



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOUSE SERVICES

Hansard Verbatim Report

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOUSE SERVICES
2005**

Hon. P. Myron Kowalsky, Chair
Prince Albert Carlton

Mr. Rod Gantefoer, Deputy Chair
Melfort

Mr. Greg Brkich
Arm River-Watrous

Mr. Glenn Hagel
Moose Jaw North

Ms. Donna Harpauer
Humboldt

Hon. Andrew Thomson
Regina South

Hon. Harry Van Mulligen
Regina Douglas Park

Mr. Kevin Yates
Regina Dewdney

[The committee met at 17:00.]

The Deputy Chair: — Good evening ladies and gentlemen. We'll bring the committee to order. I would like to welcome all the members and the Speaker and officials here this evening.

We are going to review a number of issues tonight and I would like to advise the committee that the following documents have been tabled with the committee: the Information and Privacy Commissioner, budgetary estimates for 2005-06; the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the annual report and financial statements for the year ending March 31, 2004; the Children's Advocate, the annual report for the year 2004; and the Chief Electoral Officer, the annual report for the period May 12, 1998 to December 21, 2002.

I'd also advise the committee that the committee has received an order of the Assembly dated April 4, 2005, to consider and report back the estimates of the following: vote 34, the Chief Electoral Officer; vote 76, the Children's Advocate; vote 57, the Conflict of Interest Commissioner; vote 55, the Information and Privacy Commissioner; vote 56, the Ombudsman; and vote 28, the Provincial Auditor.

The agenda for today's meeting is as follows: the consideration of the estimates and annual reports for, firstly, the Children's Advocate; secondly, the Information and Privacy Commissioner; and thirdly, the Chief Electoral Officer.

So we'll begin by asking the Speaker to please introduce the officials from the Children's Advocate office.

**General Revenue Fund
Children's Advocate
Vote 76**

Subvote (CA01)

The Speaker: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, members of the committee. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you Glenda Cooney, who's a deputy children's advocate. She's a deputy, has been with the advocate's office for eight years. Dr. Deborah Parker-Loewen, of course, is retiring as of June 20. So although Glenda's been here many times before this, this is her first time taking lead. I also want to mention that today for consideration are the estimates and, also as the Chair indicated, consideration of the annual report. And the Children's Advocate office is looking forward to your questions.

I would introduce to you then Glenda Cooney and ask her to start by introducing her officials.

Ms. Cooney: — Thank you very much. I would like to begin by introducing Bernie Rodier, who is our director of administration at the Children's Advocate, and Sharon Chapman, who's the director of communications.

I would like to begin by stating that it's an honour and a privilege to be here to present on behalf of the Children's Advocate office. I am in the unique position of presenting Dr. Parker-Loewen's last annual report as Children's Advocate in her absence. So in light of this, I'll do my best to present the

information and answer your questions, but I may need to call on my colleagues, Ms. Rodier and Ms. Chapman, to assist me in this regard. I will also provide you with background information as to the Children's Advocate's 2005-2006 budgetary estimates which you will have before you.

But let me begin before I get to that with an overview of our program and a few key points regarding our annual report. Should I just continue?

The Deputy Chair: — Please.

Ms. Cooney: — Okay. The Children's Advocate office was created in November 1994. This year we celebrated our 10th anniversary so it has been a pretty exciting year. We have had opportunity to reflect on how far we have come and how far we have to go. While there have been some mentionable advancements in children's well-being, much remains to be done.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the Assembly who supported and joined in our anniversary celebrations. I would also like to thank the other members of the Children's Advocate office who are not here with us today, but who work tirelessly on behalf of Saskatchewan children.

The Children's Advocate office derives its authority and mandate from The Ombudsman and Children's Advocate Act. We work to ensure that the interests and well-being of children are respected and valued, both in the community and in government practice, policy, and legislation.

During 2004 the CAO [Children's Advocate office] developed a new, multi-year, strategic plan that incorporates financial, human resources, information technology, capital, and communications planning.

We base our day-to-day work on our strategic plan and on our legislation. The strategic plan identifies five overarching goals for our organization. These goals represent the vision and mandate as identified in our legislation. In addition, the plan outlines the types of activities that the organization undertakes in order to promote and protect the rights of children, and to ensure that children receive the level of services that they need and are entitled to from the Government of Saskatchewan.

Briefly the goals are to advocate for the interests and well-being of children, to promote public accountability through comprehensive investigations, to educate people on the interests and well-being of children, to effect a systemic change to promote the interests and well-being of children, and finally to provide high-quality service.

Each goal in turn has a corresponding operational or priority activity. Each of these activities contribute in a significant way to the Children's Advocate's ability to identify key issues, increase awareness of challenges, promote systemic change, and advocate with and on behalf of children and youth.

