



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOUSE SERVICES

Hansard Verbatim Report

No. 6 – May 2, 2005



Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

Twenty-fifth Legislature

**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.]

**General Revenue Fund
Ombudsman
Vote 56**

Subvote (OM01)

The Deputy Chair: — Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We're prepared to start the Standing Committee on House Services. The first estimate and annual report that we're to consider this evening is for the Office of the Ombudsman, and I would ask Mr. Speaker to please make the introductions.

The Speaker: — Thank you very much. First of all, members of the committee, I want to applaud you for your willingness to meet over the supper hour and also to thank the independent officers who are here today for also giving up their supper hour today.

The first one that we have with us is the Provincial Ombudsman. It's my pleasure to introduce Mr. Kevin Fenwick, who is first time before this committee, and who was appointed as Acting Ombudsman effective October 1, year 2004. So I would ask Mr. Fenwick to introduce his official or officials, and then proceed.

Mr. Fenwick: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With me is Lynne Fraser. Lynne is our manager of administration from our office in Saskatoon, so she'll be assisting me this afternoon with the questions that I may not have the answers to if you have some, which could easily be.

I've been told I need to explain the particular, extra makeup that I have with me today. I wish I could say something exciting like I had an animated discussion with some intransigent cabinet minister who wasn't listening to our perspective on a particular complaint from a good citizen of the province, but unfortunately I had a bit of an argument with this weekend with a Jackall handle, and so it's not nearly as exciting as what it might be.

I'll try and be brief, and certainly understand that we're here primarily to answer questions you may have, particularly about our annual report. This is my first opportunity to appear before the committee, and you will appreciate that actually only about three months of this annual report take place for a period that's during my tenure. The nine months of last year were under the tenure of my predecessor.

Very quickly what I would like to mention is that we do have a philosophy at the office, and the philosophy certainly is primarily we are responsible for responding to complaints from citizens of Saskatchewan about their government departments, agencies, boards, and commissions. But I think it's fair to say that our philosophy is now, and has been for many years, that a large part of what we do is try and work with complainants and government departments, boards, agencies, and commissions to try and help them reach resolution where that's possible on their own.

We have of course very broad investigative powers but we do

not have powers to implement our decisions. So our goal would be to try to work with the boards and agencies and departments when we can so that both sides are satisfied that the result is a fair one. Primarily our goal is to ensure that there's fairness in the application of programs and in how decisions are made.

To that end we have announced in our annual report this year that there are a couple of initiatives that we would like to be able to at least begin pursuing in the upcoming year. And while we recognize that our core business will always be to investigate complaints, we do think that in the long run we can be of service to the province if we can assist boards and commissions and departments and agencies in reducing the number of complaints that come before them. There are certain Crown corporations, for example, and some departments that have already embarked on initiatives to actively engage in fair practices training or fair practices initiative within their departments to address particularly where there are patterns of complaints that come before them rather than just individual or isolated complaints. And we think we have a role to play to that end as well.

So one of the things that we are planning to do this year is to reallocate some of our resources internally to work with departments and agencies — not just to talk to them about what the Office of the Ombudsman does, but what they can do so that they don't hear from the Ombudsman's office at all.

Related to that as well, we have some — particularly Crown corporations and Workers' Compensation Board — that have established internally fair practices offices or fair practices officers, almost like an internal ombudsman. And where that's happened they have been very effective in dealing with complaints so that the complainants feel they've been treated fairly before the matters ever have to come to our office. We do want to encourage that in the next year and do some work along those lines.

If I could just take a couple of minutes to talk briefly about some of the statistics that are reported in our annual report. The number of complaints we received in the past year was fairly stable when compared to the year before. However, we are looking at an increase of about 25 per cent in the number of complaints compared to five years ago.

In 2004, we received and opened files for just over 2,900 complaints against government. We also received complaints for another 1,440 matters that were not within our jurisdiction or, as we talk about it, not against government as government is defined in our mandate. Those are complaints against municipal corporations, First Nations, federal government agencies, etc. They take some time because we don't like to throw those people out the door. We do act as a referral agent and sometimes a bit of a coach for them, to make sure they end up in the right place. But they're not what takes the bulk of our time. The bulk of our time is on those 2,900-and-some complaints that we've received in each of the last two years.

We note with respect to those 2,900 complaints that we did see last year compared to 2003, fairly significant reductions in the numbers of complaints received against most of the Crown corporations and against the Workers' Compensation Board.

Particularly with SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] and SaskPower, there were significant reductions, in percentage terms, in the number of complaints received. Smaller reductions for SaskEnergy and SaskTel, but reductions nonetheless. And with respect to the Workers' Compensation Board, a reduction of about a third in terms of the number of complaints we receive.

