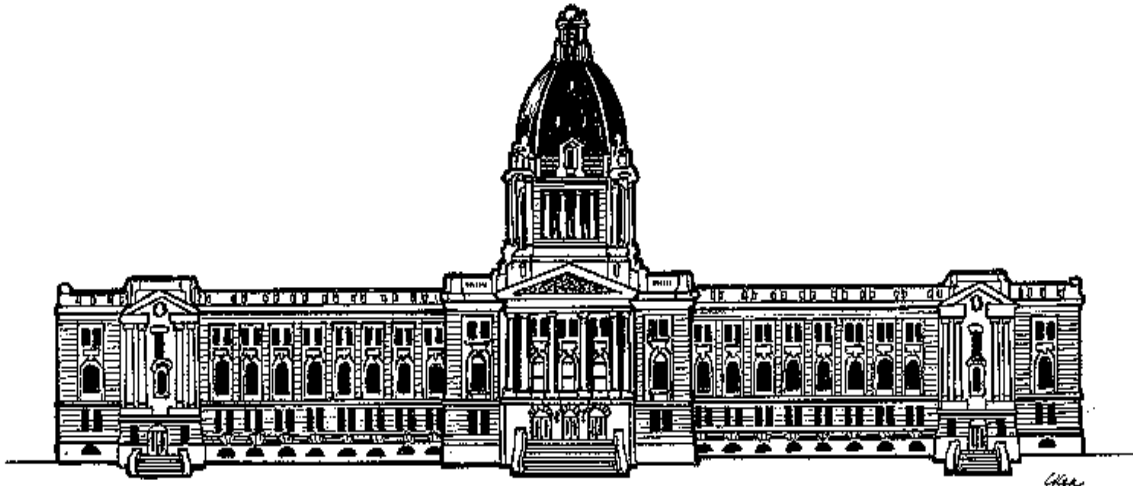




STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
2006**

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Mr. Milton Wakefield
Lloydminster

[The committee met at 19:00.]

The Deputy Chair: — Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this Standing Committee on Human Services committee meeting. This is a bit of a precedent-setting meeting, and we're going to be feeling our way around the Chair's job. As you know, there was a motion passed in the House today. I'd like to read the motion into the record. By leave of the Assembly:

That notwithstanding rule 108(5) of the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan*, the membership of the Chair of the Standing Committee on Human Services may be transferable in accordance with the guidelines for temporary substitutions except that any member who substitutes for the Chair shall not preside when the Deputy Chair is present, and further, that the membership of the Chair may be transferable only for the purpose of the said committee's meeting on Monday, May 1, 2006.

Being today. And so we're going to embark on this experiment this evening.

**General Revenue Fund
Community Resources
Vote 36**

Subvote (CR01)

The Deputy Chair: — I would like the minister to take a few minutes to make his opening statements, to introduce himself and his officials here tonight. And I would ask the officials, as they approach the mike for the first time, that they identify themselves by their name. Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Chairman, and good evening. I'm very pleased to appear before the committee as the Minister Responsible for DCRE [Department of Community Resources and Employment] or Department of Community Resources, DCR. With me is my senior management team.

To my immediate left is the deputy minister, Duncan Fisher. And behind Mr. Fisher are a series of officials including the assistant deputy minister of policy, Shelley Whitehead; the assistant deputy minister of client services, Bob Wihlidal; assistant deputy minister of housing and central administration, Darrell Jones.

In addition we have some senior officials including Don Allen, the executive director of finance and property management division; Gord Tweed, who's the associate executive director of employment and income assistance; Doug Scott, the director of income assistance; Marilyn Hedlund, executive director of child and family services; Andrea Brittin, director of child and family services; Larry Chaykowski, executive director of the housing program operations; and Wayne Phaneuf, associate executive director of community living.

DCR supports the vision that Saskatchewan people, regardless of the differences in needs or circumstances, have opportunities

to contribute and be included in the economic and social life of Saskatchewan. The department's mandate is to work with Saskatchewan people to help them build better lives through economic independence and self-reliance, inclusion in family and communities, and the involvement in the labour force and the economy. Our programs support employment, child welfare, independent living for people with disabilities and seniors, and better housing for low- and moderate-income people.

The department has four core areas: income assistance, community living, child and family services, and housing. In addition the office of disability issues is hosted by the department. The four categories, I'll start with a brief explanation of each.

The income assistance. Through the income assistance programs, we provide a wide range of financial services to help people support themselves. We are helping to improve the quality of life and to work towards employment, where possible, building independence. This year the division will continue to consult with the community, clients, and stakeholders. It is consultations such as these that resulted in some of the enhancements implemented in this year's budget.

Many of the nearly \$17 million in enhancement to our income assistance programs are the direct result of what we've heard from various sources including our own staff on the front lines, clients, and anti-poverty advocates. Budget enhancements include a historic increase to the basic adult allowance for the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan and the transitional employment allowance.

In addition we have enhanced the Saskatchewan employment allowance. SES [Saskatchewan employment supplement] will now provide close to \$20 million in total benefits to low-income working parents. The division will also be working towards a fall increase and changes to the child care subsidy. Subsidies will increase to cover over 85 per cent of parent fees on average. I'm pleased to say that this is the largest increase in this program's history.

This is just a sample of some of the benefits and the programs available through the department and improvements in this year's budget.

In the community living division, they support the development of inclusive communities for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Community living also partners with community-based organizations to maximize the quality of life of people with disabilities in Saskatchewan.

Our budget increase includes a \$2 million increase this year, part of an overall \$12 million increase in the provincial budget to support people with disabilities. Our share of the provincial increase also includes \$1.4 million in new funding to support the cognitive disability strategy. We plan to fund new and enhanced community-based residential or day program supports and to hire additional cognitive disability consultants.

Another core division is housing. The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation delivers the programs and services that support HomeFirst. HomeFirst is a \$200 million, five-year provincial

housing strategy. We are in the third year of this strategy which will bring affordable housing within reach of thousands of low-income people in the province.

This year's plans include delivering two programs to help make energy efficiency upgrades more affordable to low- and moderate-income homeowners. Through the centennial affordable housing program or CAHP [centenary affordable housing program], Saskatchewan Housing will deliver about 900 affordable housing units this year. This investment of over \$53 million will include over 90 units in the North. We also have over \$13 million budgeted to improve over 1,300 units through our various repair and renovations programs. In addition the budget includes over \$123 million to operate and maintain Saskatchewan Housing's portfolio of 30,000 units.

The child and family services programs provide services to children, youth, and families to support vulnerable families. The department is committed to protecting children and providing children in our care with the appropriate residential and personal services. This year's budget includes a \$6 million increase for children requiring care outside the home. We recognize the increased need in service demand. This increase includes a 2 per cent cost-of-living adjustment for foster care, therapeutic foster care, and assisted adoption. The budget also includes increased funding for First Nations child and family services agencies and funding to support drug-addicted youth.

In general this department budget this year is over \$603 million, nearly an 8 per cent increase from last year. I am pleased to say that the 2005-06 budget was the fifth consecutive year that we came in under budget. We did not require special warrants or supplementary estimates, and I want to share some of the success of this year's budget with the former minister, the Hon. Joanne Crofford.

DCR is a large department with about 2,000 employees spread over five regions. I'd like to take just a minute to highlight some of the recent success stories from this department. We have had an incredible team of dedicated professionals on staff who serve the public with compassion and expertise. They rarely get recognition, nor do they seek it. But I think it's important to highlight the role that they played in our accomplishments.

We have seen a steady decline in our social assistance caseload. Levels are at their lowest we've seen in close to 15 years. It's not because we are decreasing benefits. In fact it is just the opposite. We've increased benefits the past two years. Our staff are helping people move to jobs, directing them to appropriate programs as we are committed to being flexible and responsive.

Last year we launched an image campaign to help the public better understand what this department does, to put a face on our staff such as the social workers and to highlight the important work that they do. This year we've launched a marketing campaign to help recruit foster families and to explain the critical role they play.

Last summer our staff was part of the Prince Albert emergency Social Services team that evacuated nearly 1,400 residents from Cumberland House. These folks ranged in age from newborns to people in their 80s who required services for 20 days. The

emergency team was tested again last month when residents of the Red Earth Cree Nation were evacuated from their homes for 11 days. Once again this incredible team sprung into action, providing more than just the basic needs. They made the evacuees, many of whom had left their homes for the first time in their lives, feel comfortable, welcome, and safe.

Last year our staff also played a key role in a review of the province's approach to helping drug-addicted youth who are resistant to treatment. This review in part led to the new Act, The Youth Drug Detoxification and Stabilization Act, which presents more options to help these troubled youth.

In closing, these achievements would not have been possible without the dedication, without the hard work, and without the professionalism of our top-notch team of employees. I would just like to ensure that their efforts are being recognized as they will continue to play a critical role in the initiatives we have planned in the years ahead.

So that gives in a nutshell look at what DCR does, and some of our upcoming plans. Now, Mr. Chair, I'd be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I neglected at the outset of the meeting to welcome all current and some previous members of this committee to the deliberations here tonight. And I think your presence here will be well regarded and received as the questions proceed.

The consideration of estimates for the Department of Community Resources is the topic. And we're on page 39 of the Estimates document, vote 36, and we are moving to central and management services (CR01). Questions? Mr. Merriman.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you Mr. Chairman. On behalf of myself and my colleagues, I would like to welcome all the members that are here tonight. I know it's late in the evening, but we certainly do appreciate your coming and look forward to an open and frank discussion on some of the issues brought forward, not only by the critic but from people that have come to offices across the province with concerns and issues.

I would like to start tonight with the minister, that I understand that with the name change from DCRE to Community Resources that that's a significant change. And I would like to know the cost of that restructuring.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you. I just wanted to point out that while my deputy jots down some of the comments or the answers, one of the logical reasons why we shifted the employment program over to the Advanced Education and Employment portfolio undertaken by very capable Minister Atkinson, the intent there was to move the employment and training program to a wider spectrum to develop a greater plan to address some of the labour needs throughout the province. So that's the logic behind the reason why we moved the employment program services from DCRE to the advanced education and training portfolio. The intent there is to train and develop a much larger focus on meeting a larger and wider labour force need that the economy of Saskatchewan needed. In reference to the question, I'll get my deputy to give the information.

Mr. Fisher: — If you're referring to, you know, were there significant costs incurred by the department to change stationery, to change forms, to do that type of thing, we foresee the costs of the change to be very minimal because we'll be utilizing the old supply of material before any new replacement stock is ordered.

In terms of the cost of the transfer and the reorganization, I mean there were a number of employees, 195 FTEs [full-time equivalent] actually, that were transferred to Advanced Education and Employment. So that actually was a reduction in cost for the department. There were an additional almost 58 FTEs transferred to the Department of Learning. In Learning that was around the early childhood area, early childhood and care, and in Advanced Education and Employment that was the employment services that are being transferred over to Advanced Ed and Employment.

And as the minister said even with the change, we will be working very closely with Advanced Ed and Employment to ensure that the employment services that are required for our clients are maintained because the focus of the two departments remains finding employment and moving people onto the workforce, trying to move people off income assistance.

Mr. Merriman: — So if I understand you correctly, that's 253 total transfers out of Community Resources and into other departments. Is that correct?

Mr. Fisher: — Correct.

Mr. Merriman: — The fact that the minister said that we have moved the employment portion out of what was called DCRE and now into a different department, I would have some concerns that that may affect the ability of the department with its unique requirements for employment services under the TEA [transitional employment allowance] program to be somewhat diminished.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — What I would like to respond very quickly is the whole notion is that when we look at the labour force development in Saskatchewan, there's a much wider spectrum that the business community been asking the province to try and develop in terms of meeting some of the skill needs that are out there.

What we're having success in DCRE is that the employment strategy was working really well. What we've seen over a long period of time is, as I indicated in my opening statement, is that the welfare roles were going down because we're actually developing a system where we encouraged and supported financially more and more people coming off welfare and actively seeking training and or work. So we wanted to support . . . That's what Saskatchewan people wanted. And we're having such success at the program, that in my view, the plan was developed in which we would address two things.

One is we would respond to the labour force need that was out there by a wider range of participants in the economy. Like people were asking for welders and professional people in medicine, and they're asking for skilled labourers and so on and so forth.

And while we could meet some of that demand through some of the folks that were involved with the social assistance plan, there was still a wide range of people that we were not incorporating in this overall plan. So the deal was we're having success in the employment training for the people on assistance. Now we want to expand that to include many more people so we can develop many more folks with the proper skills — not just those on assistance — so that they can meet the wider need of some of our labour force demands that were out there.

So the whole plan was to move that employment division over to Advanced Education and Employment so we have a bigger picture and we meet the bigger demand for skilled labours.

Mr. Merriman: — Well, Mr. Minister, if one were to conclude that your statement that we're moving lots of people off of social assistance into jobs is true, and if one were to say that the program is working so well within your department, one would say that possibly we should leave that in your department to continue on such a good job — that the requirements for a considerable amount of people within your program may be different than they are for the general market area for jobs such as health workers that you've stated. So it would concern me that we are moving a program that you deem to be working so well out of control of the department, which may inhibit your ability to continue on with the success you believe you're having.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Well I guess from our perspective the success is there and it is a profound success. And as I've mentioned before, we've had a lot of powerful statements made over the past couple of years. The evidence is in that as you promote folks to become more and more independent then there's less reliance on the social assistance program. And so this whole Building Independence strategy was working and it is working very well.

So as a result of that the government certainly looked at how we could expand the success of the program to involve everybody, not just those that were on assistance or those that were on disability and so on and so forth. We wanted to make sure that the doors were wide open for all the people that may want to take training of some sort. And this is why the creation of that new department of advanced education and training was developed.

