

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
May 15, 1995

EVENING SITTING

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund
Municipal Government
Vote 24

The Chair: — Before we proceed, I would ask the Minister of Municipal Government to please introduce the officials who have joined us here today.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Mr. Chairman, to my right I have Bill Reader, the deputy minister of Municipal Government; behind me to my right is Ron Davis, assistant deputy minister of municipal services; immediately behind me is Larry Chaykowski, director of finance and administration; and in front of me is Peter Hoffmann, director of financial operations for housing; and to my left is Bill Werry, director of sport and recreation.

Item 1

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister and officials, I'd like to welcome you here this evening.

I have some information here that I'd like to pass on to you if I could have one of the pages, please. It deals with an individual who's having a problem with Sask Housing, specifically. He, as the story was related to me, he had a loan through Sask Housing; he also had loans with his financial institution. He contacted them with the thought that all of his loans were paid off. He was informed by the financial institution that indeed everything was cleared off. Then a year later, he gets a call back from, I believe it's from Sask Housing, saying that you still have a loan here which you're in arrears on. Why is this happening? Well he'd been informed that his loans were all paid up and he no longer owed them anything.

So I believe that you're aware of the situation, Madam Minister. I can see, with you looking at the information, that your officials at least are aware of some of the circumstances involved here.

As was explained to me, he has a credit problem now with Equifax Canada that he is on their books as having been delinquent on his loans, and still is. He informs my office that he has the money set aside in a trust account and is prepared to pay to Sask Housing if they will clear up the matter with Equifax Canada. Equifax Canada supposedly says that they are prepared to . . . clearing up his record if they can get a letter from Sask Housing that says that an error occurred some place in the system.

And my understanding is, it doesn't have to be that the error was at Sask Housing or where, but just that an error occurred and then Equifax Canada, if he pays the money, is prepared to say that his credit is good.

Madam Minister, I wonder if you can give me some information on this particular case as you understand it, and what seems to be the problems in getting this cleared up?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Mr. Chairman, this is a very long and complicated case and we have been working diligently to try to resolve it. At this point in time, the Ombudsman is . . . it has been referred to the Ombudsman's office, and he is working to try to resolve the problem.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. How long has this case been in arrears? Can you give me that information?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The account is in arrears by about 50 months.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Is that 50 or 15?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Five zero.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Madam Minister. The information that I gave you on that verbally, is that reasonably accurate in your interpretation, or are there some other circumstances involved here?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — I wouldn't say that it is accurate in all aspects. I think there is differences in interpretation. But in general, the circumstances are that a loan was taken out. The loan was unsecured, and it was on a promissory note. And the house was sold. The loan wasn't paid off. The loan went into arrears. And from that point in time, there has been a discussion and some points of difference about what happened when the house was sold.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Was the loan registered against the home at all?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — No. In 1986 up until — let me see — 1988, February 1988, the loans were unsecured at that point in time and they were taken out on a promissory note. There was a change in policy after 1988 where loans were then taken out with a caveat against the . . . registered against the property.

Mr. D'Autremont: — After 1988 when the caveats were being taken out on the loans, were all of the previous loans transferred over to the caveat system or were they remaining on the promissory note?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — No. At that point in time, the ones that were taken out previous to 1988, February, were left under the old policy, which was simply a promissory note.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. One of the questions that this individual asked . . . or he phoned in to the president of Sask Housing and wanted to know who, after a discussion with the president, who was the person higher up the ladder that he could contact to discuss this issue. He was told by the president of Sask Housing that he was the highest person in

the chain of command that this client of Sask Housing could talk to. Would you agree with that?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Well I'm the minister responsible for Sask Housing, but the day-to-day operations and the supervision of the housing division rests with Mr. Ron Styles, who is associate deputy minister of the department.

Mr. D'Autremont: — So if someone was to ask Mr. Styles who his boss was, that would be you then. Correct, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — I'm the minister responsible for Sask Housing.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you. Well why would Mr. Styles, if he did indeed say it, suggest to this client from Sask Housing that there was no one else that the client could talk to other than Mr. Styles; there was nobody else further up the ladder that he could go to?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Well I don't know that Mr. Styles did that, and I'm not aware of any of his comments so I don't think I'm going to comment on that. Mr. Styles is a very capable associate deputy minister and he has a very good reputation in handling the day-to-day operations and supervising Sask Housing.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. Perhaps it would be worth your time to discuss the situation with Mr. Styles in relationship to the chain of command to ensure that he does indeed . . . is aware that there is someone higher than he is. Just to refresh his memory on that perhaps would be a worthwhile effort.

Madam Minister, I'd like to ask you some questions now about the globals. I notice in the travel that this year in province you have \$1 million, \$1.042 million, allocated for travel. That is the year ending March 31, '95. I look at the year ending March 31, '94 and the in-province travel was 614,000. We have an additional 400,000 — approximately a two-thirds increase.

Madam Minister, what changed in your department that would warrant such a large increase in the amount of travel?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The numbers you have for 1993-94 are not the final numbers for the departmental budget for that year. And so, when you're comparing the year-to-year numbers, you have to compare the final year end, fiscal year 1993-94, with \$1.107 million. So there has . . . you don't have the final numbers on the 1993-94 fiscal year before you.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, when we get these globals we are led to believe that they are reasonably accurate. Now if the global for the year ending in March 31, 1994 as what you gave us last year, it says here: travel expenses in-province \$614,697.32.

So if you have some other figure that is the accurate figure, then what's to say that any of these figures are accurate, Madam Minister? Is there some discrepancies there that aren't available; why the real numbers aren't available? When you give this

information out, it's our belief that this is the gospel and that it is accurate. Now are you telling us, Madam Minister, that these figures are some reason suspect; that they are indeed not the real facts?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The numbers that you quoted were accurate at the time you asked the question because we hadn't got the finalized figures in for that year end. On December 12, 1994, your office was sent the final figures for 1993-94, so you do have the final figures for that year, which were \$1,107,622. That was sent to you December 12, 1994.

The numbers that you referenced just now were numbers that were used earlier before the year-end figures were all tabulated.

(1915)

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, how do you calculate your figures then for this period of time ending at the fiscal year? You say you sent us figures that . . . updated figures as of December, which is nine months later. When does your reporting come in? When would you have prepared these numbers that you've now sent us? Let's use this year's even. Is the figure \$1.042 million for travel accurate?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Mr. Chairman, I wonder if the member opposite would tell us what numbers he's using and where he received those numbers from because . . . Again I will say, when we gave you figures that you referenced to the year end for 1993-94 . . . haven't been completed, and to the best of our knowledge the numbers we gave you were accurate to that date.

As a year end has been completed and all the numbers have been tabulated, the final results are in. And for 1993-94, it's 1,107,622. And for the year 1994-95, it is 1,139,544.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I was using the in-province numbers for 1995 which are 1.042 million.

Now that number — 1.042 million — when is that accurate until? Is that accurate until December 31 or February or January or March, or when is that number for? And how long a period of time are we talking? Are we talking from March 31, '94 to some date after that but not yet till March 31 of '95?

Because I don't know when these numbers are supposed to be accurate for. You say that well this is what we have to date. If that's what you have to date, where do the other numbers come from that will change that figure, as happened in '94? You had in-province 614,000 at the end of . . . once you added all the numbers together, I gather, you had a total of 1.107 million, or you can use the other numbers, the total travel for the province in March 31, '94 of 680,000. There's still a 400, \$500,000 difference there. So when do those numbers come together to make it a reliable and accurate number?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The year ends March 31, and within a month after that all the numbers are in and tabulated. So the numbers that you have, if they've been tabulated within the month of April or by the end of April, are all correct.

Mr. D'Autremont: — So, Madam Minister, the numbers that you gave us this year on the globals are accurate. Is that right?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you. Last year's numbers, it says here, date submitted March 25, '94, for the year end reporting of March 31, '94. Would those numbers have been out a month? Would they have been out three months? What kind of a time frame are you looking at here for the inaccuracies?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — At that point we would've only had the February figures tabulated, so we would have been missing two months.

Mr. D'Autremont: — So you would have missed both February and March? Or they were tabulated in February, is that what you're saying? So it would have February and March that were missing? The minister is nodding that that is accurate.

Madam Minister, why then in the '94 year, and would it have occurred also in the '95 year, that you would have spent 40 per cent of your budget in two months, in the last two months of the budgetary year?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — That was for 1993-94. We don't have our records here and we aren't quite sure, but it could have been that the CVA (Central Vehicle Agency) were two or three or four months behind, and they all come in at the year end. So all of the accounting for CVAs are probably within the last two or three months of the fiscal year.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I wonder if you can give us some indication of what was spent then on a monthly time frame for the last three months of this fiscal year that we just completed — so January, February, and March.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — We don't account for the travel by the month. And I guess if you would like, we will try to compile those figures and pass them over to you at a later date.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. The reason I'm asking is it just seems a little curious to me that for the '94 figures you would have used up 40 per cent of the budget in the last two months. It makes one wonder if you had certain funds allocated for travel, and so all of a sudden you haven't used them and so you rush around the province and visit various corners of the province simply to utilize the budget. And I was hoping that those figures would not have corresponded into the '95 year, because if they had, then something really would be suspicious.

So I would appreciate it if you could get me those figures, Madam Minister, for the last three months of the fiscal year, to find out just what was happening on those.

Madam Minister, I wonder if you could give me information related to your personal travel as the minister in your department — the dates, the destinations, and the purposes of

each trip, please.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Do you want in-province travel or out-of-province travel?

Mr. D'Autremont: — If you can give us both of those please, Madam Minister.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — I have the pages here, if you would like. The total for the in-province travel is \$5,954 and the total for out-of-province travel is \$4,000 . . . oops, just a minute. I have to get a new total here. The total in-province travel is 12,000.

Okay, let's take this out-of province travel first. The out-of-province travel, there was a trip to New Brunswick for a ministers' housing conference; a trip to Victoria for the opening of the Commonwealth Games and ministers responsible for local government meeting; and a trip to Grand Prairie for the opening of the Canada Winter Games. The total for the out-of-province travel was \$4,863.12.

The total for the in-province and out-of-province travel is \$23,182.16, so I guess in order to find the in-province total you will have to subtract the out-of-province from the grand total. But I'll pass this over to you.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. In the information that you're passing over, would that also include who might have accompanied you on those trips, particularly the out-of-province ones?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The out-of-province travel includes the office staff who accompanied me on those trips.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I wonder if you could give us an indication who those staff persons were that were accompanying you and what duties they fulfilled.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The trip to New Brunswick was a ministers' meeting for responsible for housing, and Harlene Balsdon accompanied me. And the meeting in Vancouver, which was a ministers responsible for local government meeting, Perry Erhardt accompanied me. And the trip to Grande Prairie for the opening of the Canada Games, Margaret Morrisette accompanied me.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I wonder if you could give us a little bit of detail please on the local government meeting in Vancouver. How long was it? What was involved?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The meeting in Vancouver was two and a half days, and the ministers responsible for municipal government from across Canada were at that meeting.

We discussed issues like the role of the property tax, different service . . . different ways of providing services at the local level, some issues regarding economic development and the role of municipal governments, and trying to get an understanding across all jurisdictions about how legislation pertaining to the role and responsibility of municipal

governments is similar or different from one area to another.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. In those two and a half days how many hours of meetings would you have actually participated in? A couple hours a day, or eight hours a day, or what would it be?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The first day was an afternoon only, of 1 to 4. The second day was a full day from 8 to 5, and the last day was from 8 to 12 — a half day.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay. Thank you, Madam Minister. It sounds like you were doing your work there; that's what I was concerned about. Since Commonwealth Games were on at exactly the same time I was . . . Okay, you said attend the Commonwealth Games and local government at the same time, so I was wondering how much time was spent at actually working and how much time was spent enjoying the hospitality of the Commonwealth Games? So if you spent that much time working you didn't have a lot of extra time to enjoy the hospitality of the Commonwealth Games . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . We're just making sure of that.

