

The Committee met at 9:00 a.m. in the House of Assembly.

CHAIR (Oram): First of all, good morning everyone. Thank you for coming out to the Government Services Committee meeting this morning. We are going to be looking at subhead 1.1.01.

First of all, I am going to ask everybody here to introduce themselves. I will start on this side, first of all, and give us an introduction, please. Wait until the light comes on.

MR. DINN: John Dinn, MHA for Kilbride.

MR. ANDERSEN: Wally Andersen, MHA for Torngat Mountains.

MR. LANGDON: Oliver Langdon, MHA for Fortune Bay-Cape la Hune.

MS E. MARSHALL: Beth Marshall, MHA for Topsail.

MR. FORSEY: Clayton Forsey, MHA for Exploits.

MR. SWEENEY: George Sweeney, MHA for Carbonear-Harbour Grace.

CHAIR: Thank you.

I am Paul Oram, the Chair.

Now, this side.

MS MACDONALD: Sheree MacDonald, Deputy Minister with the Department of Government Services.

MS WHALEN: Dianne Whalen, MHA for Conception Bay East & Bell Island and the Minister of Government Services.

MR. CROCKER: Gerry Crocker, Director of Finances and General Operations.

MS COLEMAN-SADD: Vanessa Coleman-Sadd, Director of Communications.

MS DUNPHY: Kim Dunphy, Assistant Deputy Minister, Occupational Health and Safety.

MR. HENDRY: Wayne Hendry, Director of Purchasing with the Government Purchasing Agency.

MR. MORRIS: Winston Morris, Assistant Deputy Minister, Consumer and Commercial Affairs.

MS KELLAND: Donna Kelland, Assistant Deputy Minister, Government Services Branch.

CHAIR: Thank you.

We will ask the minister, first of all, to give a little talk.

MS WHALEN: What I would like to do is give you an overview of our department and then we will refer your questions to each one of my officials with me this morning.

I want to start off by saying that the Department of Government Services has an extensive public service mandate encompassing the Consumer and Commercial Affairs, Government Services, Occupational Health and Safety branches. All branches have one thing in common, we are here to protect the public and the occupational health and safety of the residents of this Province and to safeguard consumer interests.

Of our \$34.5 million in spending for 2007-2008, almost 69 per cent is for salaries, reflecting the fact that our main resources are our Human Resources dedicated to service delivery, as is fitting for a service oriented department.

As well, approximately 27 per cent of our budget is spent directly in regions outside

the St. John's, Mount Pearl metropolitan area, including the Motor Registration Division, Government Services centres, Vital Statistics, Residential Tenancy and Occupational, Health & Safety Services. Part of the remaining 73 per cent is also focused on providing provincial level services to the regions. We have a broad range of services which include: Vital Statistics, sale and distribution of various licences, environmental health, environmental protection, public safety permits and inspections, Motor Registration activities and Queen's Printer. That is just our Government Services Branch.

Our Consumer and Commercial Affairs Branch provide financial services regulation, commercial registries and residential landlord and tenant activities. This branch also regulates charitable gamings and licenses and regulates collection agencies, private investigations and security guard industries.

Our Occupational, Health and Safety Branch oversees the occupational health and safety relationships between employers and employees through developing and enforcing legislation. It investigates workplace accidents and conducts compliance inspections of workplace accidents. This is just a quick snapshot of some of the activities we perform on a daily basis.

Budget 2007-2008 is a budget which recognizes the important role the department plays in public health and safety and customer services.

My department was founded on the concept of consolidating as far as possible and practical licensing, permitting, inspections and regulations within government and providing a single window for public access in these areas.

In the fiscal year 2006-2007, the Department of Government Services collected more than \$110 million in revenue for government and

handled \$2.5 million in transactions with the public.

Because there has not been a close examination of the role and mandate of the department since its inception in 1996, we recently went through a rigorous process to do so. As a result, the department has identified a number of enhancements to its public health and safety programs, and customer services. This has resulted in the funding of thirty-five additional positions in the department. These include technical positions for environmental health, environmental protection, elevating devices, amusement rides and electrical. There are also positions for our Motor Registration Division and the Consumer and Commercial Affairs Branch. We hope to have these positions filled within four to eight months.

Budget 2007-2008 commits over \$1 million in salaries and operating funds for these initiatives. Even with these injections we are still significantly lower in salaries and operational costs than our original inception.

Given there are thirty-five positions added I will focus on just a few in the interest of time. We have identified the need for six new environmental health technician positions. These positions will be part of our very active environmental health program which is responsible for the inspection of food premises, day care, personal care homes and public swimming pools, as well as meat inspections, drinking water and raw milk sampling, septic systems approval and tobacco control. The environmental health technician positions will carry out some of the more routine functions of this program, for example water and raw milk sampling, in order to allow our environmental health officers to focus on priority areas such as food safety.

