



Standing Committee on Estimates

Hansard Verbatim Report

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Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

Twenty-fourth Legislature

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES
2000**

Graham Addley, Chair
Saskatoon Sutherland

Donna Harpauer, Vice-Chair
Watrous

Ron Harper
Regina Northeast

Carolyn Jones
Saskatoon Meewasin

Ken Krawetz
Canora-Pelly

Peter Prebble
Saskatoon Greystone

Milton Wakefield
Lloydminster

Daryl Wiberg
Saskatchewan Rivers

Kevin Yates
Regina Dewdney

The committee met at 8:30 a.m.

Mr. Putz: — Good morning, everybody. If I could call the meeting to order.

It's my duty as Clerk to this committee after the commencement of a new legislature to preside over the election of a Chair. And the process for that is that I'll call for nominations, a motion then to close nominations, then actually a formal motion to appoint the member of the committee as Chair. Then we'll repeat that process for the Vice-Chair — a nomination and election as well.

So at this time I'd like to ask the committee if there are any nominations for the position of Chair.

Mr. Yates: — I move that . . . I nominate Graham Addley.

Mr. Putz: — Mr. Yates has nominated Mr. Addley, position of Chair. Any further nominations? With that, could I have a motion that nominations close?

Mr. Krawetz: — I so move.

Mr. Putz: — Mr. Krawetz. All those in favour of the motion? All those opposed? I declare the motion carried.

And with that then, as I mentioned, we have a formal motion that we need to pass, and the motion is:

That Mr. Graham Addley be elected to preside as Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates.

If I could have somebody to move that, please. Mr. Yates.

It has been moved by Mr. Yates:

That Mr. Graham Addley be elected to preside as Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates.

All those in favour of the motion? All those opposed? I declare the motion carried and invite Mr. Addley to take the Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. Okay, we now have the election of Vice-Chair.

Mr. Wiberg: — I'd like to nominate Donna Harpauer.

The Chair: — Any other further nominations? Do we have a motion to cease?

Ms. Jones: — I move nominations cease.

The Chair: — All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Okay, we have a motion:

That Donna Harpauer be elected to preside as Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates.

Moved by Daryl Wiberg. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried. Congratulations.

Okay, the committee's orders of reference was agreed to by the Legislative Assembly on May 12, and I'll read it as follows:

That the Estimates for the Legislative Assembly (Vote 21); the Provincial Auditor (Vote 28); the Chief Electoral Officer (Vote 34); the Information and Privacy Commissioner (Vote 55); the Ombudsman and Children's Advocate (Vote 56); the Conflict of Interest Commissioner (Vote 57); as well as Supplementary Estimates for the Legislative Assembly (Vote 21) be withdrawn from the committee.

That's our terms of reference. I'd like to introduce Mr. Ron Osika, our Speaker, to the committee, and he can introduce the issues concerning Provincial Auditor, being vote 28 on page 131 of the main *Estimates* book.

So, Mr. Osika, you wanted to introduce your officials.

**General Revenue Fund
Provincial Auditor
Vote 28**

The Speaker: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee. It's my opportunity at this point in time to, just for the record, indicate that Mr. Wayne Strelhoff, our Provincial Auditor, had resigned and in his place, I'm very pleased to introduce to you here today, Mr. Fred Wendel, who is the Acting Provincial Auditor.

And Mr. Wendel, join me here if you would please. And I'll ask Mr. Wendel to introduce the members of his staff that are good enough to be here today to respond to questions with respect to our budget this morning.

Mr. Wendel: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and committee. With me today I have Brian Atkinson who is an executive director with our office. He's taking over my duties as the assistant provincial auditor. I'll ask Brian to join me up here now.

And I have Angèle Borys over there. She is our principal support services, looks after our human resources and training. Heather Tomlin, next to Angèle, she's the assistant to the manager of administration. And Sandy Walker, the manager of administration.

Mr. Chair, I just have a brief presentation to make about our business plan, and then I'll open it up to questions to the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you this morning and present our business plan. We've provided you the business and financial plan for the year ended March 31, 2001. I believe the Clerk will have passed that out to you. We presented this plan to the Board of Internal Economy on February 22, 2000. The Board recommended the appropriation we had requested and the one you are considering today in the *Estimates*.

We have extra copies of the plan if you need one. That's this business and financial plan. If you need a copy, Sandy and Heather have one.

The board has supported our plans for the last five years and this committee has supported our plans for the last four years.

We also table an annual report on operations — look's like this — to show what we actually did compared to what we had planned to do in these previous plans. We tabled this annual report for the year ended March 31, '99 in June '99 — that's the most recent one. We again have copies of this with us if you'd like one today for your questions.

We plan to table our annual report on operations for the year ended March 31, 2000 in June 2000. We should have that in the next two or three weeks.

Each year we try to improve these plans and the contents in them as we expect others to do the same.

The plan and the annual report are two key elements of a sound public accountability relationship. And in appendix III to this booklet is what we describe as a sound public accountability relationship, which is agreed-upon plans that are reliable and agreed-upon annual report that's reliable.

The business and financial plan sets out our operating plan, which is the results that we plan to achieve — that is our goals and objectives — and how we plan to achieve those results, which is our strategies and action plans. The business plan also sets out our financial plan to achieve the results.

In this plan, again, we have four parts; the first part of the plan explains what we do and why, as well as our financial proposal for this year, next year, and for the past three years. We also discuss the forces and trends that affect our work and our risk to achieving our objectives and how we manage those risks.

In this part we also talk about our employees. Then all the skills and abilities of our employees determine how well we can serve the Assembly. We have at any time about 60 people organized into about five groups. There's 30 to 35 of our employees are professional accountants; 15 to 20 are training to become professional accountants. Our employees on average are about 35 years old — I bring the average up a little bit. We have an equal number of men and women, usually; sometimes a few more men, sometimes a few more women.

We plan for about six people to leave the office each year and recruit at the universities for new graduates to train as professional accountants. Over my more than 25 years with the office, I've received a lot of job satisfaction bringing young people in and training them, watching them grow and become seasoned professionals to go out and work in business and government and meet those challenges.

Angèle Borys is responsible for our training and recruiting. Our training program has been very successful for many years. In December 1999, four of our six employees that wrote the uniform final examinations passed. And that percentage is a little better than the provincial pass rate. We're quite happy with that pass rate.

The second part of the business plan . . . As I said, there were four parts. In this part we provide detailed financial information and detailed work plans for several years. In this part we also

include a report from the auditor that audits our office. This report will provide you, members of the Legislative Assembly, with assurance that our financial plan that's in here, and what we're asking for money, is reasonable to carry out the operating plan that we are trying to achieve here, the result we're trying to achieve. So you have that assurance from our auditor.

The third part of this plan is in appendix II. In this part we provide answers to questions previously posed by members of this committee and the Board of Internal Economy. And these are good questions and they should be asked of every organization to help you assess what organizations are doing and what they are trying to achieve and how they're managing their operations.

The fourth part of the plan is in appendix IV, and this part responds to requests by the Board of Internal Economy to suggest how the board could obtain independent advice to assess our requests for resources. The auditor's report in appendix I that I just mentioned, responds to the need for independent advice on the financial part of our plan.

We also suggest to the board that it seek advice about our operating plan from the Public Accounts Committee. That committee's mandates states it works closely with the Provincial Auditor to achieve maximum accountability to government to the Assembly. The Public Accounts Committee could advise the board if we are delivering the products and services that the committee needs to achieve its objectives. The appendix also explains the elements of a sound public accountability relationship.

I'll just kind of wrap up. On pages 5, 6, and 7 of the plan, it's kind of a summary there of our request for resources. We request an appropriation of 4.698 million for the year ended March 31, 2001. This request is \$256,000 more than last year, or about 6 per cent. We face cost pressures totalling \$420,000. We plan to absorb \$165,000 of those increases.

We explain on pages 5 and 6 the cost pressures for increased salaries and for more work for our office caused by the creation of new government agencies, the quality of the government assistance and practices and making our work more timely. The government wants to complete its summary financial statements earlier this year and we're trying to work hard to help them do that.

We continue to try to do more work for fewer employees by using better ways to carry out our work. For example, for the year ended March 31, '97, we had 63 employees; for 2001 we are forecasting we will need 59 employees. During this same period, the government created several new organizations that increased our workload by nearly three employees.

This ends my presentation. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Wendel, you mentioned appendix number IV.

Mr. Wendel: — Yes.

Mr. Wakefield: — I don't see one in this.

Mr. Wendel: — Oh, I . . . It's three, I'm sorry. It's three. Appendix III is the . . .

Mr. Wakefield: — Appendix III?

Mr. Wendel: — Yes, I'm sorry. I think I was drafting this when I was writing our *Spring Report* too, and I . . .

The Chair: — Questions?

Mr. Wakefield: — I have another one, if I could, Mr. Chair. Mr. Wendel, you talked about reducing the number of employees from 63 to 59, but an increased workload. And you said that through efficiencies and so on, you were able to probably be able to do the work — you said you would be able to do the work — and yet there's an increasing sophistication of . . . no, an increasing workload, you said as well. Can you tell us again how you're going to square all those?

Mr. Wendel: — Some of the things we've done is we've moved to a cyclical approach to the district health boards. We were at each district health board each year. As the government's improved its management systems and practices we find we can get the same coverage by going to the smaller ones on a cyclical basis, making sure we get to the large ones every year. And we were able to contract our work that way.

Other ones are some marketing boards. We've managed to be able to do our work through the Department of Agriculture as opposed to going directly to some of these marketing boards, and that we are also still able to provide you with the information you need by doing that.

And just in our own internal systems how we actually carry out our detailed audit work out in the field, we find . . . look for new ways to do things each year just to improve what we do.

Mr. Wakefield: — And just a supplementary. Are you confident using that cyclic approach and the new approach through, for instance, Department of Agriculture, you have confidence that you are able to get the materials you need and spend enough time?

Mr. Wendel: — Yes, Mr. Chair, I think we're, we're there. We're still . . . It's new for us. I think the cyclical approach is in . . . going into its third year.

One of the other things we did when we moved to the cyclical approach with the district health boards is we've created an advisory committee with some members from the district health boards, the auditors of the district health boards, and the Department of Health to make sure we focused . . . like to get some advise on where we should focus our work when we want to do other work in those areas.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Fred, the comments that you make around salary increases for the year, and I note that your comment is that the government responded to market pressure. Could you tell me what's been happening in the area of professional auditors and why we see the, you know, salary increases of 5 to 12 per cent?

Mr. Wendel: — There is a bit of discussion on that on page 49;

not a lot but some. But it's been difficult because of the economy. It's been fairly strong and there are a lot of jobs for professional accountants now. And it's difficult to hang onto people.