Each priority area within the strategic plan has a set of specific goals, objectives, strategies, and indicators or measures of success. A complete overview of our office's strategic plan is

included in our annual report. It's also available on our website, and I believe it's also available in the budget information.

The creation of a Children's Advocate office was one of the commitments made to children of Saskatchewan through Saskatchewan's Action Plan for Children in 1993. The Action Plan for Children and the seven goals it contains provides the framework for the Children's Advocate office 10th anniversary report. I believe you all have a copy of this report. This annual report is unique in that it provides an overview of the office work and issues over the past 10 years, rather than the usual past year's activity.

As you each have a copy of this report I will provide you with only a few of the highlights from the report, paying particular attention to the activities of the past year. Over our 10-year history, the office has opened 8,331 individual advocacy files, with our annual requests for services stabilizing at approximately 1,000 calls per year. The Children's Advocate office offers a continuum of advocacy services to children, youth, parents, and others who contact the office. In addition, each year the office makes approximately 100 presentations relating to the interests and well-being of children.

Our work often results in recommendations to improve practice. In pursuit of improving practice, in 2004 the office developed a method of tracking our recommendations. This was done in order to fulfill our need to identify indicators of success. One measure of success is the degree to which the office's recommendations are accepted and implemented.

Since its inception the office has made 206 recommendations. Of the 206 recommendations made up to December 31, 2004, 91 per cent have been accepted; 3 per cent were not. Of these recommendations, 41 per cent were fully implemented; 35 per cent have been partially implemented; and 24 per cent remain unresolved. Forty per cent were directed to family service policy and practice, and 13 per cent to case planning, 17 per cent to multiple departments, and 10 per cent were about standards in youth custody facilities.

Another means of achieving success is through the many informal requests to improve conditions for children made to government departments and agencies, and our past years' annual reports reflect many of the informal requests made to government.

A highlight for 2004 was the development of a new program called the RAP, or rights advocacy project. This program was launched as part of our 10th anniversary celebrations. We were honoured to have Mr. Speaker and the MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly], Ms. Bakken and Mr. McCall, at the inaugural launch. It was great fun and I wish you could have all been there to take part.

The goal of RAP is to educate children and youth in a fun, interactive way about rights, and to teach them how to advocate for themselves and others. Since November 2004 over 600 students in community schools across Saskatchewan have participated in the RAP.

As I noted earlier, the office's strategic plan places increased emphasis on our ability to identify key issues and promote

systemic change. Several of these key issues were highlighted in the annual report, and in accordance with our legislation, all reports on these issues were tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

For example, in 2004 our office tabled our report *It's Time for a Plan for Children's Mental Health*. This report is intended to build a broader understanding of the issues faced in the delivery of mental health services for children and youth in Saskatchewan. We are pleased to report that in January 2005 Saskatchewan Health responded by outlining the steps they are taking to implement the recommendation in the report.

Recently the office tabled a summary report on child deaths. In addition, the office has initiated a new systemic publication entitled *CAO Perspectives*. The first issue was on corporal punishment and made three recommendations to government. The first was that government amend The Education Act to prohibit the use of corporal punishment in Saskatchewan schools, and we understand that just such an amendment will be proceeding imminently.

I will now provide background information on our budget for 2005-2006. We are continually pressured to meet our mandate with the resources allocated but we are also respectful of the need to make reasonable requests. The estimate forwarded to you for approval today is for 1,206,900. This budget anticipates a 1 per cent salary increase, includes performance and reclassification adjustments for an increase of 28,000 or a 2.4 increase over the 2004-2005 appropriation bringing the amount for personal services to 892,000. Please note that this amount includes the 129,000 set by statute for the Children's Advocate salary. The CAO currently has 12.1 full-time equivalent positions, all located in Saskatoon.

In terms of the non-personal services, again we're anticipating approximately a 1.8 per cent inflation factor increase on the non-personal services expenditures totalling about \$5,000. This brings the total to 1,178,000.

In addition the office of the Provincial Ombudsman and the Children's Advocate office in a joint submission requested a two-staged, one-time funding for an information management system. Our portion will add 28,000 to this year's budget and 16,000 to next year's budget to complete the project. Therefore, the total allocation requested for the Children's Advocate office is 1,206,000. With these remarks I invite your questions.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you very much, Ms. Cooney. I would invite the members to pose questions and we will deal with the budget estimates and the report concurrently so any of those questions can be accepted. Ms. Harpauer?

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. In the past, having attended a number of the estimates on your department, Deborah Parker-Loewen spoke of the need to do more work in northern communities, recognizing that that was also going to cost more money. Are you continuing, is the office continuing to expand their work in northern communities, and if so, are you doing it within restraints of the budget? Are you expanding at all any programs that you have for northern communities?