And everybody from the chamber of commerce to the business community, they all indicated to us that, we have to have these trained people work in our businesses so could you have a much wider spectrum in terms of training Saskatchewan people to meet some of our labour needs. So when we undertook that whole transition one of the things that we didn't want to do, as you've indicated, was to leave those folks that were on the social assistance plan or on a disability plan . . . we did not want to leave them behind.

So what we did was we . . . I have agreed that through the new program that is being handled under Minister Atkinson that we would be very, very connected, that we'd be very integrated, and that we would collaborate heavily in terms of making sure that those people that were under our department, whether it's SAP or TEA — SAP being social assistance program and TEA being the transitional employment allowance — whether any of

these SAP or TEA folks that are on that, they have the option of going into the advanced education and training department to seek that particular job.

So in a sense you're meeting the wider range of labour force needs. By the same token you're not forgetting those folks that may be on SAP and TEA. And to me that's a more inclusive model that will be very, very successful. So as opposed to just training people on assistance, you're training many others that could be working, all the while not forgetting that the folks that are on assistance also need that kind of a concentrated help as well.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you for the answer. I understand what you're trying to say, but . . . And I totally agree in the expanded training model for people outside of the social assistance category to find employment and educational skills to become employment, and I think that's what SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] does and it's doing very well. And interesting, you know, if your program's working so well, we'll get into the numbers shortly. And I'm sure you can show me where the decrease in cost is coming as we're moving these people from assistance to an employment.

I am extremely concerned with this change in the program because I fundamentally think that that diminishes the department's ability to meet the specific needs to design programs specifically for the clients within your structure versus the total market. And if the total market segment becomes larger, it only stands to reason that yours would be diminished, and I think that that's a fundamental mistake in this budget, Mr. Minister.

You know, Mr. Minister, you also stated that in the case of housing units when you talked — I'm just going to briefly touch on this because I took a note of it — that you have 30,000 housing units within your organization. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Yes, if I can I'll just answer the first question. But the answer is correct. There are 30,000 units.

But in reference to the first question I just want to clarify that the success of the Building Independence strategy really worked well. And the question that you had is, why are we deviating from that path that worked well for the folks that are on assistance? Why are we now taking away that concentrated effort?

The fact of the matter is as you look at how the stats . . . And this is one of the reasons why I credit Minister Crofford and many others before her with having the intelligence to put this plan together, is that as you brought down these numbers, what we found out, that at the end of the day almost 60 per cent of our client base in SAP had some kind of disability of some sort.

So now as you get down to the employables, the people that you're actually able to train, the people that you're actually able to transition to work, all of the sudden — the success rate was good — and all of a sudden you'd come to a level where many people below that had some type of disability.

So what we want to do is make sure that we don't just simply

rest on the laurels of getting those folks that were quite capable of working, getting them off of the assistance plans and getting them to work. You also want to work on the folks that have that disability. And of course some folks in Saskatchewan, as you know, have a severe disability and may never be able to work. Now we want of course to keep the doors open all the time to everybody, but there are some folks that will never have that opportunity.

So what we want to do now is look at the 60 per cent of our client base that may have some disability of some sort and begin to work away on that particular challenge. So again it allows us the time to concentrate on those folks that may have some disability of some sort, to see what options there are for helping them achieve a greater quality of life and to have employment and be contributing members — all these valuable things.

And before I go on any further, I'd like to ask my deputy to explain the relationship between DCR and the new portfolio to ensure that no one is left behind, especially those folks that were on SAP, TEA, or those with disabilities of some sort.

Mr. Fisher: — Just a couple points. First thing, the employment model that has been developed and has been successful is still very much in place. It will be delivered jointly between the two departments, and we will continue to provide that service continuum for our clients in sort of the following ways.

When a client approaches us in need of assistance, we will do an assessment of that client's needs and determine whether or not it is appropriate to refer that client to Advanced Education and Employment. Upon that referral there would be an employment or a training response developed by Employment, and the specific employment supports that an individual might need would be put into place.

So the responsibility has been transferred. As the minister has pointed out, it broadens the responsibility but it in no way is intended to dilute the impact for our clients in accessing training or job supports to attach them to the labour market, because I think one of our primary goals still is that finding people a job and getting them involved in the workforce and becoming more self-sufficient and independent is one of the primary goals of the department. So the mechanism had changed but the results, we believe, will be the same.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you for the answer. Two points on there. One, the minister's comments that 60 per cent of the people with special needs will require special programs. I understand that. I guess a two part-question here. One is, do you have funding set aside for those new programs to help those with 60 per cent of those with the special needs as the minister said?

And the other concern I have is that a lot of these people that we're talking about and dealing with have emotional issues or issues of concern because they've been either unemployed or, through circumstances beyond their control, put in the position where they need special assistance. And what I'm afraid of here is that we're moving people again from one area to another. You have certain responsibilities and, at some time as you

commented, then those people would move off into this new program, educational program.

Is there some way that whoever is dealing with them is seeing them through this process or are we now shuffling them off to another department and have to deal with the issues of continuity again?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — If my deputy has further comments to make after mine, I'd certainly appreciate the extra, additional information.

The key thing here is that what we want to do is make sure that nobody is left behind. Those are not just simply buzz words that we want to incorporate in many of our speeches as government. The whole notion of making sure that we incorporate as many people as we can into our thinking — and as a new minister for this portfolio, I can say that there's been a lot of good progress made. Whether it's on the housing front, whether it's on the TEA or the effort to get people into jobs, a lot of that work has been done. It has been an incredible amount of work.

Now the question we have is that, how about those folks that have some kind of disability that represent 60 per cent of your caseload? Are we now working on that particular segment of what DCR does? The answer is yes. We are working very hard to try and find out strategies and opportunities for those folks within our care or on the SAP program or the TEA program that have a disability of some sort.

So as much as I would like to say we have all the answers today, I can say this in terms of my frame of mind and my attitude — and I think the department shares it as well — is that we look at this as a long-distance run in which it's going to take the effort of many runners to get this particular issue dealt with in the most comprehensive way possible. And the baton that's been handed to me is the fact that we've had good success in getting those that are able to be employed easily, getting them employed and getting them into training programs.

Now the challenge is on the disability front. How do we improve that service? How do we incorporate new strategies to get those that have a lesser disability than others to be able to go to work? And those that have abilities yet have some physical or mental handicaps that prevent them from working in other fields that are looking at other opportunities. And those are some of the things that we are immediately trying to assess as a new minister.

But clearly the plan here is to not forget anybody within our care. That is not proper for government to do and it's not within our plans to do so. So clearly if something is working well and we expand it, it does not mean we are going to forget those that taught us how it works well. And this is where I go back to my earlier point about employment. But I'd like to get my deputy to elaborate on what programs we have right now for those 60 per cent that may be under some disability of some sort.

Mr. Fisher: — Well from a general perspective, yes there . . . we will continue the practice that we've had in the past where we would work with our staff, work with some community-based organizations. If people need support while they are on assistance as they move towards independence, that

support will continue to be provided.

For employment supports, funding for people with special needs, people with disabilities, we will be working with Advanced Ed and Employment. With disabilities, specifically within our department there are health benefits that will continue. We have joint case planning with Advanced Ed and Employment where the income assistance workers and the . . . [inaudible] . . . will be working with consultants at A and E [Advanced Education and Employment] to ensure that the necessary community supports are put into place. And finally I guess I would just reiterate that we still have the staff that are available to work with clients to provide them the benefits that are still available to them to support those people that have special needs in the community.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you for the answer. You know we're talking about the success of the program and including both SAP and TEA. How many people have we moved from — I'll just encompass it as social services if you will — in those programs to the workforce and why do the numbers in the total workforce not show any increases in this province in the last two years? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — What I'll get you in a few minutes, I'll get Mr. Tweed to respond directly to the question. Again as I mentioned Mr. Tweed is the associate executive director from employment and income assistance and he could elaborate on some of the points that you've raised.

And I can say that again, as I pointed out at the outset, is that a lot of people that are either on the SAP program or those that generally like to judge folks that are on SAP, on the assistance program, many of them want to get off the assistance program. Nobody likes to be referred to as being on social assistance. Many of them have no choice. I certainly point that out as well. But some of them really want to get off it and I think as a government I think it is important for us to make sure we do all we can to move them off.

Now those numbers as I mentioned are numbers that we're quite proud of and the effort that's been undertaken has been very successful. And this whole notion of Building Independence, there's so many different components to that in terms of us trying to take away the disincentives and really support people. That work is an ongoing effort as I mentioned. It's not something that . . . you take a plan off the shelf and follow it. It is something that I mentioned before; it is a long-distance run.

There's been some good improvements made. More improvements are under way. And our effort is to try and find a good model that works for all of Saskatchewan people — especially those that are on disability and want to work or those that have some other challenges that prevents them from work to try and, you know, to remove those challenges.

So I'll ask Mr. Tweed to elaborate on some of the numbers.

Mr. Tweed: — Gord Tweed from the income assistance division. The response to your question, Mr. Merriman, around the success of the Building Independence initiatives . . . The income support caseload, when indicated for us in terms of the

relative measure of success in . . . if you look back over time, the caseload itself would have reduced from, in 1994, to approximately 41,000 cases.

So that's cases which would be . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, 1994, to today's caseload which, if you look at the combination of both the social assistance program and the transitional allowance for putting into '06-07, we would anticipate a caseload on a monthly basis of about 26,670 total cases between the two programs. So substantive reduction there.

Most of that decline has been experienced in the area of single individuals who have imminent job capacity or job-readiness skills and family cases, largely attributable to the supports that are offered through the Building Independence programs, be that programs like the employment supplement or the rental housing supplement or the children's benefit programs.

We've also undertaken some research in terms of outcomes that client groups experience. And I just refer back to a survey that we did — I believe it was in the year 2002 — where we surveyed individuals who had entered the system at a particular point in time. And some 14 months later when we did interval checks on them in between, and approximately 40 per cent of those individuals were employed on a full-time basis and in jobs that were relatively high paying. We had income thresholds that many of the individuals were receiving incomes in excess of \$30,000 per year in their employment opportunities.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you. I had a little difficulty hearing your answer. First of all I'd like to acknowledge Mr. Tweed who has been a big asset with my office in solving some cases and is a pleasure to deal with before I get back into the question.

My question was in the last two years — '04-05, '05-06 — how many people did we move off of SAP and TEA into full-time employment? Not from 1994, from 1990, 2004, 2005, 2006 — how many people have we moved from SAP and TEA to full-time employment? Thank you.

Mr. Tweed: — The answer to your specific question, Mr. Merriman, in terms of tracking the respective outcomes of clients on an individual basis, it can be sometimes challenging when individuals leave a program of income support. Quite frequently they leave for employment or for training or for other reasons. And unless we follow up with them specifically after their involvement with the department, sometimes we don't know the actual dispositions. So it's very reasonable or very likely that many individuals leave for employment where we're not aware of their specific outcome.

What I can tell you with some assurity is that on the longitudinal survey that we conducted in 2002 and then again a bit of analysis that we did in 2005 about 40 per cent of the applicants to the transitional employment allowance were employed within a short period of time after their involvement with the system.

Mr. Merriman: — Well thanks for the answer. You know, if we're not interviewing or doing exit strategies or follow-ups on

how these people are doing, do we know if they're re-entering the system on the other end again? I mean, do we have any type of measurable goals and objectives that show they went from the TEA program to full-time employment and 12 months later they're still employed? Or have they come back into a different program within social assistance, please? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — While Mr. Tweed is looking up the answers, I would just point out that, you know, that the question specific to the last two years, again it is a bit of a tough question to answer because over the last 12 years you could look at the positive and say, yes, we've looked at the reduction of 15,000 caseloads. And obviously the caseloads have not increased. So specific to one year or even two years, the time frame to try and ascertain what those amounts were is fairly difficult because the manpower in tracking down some of the folks and following through with the folks that may be off assistance and may be working somewhere, well that's a fairly time-consuming task to track some of these people.

So I would say that over the past 10, 12 years, having the caseload down from 41,000 down to 26,600 people is a remarkable achievement. And yes, well maybe all the 15,000 have somehow re-entered the program. I can tell you 15,000 over 10, 12 years of less people on assistance is a pretty darn good indicator of some of the success of the program.

And could we perhaps split hairs and look deeper and deeper into where these folks are work and how long they've worked? That could be a possibility; we could do that. But the amount of time it would take to really follow up and follow through on each of these 15,000 cases is time-consuming. I would much rather have my staff spend their time on how we could resolve the other issues that DCR faces in relation to meeting some of the folks that are on a disability of some sort and maximizing their effort to find work and/or employment of some sort.

I'm not sure Mr. Tweed has a specific answer to your question.

Mr. Tweed: — Let me just supplement that just with respect to the survey that we did, the evaluation process that we did back in 2002. Of the individuals that had secured employment that had entered the system — so the 40 per cent of folks that had garnered employment — those folks had not re-entered the system with a surety at that point in time. So they had secured long-term, full-time employment for the most part at relatively decent wage levels, and were no longer involved with income assistance programs.

As we move forward and just as the minister and the deputy were referring to the joinery that we share with the responsibility for employment services now too with the Department of Advanced Education and Employment, we'll certainly be constructing measures to understand better the outcomes of client groups that interact with our service system so that we can develop the most effective and efficient systems that are possible, and ones that achieve the outcome of employment for individuals.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Tweed. You know, going back and not having the numbers, how can you ever estimate success or non-success if you don't have measurable goals and objectives and be able to follow them on an annual basis? If

you're telling me from 1994 to 2005 . . . and then we found out maybe we made a mistake or something was wrong, we had to change it. I think this information needs to be gathered in order to know if the programs are working or need to be modified. It's just every standard business practice.

I understand the logistics. But from government through various methods, either through health card or through some type of tracking from some type of other government department, we should be able to tell if they're working or not working. Or at least ask them to follow up so that we know if the programs we're providing are working long term. That's the whole objective of it. I don't really think I had a question other than a statement.