Our public safety program will also have additional positions (inaudible) various inspecting and managerial roles. This program ensures pressure systems, boilers,

elevating devices and amusement rides are properly installed and used.

The electrical program involves inspection of domestic, commercial and industrial electrical installations to ensure that the Province adheres to the Canadian Electrical Code and applicable safety standards.

We will be hiring three additional environmental protection officers. This program is responsible for environmental spills response, petroleum storage tank registrations, service station inspections, approval and inspection of waste disposal sites and on-farm manure management systems. These additional resources will strengthen our capacity to protect the environment.

This government was committed to bringing in significant insurance reforms. During the consultation process for homeowners, commercial and marine insurance, it was identified that the voluntary sector needed assistance with its insurance requirements in order to ensure their long-term viability. To address this need, my department has formed a voluntary sector insurance committee with representation from the volunteer sector, the insurance industry, the Consumer Advocate and my officials.

A key initiative which will provide a practical benefit to the sector is the creation of a risk manager consumer education position which will provide research and advice for the committee and will work with the volunteer sector to assess and provide risk management services to these groups, as well as develop consumer education programs for all consumers of insurance.

As part of the Northern Strategic Plan, we are pleased to announce an additional highway enforcement officer for Labrador. As well, in conjunction with the Department of Transportation and Works investment in Weigh-In-Motion sensors at strategic locations, our department will be hiring two additional weigh scale operators. These

three positions are budgeted for \$280,400 in 2007-2008. In addition, our Motor Registration Division will be provided with additional positions for program support.

Earlier, I discussed additional positions for our environmental health program. I am very pleased that we have been able to build on our bursary program for students in environmental health which we introduced last year. Our budget of this program has been increased to \$185,500 to develop a pool of certified EHOs to fill vacant positions, particularly for hard-to-fill rural areas. This will allow us to add two more students to the program which currently has three students.

Budget 2007-2008 has also seen the elimination or reduction of a number of our fees. Again, I will not go through every one of them, but I will mention that I am especially excited about the 10 per cent on-line discount for some of our services. These include fees for Certificates of Incorporation under the corporation regulations, and the filing of annual reports with the Registry of Companies. As well, some on-line services at Motor Registration are included, namely: passenger vehicle renewals, taxi and motorcycle registration renewals, annual renewal fees to licensed commercial motor vehicles or trailers, recreational trailers and dealer licence plates.

The Occupational Health and Safety Branch had another productive year in terms of inspection activity. They have issued 6,484 directives in 2006, a 9 per cent increase over 2005. The branch has conducted 3,934 inspections, an 11 per cent increase over the 2005 numbers, and they have issued 492 stop work orders, a 22 per cent increase over 2005. These numbers show we have stepped up our inspections to take on a zero tolerance policy. Our workplaces are not being more unsafe, but we are becoming more efficient with enforcement. By improving our workplaces for employees, we are reducing the number of workplace

injuries and deaths, which, in turn, reduces the burden on our health care and our compensation systems. This focus on inspections will continue this year with a total budget of approximately \$4.9 million.

The Government Purchasing Agency, through the Chief Operating Officer, is directly responsible to the Minister of Government Services. The agency continues to work within its mandate and is involved with processes such as corporate services and the acquisition of a new purchasing system to increase the efficiencies and the effectiveness of the agency. The agency is currently in the process of finalizing the recruitment process for vacant positions.

Thank you for the time to speak to me today. I have brought my staff along this morning, and will answer the questions you may have pertaining to this Budget.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

We will start with some questions.

I will start with Mr. Dinn. Do you have any questions, Mr. Dinn?

MR. DINN: No, not at this time.

CHAIR: Mr. Andersen?

MR. ANDERSEN: I am going to let Mr. Sweeney go first.

CHAIR: Okay, Mr. Sweeney.

I thought you were going to say: No, I have no questions, and I was going to be shocked.

MR. SWEENEY: We do not have a lot, now, in all fairness.

CHAIR: I was going to tell the new members that we are certainly not going to

take any advice from what we did last night and be here until 11:00 o'clock.

MR. SWEENEY: That is right. I think we are dealing with a different minister this morning.

Anyway, thank you, Minister, for your remarks. I just have a few questions, I guess, some general questions, one of which I asked in the House yesterday, and I think it is only fair that I ask it again today, and that is the one regarding the disability parking permits.

MS WHALEN: Yes.