Ms. Cooney: — Thank you. That's a really good question. We have the RAP for instance, that I introduced in my speaking

notes, is a program that we hope to bring to all schools in northern Saskatchewan. And of course you can appreciate the travel costs are serious. So in this budget fiscal year we have targeted some of the community schools, but not all of them. But we are certainly hoping that that program will be able to be replicated over and over again because it addresses children in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. So as you can see we have a high youth population in northern Saskatchewan, and it will be a program that can be repeated over and over again, and may well require more funding in the future.

We also have one of our advocates designated as a northern advocate — or actually two. They split the North, east and west at the present time, and it's always challenging. We have very high travel costs.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Brkich.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You talked about, on salaries, an increase of 1 per cent. But you also talked about reclassification. Could you go into that a little more?

Ms. Cooney: — We have one staff that was reclassified and the result of the reclassification is that it costs ... there's a differential in the salary base of ... The total for the reclassification, I don't have them split out, but to do the performance increments and the reclassification for that position, the total amount was \$13,446.

Mr. Brkich: — That was for ... Just one employee was reclassified?

Ms. Cooney: — One employee.

Mr. Brkich: — Okay, thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Thomson.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to note that certainly many of us have appreciated the opportunity to speak with the Children's Advocate's officials in their previous presentations to the Board of Internal Economy, and are familiar with the file.

I did want to advise the acting advocate, however, that we have in fact introduced legislation into the House to ban corporal punishment in the school system. And I do hope it will receive second reading in the next few days. So I want to thank you again for your patience and your work on that issue.

Ms. Cooney: — Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you. Any further questions? If not I'd like to direct members to the estimates on page 137 and 138 of the Estimates book — the vote for the Children's Advocate, no. (CA01), in the amount of \$1.077 million. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — Then I am obligated to move:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2006 the following sums for the Child's Advocate, \$1,077,000. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you, members. We further have a motion that would accept the annual report of the Children's Advocate. I need someone to move that the committee conclude its review of the 2004 annual report of the Children's Advocate.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — I'll move that.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you, members. I have the motion by the member from Regina Douglas Park:

That the committee conclude its review of the 2004 annual report of the Children's Advocate.

All those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — That's carried. I'm also advised that we need someone to move a motion, the motion that I read out, resolved for those funds.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — I'll move that.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Van Mulligen. Any discussion? If not, all those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — That's also carried. Thank you very much and a special thank you to the members of the Children's Advocate office for your presentation today. Thank you very much.

Ms. Cooney: — Thank you.

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

Subvote (IP01)

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you very much, members. I'd like to welcome individuals from the Information and Privacy Commissioner's office, and ask Mr. Speaker to introduce, please.

The Speaker: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee. It's my pleasure to introduce Gary Dickson, who is our Information and Privacy Commissioner. Gary has been before this committee before, but he has been in this position now since November 2003. I just want to mention that Gary is a former politician so he's also had an opportunity to ask the questions in addition to answering them, having gone through three elections and nine years of political experience. So I welcome Gary to the table and ask him to introduce his officials.

Mr. Dickson: — Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and members. Seated to my left is Pam Scott, who is the office manager for what I refer to as the OIPC. We live in an acronym-crazy world; it stands for Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. On my right is Diane Aldridge, who serves as the assistant to the commissioner. And so what you have in front of you, Mr. Chairman, and members, is 100 per cent of the complement in our tiny office. In any event, good afternoon.

The board has approved estimates in the total sum of \$488,000. Mr. Chair, you will recall that in fact we had submitted a request for \$576,000. I wanted to draw the members' attention to our business plan for 2005-2008 provided to you earlier. It would be the last tab in the booklet we've passed out. That business plan, I can tell you, was the basis for our original submission to the board. It identifies five core business areas on pages 5 and 6 of the business plan. It identifies 10 goals on the same two pages of the business plan, and 48 different performance measures on pages 10 to 24 — and the performance measures we developed, Mr. Chair, and committee members, to allow this board and to allow the Assembly to more easily evaluate the performance of the OIPC against some objective criteria.

Given the February 10 decision of the board, we are now in the process, Mr. Chairman, and members, of adapting and revising our business plan to reflect those funds that were actually approved. So what we'll be doing now is we will have one additional portfolio officer, not the two that we'd been seeking, and there will not be an additional full-time administrative support person as contemplated by the business plan. And there are some predictable consequences of the board-approved budget when we look at the business plan, and I just wanted to flag that now. We will not likely be able to clear off the backlog of reviews by year-end as we'd originally contemplated in the business plan. We have over 100 reviews in the backlog now. And I just want to be clear with the committee, I think it's going to take us longer than the end of the fiscal year to resolve all of those.

And I just say, Mr. Chairman, I invite any comments from members of the committee on the goals of the performance measures. We didn't get much of a chance to talk about these when we appeared in front of the board last time and so we always value advice we get from members of the Assembly.

