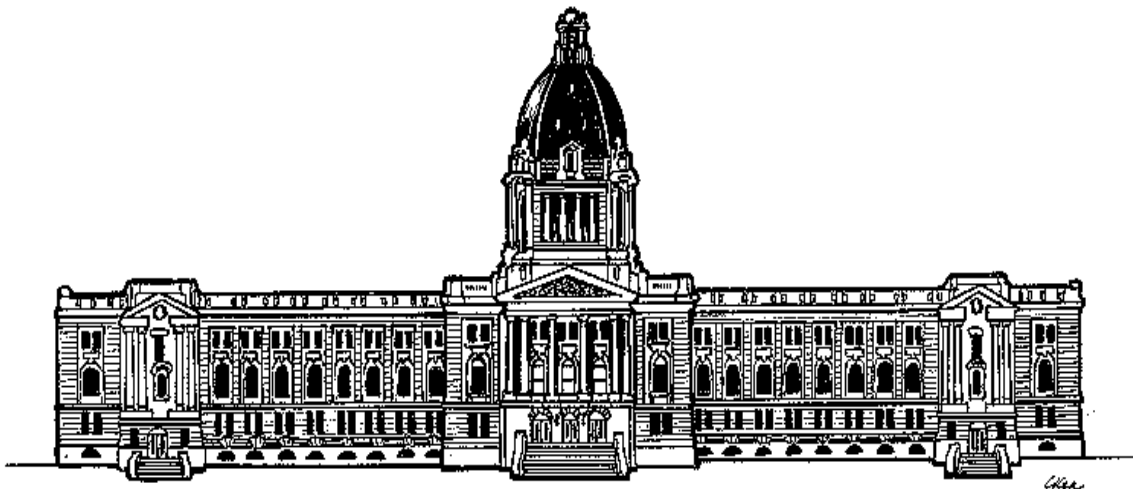




# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

**Hansard Verbatim Report**

**No. 34 – May 4, 2006**



**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

**Twenty-fifth Legislature**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES  
2006**

Ms. Judy Junor, Chair  
Saskatoon Eastview

Mr. Wayne Elhard, Deputy Chair  
Cypress Hills

Mr. Lon Borgerson  
Saskatchewan Rivers

Ms. Joanne Crofford  
Regina Rosemont

Mr. Don Morgan  
Saskatoon Southeast

Mr. Peter Prebble  
Saskatoon Greystone

Mr. Milton Wakefield  
Lloydminster

[The committee met at 16:10.]

**General Revenue Fund**  
**Justice**  
**Vote 3**

**Subvote (JU01)**

**The Chair:** — I call the committee to order. The first order of business before the committee today is consideration of estimates and supplementary estimates for the Department of Justice which is on page 103 of your Estimates book. And I'll invite the minister to introduce his officials and if he has an opening statement to give it now.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Thank you, Madam Chair. Seated with me at the table here is Doug Moen, Queen's Counsel, deputy minister of Justice and deputy attorney general; and to his right Elizabeth Smith, executive assistant to the deputy minister of Justice.

Seated behind me are Jan Turner, executive director, community justice division; Rod Crook, assistant deputy minister, courts and civil justice; Murray Brown, executive director of public prosecutions; Susan Amrud, executive director of public law division; Gord Sisson, director of administrative services; Lyle McNabb, director of family justice services; Keith Laxdal, associate deputy minister of finance and registration division; Murray Sawatsky, executive director, law enforcement services; Betty Ann Potruff, executive director of policy planning and evaluation; Don McKillop, crown solicitor of civil law; and Al Dwyer, director of consumer protection.

Briefly, Madam Chair, I would like to provide you with an overview of the Department of Justice and its 2006-2007 budget. In the Department of Justice, we provide a complex set of programs. We administer the criminal law justice system. This includes operating the court system, providing support for the judiciary, and prosecuting crimes. We provide alternative measures in crime prevention programs and support the development and delivery of community-based justice initiatives.

We support victims of crime through victim services programs. We fund the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police], our provincial police service, the Saskatchewan Legal Aid Commission, the Human Rights Commission, and numerous other independent boards and commissions.

We provide legal and policy services to government including serving as the government's official legal advisor, representing the government before courts and tribunals. We play a key role in regulating the marketplace to safeguard consumer and public interests and support economic well-being. We provide mechanisms for resolving social conflict to ensure that people do not turn to socially destructive ways of dealing with their issues. We respond to the legal and social needs of people, particularly those in vulnerable circumstances and those involved in family disputes.