MR. SWEENEY: I will say it as somebody who has a special place in his heart for people with disabilities, and some of the hardships that they endure. This thing has taken on a life of its own. I was a little bit late this morning in getting down here, and there were a couple of more calls this morning regarding those questions yesterday.

It is difficult when you get into the House of Assembly, trying to pinpoint and put emphasis on where you should go without getting too general, because we are under the restraints of the Speaker, which we are not under here this morning, but most of the problem, I think, that comes from there are those two questions on the back of the medical form that the physician is sent, one of which is regarding lifestyles.

One lady this morning, she too has spent \$90 on three different medical visits to her doctor to try and get those questions answered. Even some of the physicians are saying that the question, especially the first one regarding lifestyle, is too intrusive and it has no bearing on a parking permit. They generally understand it regarding the driver's license as being a little bit picky, but for the sake of a parking permit it seems like it is a little bit too intrusive and even threatening.

I think I have a list of probably eight or nine names up there right now of people who have called and said, look, I am not going to apply for a parking permit because I am afraid of where this is going to lead me, plus the fact of the inconvenience. Many people with disabilities find it difficult going to a doctor anyway.

I am saying this in general terms but it is a serious concern that I have, and obviously from the number of calls I am getting and other people are getting there is something to this. If not, the media wouldn't be picking it up as well. There is an issue there that I would like for you to look into and just see if we can rectify it for the sake of all those people out there with disabilities.

MS WHALEN: Let me say that we are working with the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities and we are doing whatever we can to make life easier for those types of individuals. The form itself does ask some questions, but that is something I will be discussing with the Coalition and my officials, to see if there is something we can go about that particular form. If we can make it easier for them, that is fine, but we do have an onus and a responsibility to make sure that when people are applying for those permits - some of those people are actually driving their cars, so if there is no change in their condition we wouldn't be going back and looking for additional information. Some people have degenerative conditions and some have permanent disabilities. From our perspective, we need to make sure that they are safe when they are on the roads, as well as the people who are on the roads. It is not our intent to be intrusive in their lives, but we do need to look at it from the perspective of safety.

I am more than willing to go back and have my officials look at this form, and the Coalition of Disabilities, to see where we can make things easier for them.

MR. SWEENEY: I thank you for that, but the fear that I have in this is that the parking

permit is being treated in the same light as the driver's license. I look at the driver's license, and I guess for all of us the driver's license here in this Province is a privilege that the government can revoke if we abuse that privilege, although we pay for it. The parking permit, to me, is a convenience. It is to help somebody who has a disability to become more mobile in their daily lives and so on. I know where the department is and I know where the complaints are. I, too, have stepped on a few toes in my day because nothing offends me more than to see somebody parked in one of those blue zones and hop out of a car and run into a store.

It was a little while ago that I said to this lady - I watched her as she was trying to get her van parked so she could get out and go into a store. I knew the lady who owned the vehicle that was there. I went into the store and I asked her, would she move her vehicle so somebody could use it for what it was designated for? It is something that I find very offensive. There are a limited number of parking spaces, but the majority of people, I find, who have those permits are indeed worthy of having them.

I spoke to a veteran yesterday with bad legs, he wears braces and he is afraid now to go back to Motor Vehicle Registration because of the questions that are on that form - and the doctors do not really want to answer those questions. I have checked with other jurisdictions and those questions are not totally in line with some of the other jurisdictions. So, if we could just review that whole process.

MS WHALEN: Yes, I would like to say that I think we have a bit of confusion, too, with the blue zones and the parking zone. I, too, like you, get pretty peeved when people are using them when they should not be. I have to say, some people do have disabilities that are not physical that you can see. There are all kinds of disabilities and some, within the body, that is not visible to us looking at them.

I will give you a prime example, my late husband had a disability, but to look at him he looked perfectly well, when he was not. A lot of people are getting out of their cars and coming in to us sometimes saying: Oh, they do not look very bad. They are not limping. They are not in a wheelchair or have a walker, or whatever. So, we have to be careful. We cannot judge them like that, but we are looking at the blue zones to make sure that people do not use them, who are not supposed to be using them, and we are going to work with the coalition as well on that.

MR. SWEENEY: Okay. I am just interested in asking, why wasn't that 10 per cent discount applied to everybody?

MS WHALEN: The 10 per cent discount, on which particular service? Are you talking about MRD?

MR. SWEENEY: Well, for the use of the Internet.

MS WHALEN: On the Internet?

MR. SWEENEY: Yes.

MS WHALEN: The 10 per cent was applied to get people to use the Internet more, and that was particularly why that was implemented at that time with this budget.

