back from the office saying, no you can't do this, it's got to do . . . you know, so for a new member it just seems to be quite overwhelming.

In addition to that there are those kind of practical suggestions or advice that can be given, things like where do you . . . how do you go about looking for support staff in your office or how do you go about hiring or suggestions at least? Ultimately I guess it's the member's responsibility, but you know, does it make sense to locate two offices under what circumstances? How would that be covered under the funding costs? And all of those sorts of issues, I think, that get a little bit beyond just the nuts and bolts of the financial affairs — it would be useful to be talked about.

The other thing that comes into that is this whole question of computerization because an important expenditure is your technology. And because, as I understand it, members that leave or retire have access to be able to really sort of have an option to purchase their technology, it's highly likely that new members will likely not have much that they inherit or they can use so that they're faced with very early on the reality of having to look at the technology, computers particularly.

And I appreciate the fact that the Board of Internal Economy has directed the Assembly to sort of do an evaluation of where

we're going and a lot of the issues surrounding that. I'm wondering if there's a timeline on that? Because one of the, you know, the decisions that individual new members are going to make are very much going to be impacted by some of the decisions that are made in terms of this review of technology in Assembly and through caucuses, etc. Do you have a timeline on when this report is going to come forward or recommendations are going to come forward? Is it a long way down the line?

The Speaker: — The answer is yes and no, and you may want a little expansion on that.

Mr. Gantefer: — Sounds like an answer to question period.

The Speaker: — I've always wanted to give one of those. But addressing the spirit of the question as you're asking it, because that's something that when the board gave this direction in December I welcomed the direction of the board. And that was the very first thought that went through my mind. Boy, it would sure be good to have this done in time for a system and a process to be in place for newly elected members who are establishing their offices to get their equipment up and running, that is compatible right from the word go. And I was very enthusiastic about this notion for a while until I concluded that it's just not going to happen in time for that.

We don't have a clear timeline in terms of a precise month at this stage. And I have come to accept that the practical reality is that for newly elected members, basically their advice available in terms of technology will be essentially the same as it was for your colleagues who were first . . . you and your colleagues who were first elected in 1995.

We will be certainly willing to give, you know, the best practical answers that we can in that regard as is always the case. But in terms of the compatibility question . . . because ultimately I think what we want to see is the equipment in members' constituency offices and the equipment in the caucus offices and the equipment in the Legislative Assembly, is all compatible, so that we have the most cost-effective and effective means of movement of information.

So that will be an objective and I'm simply advised that in order to do the necessary in-depth review, to make a detailed recommendation, it's just not . . . to try and make that decision in advance of an election, and newly elected members wanting to get established, would quite frequently . . . or has great potential for us to make some serious errors in our decision making.

I do point out to members that the board did approve the continuation of directive 24. So financially in order to assist with this initial purchase of necessary office equipment, computer being part of that, and under the regulations that now exist, members do inherit furnishings and equipment of the outgoing . . . or the previous member for that constituency. So the financial demands placed on a newly elected member to try and manage all of this stuff I think has become substantially improved, thank God.

We have all . . . I think every one of us has gone through the experience of trying to make, after the euphoria of an election victory and now all of this heightened awareness of the political

responsibilities, the necessity of establishing an operational constituency office with staff and equipment and so on, which at that time doesn't necessarily feel like the highest of priorities, quite frankly, but over the long term becomes very significant for all of us.

And I think with the board's direction, we have made significant progress — we really have. I look forward to the report of this review in the committee — or sorry, to the board — on computers. I think that will assist us greatly. But its real value will be for new members . . . will be for the new members of the twenty-fifth legislature not the twenty-fourth legislature, I'm afraid.

But I do want to repeat that any input that veteran members would want to make on the matter of computers or orientation is much appreciated. Our desire is to do nothing but to be as practically useful as we possibly can.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you. Turning to the professional development and the exchanges and things of that nature, where does the budget for that originate out of?

The Speaker: — It originates through the Board of Internal Economy to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. And so it would be . . . You will find it in . . . where are we here . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Okay. You will find it in (LG03), Legislative Assembly Services, Transfers for Public Services. It's within that number.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you. I certainly agree. And you know, today and yesterday with the visit of the legislators from North Dakota, I just find it every time I have the opportunity to participate in those kinds of discussions, it's just so enriching to ourselves as members and our ability to function and to build an objectivity about the institution and our role as members — it's so important.