Madam Minister, how much of the travel would be not related to land travel within this million-dollars-plus? Is the vast majority of it vehicular travel or are you using aircraft quite a bit?

(1930)

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Well first of all, I want to correct what you thought was a trip where we had a good time at the Commonwealth Games. The Commonwealth Games started 10 days after the ministers' meeting, and I on my own expense went over to Victoria and stayed with my mother, so there was no expense to the government. So I didn't make the trip to Vancouver, come home, and make the trip back to Victoria and come home. It was one trip and I stayed there, just so that you know that we weren't having a good time all of that time.

In regard to the in-province travel, most of it is CVA vehicles and there are some plane trips, mainly up to northern Saskatchewan, on two or three occasions that I've gone up to visit municipalities in northern Saskatchewan. But by far, most of the expense is related to car travel to visit municipalities within Saskatchewan.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. When you're travelling by air, would you be travelling commercial; would you be using Executive Air; just what form are you using?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Just to make sure that you understand that that million dollars you talked about includes all of the staff who works for Department of Municipal Government, including the people who work in housing and so on, and we use Exec Air to travel in province.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, is your department involved in any legal actions, either on behalf of the department or is someone taking legal

action against you? I wonder if you could detail any of that, please.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The housing division of Municipal Government may have some minor legal actions where they are trying to collect arrears or some loans that are owing, but that would be the only legal action that is undertaken by our department.

Mr. D'Autremont: — How much money would you spend on legal fees in a year, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — We don't have that exact number with me, but my officials say it would be equivalent to about three-quarters of a PY (person-year) within the Department of Justice is what we would spend approximately in one year on legal work.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Can you repeat three-quarters of what? I didn't catch what?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Three-quarters of one PY in the Department of Justice.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Three-quarters of a person is probably relatively inexpensive to feed.

Going back to that initial case that I brought forward, Madam Minister, what other measures have you taken other than legal recourse to try and resolve that circumstance?

I would think that if it could be settled through some other means, other than through the legal court system, that perhaps the taxpayer could save some money on it if you were to use perhaps mediation services or some other entity that could help resolve the situation rather than simply going through the court system which is an expense for everyone.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Well first of all, this case has received a fair bit of attention from the staff in my office and from the staff over in the department. And everyone, including the deputy minister, has tried to resolve it. There is no legal case right now. What we have done is refer it to the Ombudsman for comment. And so a collection agency is handling it and, like we have in many instances, we have referred accounts that are in arrears to a collection agency and they are the ones who have tried to collect this account that is approximately 50 months in arrears.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, you hired two more in-scope, permanent employees and then your wages though within that category have increased by \$215,000. I wonder if you can give us some details as to why, after hiring two individuals, you've had such a large increase in the salaries.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The reason for that difference is the in-scope, 2 per cent negotiated wage increase was in effect for 6 months in 1993-94 but was in effect for the full 12 months in '94-95. In addition, the employees in housing division of our department were converted to the main table of the SGEU

(Saskatchewan Government Employees' Union) agreement and that agreement was in effect for 9 months for 1993-94 and for the full 12 months in 1994-95.

And reclassifications amounted to \$20,358 on top of that, and there were other increments as well. So to recap, it was a 2 per cent increase that took effect for the last six months of '93-94 and the full 12-month period of '94-95. A conversion of the staff in housing was not in full effect until 1993-94, and there were reclassifications.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Within the in-scope increases that took place, was there an equal distribution of the funds? Did everyone receive the 2 per cent increase or did some people receive a greater amount and some people a lesser amount?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The 2 per cent was an average, depending on where they sit within the range, but on average it amounted to 2 per cent.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Would you have any employees, Madam Minister, in your department that would earn less than \$12 an hour?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Madam Minister, did any of the employees that were earning less than \$12 an hour receive a top-up that would have been greater than 2 per cent with the settlement of this contract?

And you may be wondering why I'm asking this, but we had SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) in here this afternoon and the employees in SPMC who were earning less than \$12 an hour were all topped up to \$12 or greater. Did the same thing happen within your department?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — No.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Would the employees of your department be under the same union contract as the employees in SPMC?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — No, we have a separate agreement; agreement that's different than SPMC.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I'm sure those people earning less than \$12 an hour in your department would be interested in talking to the employees of SPMC that were earning less than \$12 an hour, which they no longer are.

Madam Minister, in the in-scope areas your spending has increased by an additional 267,000 for temporary employees, an increase of about 25 per cent. What's the reason for this?

(1945)

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The increase in non-permanent staffing covered new, short-term programs like RRAP, the residential rehabilitation assistance program, that was implemented by the

federal government jointly with the provincial government last year.

There was increase in staffing at Eastend for the T-Rex discovery. We also had people who were working on the Northern mines in order to secure the lease agreement. And we also had someone working as an aboriginal liaison.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay. Thank you, Madam Minister. In the budget *Estimates* your full-time equivalent staff utilization for '94-95 was given as 380.5, and yet in our global questions, you're reporting 429 employees as of March 31. Are both those numbers correct, and if not, what . . . where's the discrepancies?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Could you please tell us where you got that first number from?

Mr. D'Autremont: — Madam Minister, it says in my notes that this is out of the budget *Estimates* for '94-95, so not this year's budget but last year's.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Well I understand what you have for the estimates in 1994-95 from last year, was 380.5 PYs . . . or FTEs (full-time equivalent).

And what we had last year were 12 additional people added to the department. There were two people who were doing aboriginal liaison. There were two people working for northern mines monitoring committee. There were four people working in Eastend paleo field station. The residential rehab assistance program had three people. We had one person working on treaty land entitlement, and we had a third of a person working in public safety.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. In your department, you've had quite a number of reclassifications. In fact this has tripled this year over last. You went from 12 to 38. And the costs increased correspondingly for about 81,000. Why so many reclassifications, Madam Minister? What's changed within your department for the need to upgrade so many people?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The reason for the reclassifications was, when we underwent the restructuring in '93-94, we brought together three different departments. There was parts of the department that had public safety, parts of Rural Development, part of Municipal Government. And when they came together, there was a lot of reclassifications as people fit into the new job descriptions and within the total, larger, expanded department. So it had to do with the restructuring of parts of three departments, reorganization into one new department.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, when you were bringing in these three departments in together, surely there would have been all the managerial positions already in place within each of those departments. And as you bring them into a larger entity, I can see that there may have been one or two new areas that needed to be made, but at the top of the pyramid, you still have one person and then going down from that.

So I would question why you would need 38 reclassifications

simply because of the combining of the three different departments. You're not going to have three deputy ministers now; you're going to have one deputy minister. You may have a couple of assistant deputy ministers, but you're . . . down the line, you're not necessarily going to still have three departments side by side under your ministry that are reporting separately. Now you have them all integrated, and surely you don't need as many managerial positions to deal with that. And if you do, obviously something is wrong there.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Well my staff tell me that when the departments were amalgamated, all the out-of-scope staff was reclassified in order to fit into new positions and new job descriptions within the new department.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, I'm going to have to look over my notes here a little bit more and just see what the changes all were.

I wonder if you can give me the total number of vehicles you have leased within your department and what those vehicles are utilized for.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — I will pass over to you a paper that shows how many vehicles we have that are leased in each of the last three years, but we don't have here tonight which areas of the department leases these vehicles. I would imagine that they are distributed through housing and municipal services as well as public safety and recreation and culture. But we will get a breakdown for you. There are eight vehicles that were leased in 1994, and I will ask that our department officials provide for you the detailed breakdown as how those are allocated in each division of our department.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister, if you would, please. My information was that you had 59 leased vehicles. Yes, and on here you have 43. So if you could provide that information, Madam Minister, please.

In the globals, you also provided us with a list of people who are no longer with your department. I wonder if you could give an indication, of those that are no longer there, if any of them — and if so, who they might be and where they went — that moved into another government department or into a Crown corporation.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — In your global question no. 4, you asked us to provide you with a breakdown on the employees and when they were terminated and for what circumstances. We have provided you with that, but we don't have tonight with us information about where these people transferred to, whether they went to the private sector or retired or took up other positions within the provincial government.

So we will endeavour to find that out, but we don't have that with us tonight.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. If you would please investigate that for me.

Madam Minister, a number of committees that were on the

globals last year no longer are and I was wondering if you could give me some indication whether these committees have been discontinued, if they were overlooked, or what it might be. They included the MPI (modification, products and innovation) selection committee, the Minister's Advisory Committee on Multicultural Legislation, the Minister's Advisory Committee on the Status of the Artist, Saskatchewan Heritage Advisory Board, Saskatchewan Heritage Property Review Board, the Saskatchewan multicultural advisory committee.

I wonder if you could give me some indication as to the status of those committees.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Some of the committees were set up for a short term and they finished their mandate, and as they finished their work they ceased to exist. So we have provided you with a number of committees that we have. Most of them are current and operational, and there were a few like the advisory committee on multiculturalism and so on, that when they finished, handed in their report, they were disbanded.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I wonder if you can give us a cost breakdown on the committees, and who may have served on those committees, and what they received for per diems and expenses.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Mr. Chairman, I have the information that the member asked for and I would ask him to take it over.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, you have, I believe, six contract employees within your department. I wonder if you could give us their names, their terms of reference, their job descriptions, benefits, offices, and principal residence.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The information we have, and I . . . we have, in 1994, as of March 31, 1994, there were nine people on contract and the total compensation was 367,269. And as of March 31, 1995, there were six people on contract and the compensation for that period, for 1995, was \$312,785.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I wonder if you can give us the names of those employees and what their job descriptions are, where their work location is at, and what their terms of reference are. Like are they employed for six months, a year, for a particular project, that type of item?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — We don't have that detailed information with us but we'll compile it and provide it to your office.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, in your globals you have one major item of purchase under computers. That was a purchase for \$380,866. You purchased 125 computers plus a dozen printers. Madam Minister, was that purchase tendered? And who will be utilizing those computers? With approximately 129 employees in your department, that's one new computer for about every three or so employees.

(2000)

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The purchase of the new computers were all tendered and as we purchased the new computer network . . . or computer hardware, some of the older computers were passed down to other staff within the department. I will give you a breakdown where these new computers are in the department.