I'd like to get back to the . . . The minister had said we have 30,000 housing units in the province. Could we assume then that there are three people per home? Would that be a reasonable assumption — a father, a wife, and one child? That would mean we have 90,000 people, which is 9 per cent of our population, living in subsidized housing.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — I want to ask the president of Sask Housing Corporation to come and join us, the assistant deputy minister, Darrell Jones, and he can give us more specific information.

One of the things that Saskatchewan can indeed be proud of is the fact that the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation has been one of the key components in our Building Independence strategy in the sense of making sure that the housing needs of some of the people that are on low income, or those with some kind of disability or those that want to go to work and don't want to see increased rents, you know, every time they earn a dollar . . . Sask Housing has been a big, big part of the solution. And many of the successes of the Building Independence strategy that we have, Sask Housing has been a core part of that effort, and as well as the other departments.

So I can just point out at the outset that Saskatchewan Housing Corporation has done a remarkable job in making sure that we respect some of the low-income folks and some of the moderate-income folks and some of the people that want to live in a decent house without having to pull themselves up by their bootstraps with very little income.

So I'm going to ask Mr. Jones to answer your question in terms of the person per unit point.

Mr. Jones: — I'm Darrell Jones. First of all I guess I would speak to the comment relative to the number of people per household. The total portfolio is made up of a combination of family housing as well as senior housing. And much of the senior housing portfolio is one occupant.

Overall we estimate that the number of individuals residing in those units would be somewhere in the neighbourhood of 67,000 individuals in about 341 communities across Saskatchewan. Of the 30,000 that you reference, about 19,000 of those are owned by Saskatchewan Housing Corporation and managed through the local housing authorities. And the other 11,000 are owned and operated by a variety of non-profit organizations and co-operatives around Saskatchewan.

Mr. Merriman: — Thanks, Mr. Jones. That's the only question I had on housing tonight. I'll get to it on another evening. But I do appreciate your clarifying that for me.

I'd like to move on to questions on the Child Tax Benefit. Can the minister explain the reason for the massive decrease in funding to the child tax credit?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — One of the process that we have looked at in terms of trying to meet some of the need for folks that are part and parcel of the effort of trying to bring more and more folks to become independent families or independent people is that the whole process is to make sure that we have a solid partner in place. And we look to that partner being the federal government because the federal government obviously looked at the whole notion of child poverty . . . and in Canada, where we're one of the richest countries in the world, that the provinces and the federal government agreed to work together.

And the whole Saskatchewan child benefit plan was designed as a transitional program until the federal national child benefit issue came into full swing, which will end of course June 30, 2006. On July 1, 2006, as we've indicated, the federal NCBS [National Child Benefit Supplement] will be fully replacing the children's basic benefits previously provided by the province. And as I mentioned before, as we went down this path we've seen more federal money come into the picture and less provincial dollars, and the plan was to gradually decrease the provincial role and have the federal government increase their part.

The Saskatchewan child benefit is a transitional program, as I mentioned, that is integrated with the federal National Child Benefit Supplement. And under our agreement — with the federal-provincial agreement — the federal government agreed to assume responsibility for children's basic benefits similar to its responsibilities for low-income seniors through the guaranteed income supplement. So as the federal National Child Benefit Supplement increases over time, the Saskatchewan child benefit is reduced by an equivalent amount. So that's the reason why you see our rates going down and theirs coming up.

Mr. Merriman: — The question I have though is that . . . So what you're saying is that from 7.9 million to the 1.8 million that's a decrease that these children are getting and where's it being picked up from?

Mr. Fisher: — No, the families that receive the children's benefit will see no decrease. The 6.15 million that you see displayed here will be fully picked up by the increased federal contribution, and this decrease in benefits is, as part of the federal agreement, reinvested in other provincial programs like SES, like family health benefits for example. So the benefits, the child benefits specifically, that families will continue to see will remain constant and, as the minister said, will go up July 1, 2006. But because Saskatchewan jumped out ahead of the pack and crafted a mature benefit, if I can use that term, when it initiated, the deal with the federal government has been as their contribution climbs, our contribution declines. And so we've had the benefit of being able to reallocate those funds that were originally invested to make the benefit mature, and they've been going into other income support programs.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you. So I understand that this new program is coming into effect July 1, 2006, with the federal government and what is the term of that agreement?

Mr. Fisher: — It's actually the last instalment I believe of the original agreement to bring the federal child benefit up to the agreed upon level and allow the mature federal benefit to stay on stream for Saskatchewan families with children.

Mr. Merriman: — I guess my comment is . . . And I'm not sure here with the federal system. But does that mean that that's ongoing forever, or is there a term that that agreement is there for, I guess was my question.

Mr. Fisher: — It's ongoing.

Mr. Merriman: — Ongoing. Thank you. How many children are covered by this plan currently in Saskatchewan?

A supplement question while you're looking it up is, how much will low family incomes receive on a monthly basis . . . are the two questions on the same subject.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Just in terms of the average eligible families . . . And I want to point out that this does not include the 8,800 on-reserve families. And the on-reserve families which are 8,800, that includes about 20,200 children. So these numbers do not reflect the on-reserve families. But you're looking at roughly 16,800 families. And the children, the average amount of children in those families is 34,940.

Mr. Merriman: — I'm sorry. I didn't catch that last number.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — 34,940 children.

Mr. Merriman: — And that's total?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Yes. That does not include on-reserve. On-reserve is an additional 20,200.

Mr. Merriman: — I'm not sure, Minister, where you got to the 34. I got the 16 which is off-reserve and then we jumped . . .

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — The eligible families that we work with, the 16,800 families.

Mr. Merriman: — Okay. Thanks.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — And in those 16,800 families, there's 34,940 children. In addition of course on-reserve we have 8,800 on-reserve families which includes 20,200 children. And I think the cost my deputy will explain.

Mr. Fisher: — So the benefit per child is \$260.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you. Has this Child Tax Benefit increased or decreased or has this been pretty static? And based on the federal government, is there an escalator clause in there of cost of living or anything that would see that increasing now that the government's withdrawn their portion?

Mr. Tweed: — Over time the amount of basic benefits for children has increased. The program, as the minister and the

deputy have indicated, was introduced back in 1998 in terms of the combination of federal and children provincial benefits into one payment for families, and over time that amount of benefit per child has increased.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you. Could you give me some idea? I don't care what year you go back to as long as we're saying . . . We're at \$260 per child now. Whatever number you've got.

Mr. Tweed: — In 1998, when the program was introduced, the combined benefit between both the province and the federal government would have been \$210 per month per child. There is a subtle variation in terms of the — well not to get really technical — in terms of the second child and third child. The amounts vary slightly but if you work from 210 to 250, or 260, pardon me.

Mr. Merriman: — Yes, that's fine. That's what I was looking for.

I'd like to move on to the TEA program now if I could, Mr. Minister. Can the minister outline the reason — you know we talked a little bit about this in the preamble — for the decrease in funding from social assistance and the increase in TEA?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — One of the things, and I'll certainly get Mr. Tweed to elaborate, the whole notion of us in terms of trying to transition folks that are on assistance, or the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan, which is SAP, we are trying as a government, trying to encourage people to get off assistance and go into the training aspect.

So what we've done is we've noticed that there's a lot of people that want to get off SAP, and we've accommodated them by shifting some of the effort into transitional employment allowance which encourages them to go into training. As we've indicated in the outset, we want to make it easy for folks to leave SAP and to move into the transitional employment allowance, which has less problems.

And I think at the end of the day the shift in resources were simply meant to encourage folks to get off SAP and go into some kind of training of some sort. That money reflects the huge transition that people are undertaking. And it's a result of some of that, an issue that people that are on SAP, and it's also the fact that the government wants to support them in doing that and many, many people support that as well. So all the people are encouraging folks to get off SAP and go into the transitional employment allowance and that money reflects that. And I'm going to get Mr. Tweed to elaborate a bit on some of the success.

Mr. Tweed: — The transitional employment allowance program, I think it's important to understand that it's a program that's open to new applicants for benefits. So as people enrol, as they contact our department for help, our process of assessment is twofold. What service is the best available service for them whether that's an employment planning service or another type of service that we might provide, say in terms of stabilization with respect to their family circumstances?

Our next process of assessment is around the program of income support that best fits or that would best fit their

individual circumstance. So as the shift that the minister refers to, the TEA caseload is a growing caseload. Approximately 65 per cent of all new applicants to the income support program would be referred to the transitional employment allowance. The social assistance program, about 35 per cent of new applicants would be referred to social assistance. And people continue to exit the social assistance program for any number of reasons, be that employment or for other reasons. And the shift that you see in funding is as the minister described. It's as the TEA caseload grows, people are availing themselves of the immediacy of employment services and the social assistance caseload would decline.

Mr. Merriman: — Just to give me some type of perspective then, could you tell me how many people we have on both SAP and TEA at the beginning of the year, whatever number you have as a starting point please?

Mr. Tweed: — The cases in March 2006, so our current caseload on social assistance and this is cases, Mr. Merriman, which may include one or more people, 21,409 social assistance recipients. The transitional employment allowance caseload or the TEA caseload, 6,120 cases.

Mr. Merriman: — Again to . . . If you don't mind, to give me some perspective would you have it for the prior year so we can see how many are moving from SAP to TEA? Total number will be fine, thank you.

Mr. Tweed: — Do you want the split, Mr. Merriman, between SAP and TEA again?

Mr. Merriman: — Yes, just so I have a comparative please.

Mr. Tweed: — It will take me just a second to find the number. I'll give you the past, the previous two years fiscal year information, and then this year's anticipated budget caseload or our estimates.

So in 2004-05 the average social assistance caseload would have been 26,818 cases. The transitional employment allowance average caseload would have been 1,470 cases. In 2005-06 you can begin to see the shift — 22,780 social assistance cases on average, 4,519 transitional employment allowance cases. And our estimate for the '06-07 budget year, 19,360 social assistance cases and 7,400 transitional employment allowance cases.

We expect at full maturity that the transitional employment allowance caseload would be approximately 8,000 cases and that would occur probably over the course of this fiscal year and next.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you. You know we can juggle numbers but when we talk about cases, I can't get a magnitude on the total amount of people if we have 26,000 cases as an example and a case can be more than one person. How do we get to a total number here?

Mr. Tweed: — I can provide you with that information, Mr. Merriman. Just using the same fiscal years for a reference point if that's helpful — 2004-2005 the average number of recipients or individual people on the 26,818 cases would have been 47,513 recipients of social assistance so that would include both

adults and children. On the transitional employment allowance that would be 2,670 individuals.

In 2005-2006 the number of social assistance individuals that were on the caseload, 38,810. The transitional employment allowance had grown at that point then to 8,750 on average. And for the '06-07 budget year, the social assistance recipients — again these are estimates — 32,910, and the transitional employment allowance 14,360.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you. Going back to our original comments when we were talking before about our success, we had 41,000 people. Was that people or cases in 1994?

Mr. Tweed: — Cases.

Mr. Merriman: — Cases?

Mr. Tweed: — Yes.

Mr. Merriman: — Do we have . . . I'm sure you've got the number.

Mr. Tweed: — I do. I'll just correct myself in terms of the average. We'd actually had a caseload of over 41,000 in May 1994. But the average for the fiscal year 1994-95, social assistance caseload at that point in time, Mr. Merriman, 40,224 cases was the fiscal year average, and the number of people on those cases, 82,341. The transitional employment allowance would not be reflected at that point in time. It was introduced in 2003.

Mr. Merriman: — I understand. Good. Thank you. I'll digest some of these and we can come back to them at the next session. I appreciate those numbers.

To try to get some perspective from the client's point of view, could you give me cost differentials from when they're on SAP to TEA, the different, I'm going to call it remuneration just so we're both talking the same thing, or assistance payments, whatever terms you want to use, from a SAP program to a TEA program? Are they the same amount of money or are they, I don't want to say penalized, but shortfall?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Yes. One of the things we wanted to do in terms of making sure — and I'll get Mr. Tweed to elaborate — is that in this whole transition of trying to get folks off SAP, and we see all the evidence show that those that are able to go on TEA, that they did go on TEA. And we continue encouraging and we see those numbers drop in terms of SAP rates and the TEA rates increase. So that certainly lends credence to the argument that if you encourage people to come off assistance and you take away some of the disincentives, if and when they are able to go to work or go to training, that many of the Saskatchewan people would rise to the occasion, and this is evidence of that.

And this is one of the compelling arguments why we as a government talk about the whole notion of affording people the ability to live independently. And again all the numbers show that, as people are given the opportunity to move from SAP or from assistance to a training program, they will take the opportunity. And I can say that the rates are comparable in

terms of coming from SAP to TEA.

And some of the deficiencies we've had in the TEA program, we've addressed in this year's budget, where more people are encouraged to go on the transitional employment allowance if they're able to take training and able to seek full-time work. So some of the deficiencies in the TEA program, we certainly looked at that and we addressed it.

And this is what I mean when I talk about our effort to try and build independence in some of our folks that are caught in the welfare trap, so to speak. And this is a good example of how we've responded to some of the criticism and some of the points that are raised out there. And it has been this year, really encourages folks to move from SAP to TEA.

But the rates are much the same in terms of trying to meet some of their needs. So I'll let Mr. Tweed elaborate.

Mr. Tweed: — The two caseloads . . . Cost per case, when we look at that and determine an average, it's driven obviously by the composition of the caseloads. So if you have more single individuals rather than families for example on a caseload, the cost per case is somewhat lower.

But just to give you a sense and with that as context, our anticipated average monthly cost per case for social assistance caseload this year would be \$779 per month. And for the transitional employment allowance, \$811 per month. So you can see that they're relatively comparable. But each individual circumstance is obviously different.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you. I understand that. And I'm just trying to get some perspective on how we're, where the program's going and come back to my original comments on taking the training out of there. When I do a quick total . . . You know, when we start talking about cases instead of people, I think we cloud the issue.