I guess my feeling is, is that if it would be possible, that the program actually be expanded, that more members would be able to partake more often, if you like, in these exchanges. I know the system allows for one or two occasions through a term of office, and they're most welcome, but I do think that more opportunities would be better than fewer.

And so I would certainly be one individual who would encourage review of that whole program with a view of perhaps increasing accessibility for more members perhaps more often. Not necessarily all over the world or whatever, but certainly in opportunities Canadian, North American wide, to participate more often. And I think it's just an excellent thing.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend . . . I'm sorry . . .

The Speaker: — I'd like to reinforce your point if I may. As I said earlier, we sent members to Minnesota just a couple of weeks ago. We've got legislators from North Dakota here now.

We won't be sending anybody to North Dakota this year obviously; their House is not in session. But in about 35 minutes I'll be meeting with the Lieutenant Governor and the Speaker from North Dakota to talk about plans for Year 2000

and beyond, exchanging both ways. Potential for some interest with Montana, and we will have the continuing exchange we started last year with the Midwestern States Legislative Conference, doing the shadowing kind of visit we're doing now.

And sometimes members, I think, are inclined to think that the value of these things is that you gain an insight into issues, which is good, and into procedural matters that you might be able to bring back home and apply, which is also good.

But I would say that in addition to that and maybe at the end of the day, one of the most important parts of that is by going and looking for example with the Midwestern legislators at some practices of democracy that are substantially different from our own. You can't do that without reflecting on how we do it back home.

And it is by seeing how others do it differently that we also learn and sometimes, quite frankly, come to more deeply appreciate the wisdom of doing things the way that we do them, reflecting the values and the priorities of our province or our nation or our people. So I can concur very, very strongly with the points you're making Mr. Gantefer.

Mr. Gantefer: — I think, if I may, an additional thing that has potential benefit particularly with jurisdictions that neighbour us or have a great deal of interaction with us is that I would rather have us spend some money on sending our legislators back and forth on a more regular basis than trying to deal with blockades and confrontations.

And I think a part of the exercise is actually beginning to know and understand these colleagues in other jurisdictions on a personal level that very often it gives you the opportunity to pick up the phone early and to avoid the kinds of negative things that distort what has been an ongoing, incredible relationship. And I think that that also has a positive benefit.

And finally then, Mr. Speaker, I would like to, I think, speaking not only on my colleagues in the official opposition but I think all of us in the Assembly to express appreciation to your staff in terms of the treatment and respect and professionalism that your staff extends to all members in their dealings here in the Assembly, but also in their roles as members out in our constituency offices as support to our constituency assistants in interpretation of expenses and bills.

I think the proactive nature and the helpful nature that has been extended is going to go a tremendous long way to see that into the future there are not errors and mistakes made that are not good for anyone; that proactively fixing things that are mistaken are much better than afterwards using a process that is not good for any of us. So thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Gantefer. Mr. Jess?

Mr. Jess: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Speaker, to use one of your approaches, Mr. Speaker, I will attempt to be pithy.

While this report was very interesting, I was wondering if in the future, Mr. Chairman, when dealing with this subject, we should perhaps consider time allocation.

The Chair: — I would like to remind the member that when we deal with this in Board of Internal Economy, we deal with it over a two-day basis in a very detailed and refined manner . . .

Mr. Jess: — You're very serious, Mr. Speaker . . . or Mr. Chairman.

What I really wanted to do was to compliment Mr. Speaker and certainly his staff on the efforts to organize the exchange visits, the program involving the Social Sciences Teachers Institute, and the one that the rural members appreciate in particular is the outreach program to the schools.

And that is extremely important. I believe that the very existence of the democratic process is in danger if an effort is not made to enhance the public, or perhaps I more accurately should say the media-moulded image of the institution of government as a whole and politicians in general.

I believe that you, Mr. Speaker, and certainly including your staff have made great progress in this area, and I just want to encourage you to continue and to emphasize that I think I can speak for most of the — perhaps all — of the MLAs in the House that we appreciate what you've done very much. Keep up the good work.