Now since The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act — I'll call it the FOIP [freedom of information and protection of privacy] Act to save time — was proclaimed more than 12 years ago, the mandate of our office has covered a lot of territory. But the three part-time commissioners for the first 10 years of the Act never had the resources to address most parts of the mandate. And then in 2003, the mandate was expanded exponentially when HIPA [The Health Information Protection Act] was proclaimed.

And if you look at schedule 2 in the handout, you will see that not only do we oversee the 76 departments, Crown corporations, boards, commissions, and agencies, all of the school divisions, universities and colleges, regional health authorities, and municipalities, but we now have added thousands of health information trustees. So that's a pretty

significant change in the mandate or at least in the scope. The mandate hasn't changed, but the number of people we have to oversee is greatly bigger.

In addition, with the advent of a full-time office, the federal Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act — and here comes another acronym, PIPEDA [Personal Information Protection and Electronics Documents Act] — the Saskatchewan privacy framework that the government announced in 2003, and just generally a heightened awareness of access and privacy, it'll be no surprise and I tell you, there's been a substantial increase in demand on our office.

And the increased demand, I think, is evident if you look at the tab marked overview and pages 5 to 9 in the handout. You can see the stats in terms of the increased caseload, increased inquiries for information. Interestingly, our website continues to attract between 1,800 and 2,000 visits each month. So clearly, I think that just evidences a high level of interest for information in the province of Saskatchewan.

And just quickly remind you of the four parts of our mandate, Mr. Chairman. Number one, public education. We have completed over 170 presentations to a diverse group of audiences and there's no sign of that demand for information abating any time soon. We view this activity as a key part of building capacity in the public sector to comply with the three laws that our office oversees.

There's been some confusion engendered as a result of the government's overarching privacy framework, and as a result that's required more work to provide clarification, interpretation, and advice on legislative compliance.

The second part of our mandate, advice and commentary. This wasn't done to any significant extent by my three predecessors. We spend a lot of time in the office providing advice to the Regina safer community initiative on what's and is not privacy compliant; advice on video surveillance to SPMC, SIAST, school divisions, health regions.

We're working . . . The Minister of Finance will appreciate there's development of a one-stop business registry, and our office has been working with the steering committee from Justice and Finance to help them navigate through the privacy jungle.

And since I see the Minister of Learning here, I might say it's obvious there's a great deal of creative energy in that office because we've certainly had the opportunity to consult on a number of initiatives that have been generated within Education . . . or Learning.

And I might add, these aren't things we've gone out to solicit. These are cases where these bodies have come to us and said, we want to make sure we're compliant with the legislation. And I see that as an important part of the mandate we have, although it's kind of new territory from what happened before.

The third part of our mandate, access requests. You might be interested to know the bodies so far showing up in our office most frequently, from greatest number of requests to least, Sask Labour is on top of the pile; Sask Health not too far behind;

Justice; the Crown Investments Corporation; the Human Rights Commission; the University of Saskatchewan; and the Saskatoon Regional Health Authority. There are many more bodies but those are the ones that we're dealing most often with.

Privacy complaints, the fourth part of our mandate. And members may recall that a couple of months ago we produced a report with respect to the Automobile Injury Appeal Commission, expressing our concern in a recommendation that the names of Saskatchewan residents should be masked before the full report is put on the website and exposed to the world.

And on Wednesday we're going to be releasing a much more substantial report on the cervical cancer screening program that's been underway in the province of Saskatchewan. It's a big report but we've been able to address a number of things in that report.

Not to belabour the mandate, I'd just say that as a result of where we're at with resources, I want to signal and be upfront with the committee and tell you that we're going to be refusing more requests for education sessions because we simply can't meet the demand now. So more groups, we're going to have to tell them we're not going to be able to do it — at least for a much longer time period. We haven't quite figured out how best to advise ministers and CEOs [chief executive officer] of health regions that we're not going to be able to give them the same kind of turnaround we have before in terms of informal advice, just because of the resources we've got.

For those of us wanting to review a decision of a public body or trustee, it will take longer to issue reports. My best guess now would be it'll be 8 months, 12, 14 months from the time we open a file until our report is concluded.

Now what's involved in producing a report? Let me just quickly say, talking to the applicant complainant, reviewing the record of the public body that . . . and there may be many boxes of documents. That's been our experience, hasn't it? Identifying issues with the public body, exploring mediation. We try wherever possible to sort these things out in a mediated fashion rather than issuing a formal report. Investigating . . . [inaudible] . . . efforts, duty to assist, researching issues, reviewing submissions of the public body and the applicant complainant, drafting the report, and publishing on our website.

Most of our reports are first impression, because there isn't much of a body of decisions from the part-time commissioners. So almost every time we pick up a file, Mr. Chairman, it's the first time we've reviewed it and so you have to spend that extra time making sure you've covered off the bases appropriately and it's going to be a useful tool.