There's also a lot more jobs for people wanting to become professional accountants like students that want to train. And it's had an impact on raising the opening salaries to respond to market. So does that answer your question?

Mr. Krawetz: — Well, partly. I understand now obviously the pressures that you're seeing, but in terms of actually negotiating salary increases do you do that collectively with the entire group that you've indicated here, your 59? Or are you doing that on an individual basis? Is there a grid system in place? How are we moving from 1999 to 2000 and then are we expecting similar kinds of pressures for 2001?

Mr. Wendel: — We do have a . . . not a classification system. Each person in the office has a personal services contract with the Provincial Auditor. We're not . . . don't have an official classification system, if you will. Like each person has a personal services contract. We have levels of positions. We have what we call auditors, managers, principals, executive directors, okay, and again the Provincial Auditor and myself.

The salaries were, or are tied, or were tied to positions in a classified service back in '83. Okay like 1983 . . . just to give you some history; 1983 the office became a separate employer. And the positions before that were classified in the public service. So we've tried to keep that same relationship for the people that are in the office. Like we tried to keep that linkage to the jobs they had and what those jobs are paid.

So an audit supervisor, we try and link to an audit supervisor in the public service. It might be a tax audit supervisor or something, or over in Department of Finance, a financial analyst. They had a classification level. And we tried to link closely to that for a market for the public sector.

Our market for entry level positions though is the private sector that we compete with. And we were under pressure back in the '80s, early '80s, to reduce our starting salaries because we paid a great deal more than the other people that trained chartered accountants. So we've responded to that. So our entry level salaries are the marketplace with the other firms that train chartered accountants. So we have that.

And then once they get into our office, then their market is something else. Their market then is the public sector. You know, they can move into a department or a Crown corporation. So we try and follow what they're paying for their new graduates, new CAs (chartered accountant), new CMAs (certified management accountant). And then that's how we deal with the market.

Now we're not a leader in salaries. We follow. Like if the government announces a general salary increase, we would follow that. We don't lead in that.

Mr. Krawetz: — Besides the salary adjustment, you indicate an economic adjustment of 2 per cent in each of two years. Could you explain what . . .

Mr. Wendel: — The government announces . . . passes an order in council every few years granting economic adjustments to its employees for inflation increases, if you like. They call them COLAs, cost of living allowances or something. And that's one of the ones we're saying we don't lead in that. If the government announces a general salary increase to all of its employees, okay, we would give the same increase to our employees just to retain that relationship that we have.

So the announced ones are listed on the bottom of page 49. These are the ones that have been granted over the last 10 years. The most recent one is due on July 1, 2000. Now for the year ended July 1, '99, we didn't provide the full 2 per cent, okay. We weren't able to finance that. We may provide the rest of it this year. We haven't decided yet. We gave 1 per cent as opposed to 2, and some of our senior officials didn't get any.

Mr. Krawetz: — The other point that you make in your funding request centres around additional work responsibilities and new organizations that you are now required to audit. I note on page 47 the creation of a number of new organizations. A couple intrigue me. Could you tell us where the Saskatchewan Land Information Services Corporation is at and do you expect the full year of audit?

And then the other one is the Saskatchewan snowmobile fund. My understanding that was going to be worked within SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance), and now I see the requirement for the Provincial Auditor to audit those books separate. Could you explain those two and what's going to be happening in the fiscal year for each of those organizations?

Mr. Wendel: — Well what we're planning to do at the Saskatchewan Land Information Services Corporation would be what we do on all organizations, we'll be auditing their financial statements to make sure they're reliable, the ones that are presented to the Assembly for whatever their first year-end is.

Again, just a little history before we move on. When we prepare these business plans, this would be done in September or October, a while back, and we would say, well what do we know about the Saskatchewan Land Information Services Corporation at this time. Well not a lot, okay, other than we know there's going to be one and it's near there. They've been doing a lot of work in Justice. There's been some work going on in CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan), but there's still a lot of things that are up in the air.

So we say, well how big might it be? It might be this big, okay? And that's our best guess. What we think it will take in terms of the \$28,000 would be, our best guess what it would take in terms of hours to do a first-year audit on one of these organizations, it usually takes a long time the first year, to try and get everything set up, figure out what's going on. It just takes a lot longer the first year.

So what we'd be doing then when we do this plan is to say, well this is the best guess, what we think is going to happen. This will be refined next year as this thing begins operations and, you know, staffing issues are all settled. I understand there's some concerns in there, like how the staff's going to move over. It's our best guess at this time.

But what we're planning to do in this job, back to that, is report on the financial statements, letting you know that the financial statements are reliable, report on their internal controls to know that they've safeguarded the control of their assets that they've got there, and to report on their compliance with legislative authorities. So that would be the standard things.

We'll also be wanting to look at their project management principles, begin work on that, like how well they're managing this project.

So that's what's encompassed in what we're planning to do there. But again it's just . . . it's up in the air. Like it could be more money than that; it could be a little less.

Mr. Krawetz: — If you are going to do a complete full year, is that still a question?

Mr. Wendel: — Well even if it's only three or four months, it's nearly the same amount of work — well not quite, but nearly the same amount. You still have to go through all the risks, you still have to examine enough evidence to support your opinion on the financial statements. When it's a new organization, sometimes the controls aren't quite as good as they might be, at which point we have to do extra work, because as they grow and fix things.

So if controls aren't as good as they should be, we do more work. Like we have to then go in and make sure that the money was spent properly. It's not good enough just to say, well the controls are weak. We'd have to then do some more work and report whether or not there's some concerns there.

Mr. Krawetz: — And if you would, Fred, some comments about the snowmobile fund. What do you anticipate for the work there and how will you be handling that organization?

Mr. Wendel: — Well, it's not going to be that large. I think the last time I talked to the president of SGI there was some concern — or not concern, we just . . . I'm not sure whether they, when the legislation was passed, the people that were going to run the snowmobile fund understood that this was still a public agency. I think they might have thought that they weren't.

I think they're now aware that they are, and we're beginning to have discussions with the people that run the snowmobile fund. But I don't think SGI does anything with it any more. So that's all I know about at the moment, Mr. Krawetz, we've just begun discussions with them.

All we saw was the legislation going through creating a snowmobile fund, kind of being talked about, SGI figuring out what might be going through it. And we said, well first year, that's probably what's going to take us. And then as it settles down, it'll be something else.

The Chair: — Any further questions.

Mr. Wakefield: — I have another one, Mr. Chair. Fred, still referring to the section on government organizations created, page 47. There was one mentioned there, the Saskatchewan Government Growth Fund VII and VIII Ltd. Not a great deal of

money is assigned to that. Were these new funds, actually new funds created just this last short while?

Mr. Wendel: — That's correct. Yes.

Mr. Wakefield: — And that small amount of money is adequate to review their operation?

Mr. Wendel: — For that particular year, it's again, this organization, Saskatchewan Government Growth Fund has, as it says, that's No. VIII, they still have I to VIII running, okay, and the management corporation itself. And a lot of the work on this we just rolled up. We just make a note here that we'll have to create a file. It costs us about a hundred bucks to set up a file and keep a file on this place, but most of the work will be done through the management corporation.

Mr. Wakefield: — Oh, I see.

Mr. Wendel: — So it's just more — just creating a file. Just a part of our internal record keeping.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Chair, a further question if I could. Back in the summary of funding request, and that's on page 5 of the report, I think you referred to this earlier but maybe if you could just expand it a bit. The third bullet point, our concern with the quality of the government's system and practices for managing its infrastructure, and you wanted to begin with the health system? Is that what you said?

Mr. Wendel: — Yes.

Mr. Wakefield: — And what is your plan with the health system and will that format continue on into other agencies or departments?

Mr. Wendel: — What we've established for our work plan for this coming year will be two things. In health itself, we're going to look at the project management practices for new construction — do some work in that area. On the broader issue, we're going to identify the risks to managing infrastructure well.

And there might be five or six risks that we identify to the management of infrastructure. And then set up a plan to audit those risks over a period of time — maybe one every six months or one every year — and just continue the pressure on there to improve management systems and practices on infrastructure.

We've done the same thing with pensions. We began that issue about four or five years ago. We identified five or six key risks to managing pension funds, and we've been slowly working through all of these risks. I think we're finished, and it's time to start the cycle again. And we make a report every year on pensions, on the risks and how the government managing its risks on pensions. We plan to do the same with infrastructure.

Mr. Wakefield: — And, Mr. Chair, one further, if I could? On the next page, the first bullet on that page talks about your concern with the information the Assembly receives to understand and debate the Crown corporation rate increases. Can you, just for the record, tell us what your concerns are

there, and how you are trying to put information together for the Assembly?

Mr. Wendel: — We again have two or maybe three . . . two for sure and as we move on likely another one. But at the moment, we've got two concerns.

One is that the accountability relationships remain sound. There's been a lot of discussions on creating a rate regulator. And when you create a rate regulator, you may impact on the accountability relationships between the government and the Assembly. Who's going to be responsible to answer then for the rate increases?

So that would be one report you can expect to receive from us. Probably this . . . in the next week or so there'll be a report on that.

The second concern we've got is when organizations move to a rate regulator, sometimes the, the accounting principles change. And then what happens is the regulator or the corporation are setting accounting principles as opposed to the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants for those, those kind of principles. Our office is always concerned when, when we're not following the accounting principles recommended by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants.

So that's the second concern is to, to make sure that when, when this rate regulation happens — if it does happen — that, that we still have sound accounting principles. We're still following the accounting principles recommended by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. So that would be the second thing you'd probably see from us; probably in the fall we'll begin to talk about that.

But the first, first part will be just talking about the accountability relationships when you have a regulator, and some of the things that membership think about as you, as you think about how best to, how best to deal with Crown Corporation rate increases. So there are some, some important issues there, and there is something coming down on that so . . .

The Chair: — Any further questions? No further conversations. Are we ready to proceed then? Okay. On page 132, we have subvote (PA01). Are we prepared to accept \$4,698,000 for the Provincial Auditor? All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Wendel: — Thank you very much committee, and I appreciate your support and your questions.

The Chair: — We also have a formal motion on this area, and I'll read it, and then we'll have a mover.

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2001, the following sums:

For Provincial Auditor..... \$4,698,000

Moved by Kevin Yates. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

The Speaker: — Mr. Chair, I just want to express my appreciation to the Acting Provincial Auditor. You notice in the reports, the role is to serve and advise the Legislative Assembly, and his office by coming here to respond again scrutinied by this committee and by the Board of Internal Economy the importance of ensuring that the legislative committees are well informed, the Assembly is well informed too in fact. Serve the people of Saskatchewan through accountability processes.

So I want to thank Mr. Wendel now who is acting in the capacity and his staff, for making his presentation here this morning. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. And on behalf of the committee, thank you, Mr. Wendel, on a very concise report. And to all your officials, thank you very much.