To deliver its mandate, Justice works with key partners. Some represent justice system components. Some deliver

community-based justice services, and some assist in policy and legislative developments and implementation. We work closely with Aboriginal organizations and, along with the federal government, provide support for innovative programs that respect Aboriginal values and traditions.

The department's 2006-2007 appropriation is \$234.1 million. This reflects an increase of 22.1 million or 10.4 per cent greater than 2005-2006.

Over half of the budget is devoted to third party agencies, funding to third party agencies such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the municipal police services, \$108.9 million; Saskatchewan Legal Aid Commission, \$16.8 million; and community-based organizations, \$3.9 million. The total 2006-2007 budget for third party agencies is \$129.6 million or 55.4 per cent of the overall Justice appropriation.

The budget provides funding to maintain the programs and services delivered by the Department of Justice and to invest in several priority areas. Our first priority is safe communities and reducing crime. The 2006-2007 budget provides additional funding of \$8.7 million to maintain and expand policing services in Saskatchewan. This will allow us to complete the commitment to fund 200 new police officers, continue to implement the strategy to suppress gang activity, develop the missing persons task force, and contribute to Project Hope through police resources for drug enforcement and awareness.

Our second priority is responding to the recommendations of the Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform. In 2005-2006, we hired a forensic pathologist to improve the coroner's program; reformed the municipal police complaints process by establishing an independent Public Complaints Commission; supported the hiring of Aboriginal police officers and the development of strategies to recruit Aboriginal people for police services; expanded the use of therapeutic approaches to justice such as the Saskatoon domestic violence treatment court; expanded victims' services in northern Saskatchewan; and introduced video conferencing between Saskatoon Correctional Centre and the Saskatoon Provincial Court.

For 2006-2007, we will continue to implement initiatives that reduce offending and victimization in Aboriginal communities and promote confidence in the justice system. A further investment of \$500,000 will provide police-based victims services in Sandy Bay, support integrated targeted crime strategies in Meadow Lake and La Ronge and expand the approach to other northern communities, provide any translation services in Meadow Lake Provincial Court, establish a domestic violence treatment court in Regina, expand the use of therapeutic approaches to Justice, and work with northern communities to develop a community safety plan to address interpersonal violence and abuse.

In 2006-2007, we'll see the opening of the Regina and area drug treatment court and establishment of the Aboriginal court party for the Meadow Lake area.

Our third priority is court infrastructure renewal. In response to the court security and facilities review, an initial investment of

\$7 million was recently announced. This funding will allow the department to begin the process of renewing court facilities and to address security needs.

2006-2007, \$2.1 million will address space requirements in Yorkton Provincial Court and the Regina Court House. In total \$8.1 million is being committed to address court infrastructure over the next several years. Perimeter security screening programs will be implemented over the next two years in the Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert provincial courthouses, the Saskatchewan Queen's Bench courthouse, and the Regina Court House.

In addition, a number of other security enhancements at various court locations will be implemented over the next two years. Additional details on these and other initiatives will be made available at a later date.

Our agenda for 2006-2007 will be as ambitious as last year's. I know the department has the commitment and dedication to ensure our success. I look forward to answering your questions about our 2006-2007 budget for the Department of Justice.

**The Chair:** — And again, I'll just ask that any officials that come to answer if they could identify themselves at the mike the first time they speak. So central management and services (JU01) questions. Mr. Morgan.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Thank you, Madam Chair. Sometime ago your department undertook an initiative dealing with exploited children working in the sex trade. It was before my time in the House. And I'm wondering what the status of that initiative is and how much money is being committed to it and if we could get a report on that.

Actually, while the minister is assembling his information, I know we're scheduled to go until 5 o'clock. I am free after 5 o'clock but I don't know the schedule of the other committee members, the minister, or his officials. So I am at your disposal after 5 o'clock. So I'll leave it to the Chair and other members to determine how late we will go.

**The Chair:** — We have other officials coming in at 5, Advanced Education and then Immigration at 6 to 7. I don't know how your other colleagues feel about giving up some of their time or whatever.

**Mr. Morgan:** — I wasn't asking them to. I was just . . . And I didn't know what else was scheduled. I was just making the offer, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** — Okay. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — The committee — and it's before my time as well as before Mr. Morgan's time — was, as I understand it, co-chaired by what is now the department of . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . A response is from Justice and Community Resources. Some are joint responses, and some are Justice responses.