The Speaker: — Thank you very much.

Mr. Belanger: — Yes, I've just got a couple of comments very quickly. Are we allowed to hand out compliments here?

The Speaker: — Sure, go ahead.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay, if you insist. I just wanted to . . . one of the points that I raised and it's been a point for many months here is that I think, you know, as a new MLA coming into the Assembly some of the immediate challenges I had was really getting to know the city and getting to know what services were available and to know where I can do certain things, and I think a small package was just basically being given to . . . some of the new members would be of some assistance, you know, in terms of what to do with entertainment and, you know, what services were available in the immediate area and what to watch out for, speciality events you know within the city, if that could be . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, yes.

You know, and that would really . . . Like it took me a number of months to find out where the Centre Of The Arts was, you know. Just because some people, they get so wrapped up in their jobs here and they're on the road quite a bit and they're new to the city. It was easy for me because I'm used to the city, but many other people may not be so familiar if there's somebody else that does replace me eventually.

I think the other thing that's very important for me anyway is to stay fit. And I think an exercise room is something that is necessary in this building, whether we do it through membership, which I think is the only way we could do it, and that there be showers available as well.

Because in this job you come here at 8 o'clock in the morning and many times they don't leave till 9, 10 o'clock at night. And you don't . . . you barely have time to eat. Can you imagine the

time you have to exercise?

So as a result, it's really a healthy suggestion on my part that we put some kind of exercise room with showers in here somewhere to try and make sure that our members at least have the option of staying fit. And I do have a match after the Assembly is wrapped up, so I got to try and get in shape here as quickly as I can.

What I also want to point out that during my tenure as the MLA the past four years we have been travelling extensively. My home is eight hours away from my driveway to here. And we've travelled on 185s, we've travelled on twin engines, we've even travelled on boats to see constituents. Our travel is very, very extensive.

And I want to . . . about the only thing that I haven't travelled on so far has been a wild rice harvester to get certain places. But I want to commend your staff for being very, very fair with me. They've been responding very quickly to some of the questions I have and certainly treated me very well.

And the only suggestion I have in terms of some of your fine work that you've been doing as a Speaker is the exercise room that is something that should be looked at. I'm really serious about that because you sit at meetings and you eat restaurant food. You don't eat well, you don't get exercise — that certainly will add up over a four-year period.

In terms of the staff, everything from the library services to media services to the restaurant or the cafeteria downstairs and the ladies in your office, and certainly financial services, I believe honestly that I am just totally impressed with the level of professionalism and certainly the dedication to service. I think your staff sets the standards.

I've been involved with many organizations, and everywhere you go, they treat you well. They're very courteous. And that's something that's very, very appreciated by myself, and as Mr. Gantefoer said, others as well. So I would, I would certainly commend them all for their fine work.

I do know that the gentlemen up front could use some help in the humour department because their wit isn't that strong — I'm just kidding . . . (inaudible) . . . I was very pleased to hear one of the commissionaires speak Cree to me. I didn't realize that he did speak Cree and that also made me feel at home. When you walk in and the guy bursts out a sentence in Cree and it really made me feel that you're part of this building. So I would also, you know, want to commend Pat and his staff.

So in closing, that's about all I have to say. I don't really have any much more, Mr. Chairman, but just to encourage the Speaker to continue his fine work. I know that people back home are really happy to see their MLA get up and speak. Not as much now, but certainly in the first few years that I was involved. And that's a direct tribute to some of your efforts. So thank you very much.

The Speaker: — Thank you for your comments. I appreciate your suggestion. You're certainly not alone as members of the Legislative Assembly. Many have expressed a desire to see some means of getting some healthy exercise around the place

in a way that doesn't run against public approval. And that's always . . . we understand that. That's the challenge that the members of the legislature I think face, and I think face collectively. And we'll ensure that your concern gets passed along.

And I encourage all hon. members who share this view for some . . . I think you're saying not publicly funded, but reasonable means to take care of personal health while working long hours under high stress in this building. I think it's a healthy concept, and one that I personally support, and encourage hon. members to continue to work together to encourage that message.