And just a quick math on what you gave me is that we had 53,000 people totally in 2004-2005, 47,000 in 2005-2006, 47,000 in '06-07. So unless my math is wrong, you know, in a three-year period we've moved 6,000 people from social assistance to employment or people have, coming in. The total number has gone down 6,000. Is that correct?

Mr. Tweed: — Sorry for the delay. Just trying to run the same math. And over the period that I referenced — the two fiscal years prior to this and this fiscal year — the anticipated decline would be approximately 2,000 cases. And that would represent about 3,000 people. Those numbers are rounded, Mr. Merriman.

Mr. Merriman: — So in 50,000 we have 3,000 people we deem are moving off of the program and hopefully out into employment. But again we're not tracking them so we're not sure if they're doubling back into the system.

Mr. Fisher: — Just a comment on that. I mean when people go off the income assistance program or go off TEA, I would agree that we're going to have to work with Advanced Ed and Employment and develop a plan for people coming . . . How long their unemployment, how successful their transition to the workforce is to be able to better try to monitor that. But when

people do come back into the SAP or the TEA system, we would know.

So you know over time we will have more experience and be able to figure out how many times people have been on SAP over the period of time or whether they've used it for a short period of time, gone off and never come back on again. So there are ways. I don't want to leave you with the impression that there's no ability to monitor who's coming on and off SAP or TEA.

And as I'm sure you're aware that when we talk about caseload, I mean that's a snapshot in time. Many people come on and off the caseload over the course of the year. So the 20,000 people that might be on the caseload at March 31 won't be the same 20,000 people that are on the caseload perhaps three months, six months later. So there is a constant change in clientele, and there is an ability to monitor that change.

Mr. Merriman: — Yes I recognize that. And where I'm coming from and where I'm trying to get to on this is to understand that if we don't have measurable goals and objectives that we're monitoring throughout the process, and particularly after the process, it's really difficult to assess the success of a program — any program — and to know that if modifications need to be made to that program that aren't fitting either the clients' needs or the marketplace needs.

I mean that's the fundamental reason that we do these things. And I'm not getting that comfort level that we have those processes in place. That's why I'm intent on going there with these questions to find out that we are tracking, we are exit strategy . . . interviewing to find out if the program worked for the individuals. Do we have to modify the program? And understanding — and I do understand — that we have a wide variety of needs within that program.

Certainly as the minister said the 60 per cent of people that have disabilities or whatever would have significantly different requirements than the 40 per cent that may be moved into the TEA program. But my major concern is (a) you're losing the ability to provide that educational component now within your structure — it's going to another structure; and (b) you're not monitoring the clientele after they're leaving. And I see that as a recipe for disaster. That's my personal point.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — If I can certainly respond, I think what the important thing is that we take the constructive point that you've raised. In a sense of the whole Building Independence strategy is exactly where we are at in terms of trying to make sure it works, the model works.

And as I mentioned at the outset — and I'm sure you agree — that the changes in trying to get people off assistance and into a workplace, into a job, into a career is that I wish I could wave a magic wand and give everybody a job in Saskatchewan, because there's so many jobs out there now that we have a difficult time in filling those jobs.

And so what we're trying to do is make sure the folks that are on assistance, is we give them every opportunity to come off assistance and go to work. And this is the reason why this whole transitional employment allowance was created. And as

we go down the path of trying to see what stops many people that are on assistance from working, we often hear that in many places that I come from and many working people say, well are we doing too much? Are some people better off on assistance as opposed to going to work? That's some of the criticism that we hear out there.

So what we're trying to do is say, okay how do we begin to figure this one out? And this is why I go back to my comment earlier about some of the ministers have taken away some of the disincentives as they sat in this chair. Now as we look at the whole issue of the amount of caseloads that we have out there, all the evidence suggests that the effort that we're undertaking to build independence with people that are on the assistance program, it is working, the numbers show it's working.

And we can argue about the numbers all night, as you mention. But arguing about the number is not important. The important thing is to make sure the net result is there's more people coming off assistance and seeking full-time work.

Now your point about assessing whether these people are staying off work and tracking them, that's a very important point that we understand as well. But at this stage of the game it's important to monitor where these folks are ending up, whether they are staying in a full-time job or whether a certain percentage of them are coming back and forth on the assistance program and back into TEA and back into work. At the very least we can say that the whole transitional employment allowance that is existing out there is showing some good success. Now what we have to undertake as a new minister in this portfolio is to try and understand how better to track that and to improve it and to take away more disincentives.

So your point is well made, but I think we both agree the plan is to offer as many people on the social assistance plan or on the TEA plan the opportunity to come off assistance and begin to live independently. And that is a multi-faceted approach. Whether it's housing or medical needs or training allowance or whatever the case may be, we have to undertake all these fronts to try and do that. That we understand.

So monitoring the program is important, but it's probably a list of 10 things that we need to do to make sure that the whole effort of trying to promote independence is going to happen. And again it's a work in progress, and it's something that we know we have to do. And to monitor this thing better is to understand our clients better, and the department is certainly undertaking to try and incorporate that in this daunting task.

Mr. Merriman: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. You know we both agree, the importance of the training. But providing training without quantitative results that we know are working and monitoring, it isn't sometimes the most efficient. And one of the major issues that I hear in the marketplace — although I'm not going to get into it tonight; we'll get into it next time — are clawbacks for people who are on TEA, who do find some employment. But that's a subject that'll take a little more time than I have.

I'd like to continue on the TEA program. How many of the TEA program clients receive subsidized housing versus owning their own home or renting in the open marketplace?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. Again I'll point out that your earlier comment about the clawbacks in terms of people going to work, that is another issue in terms of some of the challenges that we face with this whole task of trying to build independence and keeping with that theme. So monitoring the success of the TEA programming, the clawbacks that you made reference to, all these issues are certainly things that we've incorporated in our strategy, in our discussions, in our planning.

Again it's a daunting task, and there's quite a bit of work, and we're excited about the work. We look forward to the challenge. And when we were appointed to this portfolio, we have a lot of issues and a lot of questions that are raised by many people in my constituency and many people throughout the province about how we make it easier for folk that are on assistance to come off it and move to TEA.

In relation to your question of whether we track people that are on the transitional employment allowance as to where they live, the basic premise is that the TEA program is almost wage-like in the sense that we give them a single payment and we say, here's your payment. Now whether you live in a subsidized house or you rent, the decision is yours. So the TEA program and the whole notion of trying to promote people to become independent . . . so the TEA program or the TEA payment is wage-like and where they decide to live, that is their choice. That is their decision. And again it all goes back to the premise is that the independence factor is something that we want to encourage, and that's exactly what the TEA does.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I just want to get back to . . . No, I'll continue on with this. In response to that answer, do we know how many persons have multiple needs within that structure, persons who receive assistance from multiple government departments or agencies that are on the TEA program?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Again I'll get Mr. Tweed to respond. But generally in terms of whether folks that are on TEA, whether they're applying for any other government programs or benefits elsewhere, they have a choice between the assistance plan or TEA or the PTA [provincial training allowance]. They wouldn't be able of course to take part in all three. And the other thing that's important to note is that some may take advantage of the rental supplement. Others may take advantage of the employment supplement. Some may be eligible for the children's benefit.

So again we go back to my earlier point. As you get them into the transitional mode, what you don't want to do is you don't want to again put a bunch of disincentives in front of them. Some of them are eligible for some of these complementary programs that's intended to keep them off assistance and keep them on the training aspect. And so some of those complementary benefits that are out there are intended to supplement their TEA income and encourage them to stay in TEA and to look for that training and/or that job.

So in terms of the general question, no, you can't be on SAP. You have to be on SAP or TEA or PTA. And yes, there are occasions when you are on TEA where you have complementary benefits out there that you may be eligible for.

And of course this is based on a case-by-case basis, so each client of course has got different circumstances.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Tweed.

Mr. Tweed: — As the minister responded, the basic or the core income support programs of either SAP or TEA are mutually exclusive, so you wouldn't be on those two programs at the same time.

But the Building Independence programs are designed in a fashion such that as families secure work, we would certainly encourage their application for the Saskatchewan employment supplement program. So certainly you could be on either social assistance and SES, TEA and SES — the employment supplement program.

The same would be true of the Saskatchewan rental housing supplement, that program, presuming you meet eligibility criteria for renters. So you can be on social assistance, you can be on the provincial training allowance, or you can be on the transitional employment allowance and receive the rental housing supplement, presuming your property meets the qualifying standards and you meet the income tests.

The other program that the minister referred to . . . These are core income support programs for low-income individuals and families, so the families almost assuredly would be in receipt of the federal-provincial children's benefit.

Mr. Merriman: — And I don't have a fundamental issue with this, but I understood the minister to say that they sort of got the sum of money which was for them to meet all of their needs. And my question was more in other government departments than your own. But being on TEA, they're still eligible for some of these other benefits from rental . . . and employment. I don't have an issue with this; I'm just asking the question.

Mr. Tweed: — That's correct.

Mr. Merriman: — Do you have any idea how many of these TEA clients are using our food banks in our cities and communities?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Again at the outset what we've indicated, made reference to in terms of the transitional employment allowance — the TEA allowance or the TEA program — again it is wage-like, and it is a payment to that individual. And the whole premise is to promote independence.

And as to where you're finding accommodations to live, that is your decision. How you're paying your bills, that is your choice. Whether you use the food banks, again we don't have that information. But again the transitional employment allowance is primarily an allowance that is wage-like in nature, intended to promote independence in choices as to where they want to live and how they wish to manage and budget their money, which I think is very important we do.

Mr. Merriman: — Excuse me. Now you've got me confused. You say it's a wage type issue which they're getting for taking the training, to use for rent or whatever they want, but they're also eligible for these two supplementary programs. How do

you do that? How do you define that? I don't understand that, how you can get a wage which is to take care of your rent, but you're also eligible for other programs.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — All right, we'll certainly clarify that point. I just want to point out in reference to the food banks, we should know that many people . . . The food banks offer a wide variety of services. So as it's not just simply going there to pick food in the event that you have challenges finding some decent, you know, finding food to eat.

So while it says food banks, we both know that they offer a variety of services. And food banks are good marketers. They have really increased public awareness in some of the services that they offer. So while one would assume that if there's more visits to the food bank, it could be for food, probably 90 per cent of the cases. But many times — and that's a wild guess on my part — but many times food banks do offer other services as well. So I think it's important that we incorporate that in some of our response.

In relation to your last point in reference to, okay, fact that if it's wage-like, why are they looking at other supplements? I'm going to get Mr. Tweed to elaborate on that because, again it goes back to the whole notion of creating independence. And as people become more and more independent and take care of their own choices as to what they do, and they start getting work and they start moving to the workforce, we don't want to put any disincentives in front of them. And there's a transition period and a phase that we look at, so I'm going to Mr. Tweed to elaborate.

Mr. Tweed: — The resources that are offered through programs like the employment supplement or the rental housing supplement or the children's benefits, they're available to both families on the core income support programs, be that social assistance or the transitional employment allowance. But by design, they continue beyond those levels of income as people secure work and accrue more of the resources from work.

Obviously as your income rises to particular levels, those benefits begin to turn down and are reduced, or they actually reach a point obviously where they're no longer available. But it is by design to ensure that your decision to work is always a better one, so you're always financially better off. And secondly the programs are designed to provide protection for you so that you can remain in the workforce without the reliance on, at some point, the core income support programs.

Mr. Merriman: — Thanks. Where I'm confused was that, I was pretty clear with the first part of the answer. Then we got into the fact that the minister said we give them a wage — which I won't take the word wage, we give them an income or whatever term you want to say — that they then have the ability to make their own decisions, which I don't have an issue with. They fundamentally become their own keepers. But then we got into . . . but then they're also able to access these other rental and employment supplement programs. How do you define his or her need or let's just say the case need for that? I mean either you're not giving them enough on TEA, or they need these other supplements. We have an issue here now.

Mr. Tweed: — I'll try and clarify my response. The core

income support programs of social assistance and the transitional employment allowance do just that. By design, they're a bit different. The social assistance program responds specifically to individual items of need. So there would be for example a shelter component or what we call a basic allowance component which would provide for food, clothing, personal, and other items.

In the earlier response around the transitional employment allowance being sort of a singular payment or a lump sum type of payment, those components are not broken up. They're not specified. So the idea or the concept is that the individual does have the opportunity to make their own decisions around their financial affairs. So of their allowance, they would go out into the marketplace and secure perhaps a rental property and establish an arrangement with the landlord around rent. And they would make monthly determinations as to their budgeting for food and clothing and other items without there being a specific identifiable amount for that.

As families with children work or begin to work, the employment supplement program is available to those families to provide them with additional resources to assist them with the child-related costs of going to work. So they may incur additional expenses for example for transportation, and the employment supplement program would be available to assist with those sorts of needs.

The rental housing supplement program is a bit different in that it would be available to low-income renters who are on the core income support program, and also extend to those people who are in the low-income working poor. And again it's designed to provide additional resources to low-income families and people with disabilities. And in addition to those additional resources for people on the core income support programs, it by design . . . One of the eligibility criteria is it's driven by the quality of the property. So it links a standard of quality to the property, so there's an objective there as well in that the benefits for that program continue after you leave the core income support program while you're involved in lower paying wage jobs.

Mr. Merriman: — I understand where you're going, but the point I'm confused on is, I'm a TEA person; I'm on the TEA program. And I get a bulk amount in order to live for the month that I'm in the TEA program or whatever period of time.