General Revenue Fund Ombudsman and Children's Advocate Vote 56

The Speaker: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee. Once again, as our legislative officers come to us here, probably — well this is the second time now — rightfully so, as a scrutiny with respect to the responsibilities and dealing with the committee here.

And I'd like to introduce our Ombudsman for the province of Saskatchewan, Ms. Barbara Tomkins. And with her this morning is Mr. Murray Knoll, who is the deputy Ombudsman, Regina.

So I'd welcome them here this morning to respond to any questions to the committee, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Tomkins: — Good morning. I thought since some of the committee members are new to this committee and haven't had the pleasure of hearing my spiels in the past, I'll give you a bit of an overview of the office and what we do.

The Provincial Ombudsman is charged basically to do four things. The first and the best known thing that we do is we receive and investigate complaints from the public about administrative actions and decisions of government.

We then determine whether in our view, and based on the criteria under which Ombudsman operate, the decision complained against was a fair one or not. If it was a fair one, we so advise the complainant. If it was what we conclude is an unfair action or decision, we advise government and we make recommendations respecting that complaint.

Those recommendations might include proposals as to how the individual complaint could be rectified. Or they might be a broader recommendation as to how the program or system, or that part of a program or system, might be changed so that the situation wouldn't arise again. Or of course, it might be both.

That's the part of Provincial Ombudsman that most people are familiar with, or most familiar with.

The next thing that we do is what I call own motion

investigations. The legislation authorizes me as Ombudsman to commence an investigation on my own motion, and the distinction there is that I can commence an investigation on an issue about which I have not received a complaint from the public. And that certainly has happened.

In addition, we might use an own motion investigation where we have received a complaint but for one of a number of reasons the individual does not wish us to pursue the complaint in his or her name or of his or her particular circumstances. But those circumstances might apply to numbers of people.

We also commence all own motion investigations where we receive numbers of personal public complaints about the same thing or the same program. Sometimes then we'll say, well let's do an own motion investigation and look at the broader picture.

The third thing that we do is what I call loosely alternative case resolution which is somewhat different from our work on investigation resolution of complaints through the traditional ombudsman process. Although through that process we resolve many complaints using many types of dispute resolution techniques, including the formal investigation process, we also have a separate piece in our legislation authorizing us to use mediation and other kinds of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to resolve disputes.

And we have especially in the last few years more visibly been doing that, although we always did it at a certain level and in certain ways. There's certain complaints now that we filter off at the outset and say rather than using our traditional process we are going to try to resolve this.

And resolving this in that sense then may be something different than what an ombudsman conclusion might have been about the action or decision. And so I view that as a third part of our work as opposed to simply the investigation of complaints. It could be viewed as an offshoot of that but I see it as something that certainly at certain times is quite distinct.

And the fourth main part of our work is public education — about the office, about the role of the Ombudsman, about what fairness is. And our efforts in that regard are focused on the legislators, on the government employees, and on members of the public.

In terms of workload and staffing, we have two offices. Our main office is in Regina and we have a smaller office in Saskatoon. In our Saskatoon office we share space with the Children's Advocate office.

The office has a total of 19 staff, counting myself, which are actually slightly over 18 positions. There is myself; there are two deputy ombudsmen — Mr. Knoll, who is the Deputy Ombudsman for Regina, and the Deputy Ombudsman in Saskatoon; general counsel. We have six ombudsman assistants which is what many of you might more familiarly know as investigators. We have two ombudsman assistants dedicated to the alternative case resolution process. They have different skills and different workloads than the other ombudsman investigators.

We have two full-time and one-half time, or slightly less than

half-time complaints analysts or what you may know more familiarly as intake staff who receive all complaints coming into the office, make initial assessments, initial inquiries, and in fact, resolve at their desks the vast majority of the complaints that come to our office.

We have a three-quarter position dedicated to communications and public education. And we have between the two offices three support staff who provide clerical reception and secretarial assistance to the rest of the staff.

In terms of numbers, complaints to the office have risen virtually every year for the 27 years or whatever we're at now that the office has been opened. The increase of 1999 over '98 was relatively small. There have been a few years where complaints were lower one year to the next, but I think those are very few and the differences were very small.

We've been able to manage the workload with a staff that is roughly equivalent to what it was, and not exactly in numbers, but roughly equivalent to what it was when the complaints coming in was about half of what they are now. How we are able to do that is through certain kind of initiatives like focusing more on alternative case resolution and alternative processes.

Also I believe that as government staff become more knowledgeable about what we do, why we do it, how we do it, then the response from government has been different, has been quicker in some cases, although we can certainly improve that. And I think that enables us to work perhaps a little more effectively, a little more easily, and a little more quickly. And that counterbalances to some degree the increasing number of complaints that are coming into the office.

In terms of the budget submission, I presume that you've had an opportunity to review the budget submission that we made. The Board of Internal Economy recommended an allocation of 1,477,000 for the fiscal year 2000-2001, which was slightly lower than we had initially requested.

I think it's important to notice that of the increase for this fiscal year over the '99-2000 fiscal year, a large proportion of the money requested and allocated is due to one-time expenses that were beyond control of the office, especially the fact that we will have to move our Saskatoon office in December of this year when our lease expires.

And with those preliminary comments, I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: — Any questions?

Mr. Wakefield: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. I could start off with maybe an obvious question that should be easy. I think your probably addressed part of this but when I look at the increase sub 2, 1.477 million, that's my quick calculation is I think around 11 per cent increase — mainly to changing for instance office spacing in Saskatoon?

Ms. Tomkins: — Yes, our office space in Saskatoon is far too small. SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) . . . I'm going to start again. Our lease expires on December 1, 2000. We are required by SPMC rules to tender.

Even if the space were adequate, we must retender. In this case the space is not adequate. This isn't simply us saying it's not adequate, SPMC also says for the nature and number of staff the space is inadequate.

Right now for example, and the Children's Advocate will speak to this too I expect if you ask her, but in her case some of her staff are doubling up storages in my part of the office. Our storageable files and so on is in our staff offices, which has meant those who are storing files can have filing cabinets instead of a place to talk to clients who come in.

It's simply too small. Our offices have grown and the nature of the work has changed, and we will be moving. We have estimates from SPMC as to what it is likely going to cost to acquire the additional space. In addition, rents have gone up so even if we were maintaining the same size of space, the rent would increase in any event. But we are obtaining more space. And then there is always a cost of renovating that space. And I can assure you we're not proposing anything luxurious.

But we don't have finalized yet where we will. The tender has gone out. We have received the proposals. And as far as I know, unless anything has changed recently, SPMC is negotiating with the tenderer who has put forward this space that is most suitable to our needs, trying to secure us the lowest rental rate, and then we'll be looking at renovating that space.

And that's why I suggest that in terms of one-time funding, almost a hundred thousand dollars of the increase is one-time funding relating to the move and the acquisition of a very small amount of furniture. But it's so small, it's not worth worrying about.

Mr. Krawetz: — If I might follow up on Milt's question. We don't see that from the estimate page that we have. Okay. The estimate page that I see is that salaries are . . . the increase for salaries is expected to be \$102,000.

Ms. Tomkins: — That's true.

Mr. Krawetz: — And the increase in supplier and other payments is expected to be only 47,000. Now your comment just now was that we're going to see some one-time expenditures that are significantly large in the changing of the office.

To me, I see only a \$47,000 increase. I see 102,000 in salary, and you indicated that there were 18 or 19 employees, which I think is the same amount that you had before.

Ms. Tomkins: — Yes.

Mr. Krawetz: — There isn't a significant increase in numbers.

Ms. Tomkins: — No change at all.

Mr. Krawetz: — No change at all. Okay. So I see on average a \$6,000 increase in salary per person and not a whole lot in the supplier. Is that misleading, what's printed here for us?

Ms. Tomkins: — Can I just ask Mr. Knoll a question first?

Mr. Krawetz: — Sure.

Ms. Tomkins: — I think I can explain. We're working at cross purposes here. I don't have that and you don't have . . . I'd assumed that you had seen our budget submission.

In any event, what happened . . . I'm going to go backwards here then. When we put in our budget submission, we asked for a total increase of X dollars. And the Board of Internal Economy appropriated for us or recommended an appropriation somewhat less than what we had asked for. Now we're going to have to, and will manage through the course of the year, to operate with less funds than we had asked for.

I think what's happened is that in the *Estimates* book where the total increase was comprised — just to simplify this — of increased salaries and increased rent and renovations and moving cost, I think in the *Estimates* book they've allocated all that we asked for for salaries into the column you're looking at and therefore left all of the shortfall in the rent and the renovations angle. And I think that's why we're dealing with different numbers.

But I think the total increase that should show in the *Estimates* book is 144. Is that correct?

Oh, and there's another, almost an internal book entry. For four or five years the Ombudsman side has been carrying \$30,000 which was allocated to the Children's Advocate for rent. And when the Children's Advocate's office was first created — and there was initially one staff and later three, and so on as it grew — at that time it seemed logical that the Ombudsman's side simply paid the rent. And the advocate essentially gave us the money that was allocated for rent for her — for her office space.

As her office has matured and now operates a more complex program and has a more complex staff, for some years now the Children's Advocate and Ombudsman — as I say we were sharing space in Saskatoon — we've allocated expenses between us, in some cases 60/40 based on staff ratios, in other cases differently depending on usage of that particular budget code.

Rent for all those years . . . we still had in our budget that initial \$30,000 that was allocated to the advocate, but over and above that the advocate and the Ombudsman were allocating the rent. So in this budget year what we did was said let's clean that up, and we transferred the 30,000 back to the advocate. So that explains why our numbers come in \$30,000 lower.

Mr. Krawetz: — Do you expect that your salary increases for your entire staff are indeed going to be \$102,000 higher for this fiscal year, as we see here in the *Estimates*?

Ms. Tomkins: — Yes, we had a . . . last year was really unusual year for us, and I sure hope we're not going to see that again, and I expect you are too. Aside from the move, the PSC (Public Service Commission) undertook what they call an equity review of all of my ombudsman assistant positions. There was a reason to look at the question of whether those positions were and had been properly classified.

There were two aspects to that review. One was to look at the PSC criteria for classifying positions and make sure that they were in fact given proper weight for all the different aspects of their job that determine where you're classified.

And another which PSC probably . . . certainly could speak better than I can, is sort of an equity component of saying, having looked at that, are these positions fairly classified in relation to other similar positions. And the obvious one was that the Children's Advocate has roughly comparable, not identical, positions which were then classified two levels higher than my ombudsman assistant positions.

And the decision of the Public Service Commission, after doing that review, was that my ombudsman assistant positions were not properly classified and in fact should have been classified one level higher.