The other thing I have to say with bringing in that 10 per cent, it reduced the wait time at the MRDs. When you have access and you can do it in the convenience of your own home, you do not need to go in and stand up in lineups. Sometimes our lineups are fairly long, sometimes they are shorter. It depends on the time of the month when your renewal comes up. We are encouraging to do more on-line services. That was a commitment of this government.

MR. SWEENEY: Okay. Just recently there was a story on ATV accidents, and there seems to be an increase in the number of accidents. As a matter of fact, I think one of

the stories recently carried was that there were more deaths this year related to ATV accidents than there were automobile accidents. Is the department reviewing any of the ATV regulations?

MS WHALEN: We have, as you know, just recently made amendments to the ATV legislation; for safety reasons, we have just had some. That is something that is always ongoing. There are a number of things that we constantly look at. So, that is something that is always ongoing.

The other thing is that we provided a safety campaign to the schools. There has been a fair bit of education to the children and, I think the police force as well, to try to educate people who use ATVs to abide by our rules and regulations.

MR. SWEENEY: What I find in reports I am receiving from a number of people in my own area, is that the use of ATVs on the town streets, the main highways, are increasing to a very dangerous level.

It was only about two months ago I was driving on Harvey Street in Harbour Grace, which is a main highway, main road, and I was passed on the inside by an ATV and passed on the outside. Zip, zip, just as quick as that. There seems to be no enforcement or very little enforcement.

MS WHALEN: Well, the mechanism is there for the enforcement. The RNC and the RCMP have the enforcement there they can do but, I agree, sometimes you will find individuals who are risk takers and will come up on the road. But, hopefully, our RNC and RCMP will catch those individuals and imply the fines that are in the ATV legislation right now.

MR. SWEENEY: Have you or your department officials had any contact or any discussions with the police agencies regarding this?

MS WHALEN: Do you want to answer that one Donna, please?

MS KELLAND: We have a Traffic Safety Committee which is led by Motor Registration which involves the members of the two enforcement agencies, the Newfoundland and Labrador Safety Council and other departments in government, such as Health and Community Services, and Transportation and Works. Their focus is on looking at initiatives and discussing issues around all aspects of traffic safety including the use of ATVs. They are periodically looking at any ideas on initiatives. We are aware that occasionally there are crackdowns by the RCMP and the RNC in certain areas, but that committee is designed to work together with us to identify particular pressure points and safety issues.

MR. SWEENEY: The other question I have is: How many convictions have been made for use of cell phones on the highway?

MS KELLAND: I don't have the stats with me. I can provide them to you.

MR. SWEENEY: It seems to me, to be truthful with you, from the amount of highway driving I do, it is as though there are no regulations in place. Again, there seems to be a lack in enforcement on some of these things.

MS WHALEN: I do believe, though, that we have had about 500 convictions since the legislation came into effect in 2002 I think we brought that legislation in. I think it is over 500 convictions. I can get you the specific number if you wish to have it.

MR. SWEENEY: In recent months we had a serious issue in Marystown regarding a school bus operator. Is there going to be a review of regulations regarding school buses in the Province, regarding training and education with regard to drivers and so on?

MS WHALEN: Do you want to speak to that, Donna, please?

MS KELLAND: We have been having discussions with the Department of Education. That is a split responsibility between us and that department. Our responsibility is primarily on the mechanic safety of the buses. The Department of Education, with the school boards, has more responsibility for driver hiring, education and training, but we have had discussions with that department about work that we can do on the school bus safety program overall. That is part of what we are doing right now.

MR. SWEENEY: So that is ongoing?

MS KELLAND: Yes.

MR. SWEENEY: Okay.

The new license plate: What was the cost to upgrade the licence plate colors and design? Was there a cost involved there?

MS KELLAND: There were some minor costs. We had a design which was part of the existing design that we have, so there were some minor costs; I think in the range of \$3,000 to \$5,000. We had some additional cost for licence plates this year, but that was strictly related to the cost of aluminum which increased significantly over prior years.

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible).

MS KELLAND: That is a good reminder.

We waited until we needed new stock anyway. We have some minor amounts of existing stock around the Province, but we were due for a new order before we changed the design.

MR. SWEENEY: Okay, good.

On the same line, I guess, what was the cost to upgrade the new driver's licence and photo identification? Was there a major cost involved there?

MS KELLAND: That was part of our existing driver's licence costing. We co-operated with the other three Atlantic Provinces on a public tender process. The cost per card, I don't recall the exact number but it has actually gone down by a couple of cents, so the replacement card is actually cheaper than the card we were using at the time. It is done on a long-term contact, so there is an annual cost for production which mostly involves equipment use and things like that.