We think that and I've had discussions with the board of the Workers' Compensation Board about the reasons for that and we attribute a significant portion of that, as do they, to the institution of a fair practices office within the Workers' Compensation Board structure. The fair practices officer they have happens to be a deputy ombudsman in his past life, so he's certainly familiar with the work that we do and we think that's a significant factor contributing to the decrease in numbers.

Having said that, although the percentage increases were somewhat lower, we did see increases in absolute numbers, primarily from the income security division of Community Resources and Employment and from three of our four correctional centres in the province. That meant that the total number of complaints we received last year was about the same as the year before, a very slight decrease.

So significant increases in . . . or sorry, significant decreases in percentage terms for some of those Crowns, less significant increases in percentage terms from Community Resources and Employment and the correctional centres. But in absolute numbers they evened out because we received significantly more complaints overall from Community Resources and Employment and from the correctional centres.

In terms of how we deal with files, we closed 2,913 files last year. Of those we found 255 to be not substantiated complaints. Two hundred and sixteen of them were resolved as a result of significant intervention and investigation on our part. Another 1,767 cases, and that's the bulk of the numbers obviously, were resolved as a result of some type of assistance or intervention on our part, something short of a full-fledged investigation. And in those cases, the bulk of them resulted in either a complete or partial satisfaction of the complainant's concerns. We sent 171 cases to our alternate complaint resolution process, which is a form of mediation or something akin to mediation that we do.

We had only 17 cases overall where we found that a complaint was substantiated and was not resolved in one form or another as a result of interventions that our office made, or as a result of work that was done by the departments, boards, commissions, or agencies.

And out of those 2,913 files there were actually only five times where the investigation went through to its absolute conclusion, where we made a formal recommendation and that recommendation was not followed. Certainly there were other situations where we made tentative recommendations and for one reason or another we did not end up writing a formal report, but our estimate would be . . . and when you only have five out of 2,913 where a recommendation is made and not followed, we're reasonably satisfied that we're being listened to when we make recommendations. And we get frustrated with five, but it's not a bad average overall.

I'm again getting used to the position still but it's been a very interesting first six months. I'm very fortunate to have a very long-serving and dedicated staff who've made the transition to the position relatively smooth for me. I'm certainly looking forward to the next year and would be happy to entertain any questions that any committee members may have.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you very much, Mr. Fenwick. Members, questions. Mr. Brkich.

Mr. Brkich: — I would welcome here today. Just going through the report I noticed that there's a couple of Crowns that are fairly high — SaskPower and SaskEnergy — on complaints. Would that be with power and energy cut-off to the homes, or would that . . . or would most of them would be other complaints with the corporation?

Mr. Fenwick: — The vast majority of the complaints we receive that involve SaskPower and SaskEnergy are complaints that are also related to our social assistance complainants. In most cases those complaints involve someone who has been on social assistance of one kind or another, and who have fallen into arrears. And there's always a struggle between Community Resources and Employment and the utilities as to who should bear the responsibility of helping those people get back on track.

I think it would be fair to say that the position of the Crowns is that they are not social service agencies. They are providers of a utility service and if somebody is in arrears, well then we should cut them off. The position of the Crown utilities is, and there is some flexibility on their part — I don't want to paint them as entirely intransigent; there is some flexibility there — but they don't see themselves as primarily responsible for some kind of a social program.

The Department of Community Resources and Employment on the other hand says that, we do provide services and we do provide funding for those utilities, and as we continue with our efforts to build independence that it is not our responsibility primarily when someone falls into arrears to give them additional money. That's generally where our complaints come from with respect to those utilities.

If I could expand on that briefly, we anticipate that there may very well be an increase in the number of those complaints in the upcoming year. As of May 1, I believe, two days ago, Community Resources and Employment has embarked on a change in how they fund social assistance recipients for, or some social assistance recipients — those under the transition program for utilities — and they've gone from paying the actual utility rate to providing a flat rate for services.

We've made some inquiries with respect to that and we're assured that the change in policy is revenue neutral. But there may very well be some recipients whose utilities are higher than average, who are no longer receiving enough funds to pay the bills as they come in. And that, in our estimation, will likely result in an increase in the number of complaints we receive and not just about CRE [Community Resources and Employment] but also about the utilities.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. If I understand right, as

of May 1 is the utilities going to . . . or is that the way it's going to be? There will be . . . Social assistance services won't be paying the utilities at all. They'll just be giving the recipients a flat rate and that's it. Am I right in that understanding?