In inspection services we have four; the Provincial Library has 13; the minister's office has two; finance and administration has 12; communications has four; culture and recreation have one; human resources have one; recreation has four; emergency planning has two; municipal policy and legislative services has three; municipal finance has three; community planning has 10; northern planning has two; housing in Regina has 27; housing in Prince Albert has nine; housing, property management, has 14; the Fire Commissioner's office has four; heritage has seven; arts and multiculturalism has three; for a grand total of 125.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. Why would housing need an additional 50 new computers? Did they have computers available before, and if so, why 50 new ones were they required?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — In housing they switched their accounting system from an ISM (Information Systems Management Corporation) package to an in-house package and so they purchased new computers in order to be able to more efficiently make use of that service.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Am I to take it then that ISM was providing a software program along with the hardware, and then when that service was discontinued they took their hardware back with them?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Housing division was just hooked up to ISM, the main computer, so when we changed to in-house we just disconnected.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, you moved a substantial amount of office space to the London Life Building this past summer. Would you mind explaining why that move was necessary and outlining the tendering process that may have been undertaken in selecting that location?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — When we amalgamated the . . . or restructured the government, three or four different departments came together as the Department of Municipal Government and they were located at various places around the city. Last year we brought all the various divisions of Municipal Government under one roof and that change saved us in lease costs and operations over \$400,000 a year.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. How large of a change . . . okay \$400,000. But what kind of a savings were you getting per square foot on that compared to what you were paying? I noticed that in questioning other departments that they have also been moving, changing locations around the province while maintaining rental space at other areas. Was there other rental space available that was already being paid for and leased by the government?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — I can't answer for SPMC. I can tell you that we had 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 different locations from which we operated. And when we relocated under one roof, it saved the department's budget annually \$426,000.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister, for your questions. I'm through, but I believe one of our colleagues is in the House today and wishes to ask you some questions.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Madam Minister. In the . . . on subvote 3 under housing, I see there we have an increase in the home improvement program subsidies by a fair amount of money. And I was wondering if you could just tell me why this has increased in this upcoming year?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The subsidy is directly related to the prime interest rate. And as the prime interest rate goes up, the amount of the subsidy goes up also.

Mr. McPherson: — Can you tell me what the outstanding balance of these loans would be today?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — \$125 million.

Mr. McPherson: — And how much of this would be in arrears?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — We have 43,000 accounts at Sask Housing, and about 1,500 of them are in arrears. We're talking about accounts. We're not talking about total value. Forty-three thousand accounts, 1,500 are in arrears.

Mr. McPherson: — Do you have a dollar figure, as far as what these would amount?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Well this is a little bit technical. We have \$7 million in accounts; some portion of those are in arrears. So it's a small percentage of that total \$7 million. Do you understand what I'm saying? Of those accounts in arrears, they total about \$7 million, but there's only a percentage of those that are in arrears at this point in time.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, I guess I'll have to have you explain that again. I thought I understood you when you first started talking, but if you're saying that you have \$125 million outstanding, \$7 million is in arrears — but only a portion of that is in arrears at this time?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — We have \$125 million; that's the total portfolio, the total accounts. Of that, there are about \$7 million of those accounts that have . . . they have a portion of that account in arrears. It's not the whole thing in arrears. It's a portion of that account in arrears.

You have to understand how this works. There are people who are paying rent. There are people who have loans. And it's not easy to quantify, but of the \$7 million, there are a portion of those that would be in arrears.

Mr. McPherson: — Are you then saying that the 125 million isn't just in the home improvement loan program?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The 125 is in the home improvement program, but there are other portfolios that are beyond that. But 125 million is related to the home improvement program.

Mr. McPherson: — All right, Madam Minister. Can you explain to me what you meant by a portion of this is in rent because I didn't realize that there was any part of the program that rents would apply.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — I'm sorry; that was my error. I should have said it was the home improvement program that we're talking about. That's a collection of our accounts on that program. So I misspoke. Please strike that from the record. There are no rents.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Can you tell me how many dollars have been written off each and every year since the program began? Do you keep a running total?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — We have that information but we don't have it here tonight.

Mr. McPherson: — The program, I think it was a 10-year program, wasn't it, the home improvement? And if it is, then you're going to probably be projecting this year the amount of write-offs you're going to have to wind the program up. And I'm just wondering where . . . at what stage you are at with these calculations.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The program was in place for five years. The loans themselves were a 10-year term.

Mr. McPherson: — So, Madam Minister, would you be able to provide then the past years, the amounts that have been written off, because that would be over and above the figures we were talking about earlier? But also what you project for this upcoming year as far as write-offs, because the loans themselves, that part of it's going to be winding down. You said it was . . . the program started in 1986, '85?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The time when we had the most difficulty with those accounts is past. We're into the end of the program now, of the 10-year term, and so we are . . . our collection rates are much higher than they were before. We don't have a lot in outstanding accounts.

Mr. McPherson: — Can you then tell me, once again, what the \$125 million is? What I was leading up to, I thought within the next year and a half, this \$125 million would be coming back into the government coffers. So I guess we'll have to sort of start this again, Madam Minister.

(2015)

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Okay, this is going to get easier now. As you remember, the home improvement program was a loan taken out by people. They went to their banks and those loans

were guaranteed by the provincial government. The banks have \$125 million worth of those loans that are current and the clients are paying them.

There are \$7 million worth of loans that have gone into default, and as the guarantor of those loans they've been passed to the provincial government. We are now collecting those loans and some portion of those loans are in arrears, but it's not the total \$7 million.

Mr. McPherson: — All right, Madam Minister, that does clear it up. But of course you're still going to be able to give me then the amount of write-offs or any monies that the government had to give to the banks, or did you just take over all of the loans that were becoming delinquent?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — This \$7 million has been taken over from the banks because we guaranteed those loans. The banks couldn't collect them; they collected it from us; we go and ask the client to pay.

We try as much as possible to collect those arrears from the clients, and when it's impossible we then turn it over to a collection agency and the collection agency then takes on the task of collecting from those clients.

Mr. McPherson: — Can you tell us what the total cost of the program has been since its inception to date?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The total number of loans that were taken out at the banks were about \$408 million. But the portion that we have to pay for, which is the subsidy and some of the arrears, we don't have those actual figures with us, but we will calculate them and pass them on to you. So the actual obligation, the financial obligation on the provincial government, has to be calculated on what we paid out in subsidies and what we paid out trying to collect the arrears.

Mr. McPherson: — And I'm not sure if I recall just what the interest rate . . . Was it 6 per cent on both . . . on the loan? And I think there was a grant. Are we also talking about the costs of the grant that was involved?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The write-down was to 6 per cent. The provincial government subsidized the interest down to 6 per cent. And the grants that were paid out, that \$1,500 to each home-owner, we haven't got those figures with us tonight. The program was cancelled in March of 1990.

Mr. McPherson: — You would be able to send across the amounts of the grants?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — We can go back in our records and find that but it will take some research. This program has not been in effect for the last five years.

Mr. McPherson: — If that was at 6 per cent money, then the program that actually the New Democrats had to compete with at that time, 7-7-7 or 7 per cent interest over 7 years and such, did you . . . was there any costing done on that by the department officials?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — No. I say that the department officials did not calculate that proposal out at all.

Mr. McPherson: — On subvote 7, the community development program, where there's 10 per cent of VLT (video lottery terminal) profits, I guess, go back to each community, have you done a breakdown of revenues to date or expected revenues by community?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — No.

Mr. McPherson: — Are you going to keep a running total of each community's proceeds?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — No.

Mr. McPherson: — Is there any reason why you couldn't keep a running total of the proceeds sent to each community?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — You'll have to ask that question to the minister responsible for Gaming. This is simply 10 per cent of net VLT revenues that are designated to be placed in a program for community development purposes, and it was not meant to relate directly to how much money was being spent in VLTs in each community. There was never a connection between each community spending on the VLTs and what was going back through this program. We never made that connection.

Mr. McPherson: — So the 10 per cent money — that's spread amongst all communities, or is it just spread amongst those communities with the VLTs?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — When we put the 10 per cent into the community development program, we said we would take advice from SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations), SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), and SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) about how it would be distributed and what it would be spent on. And we're still talking with SUMA, SAHO, and SARM. There has been no conclusion in that discussion yet.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, I thought the minister might ask the member from Shaunavon what 50 per cent would cost.

Madam Minister, I've raised the question of housing, and I'm wondering what has been done to address some of the requests for housing in view of the fact that Municipal Government and Sask Housing has basically wound down its housing program. And in view of the reduction in funding coming from the federal government, what do communities like Fairlight do?

And are there any communities that may have existing housing that is not being utilized at the time? Would the department take the initiative of seeing whether they can make some of these units available at a cost — letting them up for tender, if you will — and see if some of these communities could bid on them and maybe look at moving them as an alternative to the other program?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — First of all, your comment about putting them up for tender, we don't sell off our social housing units, but where there are vacancies in communities, we undertake community consultation to try to fill those vacancies. And if they cannot find residents to live in those units then we do relocate them to communities that do have a need and have identified that need. And it is important for us to continue to work with the communities, both the ones that have vacancies and the ones that have expressed a desire to have more units.

It is a concern to us that the federal government no longer funds a capital program. And we must continue to express our concern to the federal government because we believe very strongly that housing is a very important social program. And it is extremely critical to residents in the North, but it's also very important to people living in our cities and in our communities across Saskatchewan.

So our desire is to continue to negotiate with the federal government to try to impress upon them the need for further capital funding for social housing programs. But at this point in time we really do have very limited options. We cannot pick up that cost entirely by ourselves; we must have the partner with us and that partner must be the federal government.

Mr. Toth: — Madam Minister, is it beneficial for a community to have a Sask Housing Authority in their community to receive any assistance? If not, who would I put a community — or the leadership in a community, such as the mayor and council, as far as the department — in touch with to just find out whether there are vacant units available that Sask Housing may be looking to make available to other communities to purchase and to move to their communities?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — If there is not a local housing authority, then that community should write to the deputy, Bill Reader, or to Ron Styles, the associate minister responsible for housing.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, a question regarding assessment and I raised this the other day as well. What's the department, or Municipal Government, if you will, doing in their discussions with both SUMA and SARM in dealing with the assessment question and the rate of taxation on houses on small rural properties such as acreages in the rural areas?

I brought this to your attention the other day when we were discussing a Bill, and the fact that some residents are finding now that they would be better off having purchased a lot and built in a community or bought a house if it was available. At least they've got the water and the sewer and those other services available to them. But since there wasn't anything available . . . and a couple that have been brought to my attention chose a house that happened to be vacant, fairly new, and are finding themselves facing substantial assessment and taxes on that property.

Is your department doing anything to try and work together with SUMA and SARM to address this question so that at the end of the day we're not overcharging for people because they chose to live on an acreage, but at the same time they're not getting it . . .

as a resident of a local community might feel they're getting it for next to nothing. I think what we're looking for here as well as fairness . . . and I'm wondering if you could just fill us in as to where we are in the discussions that are . . . and are ongoing.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The responsibility for assessment rests with SAMA (Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency), and SAMA will eventually make the decision about how they are going to value those properties.

In regard to the taxation issue, we are endeavouring to provide municipalities with as many tools as they can so that they can make their own decisions about how they want to tax residents when they live on small property holdings in rural Saskatchewan. So there is an issue both of taxation policy and an issue of assessment policy that must be dealt with.

SAMA will deal with the issue of assessment policy, and we will discuss the issue of providing tax tools and some degree of discretion for the municipalities so that if they want to provide incentives or if they want to undertake a policy that would give them some ability to encourage residents to live in rural Saskatchewan and not to be obliged to pay an onerous tax bill, then we want to make sure that municipalities have that discretion, and they can make it at their own local level.

(2030)

Mr. Toth: — So what you're saying, Madam Minister, then is, municipalities do actually have that privilege right now or that opportunity to set rates based on where a person lives and services that are available.

However, there really isn't a clear, I guess if you would say . . . clear rules that would establish the same pattern or an equal playing-field right across the province. That's what I'm gathering from your comments. Wouldn't it be fair for the department to establish and lay out some of those level playing-fields, whether through regulation, so that each RM (rural municipality) is treating the property owner, especially the acreage owner, on the same basis?