The minister said, which is confusing me, is that then I can go and apply for a rental supplement. Well, if I have to apply for a rental supplement, why don't you just give it to me in the TEA program and allow me to administrate it myself? I understand the SAP program is one you administer, right? You do the housing. You do the issues. I don't understand the TEA now where we have a base amount per month, but then they can come back for supplementary employment. That would say that there's a void in either the amount you're paying them or there's some other issues that I'm not getting.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Yes, just before Mr. Tweed clarifies the position, I just want to point out that, as we again take over this very tough portfolio in terms of trying to wave that magic wand and make sure that we take all the disincentives away from people that want to work or want to go into training and want to be part of the economy and so on and so forth, for those

who are able to do that, we want to make it as easy as possible. We want make that as easy as possible. We understand that some can never leave the social assistance system for a wide variety of facts or challenges that they face. And we understand that and we certainly respect that.

So that leaves us with the whole question of how do we make sure that when we transition people off assistance, that we make a couple of themes primary in our thinking. One is to promote independence to have them make sure that they're able to make decisions on their own and to promote that and to foster that.

The other aspect is to make sure that we don't just simply say, okay, here it is and now we'll see you later; that this is a work in progress. We may be doing something wrong. We may need to learn a bit more how that particular action works out.

So it is always so complex in terms of how we deal with this particular problem. And there's many different ways, and it's layered and to so many people it's confusing. And what we're trying to do is disentangle all this stuff to see how exactly it is best to serve somebody coming off the social assistance plan, that's able to do so, to make their transition to employment and training the easiest and one that fits them in particular. And that's why the wide variety of programs that are out there are meant to try and complement this entire effort.

But in relation to your question, if you're getting TEA — if I understand your question correct — if you're getting TEA and it's wage-like in nature, I'm trying to promote independence in you. And why do you just give me a certain amount to cover everything as opposed to having a rental supplement and these other benefits that are out there? Is that your question? Oh, sorry.

Mr. Merriman: — I think the way you worded it, Mr. Minister, was in addition to TEA these other supplements were available, such as the rental supplement and the employment supplement and I knew the child benefit supplement. You know, we can go on to several . . . I guess that question is, did you misstate that, that you really meant that those were part of the SAP program and not part of the TEA? That's the part that's confusing me.

Mr. Tweed: — The supplement programs are discrete programs from either the social assistance program, the SAP program, or the transitional employment allowance program. So there are different program rules and eligibility criteria around the employment supplement and the rental housing supplement, for example.

The advent of the supplement programs for . . . In addition to the core income support that you receive through either social assistance or TEA, there would be additional resources available to you. A couple of policy reasons. One is that it would ensure that work was always a more attractive financial decision for people. And by providing the supports outside of social assistance, you accomplish two things. One is you reduce what we call the welfare wall, or the amount of income that you can receive through benefits. And secondly is that you can continue to receive those benefits as your income rises. So it protects you as you gain your foothold in the workforce.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you. That will segue into one that I have here that I want to spend the last bit of time here on to give you an idea of some of these reasons that there are these issues and that, you know, we get a lot of case files in our offices are what I call on the clawback side.

And I want to give you one case here in particular which sort of highlights it and encompasses . . . I can't even put a word around it. But just I am spellbound to tell you the story and understand how this works. But I have been dealing with a lady who has two children. You are aware of this file. I have sent you this file. The lady called today is my understanding, has two autistic children, and she is the primary caregiver. She has kept these two children in her home and raised them and while doing so has been on social assistance.

Her son turned 18 and his funding changed. His funding changed because he now became an adult. And when that funding happened, the mother's social assistance payments were clawed back. And I can find no words to describe that. I just cannot comprehend how a woman who has stayed home for 18 years, raised two autistic children . . . She should have been up there today getting a medal for what she's done. And now to have the oldest child get his benefits and for her income to be clawed back is unconscionable.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much. And while I won't get into details on the specific case that you reference — and I appreciate the fact that it's been anonymous and that there's no particular person named in this particular file — I can advise you that as of May 1, which is of course today, that policy has been changed. And I'll get Mr. Tweed to elaborate.

Mr. Tweed: — I think the clawback that you refer to, Mr. Merriman, is with respect to the consideration of level of care payments for social assistance recipients. And as the minister suggested, the matter came to our attention as well, and a new policy is in effect commencing May 1 of this year. So the consideration of income — and I can provide you with more explicit detail if you like — has been changed beginning May 1.

Mr. Merriman: — I appreciate that and kudos for you for doing that, but get back to the case. This woman was subject to going to DCRE at the time — multiple times, multiple interviews, rejected multiple times — to bring her plight up. She went with the child's advocate to the hearing or the appeals board.

At the appeal board, the Child Advocate brought up another woman in the province that was getting those benefits while this woman was not, and within 48 hours the woman who was getting them, her benefits were clawed back. So now how can we explain that to these people who are under so much stress dealing with autistic children why this happens and why this isn't escalated to the top of the chain immediately?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Again I may not have sent you the direct letter or it's in the process of being sent. I know and I appreciate the fact that you did approach me with this issue or have approached the department.

And it is our effort as the minister to try and respond to not only the opposition's issues that are raised through correspondence. I

think it's very proper as ministers that we certainly respond and do our very best to try and get a timely response in place. So we obviously extend that to many other folks as well, whether it's an advocate group or whether it's a lawyer or some friend writing on behalf of many people. The whole issue is to respond to the many inquiries and many concerns that we do get in the department of DCR. I think it's important to note that there are many, many issues out there that people bring forward to our attention. And as I pointed out we try and respond as quickly as we can.

When this issue came forward, my department immediately responded. The change in the policy was something that was recommended and has been put in place. And as I mentioned at the outset, the problem has been fixed.

And I think it's important to note that the seriousness in which the department staff take all these issues is there. And as minister, if we can move as quickly as we can on issues to resolve some of these problems, we shall. There's no reason for us not to respond if we're able to do so. So in this regard, the policy has been changed and the problem has been fixed.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you for your comments, Mr. Minister. It's my understanding, and the client was informed, that in order to change the policy it had to go through legislation and that the legislation would come forward in June. And as I don't know of too many of us who will be here in June, I don't know where that information . . . Does this need to have a change or is it something that you can change as minister or does it need to go through the House?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Okay. One of the, certainly . . . and the authority that I have is a minister, a minister can make that order. And I will explain to you . . . I will get the staff to explain the process in which it becomes in effect. So the minister has that ability and I have since made the order. And I'll get Mr. Tweed to elaborate further as to how this comes into regulation or through regulations.

Mr. Tweed: — To respond to the immediacy of the issue, policy was changed and the policy change would be effective May 1 of this year. And that's by virtue of the . . . by the ministerial order. Regulations or regulatory amendment will follow through the process of approval at the legislative instruments committee and then through the cabinet process. So the regulation will follow on the footsteps of the minister's order, sir.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you. I've got too many papers in front of me but I understand that there still is a clawback of something for rent from the mother on this issue. Is that correct? And I can't find my paper but I'm pretty sure that's correct.

Mr. Tweed: — The policy specifically would now, for any individual who is on social assistance and has a family person or has a family member receiving a level-of-care payment, the income assessment would change now such that a basic room and board assessment would still apply as it does to all adult residents with their parents. The change in the policy, again for May 1, is that prior to this time there was a second clawback through the wage exemption formula and that is the piece of

this change, such that the total resources that are available to the family would increase.

Mr. Merriman: — So if I understand you correctly she would be getting an increase rather than the \$80 a month decrease she's claiming in her most recent email to me as of April 28.

Mr. Tweed: — I can't observe on specific instances, sir. But the policy . . . The income assessment now just . . . it would be 25 per cent of the first \$320 or a reduction of \$80 per month for each individual who receives a level-of-care payment in the house. The change in the policy would be that in addition to that, prior to the change there would have been a further reduction. The further reduction has been discontinued.

Mr. Merriman: — I think with your approval I'll have my CA [constituency assistant] call you and you two can discuss that specific case rather than doing it here in public. It's not my intention to embarrass this family or anybody else. But I certainly do have an issue with the process.

This started back in January. I don't know how many times I've had the opportunity to meet with this lady, first of all as an information gathering process but more in the latter times as just trying to console her emotions, to the point where she was ready to institutionalize these two children with the government, you know, go back and start her career.

And anybody looking at that type of case would fundamentally say something's wrong. Because it would surely cost you more than \$940 a month for looking after two autistic children. And what I'm trying to get to in this is: when we have these — and I'll classify this as exceptional — cases, we need to have someone that we can get to immediately to review this.

The process they put these people under is onerous. They go, they meet with the caseworker, they meet with the manager, they go to the appeal. And as I understand, this was going to be appealed back down to Regina, even with the recommendation of the people in Saskatoon who agreed that this, I think it's clause 18.6, should be done. All of this is putting stress on a family that's already under stress. How do we get these things that I'm going to call major to the head and get a decision quicker than five months, which is unacceptable?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Well in reference to the point raised I would point out that we appreciate the fact that because this particular case is confidential in nature, the offer to have your CA speak with our officials. Something that we will undertake to do so is a proper communication plan with the lady that we speak of. And we have to always be very, very careful in terms of confidentiality in individual cases, and I appreciate your caution on that front.

The whole notion of trying to respond to the issue is I can again point out that the problem has been fixed. And one of the things that we want to undertake as a new minister is to again, as I mentioned at the outset, that it is our endeavour to try and put a system in place, a support system in place through the Department of Community Resources and Housing in the sense of trying to recognize the specific challenge that many people in Saskatchewan face that are under the social assistance plan or the TEA plan or are having some particular challenges.

And we appreciate information coming forward and when we're able to respond in a timely and quick fashion, we shall. And one of the things that is valuable in our particular work is when we get concerns and comments expressed to us about some of the deficiencies within our social assistance and our social network and our social fabric, so to speak — some of the deficiencies that exist out there — we want to hear about them and we certainly want to learn from them and we want to respond in terms of trying to meet some of those needs that are out there.

So I would point out that yes, it's not a perfect system. And there's a lot of work and there's a lot of effort being put into the system, and a lot of resources. And I'm quite pleased we had those increases in this year's budget. But we are learning the process more and better each day as a government and that process doesn't take five months to learn. It takes much longer than that.

So I would point out that it is our endeavour to fix the system where there are chronic problems. And every problem that we hear about, we are very respectful of the person's right to bring these issues forward.

And some of the appeal processes that you talk about were set up to appeal some of the decisions, so it's not heavy-handed from either the caseworker or from some bureaucrat that doesn't know the individual's case. That's why these appeal processes were put in place — for the protection of the client.

And this is where you get more specific information. So those appeal processes aren't meant to hinder the client, they're meant to assist the client. So I think it's important that people understand is that if there are concerns out there and deficiencies in the system, we want to hear about it, we want to learn about it, and as in this case, we like to respond to it as quickly as we can.

So we appreciate all the information coming forward and we will undertake to do the best we can, given the resources we have, to meet as many people . . . Saskatchewan people's challenges that are out there, if . . . We meet as many of those challenges as possible — that's what I endeavour to do.

Mr. Merriman: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I see we're almost out of time, so I'll wrap up and try not to take your comments on a sour note. But you know, you have been in government for 14 years. This problem didn't come up in the last five months.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — That's correct.

Mr. Merriman: — Excuse me. This problem didn't come up in the last five months. So my point was just to find a mechanism, when these cases that are flagrantly out of whack, that we have an ability to have them addressed at the highest level immediately as I deem this case to be. If it's just a normal case and, you know, there's not the stress level that I'm talking about here, I understand it goes through the process. And that's why we brought the case forward. That's why we dealt with the officials. And again I want to thank your colleague, Mr. Tweed, for his assistance in this and in other matters that we deal with. And if we had some methodology of getting these critical ones looked at a lot faster, I think we would all be happier and our

job.

And once again, to all of those that came in tonight, thank you for your travel and your time and I appreciate the opportunity to ask the questions.

The Deputy Chair: — That brings to a conclusion the consideration of estimates for the Department of Community Resources. I'd like to thank the minister and his officials, and we expect to see you here again in the near future. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — We're going to take a 10-minute break. I think that it's appropriate that we do so and we'll reconvene here at 10 minutes after 9.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**General Revenue Fund
Corrections and Public Safety
Vote 73**

Subvote (CP01)

The Deputy Chair: — Ladies and gentlemen, we're prepared to reconvene the committee now, and this part of the agenda is consideration of estimates and supplementary estimates for the Department of Corrections and Public Safety. And that will be vote no. 73 on page 45 of the Estimates book and we'll be starting with central management and services (CP01). Questions? Mr. Toth.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister. And to your officials, welcome to our debate again this evening.

Mr. Minister, the last couple of times or the last time we were together . . . and of course we spent a fair bit of time in committee on The Boiler and Pressure Vessel Act. Just a couple of follow-up questions on boiler inspections, in our last few moments of committee, we were dealing with the inspections and the fact that at this current time or earlier in the spring we had an indication that there were more than 955 overdue inspections. And in our last debate, we had talked about what the department was going to do to address that issue and the number of inspectors that would be needed.

You'd indicated that there's some significant changes taking place where you're going to move a number of inspections out to industry. You indicated that other jurisdictions have already done that. Actually in other jurisdictions, they're finding it's working quite well. And it's certainly reduced the load on provincial inspectors and the responsibility of the government due to the fact that a number of these inspections really can be handled and maintained quite easily outside of the current system of dealing with inspections.

So my question to you, Mr. Minister, in moving a number of these inspections outside of the current realm, how will this impact the department, the number of inspections? And in the future, what do you anticipate would be the level of inspections currently undertaken by provincial officials in view of today? Would it be a reduction of 50 per cent, 60 per cent, 40 per cent?

The Deputy Chair: — Just before the minister has the opportunity to answer that question, I would ask his officials to identify themselves by name if they have an opportunity to respond to the questions or participate. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. In the 2005-2006 year, the branch completed a total 8,465 inspections. In the 2006-07 year, we anticipate completing about 12,000, approximately 12,000 inspections. Of those, 9,300 are due in that year.