Mr. Fenwick: — Under one of the programs, CRE essentially, as I understand it, administers three different programs. There's a training program, the PTA [provincial training allowance]. There's regular social assistance benefits normally known as the SAP [Saskatchewan Assistance Plan] program. And then there's the transition program. And it's the transition recipients who, I believe, are now going to be getting the flat rate only. I understand that the definition of who is in the transition program has been expanded however. So we are looking at increased numbers under that program.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So what, as Ombudsman, what's your . . . I don't know if you can, I guess I'm not sure if you can voice an opinion, but what would your advice be to the people who are going to be phoning you?

Mr. Fenwick: — What we would recommend for them is that they sit down and they work with CRE, and they work where they can with the Crowns. What our advice, I guess, for CRE and the Crowns would be — and they're all parties to this, I guess; there's three parties — is that there needs to be some flexibility.

We can't argue with the policy that CRE has to promote independence. We can't argue with the policy that the Crowns have that people should pay for the utilities they receive. But there will be people from time to time who have run the risk of falling through the cracks. And we think that there needs to be some flexibility on both sides, particularly during this transition period when the new program is coming in.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you. Ms. Harpauer.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, and thank you for the presentation. You have an increase of wages of \$37,000. Is that a new position or an increase of existing position wages?

Mr. Fenwick: — We received additional funding to the tune of, I think, about \$12,000 which is to help us fully fund a position that had been partially funded before. That's the only quote "new" money, if I call it that, that we received. The rest of the increases are for salary increases that were as a result of increments and regular increases, etc.

In one case, our general counsel actually had been without a salary increase for a number of years as a result of a particular wording in his order in council appointment. And so there's been a bit of not retroactive pay, but catch-up for him to bring him up to the same level as other Crown counsel with similar experience . . . But \$12,000 to help us fund a position in our Saskatoon office that had only been partially funded before.

Ms. Harpauer: — And my other question is, do you have any jurisdiction to investigate complaints about supply management marketing boards?

Mr. Fenwick: — No, we would not have because the members of those . . . Well we would have if members of those boards

had been entirely appointed by the province.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Brkich.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On looking at Saskatchewan Water Corporation, just a number of cases there, I must say it's very low. I probably had, when I was SaskWater critic, I probably had that many calls a month on it. I'm surprised not many of them are phoning the Ombudsman. But I'll maybe push them in that direction. But getting back to that, I know that was . . . I had a lot of calls, a lot of cases on it really.

If you get a SaskWater complaint, I know they have the appeal board there, but do you . . . Can you make any recommendations, or do you just try to mediate between the two parties? How would you get involved with, let's say, a dispute with a person with SaskWater over, let's say, irrigation pipes that are leaking on their land, different things like that?

Mr. Fenwick: — Because there is an appeal process in place, the first thing that we require is that the party, any complainant that comes to our office would need to exhaust the internal appeal processes first, whether that's Water Corporation or the water authority or whether it's Community Resources and Employment. So that's the first thing we say to them . . . is you need to exhaust the internal appeal processes. And we will from time to time assist them with making sure that they're adequately prepared to do that.

If they've done that and they still have a complaint, then a complaint against the water authority would be handled the same as any other. We'll do an intake on the file, and we have an intake officer in Regina and 1.6 positions in Saskatoon who will do that. If there is merit to the complaint, their role is to do a preliminary screening. Then the file would be assigned either to one of our ombudsman assistants, who are the investigators, or we have one position in Saskatoon and one in Regina who have particular specialty in mediation.

What we try and do is we try and take a look at what's most appropriate for that individual who's making the complaint in those circumstances. So on occasion, we will sit down with both sides and try and do a mediation or an assisted negotiation or facilitation. It's just as common though that we'll go out and do a full-fledged investigation.

I can't say in every case, but in every case that I'm aware of, that process would actually start in all likelihood with an on-site visit. And we've had two files that I'm aware of just within the last month or so in the office, where our staff have been out visiting with farmers on the site and saying, you know, I need to get the lay of the land, as it were. So it could be either.

I guess the short answer to your question is, it depends. If it looks like it's a communication problem and we can sit down with the parties to try and resurrect good communication, we'll do that. On the other hand, if it's an investigation that's required, we'll do that as well.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Brkich. Mr. Yates.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to

thank the Ombudsman for coming. And on behalf of the government members, we don't have a lot of questions because we had the opportunity at the Board of Internal Economy to put our questions to you. And I'd just like to state that we're extremely happy and pleased with the work you're doing and ask that you keep up the good work and have a good day.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you very much. Members, I am advised that the Ombudsman has filed his annual report for the year 2004. And I have a motion by Mr. Van Mulligen:

That the committee conclude its review of the 2004 annual report of the Ombudsman.

All those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — That's carried. Thank you. I'm also required to direct you to the Estimates book, page 147 and 148. And I need to have a motion.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — I'll move.