And as well, Madam Minister, if a person . . . and a question that was just raised today: a person happens to have a trailer in the same yard as . . . and in a lot of cases we have where a son starts farming with a father, and to start off with just moves a trailer onto the same yard. And the complaint was with the cost of the power and everything. And then the taxation . . . would that trailer tax separately too, and is that an issue that may be addressed though some regulations and guidelines?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — We are aware of the problems that you've just talked about. It is a concern to us, and we will look into it. The only tools that municipal governments have right now is they can make a decision if they want to discount, abate, or exempt property taxes. So they have at their disposal right now under the municipal Act the right to make some of those decisions.

But they are difficult, and they sometimes are reluctant to undertake those kinds of initiatives. So I'm aware of the

problem that you have just related to us. It is a concern. We are talking to SARM about it, and we are trying to find a solution for it.

Item 1 agreed to.

Items 2 to 11 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 24 agreed to.

**General Revenue Fund
Saskatchewan Municipal Board
Vote 22**

Item 1 agreed to.

Vote 22 agreed to.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the members opposite for their cooperation and their questions and I would like to thank my officials here tonight for providing us with their support.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the minister and her officials, including those in the galleries, for their support this evening and for providing the answers to our questions.

**General Revenue Fund
Education, Training and Employment
Vote 5**

The Chair: — Before we proceed to item 1, I would ask the minister please reintroduce us to the officials who have joined us here today.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. To my left is Dan Perrins, deputy minister of Education, Training and Employment. To my right is Lily Stonehouse, assistant deputy minister, advanced education and employment services. Immediately behind me is Ken Horsman, assistant deputy minister, K - 12. And to Mr. Horsman's left is Mae Boa, director of finance and operations.

Item 1

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to Madam Minister and her officials. Madam Minister, a couple of questions that have been brought to my attention.

First of all, I'll deal with one that's been brought by teachers. You're probably getting the same letters as I am, regarding the feeling that the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation) anyway . . . that there isn't meaningful negotiations regarding the salary and a number of the issues. And I'm wondering where we sit on that issue and what's basically taking place at this time.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I can report to the House that the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation met with the Government/Trustee Bargaining Committee on May 9 and 10 of last week to pursue a collective bargaining agreement. The two teams will be back at the bargaining table on May 18 and 19, or

Thursday and Friday, to bargain the issues that will successfully lead to a conclusion surrounding a collective agreement.

Mr. Toth: — I guess, Madam Minister, just from the one letter I received from the STF representation of my area is the feeling as it eventually came down to . . . boiled down to the salary and the fact that they felt that there was no initiative whatsoever to at least look at the . . . what they've lost over the last couple of years. And I suppose we could all argue that every sector of our society, that everyone's had to give up something or other.

But I'm not sure. Are you anticipating that there may be a collective bargaining agreement in the near future? Or the process, as it's taking place right now, is the government directly involved, or are we strictly dealing just through the representation from the STF and the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association), and is there a government representative on that bargaining committee?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The Government/Trustee Bargaining Committee has tabled a financial package. The teachers are aware of that financial package. The teachers' bargaining committee has notified teachers from across the province through their bulletin. We expect that as bargaining goes on that we will get to a collective agreement in the near future.

I just want to make the point that contrary to what other provinces are doing across the nation, our government/trustee bargaining team has not tabled an offer that in fact would take money away from teachers as we've seen in Manitoba and Alberta, as we've seen in Ontario through their social contract, and the Maritime provinces.

Teachers in this province and all public sector workers have not had to face the possibility of not a wage increase, but wage cuts. And our government has chosen not to do that, even though we have been successful in bringing in a balanced budget. We acknowledge, very much so, the contributions that teachers and trustees and all of our other educational partners have made to the government's plan to get to a balanced budget and to keep the budget balanced in the years to come.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Madam Minister, when it comes to balanced budget, it may look well and it may appear balanced on the general revenue side as far as the Minister of Finance's numbers would show, but certainly there are a lot of third parties that have seen significant reductions that have had to . . . they've been used to address and probably bring in a balanced budget, but the reality is, at the end of the day we still pay the same taxes.

And so I guess if there is one issue that when it comes right down to it, I think parents look at it, and I look at what's taking place in the two school divisions in my area and the substantial reduction in teachers in the unit. I guess at the end of . . . when we cut right through everything, I think most people would probably agree that probably that you don't necessarily want to see cuts in teacher population, which may require that everybody has to give a little bit.

(2045)

And so I can only say we hope the process works and people will understand what's taken place.

Another question comes from . . . and it's a Cindy Sweet from Moosomin, and it was brought to my attention by a gentleman in the area who had run across her, had gone for coffee, and she was . . . he knows her quite well and she was kind of really feeling down about a couple of days ago, and it's regarding SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology).

And this individual had applied . . . she applied on January 2 for a medical laboratory technician. The course was cancelled because of lack of employment and I'm wondering if you could just inform me as to the reasons behind this. That was the reason that she was given. She was told this on March 31, so then she transferred in SIAST or transferred her application to computer systems technology on April 5, but she was informed that she wouldn't be accepted because of lack of related work experience and extracurricular activities.

That was on May 5 she got that notification, so she then she thought well, she'll try for a lab tech. She applied for a lab tech in March '94 and was rejected because of a low average. She just doesn't know where to turn any more.

She tried SIAST. She tried three different programs and I guess she was really dejected the other day when this gentleman happened to be talking to her so he brought this to my attention and just asked where are we in the SIAST programs? Is there a cut-back, and if there is what are the reasons for them as far as the cut-backs?

And the other problem is, you apply January 2 and it's March 31 before you hear that a program is not going ahead. It leaves a lot of people kind of out in the lurch determining how they're going to pursue a career in their lives and the education they're looking for as they look at the different alternatives. And I'm wondering if you could just fill me in as to what has been happening and transpiring with SIAST and why so many rejections may have arisen.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. I'm advised that the medical lab technicians course was stopped for 1995 because the program had a poor employment rate. And what SIAST is doing is redeveloping the course so that students who graduate from that course in fact are hired in the various institutions that would be hiring medical lab technologists.

In terms of the other programs, what students do is they make application. And we know that we have a limited number of seats in any one program and we have lots of people who are trying to get into those programs, so it is possible that, for whatever reasons, other applicants came before her. But I would suggest that if she wants my office to follow up on precisely what happened to her, I'd be quite prepared to do that and get back to her.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Madam Minister, because I think as well she'd like to take the time and at least know there's someone who's willing to listen and maybe could offer some

suggestions as to some other alternatives. I think after you've been turned down through three consecutive applications, it could be somewhat discouraging. So I'll get that information and pass it on to you.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. Madam Minister . . . or Deputy Deputy Chairman, whatever it might be. Madam Minister, I believe it was last year that presentations were made to you requesting that the 4-H program that is quite widespread across this province be counted as a part credit for school work. I wonder if you could give us some details on what's happening with that request and whether or not some of the 4-H programing will be included in the educational process.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I understand from our officials that we've had many requests for out-of-school activities and credits, or partial credits, towards a high school, I guess, certificate, or a grade 12. As part of our high school review, we will not be making any precise decisions about what will and will not be counted for out-of-school credit until the fall of 1996 when we begin to implement our high school curriculum that we announced a year ago.

So there have been no decisions made as to whether, for instance, 4-H or cadets or other out-of-school activities can be counted towards a high school credit for the purposes of receiving a grade 12.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, if you're going to implement this — the possibilities of 4-H or air cadets or whatever it might be — for the fall of 1996, surely there must be some lead-in time prior to that program actually starting in the fall of '96. Will you be providing the 4-H — because they're the ones that have requested it — some information prior to that, that their courses will be acceptable? Or on September 1, 1996, will you simply say, your course is now acceptable or your course is not acceptable while somebody else's is?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — This is only May of 1995. We still have a whole school year, in essence, to go, and it's our intention to consult with not only 4-H but other groups that are asking for out-of-school credits.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, will the organizations that would be involved have some lead-in time to this? Will they receive a notification April of '96 that their course will be eligible for out-of-school credits for the fall of '96?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We have to go through a process of determining what would be appropriate and what would not be, but we would give the organizations enough lead time, if that's the question that you're asking.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay. Thank you, Madam Minister. It was this spring, I believe, if I can find the date on this . . . no, October 21, '94. In the *Star-Phoenix* there was an article about the Premier stating that he had monies available to fight the federal government's changes to funding for education. I was wondering if you would give me an indication of how much

money was spent on that particular effort, and what was the purpose of it, what did it accomplish. Who got the money and from where in your department did those funds come?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The department approved a little over 20,000, I believe, \$21,000 or thereabouts. We don't have that precise figure but it's in that range.

Groups that received funding were the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) students, the U of R (University of Regina) students, the SIAST students — students on the Woodlands campus, Palliser campus, Kelsey campus, and Wascana — as well the Gabriel Dumont Institute students, and the SIFC (Saskatchewan Indian Federated College).

The students used the funds to prepare briefs to speak to the parliamentary committee that was here in Regina, and, as you know, the federal government has not decided to unilaterally take \$100 million out of post-secondary education only. What they have decided to do is lump EPF (established programs financing) post-secondary, EPF health, and CAP (Canada Assistance Plan) into one big pot, and we've not yet heard in precise detail exactly what the impacts will be on the province when it comes to social spending, education spending, and health spending.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Do you think this was a worthy place to put \$21,000 and what results did you receive for that 21,000?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — As a matter of fact, what I found so interesting about the federal Liberal government's parliamentary hearing process was that they gave a number of different groups in this province funds to appear before the parliamentary committee to act as interveners. They did not give student groups any funds to act as interveners, yet we knew that it was their intention to eliminate EPF. I think that for \$21,000 students were able to participate as interveners in the process that the federal government engaged in, i.e., parliamentary hearings.

Student concerns were certainly heard in this province because I know that members of parliament from all sides of the political spectrum were contacting students to find out precisely what the impacts would be on students. Students clearly organized and had chamber of commerces writing on their behalf to the federal government, as well as other organizations writing on their behalf because the implications were tremendous.

Students were faced with the possibility of \$6,000 per year student tuition fees. Students were faced with student loans escalating up to \$32,000 to graduate — that's an average student loan. Obviously we think that students, not only in Saskatchewan but across the country, got the federal government to reconsider its position when doing in EPF altogether. We're not quite sure what the implications will be when it comes to the big picture of health, education, and the Canada Assistance Plan, but certainly it's not just EPF monies that are going to be reduced by the federal government. There are a number of other departments that will be impacted upon as well.

So we'll wait and see. I think that the federal government did understand that students could not afford to take a huge hit, like \$6,000 a year tuition fees. And consequently, I think they backed off.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. Having just experienced a parliamentary committee in Ottawa, I'm surprised. This committee must have been totally different than the one that we made our presentations to because they weren't listening at all.

But I do question the appropriateness of the \$21,000. Madam Minister, did you provide any student groups with any funding to make presentations to you for the cut-backs that were provided in education provincially?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I've met with students across the province, talking about funding to post-secondary institutions. I happen to live in the city of Saskatoon, I'm regularly in Regina, I also go to Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, and so I am able to meet with post-secondary education students on a fairly regular basis. So I do hear student views when it comes to the province's activities.

But we have not increased tuition fees to the point where students wouldn't possibly get an education. And that's certainly what students were feeling when they looked at the possibilities of the total elimination of EPF.

So I would say to you that Saskatchewan is a small place. Students have access to the minister, any member of government, or to members of the opposition. When you're dealing with Ottawa, you've got a bit further to go. And we thought it important that students have the research capacity so that they could discuss intelligently the impacts on students in the province should the federal government decide to do in EPF altogether.

(2100)

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, the students that I've met don't seem to have any problem in intelligently presenting their arguments. And I'm sure that they would have succeeded very well in presenting their arguments to the committee when they were in Regina or Saskatoon — without your \$21,000.