Now if you want to look at that in terms of what that decision was, and this is maybe playing with numbers, but I think there's some merit to it as well. While it's an increase in our expenses, the other side of that is that apparently we were paying those people too little. They were improperly classified; perhaps for years we were paying them too little.

So maybe what we're doing is now paying them what we should have . . . well apparently we are now paying what we should have been paying as a . . . (inaudible) . . . So in that sense we've sort of been saving money on their backs for a few years.

But that's part of how that large increase in salaries comes about. There are 10 staff affected by that reclassification and in addition . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I thought eight. Oh, I'm sorry. And then two deputies — I see you should talk to Murray; he does these things — the two deputies were similarly assessed and bumped up. So 10 positions went up out of a total of 18, which is very substantial, went up one classification in addition to three complaints analyst positions were reviewed and they were also increased a position.

This is not something which is likely to happen again in my term and probably not for a long time. I gather these equity reviews are not . . . they're not rare, they're not uncommon, but they're not something they are going to do every year or every couple of years. And it's not very often they're going to find that kind of inequity, I think. That's part of it.

The other piece of the salary thing is the statutory increase allocated to my position which, as you know, there's a Bill before the House that would have an impact on that.

Mr. Krawetz: — In your annual report, do you prepare a summary page of your employees and the classifications of each and for us to get a better understanding of where your 19 employees are? Is that something that you are prepared . . .

Ms. Tomkins: — Not in the annual report in that form. What we have — I don't know that it's helpful in the sense that you're asking — right inside the cover of our annual report we have a listing of the employees and their positions. But not their classification levels.

Mr. Krawetz: — Okay.

Ms. Tomkins: — And then there's a budget breakdown similar to what's in the *Estimates* book that I think you're referring to.

Mr. Krawetz: — Excluding yourself, if you could, you mentioned that you had, I think, three clerical and then the group in the middle, and then the deputy . . . (inaudible) . . .

Ms. Tomkins: — Yes.

Mr. Krawetz: — What range, what range of salary are we talking about from your clerical to your deputies?

Ms. Tomkins: — Our lowest paid person . . .

Mr. Knoll: — Classification is program support 4 is what it's titled as now under the new SGEU (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union) agreement. I think that tops out at . . . (inaudible) . . . Top end, 23 to 25, somewhere in there.

General counsel is order in council. The deputies are management level 7 and the ombudsman assistants are professional level 5. I do have those figures here.

Ms. Tomkins: — And the complaints analysts are PL3. Is that right? Or four?

Mr. Knoll: — Three.

Ms. Tomkins: — So, three, five and seven are the three levels for the complaints analyst, the ombudsman assistants, and the deputy Ombudsman.

Mr. Krawetz: — You have three classifications of those different groups of people.

Ms. Tomkins: — They're different jobs. Like all of the complaints analysts are PL3, all of the ombudsman assistants are PL5, and both of the deputies are PL7.

Mr. Krawetz: — Okay and the 7s are in about a mid '60s range. Agreed?

Ms. Tomkins: — I think that's correct.

Mr. Wakefield: — Just another question. It's off on a little different tangent here. The number of complaints has been going up, some years more than others. What format do you use to make sure that the public generally knows of your existence, because the level of frustration for the average person against quote, "government bureaucracy" whatever, seems to be increasing all the time.

Do you have a plan or a program? I don't remember seeing anything in the annual report about that.

Ms. Tomkins: — We do certainly on a . . . we do public presentations to anybody who asks but we also focus on trying to speak to government employee groups, to members of public. We have developed recently a brochure about the office, an updated brochure.

We did a mass mail out, or what to us was a mass mail out in I think January. In fact I think some of the members got them.

Maybe it was late fall, but somewhere in December, January, did a mass mail out including case samples, cost/spend reports, posters, brochures, and so on to public service organizations, libraries, town offices. Heavens, I think about three, three and a half thousand places. It was a very long list.

We have, yes we have a plan. In many ways the organized approach to public education communications for us is in a sense in its infancy because we only got a communications person about a year and a half ago and so we're redeveloping our materials. And that's where the poster came from and the brochure. And we have now a number of handouts that we use.

Probably presentations, I think, are about in the same range. Probably we do a total of about 30 a year. I think that for me is a frustration, that after 27 years I'm amazed at the number of people, all walks of life, who seem to have never heard the word ombudsman, who have no idea that we're here.

I will say this. This is an absolute common complaint among all ombudsmen that I deal with across Canada. I happen to be the president of the Canadian Ombudsmen Association and it's a subject that comes up all the time. And I think the difficulty of public education for an ombudsman office is that we're only of interest, or we're most of interest when you have a concern or a complaint.

But when you speak generally about there's an ombudsman office and this is what we do, if you don't have a reason to grab onto that information but your problem comes up three or four years later, you may have forgotten or you don't remember exactly who that was and where that was you heard about that — we think that's why.

Because the pervasive problem across, well not just across Canada, around the world is people are saying that we . . . except in Scandinavian countries where I think ombudsman is very well-known and accepted; well that's where it started 200 years ago. In the rest of the Commonwealth for example, it started in the late '60s, early '70s in most jurisdictions. All of them complain that this many years later, too little is known.

And it's certainly something we're well aware and we focus a great amount of attention on it. And we'd be happy to hear any suggestions as to what we might do to change that. And we also would be happy to speak to or meet with anybody that you think might be interested in meeting with us.

And one place to start if it interests anybody at this table, is with your constituency workers. I have spoken to some gatherings of constituency workers and I know they found it valuable. And in many ways we do similar work or deal with similar people. And there is a lot of room for us to better understand what the constituency workers are doing and them to understand what we're doing so that we better know when to shift between the two offices.

The Chair: — Any further questions?

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Chair, to Ms. Tomkins. You mentioned of course in your preamble that, you know over the 27 years certainly your workload has increased, you know, as again you mentioned, some years more than others.

But of course as the office becomes more well-known, that that will be a big part of it. And certainly, you know, everyone trying to every time . . . and there's always problems in any area of the world whether it's with government or with business, there's certainly a great benefit to have the Ombudsman to be able to help people work through the red tape and the loopholes that are there.

Have you found in your term to this point any particular area of government that is causing you a little . . . causing you or your staff a little more concern because of the response from the public for help from the Ombudsman at this point in time?

I'm asking the question because from our perspective in this committee, it's always helpful to know, just to be aware of, you know, your workload and what you're dealing with so that we can be able better to assist in the legislature, better understand.

Ms. Tomkins: — I don't think that I can say there's one area that stands out. There are certainly departments and agencies that get much higher numbers of complaints than others. But they're agencies and departments that you would fully expect will, and always will get much higher numbers of complaints than others. Social Services and Justice will always, I think, get fantastically more complaints than any other department or agency because of what they do. Because there, you're looking at government agencies that are dealing with the financial support of individuals who are housing and sheltering individuals, who are dealing with the care of children of individuals, and so are making decisions that affect those individuals, making sometimes numbers of decisions a day that affect those individuals. So the odds that some of those individuals are going to be unhappy with some of those decision are pretty good.

Whereas for the average person — for me, for example — the number of decisions that government makes that affects me personally are relatively small. I might have a problem with my driver's licence, my driver's insurance at SGI, or I might have a claim at SGI; I might have a Worker's Comp claim. I might have . . . Now I'm going blank. But we all have things where we deal with government, but they're relatively infrequent.

And so let's say we have 10, 20, contacts with government a year as individuals and maybe don't have any problems, or maybe have one. Whereas the people in correctional centres, the people on social assistance have contact virtually daily — and indirectly do have contact daily.

So I don't think it's fair for me to say, well I have a concern about Social Services, I have a concern about Justice. I think I understand why those numbers are where they are. And that also is true for every other Provincial Ombudsman. There are always Justice and Social Services that are the high numbers.

There are agencies — I shouldn't even say agencies; that's too generalized. There are people in government who really don't understand what we're doing, how we do it, and why we do it, and are resentful that we're there. I do believe that even in the six years that I've been there that that kind of reaction is lessening. And I'm certain it's lessened substantially over the 25, 28 years since the office started. But that slows us down and that causes trouble.

On the other side, there are members of the public who don't understand what we do and how we do it and who think we're there to put their case forward, and who are not very pleased when we say, no, we've looked at this; we've done an objective and independent investigation and we frankly don't think you have a case.

And it's a part . . . same reaction coming from a different perspective. It's people not understanding what we do and why we do it the way we do. And that takes us back to our having to do more and better public education and trying to reach a million people, which isn't easy when there's only so much money and so many staff and lineups at the door.

Mr. Wiberg: — . . . leads me to a further question, the way people talk about it. And certainly I understand that. Of course people, individuals, when you're dealing with government on a day-to-day basis, whether it's Justice or Social Services or others that impact on your daily life, it certainly would have a . . . there is the opportunity for, you know, for feeling that I'm being, you know, maligned here somewhere.

Ms. Tomkins: — And the opportunity to make more mistakes.

Mr. Wiberg: — So then in these departments that have a more personal day-to-day contact with a smaller segment or a specific segment of today's society, do you find then that these issues are more congregated in very specific areas of the province? Have you noticed that, or are they still fairly well broad spent on a even basis throughout the province or are they usually more congregated?

Ms. Tomkins: — I think they're pretty much broad spread. They congregate in certain parts of certain programs, more so than in certain geographically. They congregate in income assistance questions, and sometimes specific areas of income assistance come up repeatedly — or financial assistance. But they might arise geographically anywhere in the province.

Mr. Krawetz: — Just a quick follow-up to Mr. Wiberg's questions. Have you noticed in the last little while a change in the number of cases — whether they be complaints or investigations that your office spearheads — in the health area. And we hear of many people who phone our offices and have a health concern, waiting list, whatever. Has your office noticed a greater number of concerns raised at your level?

Ms. Tomkins: — Actually this year, I think if you look at the numbers and put together all the health districts and the Health department, we report each of those separately. If you accumulate them all, I think you find this year that we have fewer this year than we did last year against all of those health agencies.

But I'm going to qualify that. There are certain kinds of health issues that an Ombudsman — I shouldn't say that Ombudsman can't — but this Ombudsman can't look at. I can do what my legislation says I can do. And so if we get, for example, treatment issues, that's not an issue that we can logically investigate because you're dealing with professional decisions and professional discretion of a doctor over whom I don't have jurisdiction. But I will get questions about . . . that relate to the operation and administration of the health district or Department of Health programs.

Now there were fewer this year. One thing that I've learned in the six years I've been in the office is that one year isn't a trend. It may mean nothing; it may mean something. I won't know that for another year or two years or 10 years. So if you do this, that's not unusual. And that's what I see, comparing last year to this year. But if I look the year before, I saw one of these.

So I don't know that the numbers on a very short-term look mean much. But we certainly, yes, we do receive complaints about health districts and health department issues, yes.