The Deputy Chair: — By Mr. Van Mulligen:

That it be resolved that it be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2006, the following sums: for the Ombudsman, \$1,538,000.

Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — That's agreed. Thank you very much, members. Thank you very much to you, Mr. Fenwick. And I appreciate the information you brought us tonight.

**General Revenue Fund
Provincial Auditor
Vote 28**

Subvote (PA01)

The Deputy Chair: — Committee, we now are about to consider the estimates for the Provincial Auditor and would ask Mr. Speaker to make introductions.

The Speaker: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Members of the committee, as noted by the Chair, the Provincial Auditor is here to ask for a budget to be approved. And the Provincial Auditor of course reports with his annual report and several reports to the Public Accounts Committee, and that's the way the work is sort of divided here.

So I welcome Mr. Fred Wendel back to this committee and ask him to introduce his officials.

Mr. Wendel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With me today, I have Brian Atkinson, the assistant provincial auditor. And joining me shortly, Angèle Borys who's principal of support services, does our hiring and supervisor of the administration. Our management of administration is ill today, so hopefully I'll

be able to answer any questions you have if they get detailed.

I have a brief formal presentation if that's all right with you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. We provided you a copy of our business and financial plan last week. Our plan sets out the work we plan to do and what it will cost to carry out the work plan. We discussed the forces and trends that affect our work plan and where we plan to focus our efforts. We explained our key risks and how we are managing those risks, and we also set out the indicators we use to measure our success.

As required by law, we tabled our plan on November 29, 2004. The plan is automatically referred to the Public Accounts Committee, and that committee is required by law to meet with us to discuss a plan and make a recommendation for resources for the office. That goes on to the Speaker and then to go on to the Minister of Finance for inclusion in the estimates. We met with the Public Accounts Committee on January 18, 2005, and the committee recommended the resources that we requested in the business and financial plan.

The estimates you are considering today has two parts. The first part is \$5.576 million, and that's the amount intended to finance the activities needed to carry out the work plan set out in the business and financial plan. Our business and financial plan asks for \$78,000 more than last year's request or about a 1.4 per cent increase. We explain on pages 5 and 6 the factors that increase our costs for 2006. We estimate it will cost \$44,000 to audit new agencies that the government created in 2005. Also we plan to audit directly the authority in support for payments to Crown corporation directors and executives. We estimate this will cost us an additional \$34,000 this coming year.

The second part of the appropriation is \$356,000 for a contingency appropriation. The law requires a contingency appropriation to operate my office. This appropriation allows my office to respond to unforeseen expenses such as a new government agency that's created during the year or where we have to do a special investigation that may be required of one of the committees in the Assembly, or we've found some possible misspending of money which we have to investigate thoroughly. If we use any of the contingency appropriation during 2006, we will make a full report on that in our annual report for 2006.

I want to point out on page 77 that the estimates show \$5.940 million for 2006, and \$5.755 million for 2005. This shows an increase of about \$185,000 or about 3.1 per cent. As I said earlier, we are asking for a 1.4 per cent increase over last year's request. Last year's request was not included in the estimates. When I appeared before the committee — this committee — last year, I explained that the 2005 estimates did not reflect the resources that we asked for to carry out a work plan. The situation arose because there was no Public Accounts Committee to recommend resources for the office. Under the law, the Minister of Finance was required to include the 2004 estimate amount for our office in the 2005 estimates.

Last year I also explained to this committee that I would use the contingency appropriation if the 2004 appropriation was not

sufficient to carry out the 2005 plan. We used about \$90,000 of the contingency appropriation as at March 31, 2005, to carry out the work plan and to do some special investigations during the year.

Now I want to talk briefly about a work plan that is included in the business plan. And my remarks will be very brief because many of you are members or former members of the Public Accounts Committee.

The activities to carry out our strategic plan are focussed on improving the management of public resources and the accountability of the government of the Legislative Assembly. Our office encourages government agencies to address the following risks in managing public resources: risks related to demographics, economic constraints and environment; risk related to infrastructure, including large computer systems; risk related to human resources delivering essential government services. Also agencies must provide quality information to legislators about their plans and actual results, our work results, and recommendations to improve practices.

One key way we measure our success is the acceptance of our recommendations by the Assembly and the government. I'm pleased to report that the Legislative Assembly has accepted nearly 90 per cent of our recommendations, and the government's acted on more than 80 per cent of those recommendations.

In closing I want to say that for the last 10 years legislators have supported my office's request for resources. Your approval of the amount in the estimates will allow me to discharge my duties to the Assembly. And that ends my formal remarks.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you very much, Mr. Wendel. Members, any comments? If not . . . Mr. Brkich.