In my opinion, the \$21,000 was simply a political effort on behalf of the government to raise concerns dealing with the federal government's changes in funding. And not that I disagree with the intent of the complaints against the federal government, but I think it was inappropriate that \$21,000 be spent out of the Education budget for a political effort to fight Ottawa. Madam Minister, I think that that money would have been better spent providing for efforts within the province to provide education for our students, maybe to offset some of that \$6,000 you're talking about.

We've had a significant amount of increases in tuition in this province related to your cut-backs to education, not the federal

government. The federal government plays a part also, but you've had an impact also, Madam Minister. And if you're going to provide money for students to fight one level of government's changes to funding to education, then you should be providing it to fight another level of government's changes — or alternatively and better yet, provide no funding for political action groups to fight the fundings of government.

If it's important to the students, they will make the presentations. They've come into my office and made their presentations, as I'm sure they have done in your office and in the Liberals' office, if they talk to the Liberals. So, Madam Minister, I think that they can make their presentations very well without any funding from you. They are very capable, intelligent, articulate, and bring forward very good arguments.

I believe that the \$21,000 was not related to the effort of discussing education *per se*, but was in dealing with the politics of the federal funding cuts. And I believe, Madam Minister, that it was wrong to use Education money for that particular effort.

Madam Minister, I have a question dealing with the GED (general equivalency diploma) programs and upgrading for people who have left school for whatever reason and decide they need to upgrade their levels.

Madam Minister, I wonder if you could explain the different levels that you would receive in GED. Would you get a grade 10? Would you get a grade 11? Would you get a grade 12? And what is the expectation from that student when they receive a certificate for whatever level they may have been seeking to improve their education?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, just in terms of your comments about the students. I just want to make it very clear that I was in the meeting with the Premier when we talked about intervener funding. The Premier made it very clear that students could do . . . this was not a precondition that they had to take a particular position with the federal government. What the Premier was interested in ensuring was that students could access research information so that students could articulate their view with some facts attached to that view before the parliamentary committee.

And he made it very, very clear that there were no preconditions to the funding available to the students. And you can ask any of the students that were there. He made it very clear that there were no preconditions. This funding was there to assist students in their research because students were saying that they needed some funding to do the research that would allow them to provide a brief to the parliamentary committee.

In terms of GED, as you may know, the GED is an international exam and I understand that GED now will only issue certificates for a grade 12 standing, that they no longer issue certificates for a grade 9, 10, or 11 standing, just grade 12.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. On the \$21,000, I'm sure that if you ask any student if you're in favour of increasing your tuition fees, it's going to be the rare student that says yes. So I think the Premier was on fairly solid

ground when he was suggesting that there was no preconditions, you can come up with your own conclusions on tuition fee increases for students. He was on fairly safe ground in assuming that every student would be opposed to that and therefore would be opposed to the federal Liberal initiatives. So I think on that area, he didn't have to worry a whole lot about what conclusions the students might come to.

Well, Madam Minister, are there any other programs then provided within the framework of the Department of Education for upgrading skills for people who may have dropped out of the school system early?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The other program available to students is the adult basic education program or ABE that is delivered through regional colleges or SIAST.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. When someone takes this particular upgrading and completes it, what are the requirements that they must meet to fulfil their . . . say a grade 9, a grade 10, a grade 11, a grade 12?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Currently, a grade 10 ABE student has to meet the requirements of the curriculum as well as a Canadian Test of Basic Skills or the CTBS test.

For grade 12, starting in the fall, when you receive an adult basic education grade 12, that will be a real grade 12, an academic grade 12, and that grade 12 will get you into a university setting if that's the route you wish to go. It will be an academic 12.

The old ABE 12 did not necessarily get you to university; it didn't necessarily get you into the post-secondary institution that you desired to go to. Starting in the fall, it will be an academic 12 and it will get you into a post-secondary institution if that is the direction you wish to proceed with.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. What about the other grade levels, grades 9, 10, and 11. Are those also not academic today and will be in the fall? Is there some requirement to be at a certain level for reading and writing to receive each one of those different grade levels?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Currently we have a 5/10 program, and you get a grade 10 if you meet the curriculum requirements and pass the CTBS test. In grade 12, it's grade 11/12 and you get an academic 12 at the end of your studies.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. The reason I was bringing this up is I received a complaint from a lady who took this particular course, received her grade 10 certificate, then went to SIAST, I believe it was, for a home care course and was unable to read the course properly to comprehend it. And yet she had the certificate to say that she had completed the adult basic education for a grade 10.

So I'm wondering what are the requirements for reading skills when coming out of this particular program for grade 10.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well CTBS is the Canadian Test of

Basic Skills and there are various elements to the CTBS test. One of those elements is reading comprehension. In order for her to successfully obtain a grade 10, she would have to be able to pass the CTBS test operating at a grade 10 level.

So I'm not familiar with all the details of the case, but if you'd like to provide me with the specific details, we'd be pleased to see if we could give the lady some information.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Madam Minister. I'll provide you with the information later on this. Because it seems to be somewhat of a concern if people are completing these courses and then turn around and are eligible to enter a program because they have the grade level — which was 10 in this particular case — and yet are unable to do the necessary reading to be able to complete the course and comprehend it. So I'll pass the information on to you, Madam Minister . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Pardon?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Just in terms of clarification, it wasn't GED 10. It was ABE (adult basic education) 10, okay.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Madam Minister, one of the groups around the province that has a great deal of concern with education today is the SACSC group, the Saskatchewan Association of Communities and Schools Co-op, and they represent people across the province whose smaller schools are either closed, closing, or threatened with closure. And, Madam Minister, I believe they have taken a court case forward to try and gain some rights — recognition — for children in dealing with the education system. I wonder if you can inform the Assembly of the state of that court case against the Department of Education?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I understand that SACSC filed a court action alleging that various sections of The Education Act were unconstitutional. The government filed an application in court to have the action struck down in its entirety based on what the Department of Justice believed to be a number of legal flaws. We have now received the Court of Queen's Bench decision. That decision came at the end of March, and the Court of Queen's Bench decision supported the government's view on the SACSC action.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Is that the end of action then dealing with this particular organization, or are there any further litigations ongoing? And what did it cost to . . . in legal fees in dealing with this particular case?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I understand through the media — but I'm not aware that SACSC has actually filed an appeal of the Court of Queen's Bench judgement — but I understand that they're going to be filing appeal of the Court of Queen's Bench judgement. As the matter is still before the courts, I don't want to get into the specific details of the case.

In terms of what did the action cost, we have people in the Department of Justice that are constitutional lawyers that deal with constitutional law issues, and I understand that the Department of Justice handled this case before the Court of Queen's Bench. And obviously the Court of Queen's Bench rendered a decision that supported the government's view on

this case.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Would you have any idea then of how much time the Justice department spent on this particular case?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I don't have any idea. You would have to ask the Minister of Justice.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I'll try to get that question in on him next time he comes up.

Madam Minister, when it comes to students and schools, does the department make a recommendation as to what the appropriate student/teacher ratios would be?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We don't make a recommendation to school divisions what their student/teacher ratio should be. We believe that this is in the domain of the local school board who is in a much better position to determine class composition, the nature of the class, the kinds of students that are in the class, the kinds of difficulty students may have. And so student/teacher ratios, when it comes to individual classes, is within the school board jurisdiction.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Would the department have an ideal number of a pupil/teacher ratio that would be appropriate for the average classroom?

(2115)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well as I said, it would depend upon the student composition and the kinds of difficulties that students are facing both educationally or socially or behaviourally. Classrooms across the province vary because of local circumstances so the department leaves this issue to local school boards because school boards are in a much better position to determine what is an appropriate class given classroom composition and the kinds of issues that individual school boards are dealing with.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I wonder if you can give me an average across the province then of what the pupil/teacher ratio is.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'm advised that the average is about 17 students per class across the province.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Is this average increasing or decreasing?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The student/teacher ratio has not increased since 1994-95 school year. It's remained the same for the '95-96 school year.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Would there have been any changes, say in the last five years? Have the averages gone up or down?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — It has increased slightly in the last 10

years.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Is there a difference between the student/teacher ratios when you compare urban to rural schools?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We don't have that specific information here but I'm advised that the student/pupil ratio in rural Saskatchewan is smaller than student/teacher ratios in urban Saskatchewan.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I don't find that statistic surprising at all. I think that's part of the problem with education in rural areas is the lack of students and that's creating pressure on the whole system in rural Saskatchewan.

When we look at the number of grades in a classroom, Madam Minister, can you tell me if there has been any change in that over the last five years, the number of classes that are multi-grade?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Multi-grade classrooms has been a fact of life in Saskatchewan and across the country for many years. Nothing has changed in the last year.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. This trend of increasing the pupil/teacher ratios, while it isn't significant perhaps in percentage terms, do you believe this is a good trend, or is it a poor trend, that something should be done about it?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well obviously I think that there are a number of issues that contribute to the quality of education. Having been a teacher in my previous work life, I know that the impacts a large class can have on teaching life. I know the impacts that a large class can have on the teacher and individual students. It's not a trend that, if you're talking about larger and larger classes, it's not a trend that I would find appropriate, particularly in younger grades.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, I have a clipping here that comes from sometime in '95, March 15, '95, from the *Star-Phoenix* again that talks about removing education costs from property on the table. Madam Minister, are you looking at and considering removing property tax as a way of funding education in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well you're talking about a comment that I made at a, I believe, a SUMA or a SARM convention, one of the municipal governments conventions. I was asked the question whether or not this was something that a government would consider — I believe it was SARM — whether it was something that a government would consider. And I said that we're always open to consider a number of different issues.

There's no question that the financing of education is a complex question and that the way we finance education in the province has led to some inequities in the system. It's my view that we need to rethink how we should finance education in the province of Saskatchewan and rethink the formula. Because there's no question that, if you look at what's happening in rural Saskatchewan, our formula, while it . . . I believe there's about

\$70 million in additional funding for rural schools; the formula talks about per capita grant — and that becomes problematic certainly in some areas of the province, as we have fewer and fewer young people living in remote parts of Saskatchewan.

So I think that we need to take a look at how we are going to ensure that regardless of where you live in this province that you have access to education, and that we have equity in education.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Property taxation is a very contentious issue particularly in rural Saskatchewan, and I'm more familiar with that than I am with urban, but I would suspect that it's always a contentious issue no matter who's paying it, whether you live in rural or urban.

The problem arises though, Madam Minister, is how do you fund education if the property taxes are removed? In your considerations of this — and I'm not sure yet how in-depth your considerations of this are; perhaps they're just cursory — have you given any thought to how you would fund education if the property tax were removed?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I guess if you look at what Ralph Klein did in Alberta, was that the province simply began to collect property taxes, and that's how they've chosen to redistribute the wealth in Alberta to adequately fund their education Alberta style.

When I say that we're prepared to consider this, this is a very cursory view. I've just had the opportunity to have been the Minister of Education for just about two years, and it seems to me that it's becoming . . . there are a number of issues that are raised in that formula and how we fund education based on assessment, and mill rate, transportation costs, sparsity factor, small schools factor, and it becomes . . . is a pretty complex formula.

Many people would argue that it's the best . . . that it's the best way we can fund education, particularly in rural Saskatchewan. But I believe that, based on my experience in the last 18 months, that we need to take a look at how we are going to ensure that there is equity in education in this province regardless of where you live.