Mr. Krawetz: — Well for my own information, clarify then the kinds of complaints that you would immediately refuse because you would say no, that's not within my legislative powers to investigate. And what I'm looking at is, you know, many individuals call offices of MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) to ask for assistance with trying to have someone placed within a level 3 or 4 lodge, or trying to get a surgery moved up. Are those concerns that your office cannot deal with?

Ms. Tomkins: — No and yes.

Mr. Krawetz: — No and yes, okay.

Ms. Tomkins: — Yes. For example, we have people call us and we can investigate and will investigate complaints relating to the classification of care levels for people. My mom or my son has been classified level 3 care and I think he's level 4 care — that's a complaint that we could investigate.

Mr. Krawetz: — That you can handle.

Ms. Tomkins: — Yes. Someone calls and says . . . Here's something similar to a call that we got, but a hypothetical fundamentally. Someone calls and says, my mom had surgery, she was released from hospital and I had to take a day off work to go home and take care of her because she wasn't well enough to take care of herself, she was recuperating. That at the end of the day was the doctor's decision.

And if the doctor released mom from the hospital too soon, then that person's complaint is with the doctor. And as our legislation is now structured that complaint goes to the college of physicians and surgeons, not to the Ombudsman.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you for that clarification.

The Chair: — Any final questions? Are we ready for the question?

A Member: — Yes.

The Chair: — Okay, we'll move to . . . Is it agreed, item (OC01), amount of \$1,477,000 — is that agreed?

Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Agreed. Okay. We'll move to . . . Oh, thank you very much, Ms. Tomkins for your presentation . . .

Ms. Tomkins: — Thank you, thank you all.

The Chair: — . . . and for the questions and answers.

We'll now move to the Children's Advocate which is part of Vote 56 but it's (OC02) on the same page.

Thank you for coming all the way from Saskatoon, fair city of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, if you wanted to introduce your officials.

The Speaker: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Deborah Parker-Loewen, our Children's Advocate, who is here with her assistant. And I'll ask her to introduce her assistant with her and once again the opportunity for this committee to directly speak with the heads of these departments, our legislative officers who are competently and professionally carrying out their responsibilities and underlying the support for what your committee is responsible for considering here today.

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — Thank you very much. Thank you and good morning. I'd like to introduce Glenda Cooney who is the deputy Children's Advocate who's with me here today. And as with the Ombudsman, I was under the understanding that our budget submission was previously circulated so I'll just maybe give you a brief overview.

Two of the key responsibilities of the Children's Advocate office: we are legislated under The Ombudsman and Children's Advocate Act to perform a number of key responsibilities. One is public education respecting the interests and well-being of children. And my office is very actively involved in promoting understanding of the needs and developmental needs and the service needs of the children of the province — not defined specifically to children receiving government service, but the Act is clear — the well interests and well-being of children.

I'm also directed in the Act to receive, review, and investigate concerns regarding services provincial government or provincial government agencies provide to either individual children, groups of children, or services government provides to children. So there's a three-part direction to the Children's Advocate in the legislation to receive, review and also try to resolve issues and investigate concerns regarding children who receive services from the province either individually, as a group, or to look generally at the services the province provides to children.

I also have a responsibility to make recommendations to government for changes or improvements to services to children. I can do that either from an investigation, or there's a provision in the Act, a "may" clause in the legislation which provides that the Children's Advocate may advise a minister on any matter affecting the interests and well-being of children. It doesn't necessary have to arise out of a specific review or investigation.

The Act also provides that the Children's Advocate may engage in or conduct research respecting the interests and well-being of children, and we've recently released a report on the needs of children in foster care which was conducted in that vein. So the mandate for the Children's Advocate in Saskatchewan remains the broadest mandate in Canada.

The Children's Advocate has the authority in our province to

review any provincial government services to children, as well as to do public education respecting the interest and well-being of all children of the province. We were the first province in Canada to establish a Children's Advocate as an officer of the Legislative Assembly, and we remain the only province in Canada with the mandate to look at all government services. So, our mandate and our services in Saskatchewan are significantly broader . . . more broadly defined than in other provinces.

We have grown a lot. The office is now five years old. And I'm sure you've noted that our budget and our office activities have expanded significantly in the five years since the office was established.

I just want to point out that prior to the establishment of the office there was a task force, established by the government, of community members. And that task force went around the province and received submissions and input from a number of citizens, and in 1993 made recommendation to the government to establish the Children's Advocate office. At that time they also recommended a budget of \$1.2 million, and a fairly broad sense of . . . fairly broad operational responsibilities.

We are just now, five years later, beginning to reach what was the original vision for the office. And the intention, as I understood it when I was appointed, was that we would gradually assume the responsibilities as we have to the point that we are now. And we're still under what was the original proposal or the original recommendation with regards to the office. But I think we, in the last year, we began to see some stability in the number of new files opened by our office. And we're beginning to have much clearer idea of the kind of work that we can undertake reasonably within the context of Saskatchewan and the budget and the kind of work that we're legislatively responsible to achieve.

The key activities of our office have been outlined in my 1999 annual report which was recently tabled, and I won't take time this morning to go over that. The Board of Internal Economy recommended an overall budget for 2000/2001 of \$1,082,000 and so that's what we're here to discuss this morning and I'd be pleased to take your questions.

Ms. Harpauer: — How many employees do you have? You might have mentioned it and I missed it.

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — Not including myself, we have 10 positions in the office. One of those positions is a part-time position of a communications and public education coordinator.

Ms. Harpauer: — Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Wakefield: — I've looked at the report that you had circulated earlier, annual report. A lot of recommendations, a lot of concerns that you expressed in there. What would be your main concern? Is it the increasing number of people, or clients, or files that are being opened up? Is there a concern to follow up on that?

Is there a concern that some of the criticisms that you've made, maybe peripherally or directly in your report, are you getting any response from the government for instance in how you're doing your job? Are you pretty independent?

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — I think you're asking me two questions.

Mr. Wakefield: — Yes I am.

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — And one is, do I have a primary or major concern? And secondly, do I feel that the government is responding appropriately to the recommendations I'm making. Is that fair?

Mr. Wakefield: — Yes.

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — To the first question, I think in these five years, I realize and I truly believe that government and the citizens of the province are very committed to providing good services and good care and protection for children. It's difficult to do.

Children continue to be very vulnerable. They typically don't have a strong voice; they don't vote. And for the vulnerable children that my office is particularly concerned about, they often don't have strong parent advocates or community advocates who speak on their behalf.

And so I have an overall concern about how do we find a way, in a compassionate society like we live in, to ensure that our children are indeed protected and also provided ways to be truly respected in a dignified way so that they can grow to be contributing and active and healthy citizens of our province or our country.

And so I have an overall concern about that. And what I see is that government works towards that agenda and they still need support. The employees of government and the parents of the province who are raising children need support in order to do that. And these . . . in particular the vulnerable children are not as visible and not as well understood as I think we could help them to be.

Do I think government is responding to the recommendations I make? I think that there's incredible commitment and dedication by government and by citizens to protect and care for our children. And I think we're in an environment where there are competing priorities and that that sometimes becomes very difficult.

When there are many demands on resources and many demands . . . It's not just . . . this isn't just a money question. It's also a commitment and understanding, a desire, an attitude, and I think we need to help the citizens of the province come to support change that will ensure that our children are indeed protected.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Chair. Thank you, Dr. Loewen. I'm very happy to hear you give us a response in terms of that commitment and your feeling of support for that commitment.

There's amendments to the Act coming up, and do you feel those amendments are going to go some distance in helping your situation in terms of commitment to the mandate given to you?

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — The amendments to The Ombudsman

and Children's Advocate Act that have been tabled, for the most part are amendments that I and my staff really welcome.

For example, the amendment proposed to extend the age is one that is particularly important to us. The children in the care of government — if they're in permanent or long-term care of government — actually cease to be wards at age 18 but can enter into an extended care agreement with government up to the age of 21, particularly if they're taking education. So if they're in a university or technical training or some other kind of educational program, and it makes sense. It's sort of a practical extension for us because those are young people that we may have already had some involvement with.

And some of the other amendments such as clarifying the responsibilities of the Advocate and the Ombudsman in relation to administrative functions, for example, are very important to me in terms of helping to understand the different independent authorities of our offices.

So I think they're important amendments because of the Act being relatively new, and we've just had some time to work with it now.

Amendments to Acts that directly affect children, which also come forward to you from time to time, are ones that I'm also concerned with. And those are . . . those probably will impact children directly more than the amendments to this Act which are really in some ways cleaning up and making more clear the work that we do.

Mr. Wakefield: — Maybe just to follow up then, because we're talking estimates here and we have to talk about numbers as opposed to commitment and dedication to children of the province, I notice that the Children's Advocate budget is proposed to increase at about 14 per cent: salaries about 11 per cent, and supplies and other payments . . . suppliers and other payments about 19, with the average around 14.

Could you give me some idea of the justification of a 14 per cent increase overall?

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — Well one part of it is, as the Ombudsman mentioned, that we have a one-time request for our accommodation shift, which is included in that increase for that section of the codes. The remaining has to do with increased requests and demands on the work that we do.

A significant amount of our budget is allocated to in-province travel, and my staff travel to see the young people and we've made a strong commitment to do that. Last year we had about a 10 per cent increase in the number of children and young people contacting our office, which is then reflected in a need for us to travel more.

We don't make a commitment to travel to see all of the people that contact our office. But if a young person contacts our office and they're unable to resolve their issue on their own, we are committed to going out to see them. They aren't in a position to come to us. And we try to see them in a fairly quick period of time. So my staff travel extensively throughout the province, and so that's a big item for us and it has continued to grow.

The other part of our work is that we have an advocate assistant who takes all of our intakes and deals with all of the calls at the front end, if you will. And what we know is that in order for the other . . . the advocates to travel, we need to have someone in the office who's available to take calls on an immediate basis. So when she's away, we've made a decision to ensure that there is someone available to take those calls, so we have someone available during office hours all the time. So we backfill her desk, if you will. And that, that's also an increased expense to us.

The other piece of work that we've undertaken which is still concerning to me, and I think we are still looking at how we're going to manage that even this year coming up, is child death reviews that . . . We agreed to review the deaths of all children who were in care of the Department of Social Services or who were receiving specified services either at the time of their death or in the 12 months preceding their death. And that work has just . . . has actually been a much bigger piece of work than we had anticipated.

And so the . . . what we've been doing is trying to find additional funds in the last year from some vacancies that we managed. In the upcoming year, we're not totally sure how we're going to completely manage that but we're going to have to shift our budget around and I anticipate that as that work continues that we may be back here asking for further increases in the next year or so in order to manage that work which has become quite significant and a bigger task than we had initially anticipated.