MR. SWEENEY: One other question - I have a few more, actually - with regard to licensing. The fee in licensing an antique vehicle is \$75, I think, is it? Is there any plan to drop that fee? Because most of those vehicles, to get an antique plate, the criteria that you have to have is that it only be used on special occasions, it cannot be a daily driver, and so on.

What is happening now, because of the increase in fees, many people who have multiple antique vehicles are not registering them. They are not licensing them, and that, in effect, is having an impact on the amount of money raised at these car shows and so on which eventually goes to charity.

I am wondering if there would be any willingness on the part of the minister to revisit the fees on antique vehicles, because I know of instances where people will only register one vehicle - and I know it is probably against the law - but that plate may end up on another vehicle, depending on what particular vehicle he or she wishes to show that weekend. It is a subject out there that I have had a large number of calls on, in the antique car circuit.

MS WHALEN: Thank you for that question.

We have looked at a number of fees in the department, but right now the one that we put the most emphasis on, and our priority on, is the 10 per cent discount on-line. It is not something that I cannot say I won't look

at, but I have been lobbied to look at that particular fee. There is another year coming. You cannot do everything all in one year, but I think that we have done significant reductions, about \$3.4 million in fees reduction in my department alone, but that is not something that I would rule out looking at.

MR. SWEENEY: I used that same answer to a person: Well, it may take some time.

While it did not take any time for it to go up - it all went up in one year - I will leave it at that.

Minister, the taxes on insurance - the 15 per cent special tax on insurance - I know that lies basically with Finance. Was there any attempt either between the Department of Business and your own department to try to have some intervention there with that particular tax?

MS WHALEN: I cannot speak for the Department of Business, but I can for my department. We looked at all of the fees, but that is an issue for Finance. The government, overall, had looked at a lot of fees and I think this year we have brought in a substantial reduction of taxes. One particular area is the personal income tax. I think probably they, too, may have put a priority on that, but I think that is a question better answered by the Minister of Finance.

MR. SWEENEY: Does somebody else want to take a turn?

MR. LANGDON: (Inaudible).

CHAIR: Just a minute now, Mr. Langdon, your mike is not on there yet.

Okay, here we go.

MR. LANGDON: On the taxes that are collected on insurance, like the fire insurance and the auto insurance and marine insurance total, how much does your department collect for government on taxes

on insurance? You probably do not have it there, but can you get it for me?

MS WHALEN: I do not have that particular number here, but I certainly can look and see how much we collect.

MR. LANGDON: You can get that? Okay.

The other thing you were saying is that this year government did reduce the amount of taxes collected from the consumer by \$3.4 million. Back in 2004-2005, I think it was, there were a number of these taxes that were raised, and roughly around that time, if I look correctly, in the 2004-2005 fiscal year, these fees raised about \$24.1 million. So you have reduced that \$24.1 million, say from 2004, by \$3.4 million. Would that be correct?

MS WHALEN: Yes, that is an overall reduction. We had some fees reduced as well in my department last year, in last year's budget. I would like to state for the record, that the reason those fees went up is, when we came to government we found ourselves in a fiscal deficit and a lot of fees went up. We are finding now that we have turned the corner, that we are in a position where we can reduce those fees.

MR. LANGDON: I understand that, but can you give me the amount still collected on taxes? In the reduction that you gave, did you say how many dollars had been collected in total taxes and levies to government?

MS WHALEN: Are you talking about fees or are you talking about the taxes?

MR. LANGDON: Fees.

MS WHALEN: Okay.

We had \$110 million worth of revenue collected.

MR. LANGDON: From fees?

MS WHALEN: Yes, it mostly would be fees.

MR. LANGDON: This year?

MS WHALEN: This year.

MR. CROCKER: Yes, there was an amount of \$118 million that was collected in current account revenue. There was also the related revenue which is budgeted in the department, so there are another few million dollars there. Most of it is current account revenue and that amount was about \$108 million.

MR. LANGDON: Getting back to the registration for motor vehicles, I understand about going on line, that you want to streamline the service and get more people on. That is understandable, that is the way society operates, I guess. I still find that a lot of the people who are not going to avail of that or won't be able to avail of that are a lot of seniors. Some of the people who live in rural communities don't have computers, and these are the people who make \$20,000 a year or \$22,000 a year total income. If there was any break to them, especially the seniors, it would have been, I think, much welcomed news to them. I think in that case – it is not going to happen this year, but for another year or whatever, if you do that there should be at least some special circumstances for people who are seniors. That is just a comment to make on that.

MS WHALEN: Okay, I would just like to respond.

MR. LANGDON: Sure, by all means.

MS WHALEN: Seniors can access our community access sites. There are a number of sites out in the communities that they can go to, to access the computers, and there is help available. That is not to say that we cannot look at this again in next year's budget. Our fees are always up for review.