Key challenges — and I'm almost at the end, Mr. Chairman; thanks for your patience — key challenges in 2005-2006 will include trying to work at reducing the backlog of reviews. We're going to be looking at the use of the SIN [social insurance number] number as an employee number by a number of public and private organizations in the province. The USA PATRIOT [Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism] Act and implications with contracting out sensitive

personal information continues to be an issue. Capacity building among health trustees, local authorities, and government institutions, and continuing to work with police and health services. We talked about this at the board, issues in terms of when it's appropriate to share or not to share personal health information with police forces. And we've been working with "F" Division, with municipal police forces, and with the Department of Justice and health regions to crack that nut.

So I just conclude by saying we anticipate another exciting, challenging, eventful fiscal year for the OIPC. We want to thank the Assembly for its past support of this office and its continued support going forward. And I look forward to your questions and advice, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you very much, Mr. Dickson. And I would again allow questions that are concurrent on the budget estimates, as well as the report. Mr. Brkich.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Chairman, I welcome you here today. And I can understand . . . I'm looking forward to your report coming out on cervical cancer because I have a few calls over that over the past number of months and even a year about that, to my office. So I'll be looking forward for that report.

And you also talk about a backlog of cases that have to be cleaned up. Is that included . . . I think, if I'm reading the salaries right, to me increased now by 54,000. Are you going to be hiring one other person to help with that?

Mr. Dickson: — The plan is that . . . And we have resources to hire an additional portfolio officer. Portfolio officer really is a fancy title for somebody doing investigation, so they will be specifically working to reduce that backlog.

Right now it's Ms. Aldridge and I who do all of it; that's right from gathering the records, reviewing them, trying to mediate, all of that sort of work. So this will be a big improvement.

The difficulty is what we do is a fairly technical area. There aren't a lot of people we find that sort of present with all of the skills and the experience. So we were fortunate to have hired Ms. Aldridge who is a quick study. But if we hire somebody, we're looking to do that in September; that's when we can afford to bring them on. And then I anticipate by the time their trained up to a point where they're really going to put a dent in the workload, there won't be much left of 2005.

So, yes, they will be working on that but to be realistic and practical, I'm not sure it's going to put a big dent in the workload before the end of this year.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you. Then, Mr. Chairman, I've got just one more question on the person you're hiring. You said it was going to be investigated . . . one more investigator. Will it be more working the field or just more on the phone end of it with the office?

Mr. Dickson: — That's an interesting question. I can tell you that what our experience has been is that we actually end up going out to the field a lot, and there are a couple of reasons for that. One is that sometimes a request will involve a ton of records and it just isn't feasible for somebody to burn out a

photocopy or try to send a copy. So sometimes it's easier for us to go to Prince Albert or Yorkton and sit down with the people.

The other thing we're doing is, you know, I have to say that although the legislation's been around a long time, there's still not a very high level of awareness. And so when we go out to somebody's shop, it gives us the chance to sit down with more people. And we sort of . . . there's an education that goes on as well as the investigation. So it works in a positive way from that side. There isn't a lot we resolve just over the phone.

So it tends to be a lot of, in most cases, direct dealing whether it's in our office or in theirs. And at some point I think when we have a much higher level of capacity in public bodies — and I'm not sure that's going to happen before the end of my five-year term, but we're working to make that happen as soon as possible — maybe a little bit more we'll be able to do just from our office by phone and so on. But right now it's a lot of these things are just taking, frankly, a great deal of time.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you very much. Mr. Hagel.

Mr. Hagel: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. With three of our members having been members of the Board of Internal Economy, we've had opportunity to reflect and address a number of the issues, and I just want to acknowledge that the commissioner's office, it's evolving and that's certainly the context of the recommendation for future vision that he brings to us. And to say that I think we have got ourselves some quality folks and wish you well in the expansion of the office this fall. Thank you.

Mr. Dickson: — Thanks very much.

The Deputy Chair: — Ms. Harpauer.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. What percentage of your case files that you're working on would you estimate that you're putting a lot of time and resources in, that in essence won't see any change, won't result in any change? For example, with the SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] appeals list that you had made a recommendation that they be masked, now that was not done. What percentage would you just be floating out what you think or what you evaluate in your office should be done, but in essence nothing changes?

Mr. Dickson: — That will be one of the things clearly we'll be addressing in our annual report. In fact the annual report specifically mandates, I think, for me to address recommendations being accepted or not. Now I'm an optimist though and I can tell you I'm hoping I can be more persuasive in the other recommendations and reports my office issues.

And I must say, to be fair, we've received . . . and if you look actually in our, if you've got a copy of the annual report, if you look at . . . Ms. Scott has done a very creative, on page 25, kind of a pie chart there that shows you that the history of the office is that in only about 5 per cent of cases did the institution not comply with the report. Now I'm hoping to be at least as persuasive as the last three part-time commissioners, but we'll have to see. But I can promise you in our annual report, you will see us specifically addressing recommendations not accepted and that sort of thing.