And so when I say that we're taking a look at it, it's because of some of the issues that have come about as a result of that formula.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I think if you're going to look at changes to the system, to move away from direct property taxation to the school boards, you need to look at the incomes rather than at the property tax values. Or if you're going to maintain property as part of that taxation level, perhaps the way to do it is to look at the income-generating capabilities of that property rather than at the assigned value by the assessors. Because you may have a piece of property which is very lowly assessed in relationship to another property, but yet a property from which a significant amount of income can be generated through that particular piece. And that's not reflected today when you're simply taking

the assessed values.

And I would disagree with the Alberta government method of simply taking in the property taxes unto themselves. If property taxes are to be applied, I prefer them to be applied at the local levels and controlled by the local level.

Madam Minister, I believe that this is going to be one of those issues that does need to be looked at because there are a number of inequities in the property tax-based system when it comes to apply to the people across this province. And I think that's one of the areas that is going to, as I said, need some very serious considerations.

Madam Minister, another headline. This time it's from the *Leader-Post*, from March 7, 1995, and it says, "National school curriculum near." And your deputy minister was there saying that, "The first such project will be in the sciences . . ."

So, Madam Minister, where is this particular agenda in the process? Where does it sit today? When will it be implemented? And what will it mean for Saskatchewan students when they have a program that is being developed across Canada?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Let me just talk a bit about the history of this. As you may know, ministers of Education from across the country get together twice yearly to talk about issues in education. You may also know that Canada does not have a Canadian minister of education, given that K to 12 certainly is within the jurisdiction of the provinces and the territories.

It has become increasingly clear to ministers, that given we have such a mobile population in Canada, that it's important that students who travel or move from one part of Canada to the next have what we're referring to as a common framework.

Now in Saskatchewan we have a proud tradition of curriculum development. And I'd just like to say that curriculum development renewal process was begun in this province in the early 1980s. And we have a history of our partners in education, meaning the teachers' federation, LEADS (League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents), the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association), the colleges of education, the Home and School Federation, and the department . . . have been partners in the curriculum renewal process.

And based on my travels to other parts of Canada, and having met with people across Canada who are interested in educational issues, I can say that Saskatchewan is seen in this country as being the province for curriculum development and curriculum renewal.

It is not our intention, by participating in this framework agreement, that our curriculum will be the same as the curriculum in Alberta or Manitoba or Ontario or the Maritimes. But it is our intention to ensure that students at various grade levels will be taught similar concepts in those grade levels across the country.

(2130)

So that when you're a student who moves from Saskatchewan at the end of grade 9 and you go to British Columbia or the Maritimes in grade 10, that you're not behind your counterparts in those provinces or ahead of your counterparts in those provinces. We just want to ensure that we're teaching similar concepts in similar grades so that we can deal with the reality that young people in this country and their families are moving.

And we think that it's in the educational interests of Canada to have this framework agreement, where our curriculum is not on the same page the same day — certainly not that — but the educational concepts that are taught in those various grades are taught at the same grade level whether you live in Saskatchewan, British Columbia, or New Brunswick.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, it's my understanding that if you go to a national curriculum, teaching similar concepts across Canada, that a student who graduates from grade 12 in Saskatchewan would have an equal opportunity to enter Dalhousie University as someone from Halifax because they have the same basic curriculum and concept instruction when they come out of grade 12. Now is that the case or will there be an impact that way, that the student would not necessarily have an equal access to a school some place else in the province and equal access to what that student in that province would have?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Students now — I know this because I have family members that have gone to Dalhousie — students now from Saskatchewan can go to Dalhousie. Students from Saskatchewan can go to Queen's or Laval or UBC (University of British Columbia) or the University of Victoria or the University of Toronto. Our students are getting into those post-secondary institutions.

We just want to continue the process of ensuring that young people who are moving from Saskatchewan or moving to Saskatchewan are taught concepts — educational concepts — in the same year.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Now would the statement from the newspaper be correct: a common curriculum will mean students' academic standing will be recognized by other provincial education systems and high school graduates will have more equitable access to post-secondary education.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We just want to make sure that our kids have access to any educational institution in the country and we just think this enhances their chances.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Now that we've dealt with national school curriculum being near, and as the headline . . . Another headline from December 22, '94 *Star-Phoenix*: National test show schools doing good job. So it says that our schools are currently doing a good job. But if we're going to go to a national curriculum, will we also be going to a national testing policy?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — First of all, we're not going to a national curriculum. We are not going to have the same

curriculum and be on the same page on the same day. We're not doing that. But we're going to be teaching similar educational concepts in the same grade, whether you're in Montreal or Saskatoon. That's our intention.

Are we going to go to national testing? Well as you probably know, Saskatchewan has not yet gotten into the SAIP or the school achievement indicators program and we haven't gotten in for a number of reasons. I note with interest that while other provinces and territories have engaged in testing, I'm not convinced that they've done anything substantive with the results. I haven't seen changes in their curriculum, I haven't seen changes in their teaching education programs, I haven't seen changes in how they teach and what they teach, and so we're waiting with interest to see how provinces take those test scores and apply them in a practical way to the curriculum that they have, the teacher education programs that they have, or the teaching strategies that they use in their classrooms.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. If you've taken the national test and you've discovered that there may be a potential problem there, then you have to also step back and take a look and see where that problem is and how you fix it.

But the first part, I think, is very important, that you find out whether or not you have a problem there. And that seems to be the part that you as the minister and a number of others around the province seem to have a great deal of difficulty taking that first step. You seem to be more than willing to take the first step in dealing with national curriculum and dealing with concepts. If you're learning accounting, it really doesn't matter if you learn that accounting on how it relates to a farm, or how it relates to a fishing boat, or how it relates to a steel mill. You're learning accounting, not farming or fishing. So it's the concepts of accounting rather than the actual applications of it.

But when you go to take a test, again it doesn't matter whether you're talking farming, fishing, steel mills, or lumber, or whatever it might be; it's how you apply that particular concept that you've learned in your classes to the test. And that's what a national test, I would hope, would provide you the testing of, is the understanding of those concepts that if you go with the national curriculum you will have learned in grade 12, or the concept that you would learn in grade 5, would be similar across the country and therefore the testing should provide similar definitions of what results you're receiving.

So, Madam Minister, if you're going to become involved in the national curriculum and its concepts, why not also become involved in the national testing? I believe that you're already involved in the sense of participating in the development of tests, national tests, so perhaps you can explain why you'd be prepared to enter into one part of the equation while being very reluctant to enter into the other.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well you raise a number of issues. First of all, what I want to make clear is this point, that provinces and territories have participated in mathematics testing and language arts testing — reading and writing skills testing. And we have some results from those tests.

What we don't yet have from those provinces and territories is how are they going to take those test results and adjust the curriculum, adjust their teaching methods, adjust their teacher education programs. It's not just enough to test. You've got to do something with results, and you've got to have the money to do something with the results. And I haven't seen anybody yet do anything with the results.

Now let me tell you what we're doing in Saskatchewan. And what's interesting is, all ministers across the country have adopted a . . . what we're doing. We have a provincial indicators program that not only looks at testing . . . and we have done some testing. We have tested students in Saskatchewan in grade 5, 8, and 11 in mathematics skills and language arts skills . . . or pardon me, science skills and language arts skills. And we've found out some interesting things. We've found out that kids in grade 5 have difficulty problem solving. That's the whole notion behind our core curriculum and the way we've introduced the common essential learnings. The whole notion was to create students in the classroom who could evaluate, problem solve, and do those kinds of . . . use those kinds of cognitive thinking skills. The question that I've asked as a result of those test results is why is it that kids in grade 5 have difficulty problem solving. Is it because teachers are expected to know all of the answers and give the answers in class? Is it because our curriculum is too difficult, our testing is too difficult? Why is that? And the department is taking a look, a rethinking of why it is that our children have difficulty problem solving.

Now it's not just good enough to test. You have to do something with those test results. And before we get into the national testing program I want to make sure that we're dealing with our own curriculum problems, i.e., grade 5 students have difficulty problem solving, before we get into some national testing and we don't have the capacity to respond to those test results.

In terms of the science and why we're participating in the development of the science test instrument, we have basically renewed the science curriculum in the province, and we tend to be ahead of the rest of the country with this regard. And we have developed a group of experts in the province who have been intimately involved in the science curriculum redevelopment process and we've developed some skill. And it made sense that the people who are involved in science in the province of Saskatchewan, teachers, be involved in the development of that test instrument.

We have not yet made the decision as to whether or not we want to participate in national testing in the spring of 1996. Obviously we will have to make that decision shortly. But if we're going to participate, I want assurances that we have the money to respond to those test scores, and we in fact will do something with it, because I haven't seen any evidence anywhere else in Canada that provinces and territories are doing anything with the results from those tests.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. Perhaps they're all arguing the same argument you are — that they haven't got any money with which to do it. I don't know.

But when you're looking at the problem of grade 5's who have a difficulty in problem solving, how do we compare to other jurisdictions? Do the grade 5's in other jurisdictions across Canada have the similar problem? Do some of them have more of a problem, or do some of them have less of a problem? And if so, what's different?

Now that's one of the items that national testing would give you an indication of, not what they're doing differently because that would be the second step that you would have to take — to ask what's different in province A as compared to ourselves in the testing, either better or worse. And I think . . . so that's part of what the testing is there for — to make the determination if somebody else have a program that works better than ours, or is our program the best; therefore we can pass it on to others.

So perhaps we need to find out where we stand in the problem of grade 5's and their problem solving.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — You see, I don't see education, the educational process, as a competition. And this is maybe where we will have a bit of a philosophical difference.

Frankly, my worry is with the fact — and it's in the Education Indicators report certainly from last year, when it came to science; it will shortly be in the Education Indicators report when it comes to language arts — that our kids have difficulty problem solving.

To me that's a problem that we need to address inside the province. I'm not that concerned about how we stack up relative to Alberta or Manitoba or Ontario. We've discovered in Saskatchewan that our kids have — for whatever reasons — difficulty problem solving. And we've got to address that.

We've got to either redesign the curriculum, look at different teaching strategies. Maybe we'll have to deal with our teacher education program. But we have to get to the root of that question.

And so from my point of view, we have this fact before us and we need to address that fact before we get into, well, how do we compare to Alberta or Manitoba or British Columbia or Ontario. Our whole curriculum is designed to assist children in developing cognitive thinking skills — evaluation, critical thinking, those kinds of skills, problem solving. I mean if we are to get into the next century and if we are to do well socially and economically and culturally, given globalization, continentalism, free trade, deregulation, all of those kinds of things, we have to have people in this province, we have to develop people through our educational system, that can have those kinds of skills.

So I think we need to deal with those issues right here at home first before I get concerned about what's happening in Alberta or Manitoba or British Columbia.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, I agree with you to the extent that this is not a competition between our students and those in Alberta or some place else across the country,

although ultimately at the end of the day we want to have our students in the position to be able to compete around the world with whoever they may have to compete with.

But when you're looking at our problem with grade 5's, when you look at Manitoba, do their students have a similar problem? Well unless they've been evaluated on the same scale, you may not know whether or not their problem is comparable to our own. So if grade 5's in Manitoba have a problem with evaluations, if students in Saskatchewan have a similar problem, is one of them greater or less than the other? If one of them is greater and one of them is lesser, perhaps the greater has some deficiency in their program that has been addressed to a certain extent by the province whose grade 5's have less of a problem. And that is what a national testing may indicate to you. I don't say that it will indicate it; it may indicate it to you, depending on how the testing is structured.

So you need to have some relatively comparable form of testing to compare to, to make that evaluation whether our program is working as well as we possibly can make it, or does somebody else have a solution some place else that would help us. Would national testing not provide some of that to you?