Mr. Wakefield: — Maybe one more, Mr. Chairman, if I could then. It's a similar question to the one I asked the Ombudsman. Part of your role, as you mentioned, is public education. Do you have a projection or a program about making yourself even more profile to the citizens of Saskatchewan or a plan to make sure that they know that there is a Children's Advocate?

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — Well, yes, and that is also a costly endeavour. Because as we become better known, we also have more people contacting us. So, so it's an interesting and challenging activity to do more public education. We have a legislated responsibility to do public education, not only about the Children's Advocate and what we do, but about the interests and well-being of children in general. And so, so we have two public education responsibilities if you will. And that is . . . it creates even more of a challenge for us in some ways.

Last year, in 1999, we made a commitment to focus on helping children and young people particularly those in the care of government, so children in foster care or children in young offender facilities to . . . We made a commitment to help them understand our role and our services better, and so we put quite a bit of effort into that.

We are now receiving more requests to look at how we could do more public education on a broader scale. For example, could we come into schools and generally speak about children's advocacy, children's needs, children's well-being? And to move to that step would require a different kind of resourcing for our office than what we currently have.

So for this year, for 2000 and 2001, our intention is to continue

to focus on children who are receiving services from government in some direct way and not go to a general public education campaign.

It's not that we don't think that's important, but we think that the most vulnerable group are those that are in care of government in some way, either in foster care, group home care, or young offender facility. And that's where we plan to continue to put our efforts.

The Chair: — Mr. Krawetz has a question.

Mr. Krawetz: — Just a follow-up on what you said to Mr. Wakefield regarding your workload and the investigation of deaths of children.

Do you have statistics that show . . . I mean, your comments are that the workload is a little greater than what you anticipated and you're not sure where you're going to be a year from now.

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — Right.

Mr. Krawetz: — Are statistics showing that there are more cases of deaths of young children that are either receiving Social Services assistance or in the last year as you indicated? Are we aware of what's occurring in the last three to five years as far as the numbers of cases that you actually would be investigating? Is it increasing? Is it decreasing? Is it stagnant?

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — What's happened is that when I agreed to undertake the review of deaths with the Minister of Social Services, the agreement was for a certain number of deaths very narrowly defined — children directly in care. And over the past two years, we negotiated a bigger net if you will, so that we're beginning to look at deaths of children who were in care at the time of their death.

When we first agreed to take this on, it was, "and who had received services in the previous six months." We're now looking at, "and who received services in the previous 12 months." We're now looking at deaths of children in daycare, in what's called community living division, or who are in care because they are medically fragile children or they have cognitive challenges, and they may have died in receiving some kind of service or care from the department. As well as children who are in their parental home on some kind of a protective intervention or family services support program.

So what's happened is . . . The answer to your question is kind of yes and no. We're not seeing a change in the overall number of deaths of children in the province. But what has happened is — and I think to the government's credit really — is that they've opened up and have invited us to look at even a broader number of deaths, so that the numbers look greater because in fact they have expanded the mandate and, I think, have offered themselves up to greater accountability from our office.

And I think that's a very positive step because we're looking at how we can prevent deaths, how we can ensure that these children are protected, that they're being well served, and what kind of recommendations might a Children's Advocate make in that regard. So the numbers have increased because the net has increased.

Mr. Krawetz: — Okay, thank you.

The Chair: — Any further questions?

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Chair, just to continue down the line. In this sitting of course you presented a report to the legislature, which we were very pleased to receive from you, outlining some concerns you have of the children's welfare in this province. And first of all, thank you very much. It certainly keeps all of us on our toes as to how much more we need to do to look after the children in this province.

But one of the things that I'm curious about is that this report dealt quite . . . most singularly with Social Services. Is your mandate is to be as a kind of a watchdog over the Social Services, Department of Social Services, and them working through children? Or is your mandate broad enough to be a watchdog of other departments, any department that would have dealings with the children of our province?

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — The legislation would include any government department or agency of government and that's defined in the legislation. So it could include First Nations child and family agencies for example. So the Department of Justice, the Department of Health, the Department of Education, services to children could be reviewed by the Children's Advocate.

There are pockets though, which the Ombudsman also spoke to, say in Health for example, that we wouldn't look at. And our legislation is very . . . parallels the Ombudsman's legislation in that regard.

One area which we don't have jurisdiction to review or investigate, and which we do get a number of calls about, are concerns within the school system. So when there's a concern about how a school division has offered services or programs to a child or a family, at this point in time that the services provided under the school board, not under the Department of Education but under the school board, are not within the jurisdiction of the Children's Advocate office.

And certainly from time to time we get citizens who don't think that that's appropriate, who are concerned and think there needs to be some way to have an independent review of school board issues or school board complaints. So they're . . . the mandate is broader than in any other province, so in that regard you know, we are still looking at a fairly broad mandate.

And in particular the concern about school boards is one that we hear about frequently from citizens who call us. Particularly parents who have concerns about something that's happened at school and they feel that their recourse is to the elected school board, to the school trustees. However, the school trustees are acting as the employer and so they don't feel that that's an independent review of their concern. So there's an interesting question there that I think, at some point, I will be inviting you to take a look at.

Mr. Wiberg: — So in your role then in being able to be the, you know, the necessary watchdog for the children, and I'll stay on with school divisions as an example to clearly illustrate it for us. In the department's decision to have more inclusion in

general education, general education of our children, vis-à-vis the blind children ... the deaf, the ... I can't remember the name of that school in Saskatoon where deaf children ... (inaudible interjection) ... No, that's not the name of it, but thank you for your help.

But anyway, have you had to deal with it much in assisting school boards to be able to improve their mandate for children that have been affected such as this? Or have school boards been able to pick up and carry the ball appropriately so that the parents have been able to have their children in the public education system again?

Dr. Parker-Loewen: — About three years ago we began advocating for and the school ... the Department of Education also looked at and made an amendment to The Education Act which included an appeal process for pupils with a disability, which is how it's defined in The Education Act.

So there is now in the Act the ability for parents or students to ask for a review or an appeal of placement decisions such as the ones that you're referencing. That is still limited only to pupils with a disability who have been clearly identified as such through the school system. So pupils who are at risk, or pupils who have other kinds of complaints or issues that aren't specifically related to being defined as a pupil with a disability, don't have access to that kind of a formal review or appeal mechanism. So this now, for me, falls under what I call the responsibility for public education respecting the interests and well-being of children.

Last year I made a representation to the task force on the role of schools, which will be releasing its report during this year, and encouraged them to consider looking at a recommendation to establish some kind of an independent review process for all pupils and all parents who are linked into the school system in some way.

So on an individual basis, we have no authority to intervene unless the child is receiving some other service from government. Say they're a child in a foster home, we, with our advocate assistant, would provide information to the caller. Say it's a parent calling with a concern, we would give them names and numbers. We would assist them, walk them through what they can do as self advocates or as parent advocates, but we wouldn't take it on as a review or an investigative file.

On the other hand I will also and do continue to advocate for the well-being and interests of children, and this is one area that has been of concern to me.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Any final questions ... or are we ready for the question? Okay. Is items (OC02), Children's Advocate for the amount of 1.082 million, is that agreed to?

Members: — Agreed

The Chair: — Agreed, okay. We also have ... need a mover ...

Be it resolved that there be granted to her Majesty for the

12 months ending March 31, 2001, the following sums:

For Ombudsman and Children's Advocate 2,559,000

Do you have a mover? Moved by Mr. Harper. All those in favour? Those opposed? That is carried.

Thank you very much for coming down to Saskatoon. Have a safe journey back.

Just to interject, we have three more items of business before we get to the Legislative Assembly. Then there's some demands that we could ... if we could get out of here within the next 20 minutes. So did we want to try to get through these ones in the next 20 minutes? If there's further questions, we can have another meeting. It's up to you. I don't want to curb debate or any questions.

What are the wishes of the committee? Give it a try?

Mr. Harper: — Can we realistically do it in 20 minutes?

The Chair: — Well that's why I'm putting it to the group. Okay, well let's give it a shot and shoot for 10:40 for an adjournment time. Okay? Then if something comes up, I mean, we can always go beyond that.

General Revenue Fund Chief Electoral Officer Vote 34

The Chair: — Mr. Speaker, if you wanted to introduce your officials?

The Speaker: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee. We have with us this morning another officer of the Legislative Assembly — our Chief Electoral Officer, Ms. Jan Baker. And Ms. Baker has prepared a statement. I would ask her to proceed by-your-leave.

Ms. Baker: — Good morning. As you are familiar, the office of the Chief Electoral Officer is charged with the administration of provincial elections, by-elections, enumerations other than during an election, and provincial election finances under The Election Act, 1996. The office also periodically conducts referenda and plebiscites under The Referendum and Plebiscite Act, and times votes under The Time Act.

As you are also familiar, the province has undergone major reform of its electoral law. The proclamation of the new legislation resulted in new electoral processes and procedures, heightened financial disclosure of political contributions, and recording of election expenditures, and the establishment of the office operations, May 12, 1998, under Legislative Assembly.

On a going-forward basis the office has focused on identification of the operational restructuring to complete transition under Legislative Assembly, including human resource requirements ensuring immediate administrative effectiveness.

However, given the province's election cycle, as you are all aware, the last 18 months has seen five by-elections, a

provincial general election, two recounts — one to the highest court, the Appeal Court of Saskatchewan — and a controvert petition under The Controverted Elections Act.

As a result, in the ordinary course of events, the office attempts to maintain a state of election readiness pending forthcoming elections, and particular attention again is focused on and will continue to focus on preparation of documentation and materials to ensure effectiveness of the new Act, continued efforts to work with the political parties to facilitate smooth transition of administrative requirements, and to ensure compliance with the financial reporting provisions of the Act.

That said, the 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 2000-2001 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 general elections, constituency by-elections, non-writ period enumerations, referendum and plebiscites, and time votes.

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 of the 2000-2001 fiscal period.

As you are familiar, funding for the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer is based on statutory provisions.

I would be pleased to answer any questions with respect to the office's 2000-2001 budget submission you may have at this time. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. I just point out before we begin that these are statutory . . . these are statutory amounts and there's no voting required on this point. So the Chief Electoral Officer is here for questions only. There will be no vote on it.

Ms. Harpauer: — Jan, how many do you employ in your office?

Ms. Baker: — At the present time, given the position the office was in the election cycle, there is . . . I have delegated myself and five permanent positions. However, currently, the office has two permanent positions filled — myself, my receptionist — and the rest of the office are provisional to address issues as they arise as we have proceeded over the last 18 months.

Ms. Harpauer: — Okay. And you have put in . . . like your wage or salaries have stayed fairly consistent. There is quite an increase in the supplier and other payments. Can you explain why?

Ms. Baker: — I'm sorry.