Mr. Brkich: — Just on page 74. I guess I wasn't part of the Public Accounts or board of internal inquiry, so I may be asking some questions that maybe were asked there. But can you give me a little more information on page 74 on total costs to audit all the government agencies?

Mr. Wendel: — What we're trying to portray there is the two aspects that it costs to audit government agencies. In one case, there's our office. And we come forward to the Assembly and ask for our budget to audit government agencies, and we're asking for \$5.576 million to do that.

In other cases, government agencies have the authority to hire an appointed auditor, and when they do, those costs flow through the agency that's hired them to do the work. And what we're just trying to portray is the total cost. So you take our cost plus the cost that appointed auditors have charged government agencies, and that's what you see here.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Yates.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Just once again on behalf of the government members who have had the opportunity to review these documents in depth as part of the . . . [inaudible] . . . accounts committee, we'd just like to thank you for the work you're doing, and just hope that things

continue and the productive path is moved forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you very much, members. I am obligated to point out that the Provincial Auditor, as was stated, has tabled the business and financial plan for the year ending March 31, 2006, and this report is reviewed by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. However, we do have estimates to deal with. On page 149 and 150 of the Estimates book, there are two votes involved with this amount. Would someone move firstly that subvote no. (PA01), the amount to be voted is \$5,446,000. Mr. Hagel. Is that approved?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — Agreed. Thank you. And the second subvote is (PA02) in the amount of \$356,000. Could I have a mover for that, please? Ms. Higgins. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you, that's carried. And the total subvote then for the Provincial Auditor is \$5,802,000. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you very much. I need to read the formal motion that I'll need . . . I'm reminded.

To be resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2006 the following sums: for the Provincial Auditor, \$5,802,000.

Mover? Mr. Van Mulligen. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — That's carried. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Wendel. And a pleasure to meet and discuss with you briefly the Provincial Auditor's office.

Mr. Wendel: — Thank you for the support.

General Revenue Fund Conflict of Interest Commissioner Vote 57

Subvote (CC01)

The Deputy Chair: — Members, we will now consider the estimates for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. Mr. Speaker, would you make the introductions please.

The Speaker: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Members of the committee, I will appear on behalf of Mr. Gerald Gerrand, and with me is Marilyn Borowski, who will assist with the specifics on the numbers.

Mr. Gerrand has been serving as Conflict of Interest Commissioner for several years. His request is for \$122,000, an increase of zero per cent from last year. He has appeared before the Board of Internal Economy, who has approved his budget request.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you very much. Members, are there any questions? If not, then I am directed to point out that the estimates for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner on page 139 and 140, we need to vote subsection (CC01) in the amount of \$122,000.

Mr. Van Mulligen. All those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — And I am directed to:

Be it resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2006 the following sums: for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, \$122,000.

Mr. Hagel. All those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

**General Revenue Fund
Legislative Assembly
Vote 21**

Subvote (LG01)

The Deputy Chair: — Members, we will now direct our attention to the consideration of estimates for the Legislative Assembly Office. Mr. Speaker, if you would make introductions, please.

The Speaker: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, members of the committee, seated right beside me is Gwenn Ronyk, who is our Clerk; and beside her is Marilyn Borowski, who is director of financial services. Also with us today is Greg Putz, who's the Deputy Clerk; and seated beside him is Ken Ring, Legislative Counsel and Law Clerk.

Also we have Marian Powell, who is the Legislative Librarian; and with her is Pat Kolesar, assistant librarian. We also have with us Iris Lang, who's Clerk Assistant; and Margaret Tulloch, assistant to the Speaker. And there may be another member coming of the . . . another one of our directors. That would be Linda Kaminski, director of human resources and administrative services.

I want to just take a moment to mention to the committee that there are a lot of things that I'm happy about with regard to the work that's being done in the Legislative Assembly Office. But I want to highlight in particular some of the things I'm extremely happy about — about the extra work that the people in the Legislative Assembly Office have taken on in addition to their regular day-to-day work.

Last year they helped with the consolidation and updating of The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, which is under consideration by the Assembly now. Members will have noticed that they've now got Internet access and electrical power outlets at all the members' desks — something that's happened very recently. There are some new directives, new policies that were prepared last year and implemented to

support members' centennial activities.

Successful televising from this particular committee room and the Chamber simultaneously for committee meetings has been something that our team has been working towards and they've completed that quite successfully. The people that are working in the televising area have also responded to your decision mid-year to replace the Chamber sound system and to modernize the Chamber technology. There's still another aspect of that to go and that is to finish installing and checking out several different types of speakers in the galleries.