Now you asked about what the impact will be of moving to the new quality management program. Approximately 45 per cent of all the equipment that needs to be inspected will fit into companies likely to move into the quality management program, which will significantly reduce the number of direct inspections that have to be done by inspectors. Well that is coupled with a growing economy and an increase in the total number of vessels that need to be inspected. So we expect the number of vessels to continue to increase.

Just to give you an example, the new heavy oil upgrader addition in Lloydminster will represent a significant increase in volume of work in inspecting designs and moving ahead during this period of time, not to mention other significant changes that we anticipate coming in the economy.

So at the risk of not being able to anticipate, I guess, fully what business activity will be coming forward in the next year or two, we don't anticipate a decrease in number of staff. We don't anticipate, for that matter, an increase in the number of staff. But moving to the new quality management program will allow us to do our inspections in a timely manner, and to use our inspectors to monitor and evaluate the quality management program which will be part of their new responsibility as we put in the quality management program. And that is a responsibility of the branch as it is in Alberta and other jurisdictions.

Mr. Toth: — So, Mr. Minister, when you talk about the heavy oil upgrader and the needs in that facility, will the department be and your office continue the inspections there, or will that be done under the quality management program as well?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — During the actual build, inspectors will continue to monitor the design and approve the designs. But after the actual construction is complete, if Husky enters into a quality management program at that point, then the regular inspections become the responsibility of the company involved in the quality management program. I just want to check with Brian to make sure that's accurate, but I'm certain it is.

We would still continue on top of that to audit their quality management program to make sure that there in fact aren't difficulties and that they're continuing the program up to the quality that we would expect.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Minister. Minister, I would understand that as new regulations come in place and as you move to this quality management program, all these companies and their inspectors will have to follow and adhere to the guidelines of the regulations under the boiler pressure Act.

And as you've just indicated, I would take your last response

then to be an indicator that that's where the inspectors would be involved, to be ensuring that companies are complying with the guidelines and rules and that indeed their inspections are certainly up to speed and following those guidelines, and you can feel secure in the fact that those inspections are carried out in a timely and appropriate fashion. Is that true?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — That's correct. And as well our department, our branch of the department would continue to support any of these companies that may for any reason have difficulty — lost an inspector perhaps or other difficulties that may come up from time to time. Of course we're still there to be supportive of industry and supportive to ensure that, if they for any reason run into difficulties, we're there to help them.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, as you move forward with these plans through this new quality management and talk to other jurisdictions, what did you find from other jurisdictions? Would you have sense that they were quite pleased with the moves that they had made and the changes and therefore felt it would be . . . they would work well in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. Yes, I do think the program is well received by industry in other jurisdictions. But we, in consulting with other jurisdictions, we found that moving on a voluntary basis forward, rather than the mandatory basis that Alberta moved forward initially, is definitely more favourably desired by industry. And so that would be the one difference in the Alberta model and our own. We're moving forward on a voluntary basis rather than a mandatory, immediately upon implementation.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. In moving with the voluntary versus mandatory, how long do you anticipate it will take to move to full implementation of this new quality management program?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Well as I indicated previously, it will be July before we're in a position — July or the summer — before we're in a position to move forward with the program. Industry will pick it up at the pace that they are capable of picking it up, and that will be different for different industry players.

And it could be some time before we see the full advantage of what the program, the quality management program, will have on both industry and inspections in the province as companies ramp up to be involved. There's many companies that already have the capacity, have inspectors in place in Alberta, but there are others who will likely want to join the program that will have to themselves ramp up and hire somebody to do those inspections.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, when you say some time, would you say months, years?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Well there are some companies, as you may well be aware, that already have the model up and running in Alberta. And they're ready to go. So as soon as we proclaim the regulations, they in fact will be moving immediately to a quality management program.

Other companies don't have a program in place today, that we

anticipate will put a program in place today because of . . . now they have the volume of inspections and work they have in both the province of Alberta and Saskatchewan. And they'll have to develop those programs and put them in place which could take some time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, just a different line of questioning but still within regards to inspections, shortly after our last meeting I had an inquiry regarding fuel oil tanks. And I'm not exactly sure if it's specifically insurance companies that are requiring that they be replaced or . . .

The question arose regarding inspections. And it seems to me fuel oil is not corrosive like a lot of other materials. But the question was, if a fuel oil tank is still serving the purpose, is not leaking, is there a process whereby an inspection could be given of the tank and if an inspector would be able to say that this tank still has valuable life left in it, that that inspection could be looked upon as, the fact that that tank is worthy of continuing to provide a service, and then that could be used by an insurance company to insure a property where that tank may be sitting?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — I thank the member for the question and apologize to the member for not getting back to him with an answer when you asked this question of me. I simply forgot, and I do apologize for that.

The particular storage container you're talking about doesn't fall within our jurisdiction. It would fall, we believe, under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environment. It is not considered a pressurized vessel, so it isn't within our jurisdiction. So I don't have the answer to the question. It's most appropriately asked of the Minister of Environment and Resource Management. And I, once again, I want to apologize. I did get the answer and forgot to get back to you.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I'd just like to move on for a short period of time regarding issues of disaster relief. And I believe that's part of your department, provincial disaster assistance program.

As you are aware, Mr. Minister, the Porcupine Plain area of the province has certainly been impacted significantly with all the moisture last fall and then of course this spring, and the ongoing problems that people are facing, most notably farmers and the difficulty of being able to get on the land and to prepare the land for their seeding operation. It's not just a matter of looking forward to preparing the land and putting in a crop this year. They still have the difficulty of having to deal with crops that are in the field, even if they're washed up on fencelines or road allowances, Mr. Minister.

And I guess the question is, what has the department done or been doing to alleviate some of the concerns? And what type of disaster relief would be available at this time for people in that area or in areas of the province that have been impacted severely by these types of weather conditions?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — I would thank the member for the question. As you're well aware, I would believe, I have been up in the Porcupine Plain area just this last weekend. I was up in the Arborfield area two weeks ago. And there is significant damage

to infrastructure. Roads, bridges, and culverts washed out as a result of flooding in the area. At this point we are working with those rural municipalities to assess the damage. We, as I indicated, myself and Tom Young, who is the executive director of the program, were in Porcupine Plain this weekend. We toured the damage that they have to their infrastructure with representatives from the rural municipality, and at this time we are . . . And there has been engineers from the Department of Highways up there looking at the damage.

We have adjusters going in to look at the damage and to adjust what the value of those claims are likely to be. And once that process in fact is undertaken, then we'll move through the process to eventually, to the point where they start the permanent reconstruction in some cases or permanent repairs on those bridges and culverts and roads. They're now doing temporary repairs because we're not through all of the water problems in that particular area, but we definitely have significantly less water flow and significantly less water, surface water, in the RM [rural municipality] today than we had two weeks ago.

I have to tell you, having flown over the area two weeks ago and flown over the area on Saturday, it is considerably different. Even comparing photos from two weeks ago to today of similar areas, there is significantly less flooding and surface water than there was just two weeks ago. To give an example, just five days ago the RM officials believed there'd be up to 40 per cent of seedable acres not being able to be seeded this year. On Saturday they had downgraded that estimate to 25 per cent of seedable acres wouldn't be able to be seeded due to excess moisture and problems with the fields. So it's improving daily, and we're working with the RM to deal with the concerns as they raise them. And I'll leave that for the time being and await your next question.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, under the disaster assistance program in regards to a situation of this nature, what types of circumstances would the disaster assistance program kick in on? Who would qualify for what amount, and how would they apply for it? And would it be just RMs, or would individuals qualify as well for disaster assistance?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Well I'm going to give you just a slight overview here and then turn it over to Mr. Young, who is the executive director, who can go in a great deal more detail.

But the provincial disaster assistance program is not an insurance program. It's a program that covers disaster-related — natural disaster-related — losses that are not insurable. And they have to fit within a provincial-federal framework, and that's agreed to by the provinces and the federal government.

So it doesn't cover everything. It is largely designed to deal with destruction and damage to infrastructure, whether it be an individual's infrastructure or whether it be a business's infrastructure or whether it be what we more traditionally think of as infrastructure: bridges, roads, and other forms of infrastructure we more readily think of.

And in that program of course there are a number of criteria in which you have to meet to qualify. And the first of which is that they have to apply and have the area designated by the

government and by the executive director of the program, and then pass a resolution. The RM must pass a resolution asking for that assistance.

And in the case of the RM of Porcupine Plain, that was done and has been in place for some time.

Now I'm going to turn it over now to Mr. Young, who is the provincial expert on this program, to give you some more detail about the program and how it works.

Mr. Young: — Tom Young, executive director of protection and emergency services. The minister is correct. What normally happens immediately after an event such as what we experienced this spring is that the municipalities will have a look, first initial look to see what kind of damage has been done. And the damage could include damage directly to the infrastructure on public kinds of facilities that may be owned by the municipality. Or they may include private individual homes or could be agricultural enterprises.

Once they've done an initial assessment, they then pass a resolution in council and provide us with that estimate, and then we determine whether it is eligible under the program or not by just looking at what they have provided as an initial estimate.

Then what happens is we go out, and they will then, once they've been designated as eligible for assistance, they will get a more detailed assessment of what the damages are and submit that to us as part of a claim. And then what happens is we work with the adjusting industry to assign an adjuster to go out there and review the damages, have a look at the claim and determine what is eligible and what isn't. Then what we do is we review the adjuster's reports and make a determination on the claim and what is eligible.

Within the program, there is certain deductibles for private and agricultural businesses and that sort of a thing. And then there is a formula to calculate a deductible for the municipality.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you. Does this cover issues . . . for example grain bins that may have been flooded around and grain destroyed? Many times when you have insurance policies, they don't necessarily cover flooding caused by natural disasters because you don't always expect or even anticipate that you'll have that type of a flood threat.

As well what about equipment that may have been sitting in a position where you weren't able to get it to higher ground? It may have been impacted as a result of flooding. Would those types of items qualify under this program?

Mr. Young: — Yes, generally speaking they could be eligible. What gets taken into consideration is what the individual has done to try to prevent damages to occur. So if there was machinery, say, in a low-lying area and there was sufficient warning provided either through Environment or Saskatchewan Watershed Authority or ourselves to indicate that there could be some floods in the area, that there was a threat for flooding, and if the equipment was not moved, then there may be some question about that. But generally speaking, if they took the necessary precautions to prevent the damage from occurring — and we use the term reasonable — then a lot of that sort of thing

would be eligible.

Now in terms of crops, if they're in storage, and when we send the adjusters out there and they can identify, yes, there was damage, and it was as a direct result of the flooding, then those sorts of things would generally be eligible.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you. When do you anticipate you'll actually get to have some monetary values moving out to affected RMs and individuals?

Mr. Young: — We've already processed some individual claims. Now some of them are for individual homes. What we try to do is prioritize the claims on the basis of, first of all, information that was complete and was readily available. We processed those claims as quickly as we could. Some of the agricultural claims are more complicated. They require a lot of judgment in terms of what is eligible and what isn't.

Our program parallels quite closely to the federal disaster financial assistance arrangement which we have with the federal government, and the program that we have is intended to cover off a lot of the things that we would then submit to the federal government to provide some funding back to the province in terms of some of the costs that we would have incurred through the program.

So what we do is we ensure that the claims have been properly documented. And the ones that are a threat to safety in terms of a house or a residence or a family involving individual homes, we try to process those very quickly. And I am sure that those sorts of things . . . People's safety is at stake and it is a primary concern for us. Again the agricultural claims are much more complex and they take a little longer to deal with. But we have processed over 500 . . . or pardon me, about 469 claims to date.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Young. Mr. Minister, I'm sure as you are aware in having been out to the area, a lot of people's lives have certainly been up in turmoil for, well basically a good six months now if not a little more. And any assistance that can begin to move would certainly give them a bit of a light at the end of the tunnel. It's going to be a long process yet as you begin to work through and deal with the issues regarding the land and the ruts as well as just the impact it's had on personal property.

So I just would like to commend the department for what they've done. I know, as has already been explained, it's not a simple and cut and dried solution as we would hope it would be. And lots of times it would certainly be a lot easier if we could say this is . . . yes, there's yes and no, and this qualifies and yes we can, within two weeks, we can have some assistance to you whether in the monetary form.

So I want to thank you and your officials for the work you're doing and just encourage you to as much as possible get the assistance flowing as quickly as possible so that individuals living in and through the misery of all of those floods will have at least something to begin to put their lives back in order.

In view of the fact while, Mr. Minister, you mentioned 25 per cent of the land may not be seeded, now it's . . . I think we're well aware of the fact that there's going to be a lot of extra

effort needed to be put into place to get the land in shape even to seed it as it starts to dry up. So anything that can be done to assist certainly be welcome.

Mr. Minister, I'd like to move to a different area for the time being. Last year with the former minister, we dealt with a number of issues, and one of them was grievances that have been brought forward from different correctional centres and the Saskatoon Correctional Centre was one.

I believe it had the most outstanding grievances. Last year at this time I believe there was something like 172 outstanding grievances. The question, Mr. Minister is, how many outstanding grievances overall in the province, and specifically the Saskatoon Correctional Centre, how many outstanding grievances do we have to date?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Currently we 258 outstanding grievances in the department. I do not have with us the exact number of outstanding grievances in the Saskatoon Correctional Centre. I will check with our officials to see if we do have it, but I don't believe we have it broke down by institution. No, I would have to . . . I will confirm that we do not have it broke it down by institution.

Mr. Toth: — Okay. Mr. Minister, can your department endeavour to get that for us. We would appreciate it.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Yes we will.

Mr. Toth: — In view of the number of outstanding grievances at with the correction centre, the Saskatoon Correction Centre last year, and being as we don't have any numbers to correlate whether or not it's increased or decreased or by how much, what efforts have been made by the department to deal with these grievances? And how does the department respond to individuals when they come forward with grievances? I know we went through it fairly extensively with your colleague last year.