(2145)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well there's some things I do know about the Saskatchewan education system. We have participated in language arts testing and guess what we found out — that our students are the best when it comes to reading and writing; that we do well in the area of language arts . . .

An Hon. Member: — Alberta was right up there.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We're up there . . . that we have the most literate, literate population in Canada. Statistics Canada shows us we have the most literate population. If you look at the readership of the Saskatoon Public Library, the Regina Public Library, we're no. 1 and no. 4 in North America. Saskatchewan people are readers.

All you have to do is go to the University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina, SIAST, and you will find our graduates anywhere in the world. We compare well. We have people who are running large corporations. We have people who are running large public institutions. We have people at the UN (United Nations). We have people at UNESCO (United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization). We have people at the World Health Organization. We've got people everywhere.

And if you talk to employers, if you have a young person from Saskatchewan, you know that you've got a person that will do well as a working person, and they're hard-workers. Saskatchewan people are hard-workers. We have the work ethic, and we do well. We know that.

But we can't just rely on our laurels, and Saskatchewan people have never really, I think, cared what the rest of Canada thought of us. We've been able to go out on our own and do well regardless of what other people thought. We're innovative.

We're creative. We're all of those things.

Saskatchewan is the only province in all of Canada that has done the extensive curriculum renewal that we have done. We are way ahead of the rest of the country. We wanted to look at our own curriculum to see whether it was doing what it was intended to do. Now there are many, many aspects of our curriculum that are wonderful, and the test results bore that out.

We have one little problem. For some reason we have difficulty problem solving, and we're going to get to the root of that and find out why and what we need to do to correct that.

So you know, I don't care how a kid in grade 5 stacks up to a kid in Manitoba or Ontario. What I do care about is that we have a curriculum that will allow our students to develop to become the kinds of citizens that we're going to require in order to get us into the next century and in order to deal with some of the large, international issues that are coming at this province.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, though wouldn't it be nice to find out whether someone else had a solution to your problem? And how do you know that unless you know that their measuring stick is the same as yours in determining whether they have found the solution or not?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I just want to give you an indication of some of the things that we have been able to accomplish, and this is in the *K-12 Schooling: How are We Doing?* for February 1994. We released an indicators report to the public and it's our intention to do this each year to take a look at how is our system doing — a report to the people of Saskatchewan.

And I should tell you that ministers across the country are going to be doing the same thing, but it's going to be a pan-Canadian report. And where do they go to get the information on how to do this? Saskatchewan, because we're the first province that's taking a look at our education system and we're indicating to the people how our education system is doing.

In 1994 we reported that Saskatchewan had the highest proportion of 16- to 69-year-olds reading at a level 4, the highest level in Statistics Canada survey of literacy skills. Level 4 is defined as, Canadians at this level meet most everyday reading demands; this is a large and diverse group which exhibits a wide range of reading skills.

Now when you look at how our students did in grade 6, grade 9, grade 12, what did we find? We found that Saskatchewan outperformed the rest of the country. And those . . . So we know that. That's great. But we still have to have people who can problem solve; we need creative, critical thinkers to deal with some of the issues that are coming at us. And we know that in grade 5 our kids, for whatever reason, with the new curriculum, have difficulty problem solving and we're going to get to the bottom of that.

And quite frankly I'd much rather have us spend our tax dollars on finding out that and doing something about it, than spending millions of dollars participating in a test that compares us to

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Manitoba and P.E.I. (Prince Edward Island) and British Columbia, and then what? You know, then what? So what? We know where we stand in comparison to these people. I want to know where we stand in comparison to ourselves and how we do better. And I think that every taxpayer in Saskatchewan, every parent in Saskatchewan, wants the same thing for their young people.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, your Saskatchewan indicators program was started, I believe, prior to 1991. The program . . . the report came out, I believe, in 1992 — the initial Saskatchewan indicators. The core curriculum started in the early '80s, as you indicated earlier, under the previous administration. So these programs have been in place for awhile.

But when you're looking only at yourself as an indication of whether you're doing a good job, perhaps you're not using the proper measuring stick. You need to look at what other people are doing also.

And I understand that you have a great deal of philosophical reluctance to do that; that you, for some reason beyond my comprehension, just find it totally abhorrent that you would for some reason participate in a national testing system.

I believe it's important that we look at how we are doing across the province and whether our students are receiving the education that they need, whether they could qualify to enter the universities or SIAST and whatever. But I just don't understand your very vehement philosophical abhorrence to national testing.

I'd like to go on to another program, Madam Minister, and that is the parenting skills program that is in place with Social Services. I'm just wondering which department is paying for that particular program.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I don't know. You have to give me a little more information.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. November 24, '94, *Leader-Post* talks about \$70,000 to help develop a parenting skills program; along with the Minister of Social Services this announcement was made. I'm just wondering . . . No, it doesn't say that you were part of it, but with parent education, and so I'm wondering if you're paying for this or if Social Services is paying for this.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Social Services made that announcement.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Your new JobStart and Future Skills programs that have come forward, Madam Minister, I wonder if you can give us some indication as to how many jobs have actually been created to date on those programs.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'm advised that 600 actual jobs to date and several applications pending.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. And how much money would you have expended to date on these programs, all told?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — 2.3 million on Future Skills and JobStart. Those are the training . . . work-based training programs.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister, and how much would have been spent on advertising these programs to date?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — \$469,258 I believe.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Very good, Madam Minister. I knew that you knew that was one of the questions that in all likelihood would arise. What was the other 1.9, 1.8 million spent on?

Okay, Madam Minister, you've spent \$469,000 on advertising JobStart and Future Skills, so that leaves approximately 1.8 to \$1.9 million. What in particular is that money being spent on?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — That's separate from the program. When I talk about 2.25 million or 2.3 million, that is actual money spent on work-based training. That does not include the advertising.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Madam Minister. Isn't that a little high, that you would be spending approximately 1 to \$5, 1 out of every \$5, on advertising the program, rather than actually utilizing the program? If you've got 600 jobs in there right now, you're looking at about — what? — a little less than 23,000, probably about \$20,000 a job that you've created to date for that money.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — First of all, this is a \$21 million program, and I gave you the numbers for Future Skills, JobStart. I have not yet included the Partnership summer employment program which is a \$1.9 million program, and that is a subsidy for students to receive employment. I have not given you any figures for the reforestation program which is another employment program for students, and I've not given you the grads in industry placement program. I've not given you the Public Service Commission program.

Just to be clear here, there's a \$21 million program — Future Skills, JobStart — and the \$468,258 is the advertisement for that entire program, not just JobStart and Future Skills.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Madam Minister. Well then how about how much money is being spent in the other four programs, and how many jobs have they created?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Let me give you Partnerships '95 which is the student employment program. As of May 5, 3,171 jobs have been approved at a cost of \$1.47 million. There's still more applications to be approved because this is a \$1.9 million program.

Grads in industry — this is a program to create 70 jobs for highly technical people. We have received 19 applications

which have been approved for \$261,026. We still have close to 7 . . . I'll just try to get my . . . \$500,000 to go. But we have 140 applications that have been mailed to employers. We've had 80 applications returned. We've approved 19 for about \$261,000. But there's another half a million, close to half a million dollars left to approve.

In terms of Future Skills, JobStart, as I said, those two programs are \$15 million programs. We've expended \$2.25 million. We still have money to go, and we've got many applications before us. So it's a little more complex than . . . We've spent \$468,000 on advertisement. This is a very large program with many different components to it, and it's not as simple as some politicians would like it to be.

(2200)

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, whenever government gets involved it's never as simple as we would like it to be.

Madam Minister, I'd like to ask you if you could supply me with the figures on the grant structures for the different school divisions. I can't remember or recall whether you supplied that to me or not the last time, so if you haven't can you please supply that again.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'll send it over to you again.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I have some questions now dealing with the globals. I wonder if you can give me some information dealing with your travel both inside and out of the province — how much was spent on that, where you went? What was the purpose of the trip, and who accompanied you.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'm advised that you asked for this information by way of a written question. I'm also advised that this information is being compiled for you and I'm told that you'll receive it shortly.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. That just shows how efficient we are. We keep asking until we get the answer, and we haven't got the answer yet.

Madam Minister, I wonder if you can please provide me with the information dealing with any legal actions being taken either for or against the Department of Education.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We're not aware that we have any legal actions other than if SACSC launches a legal challenge to the Court of Queen's Bench decision.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay. Thank you, Madam Minister. It must mean that you're a little more careful when you're . . . with your comments than the Minister of Justice is. Every time he turns around, he seems to be getting back in court.

Madam Minister, I believe you have three contract employees retained by your department. Can you please give us their names, their job . . . terms of reference, job descriptions,

benefits, office locations, and principal residences.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — There's only one that's currently on contract and that's Gerald Weinstein, and we'll have to get you the other people because we don't have it.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Madam Minister. Some questions on the personnel report that you provided us. Your in-scope, permanent personnel rose by 19 persons with a rise in wages of 765,000. Can you explain the need for the 19 new people within your department and the salary increase?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. I'm advised that we converted a secondment to a permanent position. These aren't actual people; these are positions.

And then we've got two information technology people . . . that was converted from a contract to a permanent position; two private vocational schools; two student financial aid, they are converted from contract to permanent; one regional services converted from a secondment to a permanent position; one at the Teachers' Superannuation Commission; and two in the evaluation and assessment unit. And that will get you the 10, the difference of the 10 people.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. For some reason I had a difference of 19 in-scope people. This would have been from the '94 *Estimates* until today.

The same thing in out-of-scope. I believe that there is 12 more people there for seventeen hundred and fifteen thousand dollars. What were those additional 12 people?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We do not have 12 more management positions. We did not create 12 new management positions. No.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I notice in the *Estimates* book for '95-96 that your full-time equivalents have gone up by 16 approximately, and you've had a decrease in total budget of \$8 million and yet your staff costs have gone up.

Would it not be better to have that extra money that has gone into staffing going into providing educational services for the children around this province, rather than being absorbed within the Department of Education?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. I gave you the 10 positions. As well, there are seven new non-permanent positions for Future Skills, JobStart, and the training program, because we have people now in strategic parts of the province to work with employers and employees on the work-based training. As well, we lost a secondment. So if you take the 10, the 7, and we lose 1, that's 6, for 16.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I wonder if you could give me some information as to the duties performed by the Associate Minister of Education, along with that minister's office. Most of the departments have one minister and one office; your office is spending \$19,000-plus a month in salaries. The associate minister is spending almost \$19,000 a month on salaries.

Exactly what benefit does the Department of Education receive for the assistant minister of Education and his office?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The Associate Minister of Education is responsible for all of the K to 12 and post-secondary issues surrounding Indian and Metis people. And as you know, we have a very large Indian and Metis community in the province of Saskatchewan, so he spends a vast majority of his time addressing Indian and Metis educational issues, both at post-secondary and K to 12.

As well the minister, myself, and the associate minister collaborate a great deal on educational direction, educational policy. I'm not sure if you're aware of the associate minister's background, but he does have a master's in education. He has administered community colleges in the province. He administered Gabriel Dumont Institute. He has a vast knowledge in the whole area of educational philosophy, so obviously he is a great assistance to myself and the department, and to the cabinet.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. We see very little evidence of it in the public view as to what the associate minister is doing, and therefore I believe a question is necessary to determine whether or not the department is receiving any value, or the taxpayer is receiving value, for the monies that are being spent in that particular office.