Ms. Harpauer: — It shows an increase from 193,000 to

519,000.

Ms. Baker: — I'm sorry. I can't hear you to start with. And I'm not sure I understood the question.

Ms. Harpauer: — Oh sorry. It increases from 193,000 to 519,000.

Mr. Krawetz: — This is what we see, Jan.

Ms. Baker: — Oh I'm sorry. Okay, the increase in the operational estimates are primarily due to the office maintaining a state of election preparedness. There is approximately \$250,000 incorporated into the operational costs for 2000-2001 particular to stocking, packaging, and distributing of election materials in the event of an election call.

Mr. Wakefield: — Ms. Baker, is that a one-time cost? The preparedness?

Ms. Baker: — Yes.

Mr. Wakefield: — So that the large increase in percentage, of course, sticks out like a red flag but that may not tell the whole story. Is part of the reason, too, the relocation to your new office facilities there? Or was that in a previous budget?

Ms. Baker: — That was done prior. I believe it was in 1996 we entered that facility . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I just — excuse me — I just think, particular to the last question, I should elaborate on election cycle. An election cycle is five years. Normally, 15 to 18 months prior to an election, budget submissions usually include the costs associated with materials for the conduct of a provincial election.

The budget submission following a first year of election cycle usually accommodates a reimbursement of election expenses to candidates and political parties. There normally is a two- to three-year period where there would be their operations or submissions that would only be enhanced due to office initiatives.

However, in this circumstance, given the current environment, the office felt it was necessary to ensure election preparedness and have the materials, at the very minimum, in the warehouse. So we, although we are in the first year of a five-year election cycle, we are stocking materials for a potential election. And that is the increase in the cost.

Mr. Wakefield: — Your mandate, of course, is to administer The Election Act?

Ms. Baker: — Yes.

Mr. Wakefield: — And under the . . . if there is an infraction under The Election Act, or presumed or a potential infraction under The Election Act, how involved do you become in that or are you involved in the infraction part of The Election Act or is it just administration?

Ms. Baker: — No, on a routine basis registered political parties are required to file fiscal period returns of operational activities, revenues, etc. Routinely, they are reviewed by my office.

Certainly as a regulator of this Act, I am responsible and have authority under section 280 of the law to conduct investigation. If I felt there were infraction, I indeed would first go to give consideration to consulting with council, at that base make a determination whether it would be necessary to forward a recommendation to public prosecutions for potential prosecution.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Jan, just a follow up on the comment that you made about the supplier and other payments. Am I understanding you correctly in that you're saying for this fiscal year, 2000-2001, that that \$519,000 estimated expenditure will include electoral rebates to individual candidates and political parties from the 1999 fall election, that indeed those expenditures are for the budget that you're proposing here?

Ms. Baker: — No, it does not. I have a base year, which is operational and new initiatives. When I am talking about stocking of electoral materials for the administration of election, they are incorporated into the operational costs. However, when we are discussing costs over and above operations, we must incorporate the associated costs of the estimates provided to you whether it be a by-election or a provincial general election.

And if you look at the election estimates provided to you, there is a potential cost in the 100 codes for reimbursement of candidates' election expenses, auditor expenses, party expenses, and party audit expenses that in addition there will be other administrative costs for the conduct. And the two are knit together as one to incorporate those costs in the second year or in the first year of the election cycle in order to accommodate the reimbursements to the candidates.

Mr. Krawetz: — Okay, so for this year, being that it's the first year post-election, the additional expenditures of \$326,000, is that so-called election readiness and is a one-year expenditure that we won't see next year if indeed there is no provincial election? Is that correct?

Ms. Baker: — No. It's not quite correct. Okay. The budget presentation approved December 9 last year, as we had the provincial election fall in the year 1999, speaks to the associated costs particular to an election. And those costs were incorporated in 1999-2000 expenditures. Okay.

In 2000-2001 expenditures on an on-going basis are the operational costs for the office and stocking for forthcoming elections. But the monies that was approved in 1999-2000 is inclusive for payouts to the political parties and the candidates for the year 1999, which incorporates the September 16, 1999 election.

The Chair: — Any final questions? Seeing none. Well thank you very much for your presentation and for answering the questions. Appreciate that.

**General Revenue Fund
Information and Privacy Commissioner
Vote 55
Conflict of Interest Commissioner
Vote 57**

The Chair: — If you want to introduce Mr. Gerrand?

The Speaker: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I'm pleased to introduce to you this morning for both of the roles, Mr. Gerry Gerrand, Q.C. (Queen's Counsel), who plays the important role of Information and Privacy Commissioner as well as the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. And I'd ask you to welcome him. And, Mr. Gerrand, please make your presentation to the committee.

Mr. Gerrand: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, would you like me to deal with both roles together or singly?

Mr. Wakefield: — Is there enough commonality to deal with them together?

Mr. Gerrand: — I think so; I think there is. I would prefer to deal with them together, if you agree.

The Chair: — Sure, I think that's agreed. We still will have to vote on them individually . . .

Mr. Gerrand: — I appreciate that.

The Chair: — But for the presentation I think it's appropriate to go together. Welcome, Mr. Prebble.

Mr. Gerrand: — My remarks will be quite brief. I have no experience in budgeting or budgets. I've only previously in my life had to account to my wife for my expenditures. Let me tell you how the budget that is before you, how it came to pass.

Some months ago I was approached and asked to take on the responsibilities with respect to these two matters. I was informed by officers of the Department of Justice as to what had happened previously and why there was a need for a new acting commissioner, and the fact that it would have to be an acting commissioner in each instance because the legislature was not sitting.

I tried to find out as much as I could about the roles before I made a decision that I would agree to do this. I was told of the financial arrangements that existed with the previous commissioner. Certain signals came to me that there would be quite a backlog of activity in both areas, but because I was not the acting commissioner I had no access to the files or the records and could not have access until I was formally appointed.

So with the assistance of members of the Department of Justice and the financial department of the Assembly, a budget was prepared for my review. I reviewed the budget and I approved of it. So in that sense it's my budget, prepared by others for my approval.

Included in the budget were some increased items to account for the anticipated increased activity. And when I received the files and got my feet into both roles, I discovered there was quite a bit of increased activity required, and I've been quite busy since then.

So that, ladies and gentlemen, is the background to the figures

that are before you. I am now about two months into each role. I'm in the course of educating myself. A week and a half from now, I will attend a conference of commissioners of freedom of information for Canada. The conference will be in Winnipeg. I expect to learn a great deal more about my responsibilities at that conference.

The role of Conflict of Interest Commissioner has proved to be a very interesting and active one. I've had the privilege of meeting with slightly in excess of one-half of the members of the legislature to this point in time. I hope to complete the required meetings and file the public disclosure statements as required by the Act prior to the end of June. I have of course not prepared any report as required by the Act yet. And I'm in the course of acquiring the information that will be necessary to do that on a timely basis.

So with that brief statement, I invite any questions that you might have.

The Speaker: — Mr. Chairman, if I may, I'd just like to also introduce to the members of the committee someone that you're acquainted with and familiar with, but will assist us with this process, Ms. Marilyn Borowski, who is the director of financial services.

The Chair: — Thank you for your presentation, and there's questions.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and welcome Mr. Gerrand.

Two quick questions. In both of your roles, the request, the estimate of request is increased for suppliers and other payments. There is a doubling; there is a request for doubling. Could you explain why you anticipate that both of those roles will require a double expenditure from the previous year?

Mr. Gerrand: — Well I think the doubling comes about in part by a provision for me to retain the services of others to assist me. In each budget there's an amount that wasn't in the previous budget for me to retain counsel to assist me in catching up in the backlog in both areas. And in fact I have done that by having the assistance of a lawyer in the office with which I'm associated.

I think that the budget in each case was for an additional \$25,000 in those areas. To this point in time, I have incurred an expenditure of about \$3,000 in the area of freedom of information through that avenue, and about \$1,000 with regard to conflict of interest.

The other increases relate to the remuneration paid to the commissioner. And that was the figure that was suggested by those that approached me. They indicated that there had not been any increase in the role . . . in the figure paid for the role to previous commissioners for some time. And the figure was presented to me and I agreed to it, and it was on that basis that I accepted the appointments.

The other increase relates to the provision of services in the area of office space, secretary, and other facilities. As you know, both roles are carried out of the law office with which I'm

associated. And the jurisdictions, I am told, of Manitoba and Alberta with respect for instance to freedom of information, have a vastly greater staff and a greater expenditure. And it was anticipated that this role would increase with my appointment.

There is a school of thought that I am still considering, that the role should be much more expanded than what it has been. So for those reasons, those additional figures were incorporated in the budget and I accepted and agreed with them.

Mr. Krawetz: — Just for clarification, if I might, Mr. Chairman, the two salary requests then in the budget for both of the roles, are strictly salary for the commissioner, and that is why we see one increase in one area and the other one remaining at the same level.

Mr. Gerrand: — I think that's correct.

Mr. Krawetz: — Okay. And therefore any additional, you mentioned, additional people that you require to catch up on the workload, those costs are going to be included in suppliers and other payments, not the salary.

Mr. Gerrand: — That's correct. And I don't expect that those total figures are going to be approached at all to the level authorized.

Mr. Krawetz: — Good. Thank you.

The Chair: — Final questions. Okay. Is Item (IP01) for the Information and Privacy Commissioner for the amount of \$105,000 agreed to.

Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — We have a motion for the mover:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the twelve months ending March 31, 2001, the following sums:

For the Information and Privacy Commissioner... \$105,000

Could I have a mover for that. Mr. Prebble. All those in favour?

Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Okay. And going over to page no. 122, Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

Is item (CCO1) for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner of the amount of 122,000, is that agreed to?

Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — All right. Okay.

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the twelve months ending March 31, 2001, the following sums:

For the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.. \$122,000

Could I have a mover for that? Mr. Harper. All those in favour?

Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Mr. Gerrand, for your presentation.

Mr. Gerrand: — Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen.

**General Revenue Fund
Legislative Assembly
Vote 21**

The Chair: — And we now have some time to get into the Legislative Assembly. And, Mr. Speaker, if you wanted to introduce your guests.

The Speaker: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I would like to first of all introduce to my immediate left, Ms. Gwenn Ronyk, someone that's certainly no stranger to you. And on the far left, again to reintroduce Ms. Marilyn Borowski who is the director of financial services. And also seated here, Margaret Kleisinger, the assistant to the Speaker, here this morning.

And I wonder if, Mr. Chairman, I might just be able to give you a brief overview and some background before we go line to line on each of the votes in the budget for the Legislative Assembly and tell you about some of the accomplishments, some of our hopes and dreams I guess for the future, on behalf of all members of the Assembly.