And even, I must say, even with the Automobile Injury Appeal Commission, they may have not accepted our key recommendation, but they've accepted a number of other recommendations. For example they hadn't addressed the Health Information Protection Act, although they are designated as a trustee. And so there are some things that they have to do and we'll be doing as a result of the report. Am I being responsive to your question?

Ms. Harpauer: — You are so.

Mr. Dickson: — Okay.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — Any further questions? Seeing none. Oh, Mr. Brkich?

Mr. Brkich: — Just one more. Getting back to the budget, I see on supplier and other payments, you're requesting a bit more for that. Can you give me a little more detail on that?

Mr. Dickson: — We're looking at page 12 of our material and the biggest change there is office space. And the members of the board I'd ask to bear with me because we've sort of gone through this in detail, but what had happened is that when I had arrived my predecessor had negotiated the lease on some very nice space for a five-year term. But it was about 900 square feet and so it became pretty apparent that there's just no room we could grow. So the biggest change here is we're trying to negotiate a surrender of our existing lease and taking over some additional space so that we will have room for another investigator.

And we've tried to be creative. For example, we've had a SIAST work experience student from the health records program and we've tried to do some things like that to help. But the biggest part of this is really additional space and we're going to have to pay more wherever we go, because it's going to be more space.

Does that . . . I should just confirm my . . . The woman who really knows the numbers, is that an accurate . . .

Ms. Scott: — That's right.

Mr. Dickson: — Okay.

Mr. Brkich: — Okay. Thank you. Do you negotiate your own lease or does Saskatchewan Property Management negotiate?

Mr. Dickson: — I'm new to this, but I have to tell you my sense is I'm entirely in the hands of SPMC and we sort of tell them what we would like. And then, we're breathlessly waiting for a report back in terms of whether we can move and if they can find some space for us that we can afford. And I understand they're working hard on it, just we don't have anything nailed down as of yet.

The clear direction from the board was . . . When we went in front of the board we had actually built in a double rent portion for 2005 because we needed more space for people. But we didn't know what would happen with our lease space and we

hadn't started negotiations until we got at least a go-ahead from the board.

The board made it very clear, as I understood it, that we weren't to look at any expansion in terms of staff or going out to get any new space until we could extinguish the liability on our existing lease space. If I misunderstand, I'm counting on somebody on the board to correct me.

So, it's that sequence thing. We have to be able to walk away from our lease before we're permitted to look at any expansion of the office or any move. Thanks.

Mr. Brkich: — Okay. Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: — That's it. Thank you. Any other questions by members? If not, we have two issues to deal with. First is someone to move a motion that this committee conclude its review of the 2004 annual report and financial statements of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

While we're waiting for that motion to be signed, on page 142 of the Estimates book is the vote for the Information and Privacy Commissioner, vote (IP01) in the amount of \$488,000. And I will need someone to move:

That it be resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2006 the following sums: for the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$488,000.

Mr. Hagel will move that? All those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — That's carried. Thank you.

Mr. Dickson: — Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, members.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you. You have your funding.

And, members, we also have moved by the member from Regina Dewdney:

That this committee conclude its review of the 2004 annual report and financial statements of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

All those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — That's carried. Thank you very much.

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

Subvote (CE01)

The Deputy Chair: — Members, thank you. We are now turning to the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, and I'd like Mr. Speaker to introduce the officials, please.

The Speaker: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee. It's my pleasure to introduce Jean Ouellet to this group. Mr. Ouellet was appointed as our Chief Electoral Officer on December 1, 2004. He is one of the people that has come back to Saskatchewan. He was here until two years ago when he took an appointment . . . He was actually working with the electoral office here, took an appointment at the federal level and worked as a senior adviser there, and we welcome him back now.

And I must say that one of the things I want to give him some credit for is he was willing to give a presentation to the teachers at our recent teachers' institute and was a big hit. They really learned a lot about our own electoral system. So I yield now to Mr. Ouellet and ask him to introduce his officials.

Mr. Ouellet: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To my left is Dave Wilkie, the assistant chief electoral officer; to my right is Brent Nadon, the newest addition to the office and manager of election finance; and to my left is Polly Hrenyk, our communication and operations manager. That's not all the staff, we have a receptionist that kept guard at the office.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman, members of the House and Service Committee, as this is my first opportunity to address you it is my pleasure to thank you for the trust you have placed in me through your recommendation to the Legislative Assembly that appointed me as your Chief Electoral Officer.

The Chief Electoral Officer, as an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly, must possess neutrality, integrity, and be worthy of the trust of all the components of the voting public and the political entities. The officer, Chief Electoral Officer, strives to achieve excellence in its administration and reaches this goal through the optimal use of resource made available to it.