Since the minister is not dealing with the full load of a cabinet minister, would it therefore be not more appropriate that his office and any other associate minister's office have less staff in them, and therefore less cost, than what the minister in charge of the department would have?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well the associate minister, as I indicated to you, is in charge of all Indian and Metis issues in education as well as northern issues in education.

As well he has an interest, along with myself, in all of the other issues in education. I mean this is a very complex, very large department. We have many school boards, many teacher associations, two colleges of education. We have high school renewal process, the provincial indicators program. We've had many reviews, and we're putting together educational policy in the province of Saskatchewan. This is a huge job, and the associate minister is there day in and day out representing cabinet colleagues, the Premier, the government, in all kinds of educational issues, functions, meetings. He is a full participant in the business of education in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I'm not sure though that the Department of Education is any more onerous or complex than the Department of Health which is now being handled by one minister, previously two. And I'm not sure what the associate minister did there when he was the associate minister. But now that is being dealt with by one minister. And so I don't believe that the Department of Health is any more complex . . . any less complex, excuse me, than what the Department of Education is.

Perhaps there is a need for an assistant minister in a sense, but

I'm not sure that that would necessitate a full complement in a ministerial office in supplying that support. So I think that's one of the areas, Madam Minister, where your government could provide some more funding to be available to the Department of Education rather than being spent in the political arena which is what is being done now.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'd just like to point out to the member that I think in every province, with the exception of Newfoundland, every province in this country has a Minister of Education, K-12; Minister of Education, advanced education or post-secondary. So while you say that there may be no need for an associate minister, I would point out to you that in every other jurisdiction, with the exception, I believe, of Newfoundland, every other province has two ministers doing the work of this ministry.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. A little earlier you were telling us that we don't need to be comparing ourselves to the other provinces and that was not the way to go. So therefore I think you should also do that in this particular case.

Madam Minister, in your notices of terminations and new employees, you had an additional MA (ministerial assistant) this year, a Margaret Herman, who was previously with the Minister of Health's office. Can you explain why she was with you for two months and what happened to her?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — She pursued other interests.

Mr. D'Autremont: — So, Madam Minister, she's no longer with government, either department or Crown corporation, whatsoever? The minister is indicating no.

Madam Minister, can you please indicate whether or not there are any other employees within your department that may have come from the Department of Health?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Do you mean the minister's office or do you mean from the Department of Health? Oh, I believe we have one person that came from the Department of Health over to the Department of Education — the deputy minister. And there's one other person who came . . . there are two people: the deputy minister and another senior policy analyst.

Mr. D'Autremont: — I gather it . . . then it's the deputy minister that everybody out in rural Saskatchewan is nervous about. They look at the rural hospital system and think: oh no, we're getting the same guy in Education as what they had in the Department of Health; what's going to happen to us? We certainly hope that the deputy minister's expertise is not in closing facilities.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well first of all, I just want to put this on the record that the deputy minister was the associate deputy minister of Social Services when I was there, and the associate . . . or the deputy minister went to the Department of Health after the government made the policy decision to engage in health reform. The deputy minister has had many years experience in Social Services, some experience in Health, and he's now in Education for some very good public policy

reasons.

We have made an attempt to integrate service delivery to children and youth in the province of Saskatchewan. We thought it important, given that schools are where children are and given the deputy minister's vast array of experience in Social Services and Health, that he would be a key person to assist government in the policy direction of providing a more integrated service approach to children and youth in the province of Saskatchewan. So there is no hidden agenda here, folks. The deputy minister comes with a wealth of experience and this is one of the key public reasons, public issue reasons, for having the deputy minister come over, was to assist with the integration of services given his experience in Health, Education, and Social Services.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, I'm not sure that it's real comforting to the parents of the province that the deputy minister comes from Social Services, although we have seen that Social Services have not been shut down, so in that sense it will be of comfort to them that his experience from the Department of Health will not necessarily translate directly into Education.

Madam Minister, in your globals under computer purchases, I have a number here of which I'm interested in. You purchased for \$38,000 some Cabletron equipment for network connectivity. Can you mind explaining what that was for?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'm advised that it was to connect our server to a network. It's computers and I must admit I am not high tech yet and so this was to connect the server to the network.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. On the next page of the globals we have a purchase for \$35,000 of Chameleon software. Now I wonder if you could explain that one for me because I have no idea what that would do.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — It's the software for e-mail.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you. Would that be one software package, or is this package to be distributed throughout the department?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — It's for the whole LAN (local area network) network.

Mr. D'Autremont: — I won't ask you for the meaning of LAN.

An Hon. Member: — Local area network.

Mr. D'Autremont: — That's right. I wasn't sure that the minister would know though. Madam Minister, a purchase of \$120,000 for 50 computers. Was that tendered, and who was that for?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — It was tendered. And it was tendered for various areas across the department.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Another

purchase of \$56,949 for LaserJet printers. Was that tendered, and for whom were the printers?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The same as the previous answer.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you. I'm getting to the end of my questions, Madam Minister. In the supplementary estimates, under post-secondary education and skills training on page 144, you have an additional expenditure there of \$273 million. I wonder if you'd mind explaining that.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What this is, is a restated blue book. The 273 million is the old number for 1994-95. And the 150,000 is money that was provided by Dumont Technical Institute, so we were just restating the figure.

Item 1 agreed to.

Items 2 to 7 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 5 agreed to.

**General Revenue Fund
Loans, Advances and Investments
Education, Training and Employment
Vote 141**

Vote 141 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1994-95
General Revenue Fund
Budgetary Expense
Education, Training and Employment
Vote 5**

Items 1 to 4 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 5 agreed to.

(2230)

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'd like to thank the minister and her officials for coming in and dealing with Education.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Chair, I also want to thank the officials that were here tonight on the floor of the legislature. Mr. Speaker, I think that this is a department that is incredibly professional, has done an incredible job in the whole Department of Education, Training and Employment.

This team of people is backed by another team of people that aren't here tonight. That I'd just like to put it on the public record that this is a superb department and they've done an incredibly good job in the last 18 months that I've been associated with this department. So I just want to publicly thank everybody who works at Education, Training and Employment for all of the hard work and good work that they've done.

And I also want to put it on the public record that this is not a department that works from nine to five. This department works after hours. It works weekends, and I'm incredibly proud that I've had a chance to be associated with it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

**General Revenue Fund
New Careers Corporation
Vote 59**

The Chair: — I would ask the minister to please introduce the officials who have joined us here.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — To my immediate right is Merran Proctor, who is the CEO (chief executive officer) and president of New Careers Corporation. And to Ms. Proctor's right is Tony Antonini, who is the director of finance and administration for New Careers.

Item 1

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to the minister and her officials.

Perhaps I should just comment on my trip to Ottawa where I was sitting in the restaurant having breakfast one morning and overheard the people at the next table discussing some sort of issue or another, and Ms. Proctor's name came up in that conversation with the other people that were at the other table.

An Hon. Member: — And was it well spoken of?

Mr. D'Autremont: — Yes, it was not negative. So you can be pleased with that. I'm not sure what they were talking about but my ears perked up when I heard your name, so you are known across the nation.

Madam Minister, I wonder if you could please give us some indication as to any changes within New Careers and the delivery of their programs.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I think one of the key initiatives for 1995-96 is to improve our linkages between employment services and economic development and training requirements of communities through the establishment of five regional offices, client advisory committees, and increased staff development and involvement with employers. As well it's our intention . . . and we have been working very closely with the private sector. It's not just good enough to — I think we've had this discussion before — to have a training program that doesn't lead to permanent, sustainable jobs. And our focus is to now train people for jobs that exist right now and jobs that will exist into the future.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Madam Minister, one of the indications with New Careers programing in the past has been the perhaps heavy emphasis on single males or males in general being part of this program. Has any improvement been made in the percentages of females participating in the New Careers program?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We don't have a comparison to previous years but I'm told that the balance has sort of shifted

and in terms of all New Careers placement programs, which would take us to December 1994, 42 per cent were males and 58 per cent were female. And if you look at training, 33 per cent of the training programs were geared towards men and 77 per cent were women in those training programs.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. That is indeed a change, because in the past I believe it was probably those numbers flipped the other way. So that would seem to indicate that there was probably some change in the programing that facilitated the changes. So what were the changes in the programs that was brought forward that made that shift in the balances?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well as you probably know, New Careers was heavily involved in the construction, building marinas and parks and golf courses and those kinds of things. Those tend to be male jobs. And we're still involved in the work-experience program, but there is not . . . there is more emphasis in other training programs that would fit target groups like women. As you know, we have a large number of single-parent women that are on the SAP (Saskatchewan Assistance Plan) case-load, so it's incredibly important that we design programs that can assist women in getting training and work experience so that they can move on to real jobs and work so that their families don't have to be on the income assistance.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well what kind of new programs, Madam Minister, have you implemented to aim at the female population and the single mothers?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — There's several things that we're doing. In the coming year, under JobStart, we do have a single-parent program for single-parent women in particular. And that will be for young single parents under the age of 25. As well we have increased the community employment program for the private sector so that women are participating in those kinds of programs. As well we have short training programs geared towards women so they can receive jobs in the private sector.

Mr. D'Autremont: — What kind of job skills though, Madam Minister, are these programs being designed for? Is it across the board or are there certain areas that you're more heavily involved in?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — This is literally one job at a time. You know, gone are the days where we're going to have 60 people and a large employer. So what I'm about to tell you is basically one job at a time and we're talking about 1,600 jobs.

So I'll just give you some examples. Mechanic's helper — assist mechanic as required — courier work, shop maintenance, oil/tire change, general automotive repair work; reception — typing, filing, collecting, compiling and editing newsletters on family violence; two labourers to undertake landscaping, planting grass, gardening, building a root cellar; training as a receptionist; training in customer service; data inputting; accounting; early childhood education worker; a cook; sales clerk; cashier; operation of a store; basic bookkeeping; another cook; a liaison officer in the administration; computer software; data entry; auto shop assistance; cut and hauling logs; widening

fire guards; constructing a garage — so that's construction industry — general labourer to work in a saw mill; and it just goes on and on and on and on. And it's just one job at a time and that's how we're solving the jobs question in Saskatchewan.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I have another question dealing with the estimates. Capital grants of 2.94 million — what is that for?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The 2.9 is all the work experience program, so that's the construction, building, carpentry, landscaping, bricklaying, building swimming pools, all of those kinds of things. That's what that's for.

Mr. D'Autremont: — When you're building these programs, this capital works, are those being done in parks? Are those being done on private facilities? Where is the work being done?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — It's all non-governmental organization. I was out at the Abilities camp at Watrous and New Careers was involved in building a pool for the physically challenged young people in the province of Saskatchewan. It's all for non-profit organizations.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, I believe this New Careers Corporation is indeed a valuable corporation that provides good service for the people of the province in what they construct and as an educational tool for people to learn some real skills to go on to provide for themselves for the rest of their life. And I believe that this particular development is a good one.

I believe it's been in place now for a number of years; I'm not sure — 15, 20 years, whatever it might be. But it's been there for a significant period of time and is providing a very worthwhile role in the province. Thank you.

Item 1 agreed to.

Vote 59 agreed to.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'd like to thank the officials for being here tonight. I'd also like to thank them for the experience of working with them for the past 18 months. New Careers has undergone some fairly significant changes as a result of some of the social reform processes that are coming to the province. And I just want to thank the team here in Regina but also the team across the province for their good work. And I want them to know that I certainly have appreciated everything that they've done for the people of Saskatchewan and the clients they serve.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the minister and her officials for their cooperation this evening in providing the answers. Thank you very much.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 10:48 p.m.