First of all, the major impact . . . and in going through the budget you will notice the increases and some of the major impact is on staff time and effort in assisting members with the dissolution impact, the transition of outgoing members leading up to and following the election last fall, termination and hiring of constituency assistants, the set-up of constituency offices, procedural and administration orientations. So these are all situations which occurred as a result of the general election in 1999.

Now there was also a completion of Legislative Assembly office staff to the new in-scope classification plan. And again that's had a great deal of impact.

The system that's now in place for all future classification processes whereby an outside consultant is used to evaluate and recommend the class level. This recommendation is forwarded to members of the Board of Internal Economy who then have a week in which to either approve or request that the classification be discussed at the next board meeting, Board of Internal Economy meeting. Now in this way, having an outside consultant provides an objective evaluation of the positions that are being considered.

Just to again reiterate perhaps what I heard some of the legislative officers, as they've mentioned, there are responsibilities which perhaps not everyone is totally enough familiar with. And I expect that perhaps some of the responsibilities of a Legislative Assembly Office is not fully recognized or appreciated in that extent, in a global extent.

So I wanted to mention that because there are serious challenges — not only responsibilities but challenges that we are now faced with for the coming years.

Now there's also been the impact of extension of benefits to the constituency assistants, the employee family assistance plan and sick leave benefits which has just been extended as well to those employees.

The impact on the time and resources within the Legislative Assembly Office, human resources to administer, and hopefully we're looking forward to automate these types of processes in order to reduce the time needed to administer all these new benefit requirements for our staff.

As you are aware, the Legislative Assembly Office and staff are there to serve the needs of the members, and by doing so in that role, also serve the members, the elected members, in serving the people of Saskatchewan, the electorate of this province. So that's the main objective and the mandate of the Legislative Assembly Office staff.

The other area where there will be some impact, and you'll recognize there have been three new committees established from last December. The large volume of the extra work that results from this in the Clerk's office, and the Legislative Library also is impacted by the creation of these committees. Something that may in fact increase in the future as well, given some of the discussions in the rules and regulations committee about the effectiveness that these committees may perhaps have in the future.

As a result of that we required additional research staff. And as well, as you know, and we introduced in the legislature, we've seconded staff. We had seconded staff from the . . . a Clerk from the committee in Toronto.

We've done . . . there are a lot of things that the Legislative Assembly offices have to be proud of as well. The extension of our legislative broadcast services and our sites, which is now I'm told there has been an additional 23 sites in the recent past. So we're now up to 111, bringing our Legislative Assembly business to the people in your communities and in your constituencies.

The challenges that we're looking at facing for the coming years, again on behalf of elected members, on behalf of the people of this province, are first of all the increased parliamentary visits and exchanges. Members are aware that we are currently hosting a delegation from the Midwest legislative committee in the United States, people that we have a great deal in common with.

Members have supported the need to learn about our neighbours. This is not something that was just initiated; this is something that has been coming about since the early '90s. And members see that we need to visit with people from other areas so they can learn from one another and co-operate on areas of common interest. Because the bottom line as legislators, whether we're north of the forty-ninth parallel or south of the forty-ninth parallel, we do have those common objectives and the principles of democracy.

So what we hope to do is to establish again more exchange visits with people from Montana, people to our immediate south and in the southwest. We're hoping to have some people from North Dakota come to visit. And as you're perhaps aware, it's not always possible because of some logistics where their Houses, state representative Houses, and Senates perhaps don't sit for two years at a time. And some of the times that when they are sitting is when we would like to host them while we're sitting here. It doesn't always click.

Anyway, the other thing that we should be very, very proud of, and I know that the members have supported it a great deal, is the Social Sciences Teachers Institute which we just completed very recently — the second one of its kind. And I have to tell you there's just been incredible support from all the staff and caucuses for this very, very worthwhile project. It's an extension of an opportunity for members here to reach out to their constituents, and particularly to the students, in order to learn more about what we're doing.

Teachers that have attended here have a new-found respect and appreciation for the work of our legislators and for the members themselves. Our objectives are to reach and show what elected members do after they're elected and to combat the cynical attitudes that the public may have, and this is one way of doing it. The objectives are well-met.

And I just want to very quickly and I don't want to take up your time, but I want to take up very quickly some of the comments that teachers who have attended have told us and I'm proud to be able to share this with you.

Regarding a briefing by Ms. Lorje and Mr. Boyd on the role of private members: this was an extremely informative session illustrating parallels between different party strategies and the daily work of members outside the Assembly.

Another one:

Excellent presentation. They both provided us with a very good idea where they stand politically, and yet how they get along, as well as the duties of the MLAs. Enjoyed their candour.

Another quote:

House leaders' briefing by Opposition and Government House Leaders: frank discussion of political realities in the House. Superb, fine analysis of the role.

And a final one:

I'm greatly appreciative of every effort that was made to make this event a success. This has been the most valuable personal development experience I have had.

This comes from teachers who are also professionals and who are now able to take the message back to their classrooms, to their communities, on our behalf.

The other challenging thing that we have, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, are technology. The rules and regulations

committee, as I mentioned, has met and as a result of that I believe we will see an impact on both how members and staff work as the committee supports a much-expanded use of this technology.

For example now we have laptops allowed in the House and somebody mentioned, well at least we're approaching what we should have been doing in the '80s. So slowly we're moving towards and trying to keep up with technology. Something that comes at a cost. I'm sure you'll appreciate that. So now we allow laptops use in the House at all times.

There will be wiring needed to provide expanded access for caucuses, committee rooms, and members in the Chamber as well to network and access the Internet both through the laptops and their offices. The digital audio in the Chamber and committees — and members here will recognize that the committee recording equipment must be replaced; it's 22 years old — digital audio will improve the sound quality in the Chamber plus as well the transcription, and assist people at *Hansard*.

The digital audio will also allow members to post their speeches on the web sites. And that's a pretty exciting technology. And I just wanted to make some comment here about the legislative pages — the web pages. There's been a significant savings with respect to the fast and effective, extensive distribution of Assembly documents as a result of our web site.

And I want to tell you quickly, the web site allows researchers and public to now see exactly what's going on, almost on an immediate basis. The search page is by far the most popular page on the web site. And just some stats here. The following are statistics for the Assembly's web site. Pages viewed, let me start, 1998-99 were 96,000; '99-2000, 545,000 — 460 per cent change, increase in the number of people that have visited; 114,000 visits to the web site in '99-2000 as compared to 19,000 the previous year; 41,000 visitors in '99-2000 as opposed to 9,000 the previous year. The most popular ones are the main page, the search pages, members' pages, and so on.

So there is an interest and the public do want to have access to what's happening here.

We've had people from all over the world visit our web sites. The guest book records visitors' comments, and they have been overwhelmingly positive as well.

Tobacco committee web site, which is on as well — it's part of the Assembly's web site — hosted a survey which had over 500 responses from Saskatchewan people in seven weeks.

Now the future plans which are reflected again ... as I mentioned at the outset, in order to gain the benefits of technology there is a need to remain current and upgrade, and I'm sure members of the committee will recognize that. And it does come as a cost. If you ... in that particular area, if you get behind it's difficult to catch up unless you have some major, major investments.

The future plans and the main goal in this particular area is to provide at some point live audio of the legislative proceedings to the public via these web sites. So ... and that again

depending on finances, costs. We're hoping to do that as quickly as possible; however, right now it looks like maybe 2002-2003. So it's a slow-moving process. There's cost involved, but it's very important.

Again, with respect to the building restoration, just to bring you up to date. Phase 2 is underway, and that involves the Chamber sprinkler system and all the other work that's being done now. And as you wander the hallways, you can see the ceilings have been torn out to achieve these personal safety initiatives that are underway right now.

There will be a restoration of the library reading room so that we can once again use it for public events and teas and so on. And then, of course, one of the major significant changes will be the barrier-free access on the north side of the building in the front entrance adjacent to a gallery for more visitor services' programming, and again, to include a gift shop as well.

We have had approved, by the Board of Internal Economy, two new positions: a Clerk of committees and a secretarial support person. And these competitions will be open in the next couple of months.

So I . . . That's in a nutshell, Mr. Chairman. Now let's . . . you know, the on-depth analysis. If there are questions, my staff is here. If there's anything along the communications aspect and technology, Mr. Greg Putz, who is the Deputy Clerk, serves on that committee as well and is a wealth of knowledge in that respect.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: — Thank you very much for those remarks. Any questions or comments?

Mr. Krawetz: — I'm wondering, Mr. Chairman, based on the time factor right now, I mean, if we're going to go into each individual category, I think that's going to take longer than the time that we have.

Maybe for clarification of some of the general comments that the Speaker has made, we could maybe ask those questions now and then deal with the entire budget and the estimates at a later date. Is that . . .

The Chair: — What are the wishes of the committee?

Mr. Krawetz: — Because we're almost at 11 o'clock already. And I don't think we can do justice to all of the figures before us.

Just, Mr. Speaker, if you could clarify. You mentioned a couple of things, and pardon my ignorance, but I'm not sure into which of the categories they fall. You talked about broadcast services and you talked about social studies teachers' group and you talked about the building restoration.

And I'm wondering — let's deal with broadcast services — which of the areas of expenditure does that fall into?

The Speaker: — The Legislative Assembly services.

Mr. Krawetz: — The costs associated with the social studies teachers visiting the legislature for that week — where do they fall in?

The Speaker: — That's included in the administration part.

Mr. Krawetz: — Just how are we supposed to know that? That's exactly what we're trying to do. Now, building restoration — obviously the huge project is not within these?

The Speaker: — No, that's Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation. But it may still impact because of the opportunity for now to do wiring and some of the . . . As I mentioned in the rules and regulations committee, that when the time comes that we're looking at putting . . . having laptops and access to electrical power to operate them — right now we don't have that, it's strictly on battery — there'll be a cost included in that. Some of the wiring, and some of the technology, the networking for caucuses, will fall in our purview.

Mr. Krawetz: — Just a quick . . . I know that there's someone at the door already. You mentioned three, I believe you said three committees of the Legislative Assembly were created. Obviously the Tobacco Committee and the committee dealing with prostitution. What was the third?

The Speaker: — Yes. And then we had the Agriculture Committee last December, if you recall. And the Rules Committee; I'm sorry, there's another one.

Mr. Krawetz: — So there's four.

The Speaker: — So there is a fourth — the rules and regulations committee.

The Chair: — Okay, thank you very much. We're getting close to the end of our time. Just point out that this budget, in greater detail than what we're going to be going through, was dealt with at the Board of Internal Economy which there are *Hansards* available. So perhaps before the next meeting if you wanted to go through those *Hansards* and the verbatim, it may be able to answer some of those questions or it may raise others as well.

So thank you very much for your presentation and for the discussion. And I would entertain a motion to adjourn. Moved by Mr. Yates. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried. We are adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 10:58 a.m.