Last year we began a detailed plan for the MLC [Midwestern Legislative Conference] conference. Those plans are ongoing. And I also want to mention that this office managed and supported the selection process for the new Ombudsman, the Chief Electoral Officer, and the Child Advocate office, which is now being under consideration.

What we're looking forward to in the coming year — I'm going to thank the committee members for approving funding for the Cumberland Gallery gift shop. I hope members have had an opportunity to take a look at it and we're looking for input to content so that we can properly . . . and how it functions, so we can properly evaluate it at year-end.

The branch is continuing with the implementation of MIDAS [Multi-Informational Database Application System]. There will be continued development of the members' Internet portals. We're also looking at new processes and procedures for constituency assistant pay and benefits. We're also looking at a preparation of a best practices checklist and preventative law initiative for the MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] as an employer.

I'm hoping to be able to implement this year a plan for long service recognition for members, caucus, and constituency office staff. And we are asking the Legislative Assembly Office to begin a project to develop a comprehensive disaster and recovery business resumption plan in case of an emergency.

That sort of summarizes the main things that we're going to be looking at. I will just turn this over then to Clerk Gwenn Ronyk for the numbers, and be prepared to answer any questions you might have.

Ms. Ronyk: — I think Mr. Speaker has covered things quite well. Our overall numbers both on the statutory and the budgetary side reflect an increase of 4 per cent over last year.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you very much, members. Mr. Brkich.

Mr. Brkich: — On the first page, I noticed there's an increase with central management and services and Legislative Assembly services. Could you . . . a little more detail on that, exactly what the increases will be used for?

Ms. Ronyk: — Thank you, Mr. Brkich. You're looking at the summary page, and if you'll turn to page 2 there's the breakdown of what central management and services consists of. And it does include the expenses for the Speaker's office, the Board of Internal Economy, and the Clerk, and the centrally

managed services of the Assembly — that includes HR [human resources], administrative services, and financial services. That's what the expenditure for executive management is and the central services. So it's sort of the overall administration of the Assembly service itself.

Mr. Brkich: — That was just for wage increases then? Is that what . . .

Ms. Ronyk: — No. At the bottom you'll see that there are some increases in personal services, wages. They have increased by \$27,000 and that's as a result of the normal increments and position reclassifications. There are no new positions in this, in these estimates. And it includes a 1 per cent increase over last year in line with the collective agreement within government.

The rest of the increases then are on the supplier and other payments. There's some increases in directive 24 due to an increase in the maximum available to members from 7,000 to 10,000 over the course of a whole term. And there has been a small decrease in the information technology expenditures of \$14,000. And there has . . . A new element is the grant, the small grant for the operation, to assist in the operation of the gift shop of \$21,000.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Was there many job reclassifications this year? Or last year's budget, I mean, I guess is what you projected for.

Ms. Ronyk: — In this particular subvote it might have been one or two. I don't think that there was in the executive management grouping here in this particular, this last fiscal year. Now Linda will check that and she'll correct me if I'm wrong on that.

Mr. Brkich, no there were not any reclasses in this grouping.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Van Mulligen.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — I've got a question concerning caucus operations. Of the estimated expenditure for the opposition caucus and office of the Leader of the Opposition, do you break that down at all? Like, it's budgeted \$951,000. Is there a specific allowance that's for the leader's office as opposed to the opposition caucus office?

The Deputy Chair: — Marilyn Borowski to answer that question.

Ms. Borowski: — Okay. For the opposition caucus and office of the Leader of the Opposition, the grant for the office of the Leader of the Opposition is 144,700. And the grant for the rest of the caucus, the caucus resources funding is 805,600.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — My next question is, how do you account for the difference between the then 805,000 for the opposition caucus and the government caucus?

Ms. Borowski: — The difference is due to the formula that's used for calculation of the caucus grant. The formula is based on the number of private members in the caucus.

In the case of the government caucus, there are 12 private members. And then it's 12 plus 2 is used in the formula. In the case of the opposition caucus, it would be 27.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — The formula then assumes that, in the case of the government caucus, that the government caucus would not be providing secretarial or administrative services to cabinet ministers, but would be providing that for private members. Correct?

Ms. Ronyk: — I think the difference is that they're assuming there are fewer research resources required for ministers.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — And so I have a question about that. Given that some years ago the Provincial Auditor had a report before the Public Accounts Committee about making sure there's a distinction between the services that are provided in ministers' offices, and that those services not be confused with any other entities so that there's clear accounting, there are research services that the caucus provides that I don't think my department could provide to me. And so I'm curious as to how you then make that distinction.

The Speaker: — The formula that we're using is a formula that's been authorized of course by the Board of Internal Economy. And the decisions of the Board of Internal Economy could be one of several other methods to set this, the amounts that would go to each caucus and to each leader. It could be a flat rate, it could be a per . . . it could be a flat plus a per member, or could be strictly a per member, or maybe some other combination.