MR. LANGDON: There are a lot of communities where there are no sites available, and I will not get into that. You know them as well as I do.

Getting back to the cellphones, within the last month I was pretty close to having two accidents - not myself - people on cellphones. I have been looking, as a result of that, and honestly I cannot believe how many people are using cellphones when they are driving. They are not using the head band, like they should be doing. They are talking and they are driving the Outer Ring Road, they are crossing over lanes with no concern about the person who is behind them.

I think it would be probably prudent, on behalf of the department or whatever, to contact the RNC and the RCMP to spruce that up; because I think what has happened is that people do not realize, or do not want to realize, that the prohibition is there and you cannot do it. It has just become so much a part of life that they do it anyhow.

MS WHALEN: I am really proud to say that we are the first in North America to bring in that cellphone legislation.

MR. LANGDON: I know. We were here when we did it.

MS WHALEN: You know, there are always people out there who are careless, regardless, and these are the ones that I would like to see the enforcement officers really crack down on. Again, you cannot stress enough how much safety is involved with a distraction from that cellphone.

MR. LANGDON: It is a real problem. To be honest with you, the way that I think about it, even though we passed the legislation, and we were the first jurisdiction in North America to do it, people just do not care or just do not bother to say that we are prohibited from doing it. They just do it anyhow.

MS WHALEN: I know. One of things that we put in the You're in Control campaign, we actually put up some signage telling them it is illegal to use those cellphones, always trying to educate the public.

One thing that I always like to pride ourselves on, it is common sense that you should not be on a cellphone when you are driving. It is really a distraction.

You are quite right, you can really involve someone's safety, but I will consult with our RNC and our RCMP to step up some enforcement on that.

MR. LANGDON: The other thing, just a comment that has already been made, and I recognize you were saying that the programs are in the schools for the kids for the ATV use, but it is a major problem, probably not as much in urban areas but in rural communities. Like, you are driving through town and you have ATVs, young people, coming up and passing you, and they pass you on the wrong side.

Like George said, it is not just one occurrence. You are driving up the road and one ATV is on that side and one ATV is on the other side, and they both pass you. It is becoming a real major problem – and a lot of them have no helmets.

Again, I applaud you for doing it with the schools, but again you cannot overemphasize - or even a reminder to the schools - that those things are prohibited. I know it is human nature, and young people, especially boys, are free and carefree and they want to do these things, but it is happening.

MS WHALEN: I think one of the ways, too, that we probably can work with individuals is in municipalities, because municipalities do have an awareness day, a Municipal Awareness Day, and it may be one of the things they can incorporate in that day, to educate the young people in the community how to use those ATVs.

MR. LANGDON: Wally?

MR. ANDERSEN: Minister, last year I raised a question, and I am not sure what was proposed but I am going to raise the same question again, and that is on the Motor Vehicle Registration of \$180.

Again, particularly in my riding, we have people who, more so than before now – at one time people would drive vehicles in small communities without any registration, without any insurance. All of that has changed because of the consequences if something happened. These people use their vehicles and they pay \$180, or whatever the fee is for the registration, for their sticker; yet, government does not do any work in the community with regard to the roads. They are the sole property of the communities, and for seven - or at least six - months, they cannot use their vehicles because of snow.

Again, I would ask the question: Would government, or has government, looked at anything regarding these small communities where people can only use their vehicles for certain months of the year?

MS WHALEN: I am going to let my deputy minister answer that one; she has done some work there.

MS KELLAND: I think I mentioned last year that there is an option for people to get a part-year registration, but it involves turning their licence plates in and getting them back. That is just the way our system operates. You may be able to appreciate that we do about 1.5 million transactions at Motor Registration every year. We are, however, looking at options in those communities and it would be helpful if we could have a list of which communities you think are particular in that regard. We are looking at options to have some secure handling of those plates, if that might be a partial solution.

The other thing we are looking at, with the Office of the Chief Information Office, is a

review of our Motor Registration computer system which is a long-standing, very large mainframe system which needs some revision. We are hoping to look at a complete review of that with them, and a partial registration scheme may be able to be accommodated through that, but that will take some time to accommodate.

The current solution would be to actually turn their licence plates back in for the winter months and we can work to try and find a secure way to secure those plates so they could get them back when the vehicles are put back into service.

MR. ANDERSEN: Where would they turn these plates in?

MS KELLAND: That is what we are working on - just to try and identify people in those communities - perhaps the town council, but that is something that we are exploring at present.

MR. ANDERSEN: Okay.