And the fact that I believe, if I'm not mistaken — then I believe, Mr. Minister, you may have had some fair bit of knowledge in this area as well — that as grievances come forward unions . . . the grievances go to their union. The unions carry those grievances forward.

I guess the question is, Mr. Minister, as grievances are brought forward and they don't seem to be moving forward, what steps does an individual or individuals have in dealing with grievances if they don't seem to be moving forward, and more specifically if their union isn't moving them forward on their behalf?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Well let me first start by laying out . . . There's a very detailed process used to try to create a positive labour relation environment within the correctional centres. I'm going to start by laying out . . . There's a number of processes that we encourage the institutions to use to avoid laying grievances. They have institutional union-management committees that meet regularly. There are groups that meet with the individual directors of institutions. There is then a province-wide corrections union-management committee that has representatives of all the institutions and management from

the various institutions.

And our first choice of their issues is to have those types of issues come to the table for discussion because what you're often dealing with is issues that there isn't necessary clarity. So the best solution is to come up with an agreeable solution to all the parties. And so in many cases that's where we would encourage issues to go before they get to the grievance process.

If they get to the grievance process or if an individual wants to lay a grievance, it's their right under the collective agreement to lay a grievance. And then the employer has to accept that grievance. Then there is a three-step process that the grievance process goes through.

I should tell you — and as you are well aware I have extensive experience in these areas — sometimes grievances are laid by individuals that aren't supported by the union. When it's not generally supported by the union, it's because an individual is interpreting the language in the collective agreement in a way that is contrary to the way that both parties have agreed the language should be interpreted; in fact the parties have an agreement as to what it means. But that doesn't prevent an individual from laying an individual grievance if they disagree with what the interpretation of that language is. Thus you run into the situation sometimes where that grievance isn't supported moving through the three steps or process by the union.

But if an individual lays a grievance, at step one the grievance is dealt with at the local level by the supervising manager. In the correctional centre it would usually be by the director or his designate. If they can't find resolution to that grievance at that stage, it's then . . . Their step two process involves the human resource department or branch from the department and usually a senior labour relations consultant or the director of the human resource branch. And they again then look at the grievance and see if they can't find resolution.

And finally if you can't find resolution, we will send . . . these items go to or grievances go to a third party arbitrator. And then both sides make their case to an arbitrator and the third party determines who is living up to . . . or who is right or wrong in the interpretation of the agreement.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, over the past number of years, we've seen ongoing concerns in the Saskatoon correctional facility. And certainly last year was, seemed to be a lot of upheaval within the institution when you look at the number of grievances were outstanding at that time. And when we get your response — hopefully in the near future — we'll get a better understanding of whether or not there's been some alleviation of those concerns.

But there have been, were a number of changes — certainly in the director, a number of directors over the past number of years and those types of concerns, Mr. Minister. And I believe the former minister had indicated that due to the number of outstanding grievances there was great difficulty in trying to move forward in addressing a number of the issues.

You mention that if the union doesn't necessarily support the individual person, then they can go through — if I understood

you correctly — third party arbitration. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — No. What happens in a grievance — and I'll give you a little more detail — an individual can lay a grievance through step one and step two of the grievance process. That grievance will be moved forward by the union. When it gets to arbitration, a third party group within the union determines whether or not there's validity in moving that grievance through to arbitration, because arbitrations cost thousands of dollars and sometimes tens of thousands of dollars. And if in fact there's an agreement between both the employer and the union as to what the interpretation should be, the union may decide not to proceed with that grievance through to arbitration.

Now the individual would have a right to appeal that decision made internally by the union if he disagreed with the decision made by the union. And in fact, they can take that decision, if they like, to the Labour Relations Board and a duty to fairly represent the interest of that employee in a grievance. So there are a number of safeguards for employees who would feel that their grievances aren't moving forward as they would feel that they should.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Mr. Minister, I guess that was the major question that was coming up last year is the sense that having had the discussion — and one of our employees is quite familiar as well through the process — and yet the fact that these individuals just felt they were being stonewalled in trying to move their grievances forward. So what you're saying is when they feel that they're getting nowhere, the union isn't really offering support in their grievance, and they haven't been able to move it forward that they would have the ability then to go to the Labour Relations Board. Is that what I understand?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Yes. The section of The Trade Union Act indicates that if an employee or member feels that they're not getting fairly represented by the union, they have the right to take that issue to the Labour Relations Board. It's called unfair labour practice. And then the Labour Relations Board can determine whether the union is acting in good faith.

Now I want to set some context to the grievance process for you. When an individual raise a grievance, in some cases they may not be aware that there may be a grievance on the same issue on the exact opposite position. And in some cases what you will find is you will have a grievance coming from one side of an issue and a grievance coming from the other side of the issue. Both those grievances cannot be right or valid because you can't have grievances on the same issue coming from very opposite points of view and both be valid. So the union has to make determinations, based on what the language means and was agreed to between the parties, to proceed on some grievances and not on others.

Now when you get a significant situation where you have a significant number of grievances as well, the union and the employer have the ability to look at putting in place special processes to deal with the backlog of grievances. At this point, both the union and the management of the department are exploring options to look at the backlog of grievances in the correctional system across the province.

It is in everybody's best interest that we have a good labour relations environment, and we would like to have a good labour relations environment. We need to work through with the union and put processes in place to deal with the backlog of grievances. As you can appreciate, the longer a grievance sits there unresolved, the more difficult it is to get people to just, to sit down and work through the process without going to a third party.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I'm going to wait your response to my original question about the number of grievances still outstanding, the number in the correction . . . Saskatoon Correctional Centre, and also some inquiries with the individuals I have chatted with, to pursue this issue further the next time we're here to make sure that I'm on the right wavelength as well as in regards to the concerns that have been raised by the individuals.

Mr. Minister, I'd like to address another issue for a moment. And I'm not sure how far we'll get into it or whether we'll feel like we've covered it for today, but I noticed this week and in the past while, there's been a number of situations where correctional centres have actually just been overcrowded, if you will — just more inmates than they actually had positions for. And as a number of my colleagues and I were . . . noted when we toured the facilities in Prince Albert, both the male and the female one, that they were actually setting up beds in the gym, or mattresses in the gymnasium because of the number of inmates being brought into the correctional facility. And I understand this weekend was no different. In fact, in Saskatoon if I'm not mistaken, there were more . . . something like 42 more inmates above what the centre would actually accommodate.

And my question to you, Mr. Minister, is, exactly why are we facing a situation where we've got more individuals that we can actually have the ability to handle?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. As you may be aware, the correctional system is the catch basin, if you would like to use that term, in the system. The courts sentence people to custody, and it's the responsibility then of the correctional system to accept those sentenced to custody and carry out the order that's placed before them. So the correctional system or the department has no say in the number of inmates that are sentenced to custody. Having said that, I would like to point out we are experiencing a trend now, over the last several months, of increased counts. And we are working with staff and directors to deal with these higher count numbers.

There's another important trend I think needs to be mentioned. We are now experiencing a far larger number of inmates remanded for longer periods of time. And the inmates on remand of course generally they're higher-security inmates because during the period of time before you go to court and you're sentenced, it is quite normal for individuals to be more agitated, more concerned about the unknown, about their future. And the high number of individuals in remand has resulted in a significant upswing in the count, particularly for this time of year. Generally this time of year the counts start to go down. We're not experiencing the decrease in counts you'd normally see in the spring.

But I want to tell you, we have some of the best qualified, best trained and senior staff anywhere in the country. And I can tell you that we have experienced these levels of counts before. And I can tell you that we have experienced higher levels of counts, particularly in the Regina Correctional Centre, than we have had today. And although any time that you get counts above a certain number it creates some pressures, we have a highly dedicated, highly qualified, highly trained staff and I'm very confident in their ability to manage these counts.

Having said that, we are, as you would be aware, building a new correctional centre in Regina and we anticipate that being open in 2008, and that will put 316 beds . . . 216 beds into the system. We are planning at that point to close the old 1913 sections of the Regina Correctional Centre. But the new, state-of-the-art centre we're building gives us a great deal of options that we don't have today.

And we will continue to monitor the counts. And in particular we are concerned about anticipated changes under federal law which could result in even greater increased pressures. But we will continue to monitor them. And at the same time we are looking at our long-term needs and planning for the future.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. You mention 216 more spaces with the new facility in Regina. However, that's replacing an older facility — well I guess a fairly rundown part of the Regina Correctional Centre — so I'm not sure if that's any more additional spaces than you already have, currently have.

But you also indicated that you're seeing a significant increase in the number of cases of individuals in remand and cases coming before the correctional centres. And while you're currently in the process of replacing a badly needed section in the Regina Correctional Centre, what are the long-term plans that government has and the department has to address the upswing in the number of individuals being brought into corrections? And I'll even go beyond that. What do you think is causing this upswing besides the longer terms for people awaiting their day in court?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Well we're in a planning process to look at what our long-term needs are going to be, structural needs are going to be. And at this point I can't tell you what that plan is going to look like, but we are in a process of putting a longer-term plan. Our numbers are higher than we have historically experienced in the last number of years. The increase in remand is the one identifiable factor that we can determine and understand at this point. The length of sentences and judges' sentencing patterns are changed from time to time. It may have some impact on . . . That may be having some impact as well.

But on top of that, we are experiencing . . . And what we cannot know and understand at this point is what the impact of federal changes are going to be on the number of incarcerated people on a daily basis in the province. And we are monitoring and we're not sure exactly what the federal government is going to do. And until they bring forward legislation to change certain things, we're not aware of everything that they're looking at doing. So we need to understand as we're planning some of those things.

In the meantime, as you're well aware, it takes several years to build a correctional facility. We're in the process of building the Regina facility. We will have a number of options upon its completion, some of which some people will like and others will not. But you know we have of course the possibilities of keeping the 1913 section in operation if we need to. We have options of double bunking if we need to. There are several options that have been done in the past in this province and are done routinely in other jurisdictions in Canada to deal with inmate counts.

I can tell you from direct experience, I have seen the situation in Regina Correctional Centre with well over 500 inmates in custody in-house, prior to the new units being built which now house 120 people. So when we just had the original centre, there were times when it housed more than 500 individuals in-house.

And so although we have pressures now, over the years those pressures have existed from time to time and have been managed within the system. And once again I'd just like to commend the staff and management of the system for their willingness and their ability to manage this. It's not always easy but throughout the years they've stepped up to the plate and they managed these situations through some difficult times.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, a couple of questions. Are you seeing an increase in the number of repeat offenders? And if so, what is the department doing to try and address this problem of repeat offenders? And what steps are being taken to work with individuals — especially first-time offenders — that may assist them in changing their habits, changing their ways and not being seen within the correctional system again?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Well let me first indicate that we have no indication of a greater recidivism rate or greater incidence of individuals returning than in the past. It's remaining relatively stable.

We are, and I should point out to you, putting money into targeted strategies to reduce crime and it's having an effect. Just look at an example, the auto theft strategy in Regina; break and enter strategies in Regina, Saskatoon and other communities. These targeted strategies where we're putting forward resources and money are in fact having an impact. As you read in the paper — as I did with being a Regina resident, with some enthusiasm I guess — that we're no longer in the same situation for auto thefts that we were a few years ago. The targeted strategy is having an impact. We're also seeing through targeted strategies decreases in break and enters. We're seeing targeted strategies in Saskatoon, North Battleford, and P.A. [Prince Albert] starting to have some impact.

And so as well as working on ensuring that we have adequate facilities to deal with those being incarcerated, we're also putting our resources towards targeted strategies to reduce incarceration.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The current trend of repeat offenders, what would be the percentage of repeat offenders?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — On average about 50 per cent would return.

Mr. Toth: — And of the 50 per cent of repeat offenders, what would be the percentage that would actually become long-term offenders or criminals?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — It's very difficult to determine, to answer the question, I guess, the way you've asked it. Many of the offenders will repeat many times, but there will be periods during their life that they may not offend for a considerable period of time. So there's no pattern that we can just point to and say they become long-term offenders. Different factors in their lives often determine whether or not they get involved with the criminal justice system and become incarcerated. And there's no clean, clear answer to that.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, a moment ago you talked about car theft and I believe the sense that that has certainly been reduced. But recently we had a situation where . . . well it wasn't car theft. It was vandalism and mostly against university students, and I forget the number of vehicles. It was a significant number of vehicles. Unfortunately, if I'm not mistaken, each one of the individuals are left with the total cost of repairing those vehicles under the current insurance program.

So while maybe we've reduced the number of thefts, there are situations that are still occurring where, whether it's cars or other personal property, there's significant amounts of vandalism. And I'm wondering what the department is doing in conjunction with the police to address these types of concerns.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — At this point that really is the responsibility of the Regina police department. We've seen a short-term trend there. We don't know that it is a long-term problem. We don't know if it's a localized problem. We don't know if it's . . . It's a relatively new trend for damage of vehicles on the university grounds or university parking lots.

If the pattern were to continue, then we would work with the police and others to look at developing strategies. But at this point this has been a recent action over just a short period of time and we don't know if that pattern's going to continue and whether or not it's one individual, two individuals, or somebody that's angry from the university. Until the pattern continues in some way we're not going to . . . you normally wouldn't target a longer-term strategy until you know you have a longer-term problem.

The police routinely deal with vandalism throughout the city as does the Wascana police, who have responsibility for supervision of the university campus. So I'm not saying that it won't be monitored, won't be looked after, but it's really at this point a routine, normal police activity. If it were to persist for a period of time then we would get all the players together and perhaps look at what types of strategic interventions might be able to be done once we better understand the nature of the problem. At this point it's just a routine, it would be part of the routine policing responsibility.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm sure you can agree that a circumstance of this nature, especially in view of the fact

that this was committed against university students and their vehicles and these students are struggling to make it through university, many of them with already accumulating student loans . . . And then to have to deal with a vandalism that they've got to cover out of pocket, it's not just an annoyance. It has an economic impact and it impacts even the families. So I think, Mr. Minister, that if this continues we certainly need to look at a strategy to deal with this issue to assist students so that isn't another burden that they have to bear as they're putting their minds to trying to achieve their goals as they move through university.