I should note that there is a small accommodation because I think that this was an issue earlier, several years ago, or at least before last year, before this year to make a slight accommodation — that is that the formula for the government caucus would be based on the number of members plus two. I think that this was done at a time when the number of . . . I may be stand corrected, but I think it happened at a time when the number of private members on the government side was larger than 12.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — It seemed to me that one of the recommendations or one of the abuses that occurred in the latter part of the '80s was that the government was in effect paying for the salaries of people through ministers' offices, through departments and then having those people, in actual fact, being employed by the caucus offices. And the Provincial Auditor says, no you can't do that for very good reasons, that someone works for someone and ought to be a clear chain of responsibility and work that they do. I'm not sure that I can ask my department to do research for me that I might want to do as a caucus member, in addition to being a member of the Executive Council. So is there no allowance then at all for research for cabinet ministers, in the context of caucus or . . .

Ms. Ronyk: — I could just say that there is a base amount that's provided to every caucus, and that's the amount of one hundred and seventy-seven thousand, three hundred thousand — yes, 177,300,000. And that is for the base work. Now whether you consider that to be, you know, computer systems and clerical assistance and administrative assistance and not research, you know, that's up to the caucuses to determine, I

guess.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — I can certainly understand administrative and secretarial. No one in caucus would do anything, any work of that nature for me. But there are from time to time research activities they do that benefited me as a member of the caucus that I couldn't ask the government department to do. They would say, well that's not really our responsibility. So I . . . No, I'm just curious, and that's all the questions I have.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you very much. Any further questions? If not, I am obligated to direct you to the Estimates book on page 143 to 145. We have a number of subvotes. Subvote (LG01) on page 144 in the amount of \$2,187,000. Agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — Subvote (LG03) in the amount of \$4,365,000. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — Subvote (LG05) is statutory. Subvote (LG04) in the amount of \$19,000, that has to be voted. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — Subvote (LG06) is statutory and subvote . . . the amortization of capital assets is for informational purposes. Could I have a motion then:

Be it resolved that it be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2006, the following sum: for the Legislative Assembly, \$6,571,000.

Mr. Hagel. All those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Legislative Library

The Deputy Chair: — Members, I would like to draw your attention to the consideration of the annual report for the Legislative Library. Mr. Speaker, would you make introductions, please.

The Speaker: — Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've already done it; I'm going to do it a second time. With me is Marian Powell, who is Legislative Librarian, and assistant librarian, Ms. Pat Kolesar. And I believe that I would ask Ms. Powell if she would have some general remarks she would like to make.

Ms. Powell: — Thank you. Yes, just a very short comment this evening. I'm very pleased to be able to bring the annual report to you. This particular report covers the period April 2003 to March 31, 2004, and was actually tabled in the Legislative Assembly in November 2004. This is a second library annual

report to adopt a new format to report plans and activities using the format of the Legislative Assembly service draft strategic plan, and you'll notice that when you take a look at the front matter in the report.

Of special notice in this particular report is a new table which we feel helps identify our achievement towards our goals and objectives under the strategic plan. And you can find that on pages 8, 9, and 10. We feel it gives you a good format to be able to very quickly assess the progress that we're making towards the identified goals and objectives.

In this particular report year, we've identified a number of achievements and a number of challenges. And just a quick summary of the achievements. During this period we established a new MLA direct-user online news service, which we started out with as simply a pilot project, but it was taken up so quickly by members and so successful that we at the end of March 2004 already had 22 MLAs registered for it. And a number of you here now are on the system, I know.

We also completed and published to the Internet site and the members' portal, a long-time publication of the library which had never been listed anywhere we used it. It was the MLA maiden speeches; the first speeches that each member makes when he rises at his first opportunity after his election, and there's lots of interest in that. So we're very glad to make it available both on the World Wide Web and to members through the members' portal.

And this year we also began the first stage of work on a library disaster recovery plan. And the first stage was to make sure we had a current and accurate list of emergency contacts. In the past we've been called upon to assist offices in this building where there's been a flood, various records damaged, how do we treat them, that kind of thing. So this is the start of our disaster recovery plan.

The challenges we face grow each year and continue on several familiar themes. The first one is the rapid expansion of electronic information resources, both free on the Internet and subscription services. These impact on our ability to build a collection and acquire materials, and it also requires a new form of access management and licensing for our paid services. Equally the increasing user self-sufficiency with finding basic information on the Internet means that the library handles proportionately more complex information requests.