A couple of the areas that I think are important to touch on from Justice are the vehicle impoundment legislation. And since this program's inception in 2002, 320 vehicles have been

impounded. Fourteen of the seizures involved child victims. The program gives the police the authority to seize and impound vehicles which they have reasonable grounds to believe have been used in committing certain offences relating to procuring sexual services and prostitution.

My understanding is that the success of this program in Saskatchewan has led to it being considered adopted in Alberta, and they are introducing a similar program based upon the Saskatchewan program.

The other Justice initiative that I would mention in this regard is safer communities and neighbourhoods and that initiative. I think there has been some concern given the success of particularly the VISE [Vehicle Impoundment against Sexual Exploitation] program, that some of the sex trade and some of the sex trade involving children was being driven off the street, and some of that was now being operated out of buildings. Most of the investigations have involved drug trade. But a significant number of the investigations on the safer communities and neighbourhoods program have involved prostitution.

The third program that I think is worth mentioning in respect to Justice response to the sexual exploitation of children, and specifically but not necessarily only in the sex trade, is the Regina Children's Justice Centre, which is now I think 11 years, approximately 11 years in operation.

**Mr. Morgan:** — I'm wondering if you could tell us — because you've indicated two departments are involved — how many dollars in each of the last two years were committed to that project, and how many full-time equivalents were working in it?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — I don't think we could give you, for a couple of reasons, the cost of responding to the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth, partly because it's spread across government. So there's responses not only in Community Resources and Justice, but also responses in Health, and I expect probably in Learning.

The other reason of course is that the Regina Children's Justice Centre and a similar program in Saskatoon don't only deal with the commercial sexual exploitation of children, but concern themselves very much with the exploitation of children generally.

As I've explained safer communities and neighbourhoods, I can give you the cost of that program. But how much of it has been directed at prostitution and how much of it's been directed at child sexual abuse, I can't because of course the program covers a number of areas and a number of unlawful activities.

**Mr. Morgan:** — What year was the program initiated, and was there ever money specifically targeted, or was it a part of a variety of other things?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — I can give the funding for some of the programming. In Regina, \$544,090 was spent — this would be 2005-2006 numbers, I believe — on three projects: the Regina Mobile Crisis Service to run a safety service mobile outreach van, the Action Committee for Children at Risk, and the Treaty Four Urban Services for a safe house.

In Saskatoon, \$342,380 was spent on four projects: some to Egadz, which I think Mr. Morgan would be familiar with, for outreach services; a certain amount to Operation Help, a Saskatoon peer support group of sexually experienced youth for enhanced outreach and follow-up services; a portion to the Saskatoon Tribal Council to operate a safe house and to run a satellite home; and a portion to Communities for Children to develop a community awareness campaign.

In Prince Albert and La Ronge, \$236,000 were spent on two projects: \$181,000 for outreach services and youth-focused activities at the Youth Activity Centre in Prince Albert and \$55,000 for the Kikinahk Friendship Centre in La Ronge.

Saskatchewan Justice, who in turn spent \$260,000 to support programs in three centres. In Regina, \$67,000 to support cultural, recreational, educational programs provided by the Rainbow Youth Centre for at-risk youth; and \$12,000 to support family healing programming provided by the Regina Indian and Métis Christian Fellowship. In Saskatoon, \$65,000 to support the Saskatoon safe house, as well as \$15,000 to support Operation Help. In Prince Albert, \$101,000 to support life skills, decision-making, and conflict resolution programs offered by Prince Albert Youth Activity Centre. So those would be more targeted programs.

The operational cost of the Vehicle Impoundment against Sexual Exploitation program is, this is \$85,000; \$75,000 of that is wages and \$10,000 of that is operating.

The estimated cost for the safer communities and neighbourhoods program which I referred to earlier is \$909,000 for 2006-2007.

**Mr. Morgan:** — If you answered the question about what year the initiative was started, I missed it. One of the committee members indicates 2002. Would that be correct?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — No. It'd be earlier than that. The report of the legislative committee was in 2001. Now the Saskatchewan strategy to address the problem of sexually exploited children and youth consists of a mix of prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and law enforcement measures.