As for Mr. Gantefer's and your comments about the satisfaction that you have in the performance of services by employees of the Legislative Assembly, we will ensure that those are properly passed on to the people who work in the building here. I do say to you that that means a great deal to them. It is important to them that you consider yourselves to be well served.

Having had the opportunity to see legislative services across the nation, I would say Saskatchewan would quite happily stack ours up against anybody's any time. We have a very high calibre of professional commitment and personal courtesy that is characteristic of it and I'm very proud of that. And I appreciate your observations and your acknowledgement of that.

The Chair: — Thank you, members. Mr. Speaker, before we go on to the vote I would certainly like to express my appreciation to the staff of the Legislative Assembly. I've certainly received I think very professional care in terms of what goes on, and very good advice in terms on how to handle things. And I certainly appreciate that at any time. And from all services, be it from the front door, to the tour guides, to the library, to financial services, and everything in between, I think it's very commendable, the professionalism we have with our people in this building.

So with that I will move on to the vote, page 122 in the *Estimates*, (LG01) the amount of \$1,977,000. Do I have agreement?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Accommodation and central services: \$107,000 — (LG02) I should say.

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — (LG03): \$3,171,000.

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — (LG04) and I bring to the attention of (LG04), (LG05), and (LG06) that these will not show up in . . . In (LG04) only a portion of this will show up in the vote. The rest of it is statutory. (LG05) will be statutory and (LG06) will be statutory. Okay, (LG04): \$97,000.

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — (LG05): \$9,098,000.

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — And caucus operations (LG06): \$1,005,000.

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: —

Be it resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, the year 2000 the following sum:

For the Legislative Assembly..... \$5,308,000

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. Moving on to supplements. Be it resolved . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh I'm sorry, yes. On page 7 of *Supplementary Estimates* I bring to your attention vote 21 under legislation (LG03) which deals with the Legislative Assembly: 170,000; the Legislative Library: 250,000; Legislative Counsel and Law Clerk: 120,000. Do I have agreement for (LG03)?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — (LG04) committees of the Legislative Assembly, committee support services: 188,000. Do I have agreement? Carried.

Then moving on to the resolution, for supplement to *Estimates*:

Be it resolved that it be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 1999 the following sum:

For the Legislative Assembly..... \$728,000

Thank you.

We have some motions that we need to deal with and I will be asking a member to move the motion.

The Standing Committee on Estimates for the legislative branch of the government General Revenue Fund. Resolution No. 1:

Resolved that towards making good the supply granted to Her Majesty on accounts of certain charges and expenses of public service for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2000 the sum of \$11,169,000 to be granted out of the General Revenue Fund.

Do I have a mover? Mr. Johnson. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Now going to the *Supplementary Estimates*, a similar motion.

The Standing Committee on Estimates for the legislative branch of the government General Revenue Fund:

Be it resolved that towards making good the supply granted to Her Majesty in the accounts of certain charges

and expenses of public service for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1999 the sum of \$775,000 to be granted out of the General Revenue Fund.

Do I have a mover? Mr. Jess. All those in favour? Those opposed? I declare the motion carried. We now move on to the motion regarding the presentation of the report to the House regarding this.

The Speaker: — Mr. Chairman, can I ask that before the motion if I can just say thank you to the committee for your scrutiny as well as your support.

The Chair: — I will require a motion and a seconder from the committee. Oh I don't need a seconder, sorry:

That this committee recommend upon the concurrence in the committee's report, the sums as reported and approved shall be included in the Appropriation Bill for consideration by the Legislative Assembly.

And the said report, I think Greg is going to pass out right now.

Mr. Belanger: — I'll move that, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: — The report is simply outlining the numbers that we've approved today. Again, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

You've had a chance to see the report. All those in favour? Those opposed?

I would now like to request a motion by which the said report can be adopted and presented to the Legislative Assembly.

Do I have a mover? Mr. Jess. Do I have a seconder? Mr. Gantefoer. All those in favour? Those opposed?

I think that concludes our work.

I want to thank all members for their diligence today, and we completed our task before the allotted hour. And again thank you to all members today for their participation.

Motion to adjourn?

A Member: — So moved.

The Chair: — Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 11:15 a.m.