Another challenge relates to the accommodation of our collection. First and alas, foremost we're running out of space again, and so we're having to start to plan for new space considerations. But equally, although we have wonderful space in the Walter Scott Building where approximately 80 per cent of our collection is housed on mobile shelving, that particular facility does not have the proper environmental controls and monitors that a record centre should have, so we're beginning to plan in that direction as well.

And finally the access to the research depth of this collection of half a million volumes in the era of electronic information is not where we would like it to be. Approximately 30,000 titles are not listed in the online catalogue. And these are unique items in many cases; we may be the only library in the province to hold

them. And we are addressing in the budget that you've approved some measure towards getting more of those records, both in our online catalogue for the ease of use by members and their staff but as well accessible on the Internet in the same way. And I'd be happy to receive any questions.

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

Mr. Hagel: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. Marian, just related to the ongoing saga of storage at Walter Scott, etc., what are you . . . I recall it's not all that long ago that that space was cleaned and then appropriately equipped in order to safely store equipment. And then I hear you saying that you think, I assume it's humidity levels or something are a problem. Just let me roll this together and ask you to respond together. What do you see as the . . . maybe just expand a bit on what is the problem, what do you see as the requirements?

And then secondly, in the world of storing electronic records, I'm assuming that really has minimal space implications but maybe you could just confirm that. And what other kind of cost implications, if any, are there as we move to holding . . . increasing the amounts of library information in electronic format as opposed to paper format?

Ms. Powell: — Let me start with the second question first, if I may. You're correct that electronic records don't take up shelf space; they do however take up computer space and to the degree that we own them, we have to allow for the proper capacity in terms of our computer systems.

You have before you in the House presently a revision to The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, which amends the library deposit requirements to include the electronic. Right now that's not included in our present legislation. That will require some expenditures on a separate server that can house those particular publications as permanently as the electronic record is permanent. To the degree that we licence access to somebody else's electronic data, that doesn't take any space at all and we do have a lot of licence subscriptions that we access through the computer.

In terms of the Walter Scott facility, first of all there are still a lot of books being purchased and they have to go somewhere. Since we were able to develop the Walter Scott mobile storage facility we have acquired three extremely substantial and important collections which has eaten up our space a lot faster than we expected. So we're running out of normal bookshelf space faster than we anticipated. But even at that, when we made our proposal in the late '80s, early '90s, we anticipated 10 years space with that and we're rapidly coming to the end of that 10 years.

The solution is a multi-fold one. In some cases — and we've been doing this — we've replaced some very large sets with microfiche, microfilm. We have acquired some electronic versions now on CD [compact disc] or perhaps on the Internet with a paid subscription, and that saves us space. Where we can do that, we're removing the paper. But we're never going to get away entirely from having a certain amount of growth each year in paper products.

Mr. Hagel: — And so what are you forecasting in terms of

future needs? I think you were referring to quality of air, quality of environment.

Ms. Powell: — Well the environment, we're working in old buildings. Old buildings can never be like a new building. But what we have to do is to work . . . And we are working in the Walter Scott building right now. This present budget that we've just been discussing includes the funding of two commercial-size humidifier/dehumidifiers for that stack area. Presently, we have sort of a residential one which one of the library technicians has to empty every Friday. So we must get a proper one that can cover the larger spaces, and that's in the works.

Equally, we need to be able to monitor better. We've been adding some better temperature and humidity monitors, so it's coming. But there will be more of that kind of development.

Mr. Hagel: — Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — Ms. Higgins.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — I'm just curious, what kind of interest do you get in . . . what kind of hits do you get on the electronic version from out and about the province or beyond?

Ms. Powell: — I think Pat can answer that. You've done some research with information systems on that.

Ms. Kolesar: — I believe we do have some indication as to how many visits our Internet presence receives. And for the year under discussion, I believe it's on page 23 at the bottom of the page in the box. It indicates that during the year in which we were reporting, there were 56,431 visits to our pages on the website, which was an increase of almost 140 per cent over the number of visits two years prior, which was the most recent year for which comparable statistics were available. So it is increasing.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — So from inside the province or this could be from anywhere. You don't have a breakdown of where they would . . .

Ms. Kolesar: — They could be from anywhere.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you very much. There be no further questions, consideration of the annual report for the Legislative Library. I have a motion moved by Mr. Brkich that this committee concludes review of the annual report of the Legislative Library for the period ending March 31, 2004. All those agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

And now there being no further business for this committee, I have a motion by Mr. Van Mulligen:

That the draft fifth report of the Standing Committee on

House Services be adopted and presented to the Assembly on May 3, 2005.

Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — That's carried. Members, I would like to thank you for your attention and for those who appeared before the committee. And a motion to adjourn is now in order. Mr. Van Mulligen. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 18:25.]