If I could make a suggestion, that these people would turn them in to the operator of the airstrips, or the RCMP in the communities, except for Rigolet, because Rigolet - I am sorry - Postville is the only one that does not have full-time policing. Because, Minister, if they have to turn their licence plates in somewhere other than in the community, with the cost of Canada Post, for just a licence plate, if they have to turn them back in and ship them out, there will be no savings whatsoever. I would suggest, if that is the case, that you would look at –

MS WHALEN: Yes, that is the particular reason why we have not gotten around to getting it all straightened out yet, because we are still trying to explore that. We realize there are significant costs there at the coast, so we will look at that for you.

MR. ANDERSEN: The only other question I have is regarding people trying to get their driver's licence examination test.

Under the previous government, we got the airstrip operators to do that job. I guess it is a bit ironic; I heard someone on Open Line saying: You know, Government Services has an office set up in the community of Postville.

What it is, the airstrip operator does some training where they can do the examination; however, in the last couple of years, especially, we have lost some of our operators to Voisey's Bay and other places. Last fall a new person was hired, but in the meantime they weren't given the training where they could go out and do these tests.

In particular, a young gentleman from the Community of Nain had a chance for a job at the store, a permanent job, and one of the responsibilities was driving the truck and hauling the freight, when it came in on the boat, from the dock to the store. In order for him to be able to get that job he had to fly to Goose Bay at a cost of probably \$700 so he could apply for the job. Now, eventually he got it. It does happen from time to time.

We requested Works Services to get someone in there. I talked to several people but it never materialized. From time to time these people do have to do this. I guess you can understand that when a job comes up and they apply for it, then you have to have a license. When you have to pay any amount of money - even to fly from Nain to Hopedale, for example, would have been \$400. From time to time we still run into these problems.

Again, the question is a difficult one. The only concern I have is that I don't think, and neither do the people, that in order for them to be able to do their test and qualify for a license they should have to pay large sums of money.

MS WHALEN: I am going to let my Assistant Deputy Minister respond to that one.

MS KELLAND: Yes, we are aware that there has been some turnover in airstrip operators. We will talk to Transportation and Works about getting training for those people, for anybody who is new. We do have driver examiners who fly to the Coast periodically, but in terms of trying to deal with one instance where somebody might need something in a short timeframe, we can certainly look into making sure that the people who are available are properly trained. That is something we can discuss with that department.

MR. SWEENEY: I just have a few more questions and I am ready to clue up.

Ms Kelland mentioned a little while ago about the age of the computer system, unless I misunderstood her, of course. With an increase now in credit card usage for online purchasing, is that system secure? Has the security system been upgraded to a point where the public can be assured that their private information is protected?

MS WHALEN: I will let my ADM respond to that.

MS KELLAND: Our services are provided to us through the Office of the Chief Information Officer and through xwave, and they would be able to answer the question better. My understanding is that there is absolutely no problem with security of information on that system. The only issue we want to review is some of the ways the program operates for our operators and some of the things it can and can't do. It is not an issue of privacy or security at all.

MR. SWEENEY: My colleague from Fortune Bay-Cape la Hune mentioned - what was it? - \$108 million in fees. When those fee increases were brought in they were brought in for improvement of the highways, the roads in the Province. How

much of those fees, that increase in fees last year, was spent on road improvements?

MS WHALEN: I think most of the money that comes in has gone into roads. This year alone we are putting in \$66 million into our roads budget. The funds that we raised from that increase in fees were put into Transportation and Works so that they could upgrade our roads. They were in deplorable condition when we came in and there is still a substantial amount of work to be done on our roads. I am proud to say we are putting in another \$66 million this year.

MR. SWEENEY: So, that \$66 million came from your department?

MS WHALEN: It goes into general revenue, so I don't really know where all of their money comes from, but the money that we collect in fees goes into the general revenue.

MR. SWEENEY: So we can't really be sure that those fees are actually used?

MS WHALEN: You can be sure that the road has been upgraded. I have gotten a lot of calls thanking us for the road upgrading.

MR. SWEENEY: The question I am asking is: What portion of the fees went into road repair?

MS WHALEN: I am just going to let the Financial Director explain this one to you.

MR. CROCKER: The current account revenue for the Province, of course, is sort of all, as it says, consolidated. That is on one side, the revenue side of the balance sheets, shall we say, and your expenditures are on the other. So, I would not say there is any big correlation between the amount that is spent - you cannot say, okay, we are going to take the revenue that is coming in from Motor Registration, we are going to use that, in particular, because it is all coming into the revenue account and the expenditure is the other side.

MR. SWEENEY: So, we do not know?

MR. CROCKER: Well, it is two different pots of money.

MR. SWEENEY: Yes. I will have to ask Finance, I guess.