The Chief Electoral Officer role is to strengthen the office's mission, uphold its value, and enhance its vision while remaining accountable for its performance. My office must possess short-term and long-term priorities. Furthermore both the members of the Legislative Assembly and the public need adequate information about the office's goals and they must be able to measure the office's achievements.

To that end, my office is in the final stage of developing a comprehensive 2005 through 2011 strategic plan that will define where the organization is, where it will be going over the next seven years, and how it's going to get there; and through measurable outcomes, evaluate its progress and ultimately determine if it got there or not.

The ultimate success of the office may be achieved through a renewed partnership with legislators, political entities, and the electorate while at the same time maintaining or even strengthening the independence of the office. New partnerships must be created with all elements of the voting population and in particular with the youth and First Nations communities. Positive experience should lead to some success in their rate of participation.

My office also wants to develop a partnership with the office of the Minister of Learning with a view to include a strong

component of civic education in our schools as part of their curriculum. My office also intends to build constructive relationships with the media since it is one of the most important means of reaching our stakeholders.

Voting must also be made more accessible to all Saskatchewan electors. And through its reporting function, the Chief Electoral Officer must recommend to members of the Legislative Assembly various ways of making the voting process in Saskatchewan more user-friendly and more accessible.

My office needs to revisit and re-evaluate existing processes to determine why they are needed, how to better implement them, and how to measure their success and effectiveness. This province is celebrating its centennial. This is an opportunity to focus on past success and future renewals. Collectively we can create a made-in-Saskatchewan electoral process that responds to the needs of all our stakeholders.

Committee members, you have before you the 2005-06 expenditure estimates for the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer. You will note that the office is requesting \$30,000 above its 2004-05 submission. This request is to study the possibility of offering electronic filing to candidates in registered political parties.

In closing I wish to assure you of the continued co-operation of my office and thank you for your time. And I'm able to take your questions if you have any. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you very much. Mr. Van Mulligen.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — It's not about your operations as such. The question was posed to me — and I don't know whether it's a matter of practice or whether it's a matter of The Election Act — but the issue of school groups being able to witness an actual polling place in operation, is that a question of practice or would it require a change to the legislation?

Mr. Ouellet: — This would be a statutory change since in The Election Act it states who may be in a polling station, such as the electors, poll officials, scrutineers from representatives of candidates, and that's it. Media is not even allowed in a polling place as well. As you will recall, sometimes every election we get requests from the media to film leaders voting. And obviously they can't get in the poll. They can sometimes, if they do not interfere with the process, stay outside and film from the doorway into the poll.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — But for a school group of children, for example, again that would require a change to the Act?

Mr. Ouellet: — That's correct.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — The other question I have is, you know, you've been avidly reading all of the comments with respect to a federal election, as to whether there will or will not be a federal election. My question is, do you think that the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada is ready for an election?

Mr. Ouellet: — Well I was there. I was fortunate to have been working at Elections Canada just after the election when the

outcome came out. And there was a great, great drive to be ready at any time. And to the best of my knowledge, I believe March 1, 2005 was the magic day.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Okay, that answers that. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Brkich.

Mr. Brkich: — I have a couple of questions, I guess. One I could ask, are we ready for one, more importantly? But two questions, I guess, I was going to ask that were totally different. But I'll start with, you'd mentioned working with the Department of Learning. And I think the member opposite, is that what you were talking about — was allowing school groups or just coming in to polling stations or were you talking about maybe just education, going out to schools to talk about voting?

Mr. Ouellet: — Well one of the noted difficulties with current election is a decrease in the rate of participation, most specifically of two groups that are particularly noted, First Nations communities as well as youth. We find that if the process continues, these youth will become parents of youth who will not vote either. So we've got to break that systemic problem and put a very strong education or civic education material on their curriculum to give them those values.

I remember when I was very young when we wouldn't vote federally until we were 21 years old. And I couldn't wait to get to be 21 years old to vote. But that's not the case nowadays.

Mr. Brkich: — No, it's not. I noticed when I was campaigning in '99, I think, I had two schools that were running elections at the same time. You know, that's how they got involved with it, and I know that that was very well received by the students. It got them involved. And you go to other schools and talk and they didn't have elections, the questions weren't as good as I was getting from them two school groups that actually ran, they ran an election for a week. They had kids picked out that were candidates, and they had to bring issues. And the kids at the end of the week had to vote on it. So that was one way of reaching out.

So I guess I was asking, that's more what you're going to be doing is more information and possibly talking to teachers if they want to, you know, have some mock elections?

Mr. Ouellet: — Exactly. Election simulation, political history, you know, all this material.

The Deputy Chair: — Ms. Harpauer.

Ms. Harpauer: — So have you issued a letter to all the schools in the province saying that this is available, or you're . . .

Mr. Ouellet: — No.

Ms. Harpauer: — No?