These measures began in 1997 with the provision of \$250,000 to outreach services for children involved in prostitution and for street youth; and a strict law enforcement policy targeting pimps, people who have sex with children, others who exploit children involved with prostitution; and a public education campaign to clarify that procuring a child for prostitution is child abuse — members may have seen the posters; they're up in many places still — and a system to track and monitor perpetrators and to improve services to victims.

As I said, the special committee of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan released its report in June 2001, but those activities would have been in existence prior to that.

The province announced a comprehensive strategy in March 2002 that built on the developments already in place since 1997. As I said, the departments of Community Resources and Justice co-chair a provincial interdepartmental committee that oversees the provincial programs and services. It has represented some

other departments, and I did mention the intersectoral approach. I mentioned Learning and Health . . . also involved Corrections and Public Safety, First Nations and Métis Relations, and Labour. There are some initiatives that were implemented in 2002, but there were some initiatives that were implemented prior to the release of the report in 2001 as well.

**Mr. Morgan:** — The report that you referred to is the report that sort of initiated the problem or identified steps that should be taken. I'm wondering what statistical evidence the department used at that time to determine the magnitude of the problem and how they assess the success of the various initiatives. Do they look at arrests, prosecutions, statistical numbers of what agencies deal with youth working on the street? I'm just wondering how we identify (a) the magnitude of the problem, and (b) whether we've been successful in reducing it.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — It doesn't appear to me — and again Mr. Morgan and I weren't here in 2001 — that the committee that looked at the issue developed baseline numbers for the number of children involved in the sex trade. So having not those numbers . . . And we had estimates then, and I expect we have estimates now, but it's difficult to say definitively what the number was and what the number is now. Both the . . . well all of — I shouldn't say both — all of the johns school, safer communities and neighbourhood, and the vehicle impoundment program are undergoing evaluations to determine their effectiveness.

**Mr. Morgan:** — You had indicated that you felt the department had done some estimates. Is the department willing to share those estimates?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — And again what I think I said was that I don't think the committee had established a baseline, didn't have an estimate. And we wouldn't have a fixed number. The special committee noted that some estimates, not necessarily their estimate but the number of children working the streets of Regina and Saskatoon, at approximately 400 people annually, while others suggested that that would be on the high side. Now any number would be too high.

We can say that police are reporting a marked reduction in traffic in the stroll areas. That would be as a result, probably in part at least, of the vehicle impoundment program. And we did want to ensure that we weren't displacing the problem off the streets and into what we would call brothels, buildings in neighbourhoods, and which was part of — and only part — but part of the motivation behind the safer communities and neighbourhoods program.

**Mr. Morgan:** — I think when you have that type of a problem and you are committing resources to it, you would want to develop baseline numbers and try and do some tracking to determine the success of the program. I appreciate when the police work the area, the police do a very competent job. We see a marked reduction in traffic. But I'm just wondering why we wouldn't want to develop, as you refer to it, a baseline number and then try and see whether we're moving upward or downward from that and . . . so we know the success of the various programs.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — The concept of attempting to determine a reliable number for the children involved in the sex trade certainly has been discussed. And I again wasn't involved at the time that the committee did its work in 2001. But I believe that the opinion has been at that time and carries on to be that the sources of information as to how many people are involved are so unreliable that to expend resources on collecting information which may or may not provide even a close estimate would be resources that you might want to spend on addressing the problem.

**Mr. Morgan:** — So what you're telling us is that you don't have an estimate that's reliable enough. You give us a figure at the beginning of the program. You don't have an estimate now, and you're not willing to track anything.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Well if there was a reliable way of measuring the number of young children involved in the sex trade within either the province or within a specific community, I think that would have a value. The issue is how would you do that, that would provide you some confidence that you actually obtained a meaningful result and a meaningful number.

**Mr. Morgan:** — I take it your answer is you don't feel there is a reliable method, and you've made a conscious choice not to pursue one. Is that fair?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — That's been the conscious choice up to now that . . . We've all got census forms now I think in our mail boxes, and I think that's perhaps an accurate way of collecting certain information about people's activities and behaviours and purchase and possessions and status. But I think there's some information that you couldn't collect that way. And I think that you'd want to have some confidence that you were actually collecting useful information.

**Mr. Morgan:** — So if I understand your answer, you don't believe there's been a reliable way. You haven't used a reliable way, and you're going to rely on the census forms.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — No, I think I'm suggesting that the way we usually collect information about what people do, like the census forms, would not provide any useful information in a circumstance like this, and that absence . . . some reliable way of collecting the information, that perhaps resources could be used in a different way.