MR. CROCKER: You have your revenue side and you have your expenditure side. So, it is not directly correlated like that.

MS WHALEN: I would just like to add that our money has to be there in order for us to do this work. We have done significant improvements with this revenue that we have generated.

MR. SWEENEY: Branding; what costs have been incurred by your department with regard to the new brand?

MS WHALEN: The branding is about \$145,000 this year. The branding will cost the Government Purchasing Agency about \$145,000.

OFFICIAL: Overall.

MS WHALEN: Yes, overall that is what it would cost.

MR. SWEENEY: What would that be used on?

MS WHALEN: Well, there are a number of things we use our branding on. Particularly, when they put their tenders in the paper, we will be using our branding on that as well. The branding is something that this Province is going to certainly promote for our logo. I think it is very worthwhile, particularly in our tourism. There are a number of initiatives that will have our branding on.

Just recently, I had the branding on our name tags that was just put in for customer services in MRD. So, all around, you will see the branding of the Province. I think this

is very important, that we promote that branding, and it is at no additional cost.

MR. SWEENEY: What dollar amount was spent by the department in advertising this year?

MS WHALEN: Just one minute now, I will check with Gerry.

MR. CROCKER: I will have to check the actual line item for you. I can get back to you on that, but the way most of the reports roll up, it rolls up into Purchased Services. Of course, advertising is just one line under Purchased Services, but I can certainly get back to you with that item, if you like.

MR. SWEENEY: With some of the increases in the Budget this year, how many new positions will be created?

MS WHALEN: There will be thirty-five new positions that we will be adding to our department.

MR. SWEENEY: There are permanent positions?

MS WHALEN: Yes, there are permanent positions.

MR. SWEENEY: How much helicopter time does your department use?

MS WHALEN: Pardon me?

MR. SWEENEY: Helicopter time, how much does it use?

MS WHALEN: We have not used any, I do not think. No, we have not used any.

MR. SWEENEY: Section 5.1.01. There was an increase there in Professional Services, some \$38,000 last year to \$225,000 this year.

MS WHALEN: Pardon me?

MR. SWEENEY: Section 5.1.01., Government Purchasing Agency.

MS WHALEN: Yes.

MR. SWEENEY: There is an increase of almost \$200,000 for Professional Services for this year over last year. What would you anticipate that to be?

MS WHALEN: Yes, that is the revised variance of \$13,000, which reflects the greater than anticipated auctioning fees in 2006-2007, and for 2007-2008, additional funding of \$200,000 is provided to cover a review of the procurement legislation policies and processes.

MR. SWEENEY: Okay, that is it for me.

MS WHALEN: Thank you.

CHAIR: Any other questions?

Mr. Forsey. Just a minute now, your microphone is not on.

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

About the antique autos on-line, can they register on-line?

MS WHALEN: All renewals you can register on-line.

MR. FORSEY: I do not know if you answered that earlier or not.

OFFICIAL: You cannot. That is the only one you cannot.

MS WHALEN: Okay. That is the only one that you cannot, but we are continuing to improve our services.

CHAIR: Mr. Langdon, do you have another one?

MR. LANGDON: (Inaudible).

CHAIR: Okay.

We are going to move that - if we can do this inclusive from 1.1.01 to 5.1.01, would that be all right with everyone if we could move that?

Shall 1.1.01 to 5.1.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 5.1.01 carried.

On motion, Department of Government Services, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: All right. Thank you for coming out this morning. I just want to remind you that our next meeting is on Monday at 7:00 p.m. and we are going to be doing Finance, and that is right here in the House of Assembly.

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible).

CHAIR: No, not tonight. We were supposed to do one tonight, but that has actually changed. It will be Monday night.

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible).

CHAIR: Yes, that is what I have here. Am I right, Elizabeth? Let's just make sure we have this right now. We have to check.

One thing I want to say to the department, too, before you go. I want to throw a bouquet to this department, because I have to tell you, they handle so much during a year; 2.5 million transactions, I think it is. My experience with the department has been really good, and I mean as a private citizen whenever I do my on-line things.

The question that Mr. Forsey asked was my question, because I still can't register my antique auto on line.

MS WHALEN: Well, we will continue to improve on our services.

MR. ORAM: Thank you very much. Good job!

MS WHALEN: We aim to please.

MR. ORAM: Good job! Well done! Thank you.

MS WHALEN: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

MR. ORAM: I need an adjournment motion as well.

MS E. MARSHALL: So moved.

MR. ORAM: So moved by Beth Marshall. Thank you.

MS WHALEN: At least, Paul, it is not a long one like last night, right?

MR. ORAM: That is right, exactly. Thank you.

On motion, Committee adjourned.