And if the car theft strategy has certainly worked, certainly working, and I guess we'll find out as we get into the summer months how well it's been, it's worked. I think we've seen more of the thefts as we've got into the nicer and longer days and months of summer and spring and what have you. But I think, Mr. Minister, it's certainly something we need to continue to keep an eye on and be mindful of the people it impacts, whether it's university students or whoever it is. It's certainly imperative that we make every effort to assist individuals in protecting their property and their well-being.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. I agree with you 100 per cent. We share the same concern. Our department is responsible for offenders once they're caught. Part of the problem here is that at this point no one has been caught for these particular, or charged and caught for these particular crimes. Once people are caught or incarcerated then we can start to analyze whether or not this is a larger problem, and that's when our department really plays a role. To date we don't have anybody that's been caught for these particular crimes. And so that's why it's more difficult to look at whether we need a longer-term strategy because we don't know what we're dealing with yet.

But we do share with you the concern of these university students and the concern in the general public about the vandalism of vehicles, and by no means want to leave the impression that it isn't very serious, because it is. And in particular too, I understand exactly what you're saying about those young people and the financial cost to them and what that cost means to young students who are struggling just to get by month to month.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, another area I think of major concern — and we certainly saw it in the vehicle vandalism — a lot of that vandalism was being precipitated by young people, in fact some fairly young, young people. And the vandalism against students, I have no idea what the ages because we haven't been able to determine who created the problem. But I guess what bothers me is the number of young people that are on the streets even late at night.

And I think what we're just seeing is we're seeing a very dysfunctional family and a lack of leadership at home. Of course you and I don't have the ability just to correct that. People themselves, parents need to take some leadership. And there's no doubt a lot of issues in the home that maybe are precipitating some of what's happening. But it's an issue that I think needs to . . . we need to look at and encourage people in how they raise their children and if there's supports that are needed out there, to work with them to address those issues.

Mr. Minister, when we look at corrections, and I guess the question that really comes up and the question is: how do we deal with it in this province, the significantly high number of First Nations individuals in our correctional and prison system? What is the department doing at this time to begin to address that question? And what efforts are being made together with First Nations leadership in seeking their assistance as to how we address this question?

I realize it's quite complicated because you've got the reserves around the province. But you've also got individuals who have moved off-reserve and moved into the inner city where in many cases there's a lot of social problems, some issues of housing, issues of poverty and family relationships. So I guess, Mr. Minister, over the years and as we move forward, what is the department looking at in adopting measures that they may feel or may be able to look at and plan . . . and developing a plan whereby they would say well, we would hope that within say, three or five years we can change that number and reduce the number of, the percentage of First Nations involved in our correctional system?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. As you may well be aware, there has been a detailed commission on First Nations and Métis peoples involved with the justice system over the last . . . that came down in 2005. In May 2005 the government released its response to the Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform, and we are working with the First Nations community and its leadership to implement the recommendations of the commission. As you're well aware, that is not a short-term process. Fundamental changes take time. They take co-operation of the community, the justice officials, the officials in CPS [Corrections and Public Safety], the police, but more importantly the community as a whole to move forward with reforms.

We would all like to see a system which created better opportunities for Aboriginal and Métis people that saw fewer of them incarcerated, and that's what we're working towards. And we're working with the leadership in the Aboriginal community and the Métis community towards those goals and we're going to continue to work towards those goals over the next several years.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, following the commission of First Nations justice reform, you mentioned a number of recommendations . . . were recommended. Have any and how many have you implemented to date?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Well let me start by indicating that the recommendations will fall in several different departments. They're not the responsibility of a single department because the issues covered under the commission's recommendations do fall in a number of departments.

But I'm going to talk about what we're doing in our department as a result of that, and then at the end of that just for a couple minutes, about where we're at in the broader picture.

During '05-06 as an example, more than 48 million in new funding was invested in the interdepartmental responses addressing a broad range of initiatives such as public education to combat racism, strengthening of FASD [fetal alcohol

spectrum disorder] programs, and education of youth-in-custody program, some crime reduction strategies targeting at high-risk individuals, programs to reduce violence and reoffending, and reduction in the use of remand. In 2006-7 more than \$86 million will be invested, so just about double what we invested in '05-06.

We're undertaking some key initiatives in our department to respond to some of the commission's concerns. One of them was replacing the 1913 section of the Regina Correctional Centre. It was raised, and we're working on . . . As you know, we have a program in place to replace that section of the Regina Correctional Centre.

We're implementing violence reduction strategies. We're developing a remand strategy to reduce the number of offenders remanded due to systems offences. So we're trying to keep or increase the number of people who are released that are there simply because of systems offences.

We're enhancing reintegration and cultural programming within the institutions. We are continuing with just the supporting . . . the partnership approach involving the province, the Government of Canada, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, and Métis representation. Discussions continue regularly between the partners.

Later this year there will be an update to cabinet about the response of the various departments to this initiative and where we're at and where we're going. And on a regular basis, the stakeholders meet and continue to work on moving forward the recommendations from that report.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And, Mr. Minister, you indicated that the recommendations actually fall into a number of different departments. Can you indicate which departments these recommendations would fall under?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — It would be all the human service departments of government and the federal government, all the human service departments of the provincial government and their corresponding units in the federal government as well.

So as an example, in the province it would include Corrections and Public Safety, Justice. It would include Community Resources and Employment. It would include Learning. It would include . . . Now that we have an Advanced Education department, it would include Advanced Education and Employment because employment is a key consideration. It would include Health because as you're well aware, as we're all aware, that the quality of health plays a role in an individual's well-being. The quality of, you know, housing, even nutrition — all those things play a role.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, you gave a couple of numbers, and I missed some earlier as you talked about the different changes. You mentioned about \$48 million being spent on, I believe, drug programs, public ed, fetal alcohol system effect. And then I think for '06-07, you were giving a number that was substantially higher. I missed that number.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Okay. '05-06, more than 48 million in new

funding was invested in the interdepartmental response to a broad range of initiatives such as public education to combat racism — just to give you a few examples — strengthening of FASD programs, an education of youth-in-custody program, crime reduction strategies, a program to reduce violence and reoffending, and a program to reduce the use of remand.

In 2006-07 we'll be spending more than \$86 million. And that's government-wide; it's not just our department because so many of these responses cross several departmental boundaries. It's through working together co-operatively that you can actually move forward on these issues.

Mr. Toth: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, we're aware of the fact that we continue to face a major problem in regards to drugs. And crystal meth is certainly continuing to be a major issue.

And one of the real concerns over the past number of years has been fetal alcohol system effect. And with all the money that's . . . And while you've just begun to develop this program and begun training and public education, would you be able to say that we've actually been able to get through to a lot of young pregnant mothers about the impact of consuming alcohol while pregnant, which will impact that young person for the rest of their lives? Are we having an impact in that area?

Are we having an impact in regards to young people and their second thinking about whether or not they would participate in taking drugs, or are young people beginning to say, well maybe there's just too many issues here I need to look at, and it's time I rethought how I'm focusing my life?

I know that's a fairly broad question, Mr. Minister, but maybe you could give me an idea of what you have seen in the short period that you've begun this number of programs in regards to addressing the issue of crime.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. I'd like to start by indicating the primary responsibility for dealing with FASD would in fact be the Department of Health, as you can realize, because of how individuals who become in contact with the law and end up in custody also have some of these particular challenges.

We're directing \$15,000 from funds provided by the cognitive disabilities strategy in support of Saskatchewan fetal alcohol support network. We're allocating 60,000 through the cognitive disabilities strategy to an extra judicial-sanctioned diversion pilot project in Saskatoon to assist youth who are involved. So we're putting forward, based on the needs of those who are involved that are experiencing FASD, programs, alternative programs to help assist them in dealing with having FASD.

This year as an example we're spending \$120,000 just on cognitive disabilities strategy in our department. As you may well be aware, some of the new Project Hope money is finding its way into our budgets to help young people that are facing those challenges that are in our institutions because while they're in those institutions, we're going to do everything we can to help them deal with those problems prior to being released. And this year that in the amount of \$550,000 to help deal with young people who are experiencing these problems

while they're incarcerated . . . that came into custody, pardon me, with those problems.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Just some of the observations that my colleagues and I had and some of the comments that came from talking to corrections officials, the question we had was the number of individuals that end up at in corrections and as a result of, say, drug or alcohol abuse, and I believe that is fairly high. What is the department doing to assist individuals in dealing with these issues while they're incarcerated? Hopefully with the hope that by the time they've completed their sentence, they've been actually able to come up with a system where they've been able to address that issue. And as they're released back into society, they're better prepared to refrain from further overindulgence in drugs or actually refrain completely from dealing in those issues.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Well I'd like to share with the member that there is addiction education programs and substance abuse intervention programs offered in each of the three large correctional facilities: Regina, Saskatoon, or Prince Albert. As well the women's substance abuse program was offered to women in custody at Pine Grove.

So we do have extensive specialized addiction programming offered to offenders while in custody. Does it meet all the needs? As you know, many times people who are dealing with an addiction have to seek help several times before it works. And our hope is, of course like yours is I'm sure, that more offenders will actually seek the treatment and will change their particular lifestyle. But as you are well aware, as I am, that sometimes it takes many interventions before an individual actually comes to terms with dealing with their addiction.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, you mentioned that there are a number of educational programs offered. Are these programs mandatory? And if so or if not, what's the percentage of participation in the programs?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — I'd like to start by indicating they're not mandatory. The mandatory programs with adult offenders, people who don't wish to be part of the program, as you'd know, are not often successful. When you have limited numbers of spaces available, you want to work with those who first want involvement in the program because you're going to have the greatest success.

And just to let you know the type of success we're having, research has found that, compared with other offenders, those who complete the treatment in-house have a 17 per cent lower rate of reconviction over a three-year, follow-up period. So going through the treatment reduces the chances of recidivism or the incidence of recidivism by 17 per cent.

And so we are working to provide treatment within the facilities. Our hope is that more would want to take the treatment. In some cases, we may have . . . there may be a court order that individuals take treatment. But in the absence of those types of orders, usually for DWIs [driving without impairment], we can't force individuals to take treatment that they do not want to take.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, you mentioned spaces. How many

spaces available? Are there a limited number of spaces? While you indicated that it's not mandatory and if it was mandatory, the indication that there's spaces available, then it probably wouldn't be able to handle all of the inmates. Is that true?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — The programs are restricted to 15 inmates in the program at any given time in the institution, keeping them involved. This program operates year-round. The program is only, I believe, five weeks in length. And the program is not available . . . Well it's available in the numbers that it's available, based on the amount of desire for people to go in.

And the other aspect is clearly that those who are doing shorter periods of time — and there are a number of people who do shorter periods of time — and want treatment, the system starts working with them immediately on release, planning to get into addictions treatment upon release. And so for different people needing different things, the program looks at it differently to meet their needs.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, given that there are a limited number of spaces, to your knowledge are there more people actually seeking assistance from these programs? And if so, what steps or efforts would be made to offer the program to a larger number of individual inmates if it's their desire to get involved in that program?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — I think it's fair to say in the past there hasn't been enough resources. That's why we're now spending another \$550,000 on resources. I think with . . . Like with any program, there are times that there is a greater demand than availability, and there will be times when there is greater availability than demand. It depends on the people that are currently incarcerated. But as a general sense, we believe we need to do more and so are putting \$550,000 in new resources in.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, if I understood correctly — and maybe just correct me if I'm wrong — of the individuals who have taken this drug addiction education program, 70 per cent have been successful in not reoffending in the past three years. Is that correct? And as well . . .

Hon. Mr. Yates: — 17 per cent.

Mr. Toth: — Oh okay.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — 17 per cent.

Mr. Toth: — I thought, 70 per cent, boy that's doing a pretty good job.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — If that were the case it would be . . .

Mr. Toth: — Well even 17 per cent is better than nothing. I think we'll admit to that, 17 per cent is better than nothing. But maybe it's a start.

I see our time is sliding by fairly quickly. One other question is, you mention the program is five weeks. But it would seem to me that when an individual is released, even with a five-week program . . . and maybe with the supports in the correctional

centre, if when they're put back on the streets if there aren't supports for them, it's . . . And I think your numbers indicate it; 17 per cent tend not to reoffend which means 17 per cent were really assisted.

If there was support mechanisms outside of the correctional facility that these individuals could become involved in, and I'm not sure if there are or there aren't, but if there were and that period of education was continued, there maybe . . . We might see even a higher percentage of individuals who wouldn't reoffend. And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, is the department looking at other avenues whereby they may expand the program if need be outside of the correctional system to assist in individuals as they leave remand to help them to change their lives and their way of life?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Yes and I should indicate that on top of the formal five-week training program, there are volunteers who come in and operate AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] groups and other addictions groups within the institutions, and those groups help match individuals to sponsors and groups in the community. So when we're talking about the five-week program, that's only one avenue which is used to deal with the alcohol and drug treatment.

There are other volunteer programs that come in. There are spiritual programs run by the Aboriginal community. So there are more than . . . It's more than just one single program. But what . . . We believed we needed to do more. That's why there's now \$550,000 more resources forward in this year's budget.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Mr. Minister, I see the hour is getting to the point where maybe we're already past somebody's bedtime; I don't know. But I'd like to thank you and your officials for taking the time to come in and respond to the questions. And we look forward to further debate on other areas in the correctional system. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: — This brings an adjournment, consideration of estimates and supplementary estimates for the Department of Corrections and Public Safety. Thank you, Mr. Minister. And to your officials, thank you for giving us this late part of the evening. And we look forward to another visit from you and your officials at a future date. Thank you. The committee now stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 22:31.]