Mr. Ouellet: — We're really in the beginning or the preliminaries of this, some discussions. I was fortunate, as the Speaker said, to be part of the Saskatchewan social science

institute, the teachers. And I was able to meet some officials of the Learning department. And I ... [inaudible] ... great enthusiasm, and I want to exploit that particular aspect of it.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Brkich.

Mr. Brkich: — ... you also talked about using some extra money to explore, I think it was electronic voting which ... I was at a conference that was, I think that was in Edmonton. That was quite a few, well quite a few years ago, but about four, and they were talking about Internet. In fact they had one of the speakers ... Oh, we were at a seminar on Internet voting and electronic voting and ... Are any other provinces looking at moving in that direction right now that you know of? Have you been ...

Mr. Ouellet: — Well generally speaking there's no great taste for electronic voting at this time. The security system that is required for me to be sure that John Doe is the person casting that ballot, and not someone else, are not in place. There is room for, for example, for jurisdictions that have a register, a permanent register of electors — and I'm thinking specifically British Columbia at this time will allow registration online, will also allow verification of registration online, changing addresses online. So that's the, you know, really the beginning or the outset of it.

There was some, I don't know if members are aware, but there was in Calgary there was a civic election that caused enormous amounts of problems with electronic voting. So I don't think we're really ready for that at this time.

We need to secure the electoral system and the confidence in the electoral system, particularly in times where the political process is really debated before the TV at this point in time and discouraging people, I think. I think we've got rebuilding to do.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you. With that answer I'll just ... a follow-up question along that line. Are you looking at voter registration then a bit? Is that what the money's going to be, you know, lean more towards voter registration online?

Mr. Ouellet: — At the present time there is provision in the Act, I'm referring particularly to section 30, which would permit an enumeration outside an electoral event. However the maintenance of this particular enumeration and turning it into a permanent register would be through regulations. No such regulation exists at this time and so, notwithstanding that, we're still doing enumeration. Certainly there is an advantage of a register, but this will be up to the decision of the legislators.

Mr. Brkich: — So the money that was budgeted that you're looking for — electronic voting — you're looking just studying a few other countries then, see how that works?

Mr. Ouellet: — No, not particularly. What we're applying for is as a request of the political elements, the feasibility of having an electronic program where the return can be filed on the particular program, in order to minimize the amount of corrections that may be required or inaccuracies, and then it speeds the process as well.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Hagel.

Mr. Hagel: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. Again three of our members on the Board of Internal Economy have had opportunity to review your operation, appreciate the work you do. Just one quick question. For sight impaired voters, are we looking at any mechanisms other than being accompanied by someone into the polling station?

Mr. Ouellet: — There is many provisions, there's up to five provisions for accommodation to disabilities and those could be any physical or even impaired disabilities. There is a possibility of voting by absentee, if you're neither able to get a poll or an advanced poll. You may vote at an advanced poll which will give you better, you know, access to probably the slower process and not being rushed and being capable of going through. You've mentioned the friend of the elector that could mark the ballot for sight impaired electors. There's also a provision in the Act for the use of a template, whereby a template is fit over a ballot and if the elector requests, the poll official will give the order of the candidates on the ballot. And then the elector chose his sequence and will go by himself or herself behind the voting screens and, over the template, just feel for the particular candidate they wish to vote and mark the ballot with a cross or with an X. And that is basically the best practice across from coast to coast.

Mr. Hagel: — Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Thomson.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — I just wanted to say thank you very much for the offer to work with the Learning department on developing a program to encourage young people to take a more active role in the democracy. I do think that that is something that young people are very interested in. And if we approach it in the right way, I do think we'll garner a fair amount of interest in years that are not necessarily part of the election either.

You know, there is a lot of debate. As we read around the country, I think Toronto has been debating whether or not to reduce the voting age to 16 in the city council elections. And I know that periodically this comes up as an issue across provincial governments. That debate is one that has a certain degree of controversy, but I think all of us agree that young people should be more involved in understanding the mechanics of the democracy and the philosophical underpinnings that really do provide this as a different system of government.

So I welcome your attention to this. I think that it's appropriate that it be by an independent officer and it be in direct relationship with the school boards and the Department of Learning. And so I look forward to that initiative moving forward.

The Deputy Chair: — Any further questions? If not, I would direct members to the estimates for the Chief Electoral Officer found on page 135 and 136 of the Estimates book.

However, it's my obligation to point out that all of these funds are statutory and therefore it requires no vote on this committee's part. However, a motion is required that this committee conclude its review of the annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer.

Thank you, members. I have a motion by the member from Regina Douglas Park:

That the committee conclude its review of the annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer.

All those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — That's carried. Thank you very much, members. Is there any other further business? There being no further business before this committee, a motion to adjourn. Mr. Yates.

Thank you very much, members. Until next week, Monday next.

[The committee adjourned at 18:13.]