**Mr. Morgan:** — So your answer is, you don't believe it's possible, so you don't intend to do it.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Well my answer is my answer, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Okay so if I'm understanding you right, you don't intend to do anything by way of tracking, going forward.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — And again, if we were persuaded that there would be a cost-effective method of determining the numbers beyond the estimates that we have that would be more accurate, more meaningful, more substantive than the estimates that have been made, then of course we wouldn't rule out collecting that information.

**Mr. Morgan:** — So your answer is you don't intend to do tracking going forward unless somebody gives you a method of doing it. Is that correct?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — I'm advised that the urban police departments are not seeing a significant number of sex trade workers under the age of 17, 18 — that clearly there would be some, but they're not being seen in significant numbers by the police.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Well you've indicated earlier that you haven't done any tracking in the past, so your information is anecdotal . . . [inaudible] . . . there's no statistical information that you have or intend to get. Is that correct?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Well perhaps I'll give an extended answer to the question. Saskatchewan Justice initiated research in 2002-2003 with the Department of Community Resources to gather baseline data and establish data collection methods in relation to programs for sexually exploited youth. The cost of this work was \$25,000.

The aim of this research was to assist provincial agencies to monitor the impact of programs that try to respond to the needs of sexually exploited youth through the preparation of a preliminary report on outcome measures, indicators, and data collection methods and in so doing to lay the groundwork for an evaluation of the province's strategy to prevent the sexual exploitation of children and youth and to deepen our knowledge of the social characteristics of sexually exploited youth and to gain a fuller understanding of their views about the kinds of services they need to help curtail, end their involvement in the commercial sex trade, and follow a path to a healthier life.

Moyer Associates, a nationally recognized firm with extensive experience in innovative social and criminal justice research, was contracted to undertake this important work and has completed this project. The recommendation of Moyer & Associates, as I understand it, was that an attempt to develop the number that Mr. Morgan is curious about would not be useful.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Do you have that report? Is that something you're prepared to provide?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Sure.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Do you or your officials believe that there are any other methods of identifying the magnitude of this problem other than by numbers of people working?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — And again, I talked about programs that have been funded by both Community Resources and Justice, Egadz for an example. There were others.

They, as well as the police, have — what do you call it? — on-the-ground information about the problem, the nature of the problem, the extent of the problem. And we are in discussion with them and again with the police services. And I've discussed briefly the reports that we are receiving from the police, the response to our vehicle impoundment program, a response to any concern that we may not have eliminated the sex trade involving minors but may have moved it and our

response to that in respect to the safer communities and neighbourhoods program.

**Mr. Morgan:** — So your answer is that there is no other method other than the anecdotal information provided by Egadz and police services.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — My answer is on the record. My extended answer is on the record. I don't think I need Mr. Morgan to keep telling me what my answer is.

**Mr. Morgan:** — I just want to be absolute . . .

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — If you can talk about the programs, I'd appreciate the opportunity . . .

**Mr. Morgan:** — I want to be absolutely sure of what your answers are, Minister, because our concern is whether the programs are doing what they're supposed to and whether we've committed sufficient resources to the programs. So the questions that I'm asking deal specifically with how we determine the success of those programs. And if it's anecdotal, that's an acceptable answer for you to say that. If there is a statistical way of determining either the number of prosecutions, the number of johns, then that's a fair question and I'm looking for those answers.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — And I've answered those questions.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Okay. So what I'm getting at specifically is that there is no statistical tracking that's involved and that you believe that there isn't, that we're not capable of doing any.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Well I've answered the question. If we want to talk about the programs I suggest we talk about the programs.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Well I'm just wanting to know how you are determining the success of those programs. And you've indicated that you're relying on what those people in those programs are telling you.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Well I've answered the question.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Minister, in question period we raised the issue of Statistics Canada's determination of the number of police personnel that are working in this province — and going back to the 1999 commitment — I know that that's somewhat of a sore topic. And I'm just wondering if you can tell us what your department's numbers were for the number of police officers in Saskatchewan in 1999.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — I have discussed police numbers when we were last in estimates and provided since then a letter to the Chair of the committee as to the calculation of police numbers from 1998, going forward to the officers provided in this year's budget: 29 officers, plus the 14 for the gang suppression strategy, plus the 8 for the missing persons task force. So I can revisit that letter. But that's a letter that I provided to the committee in response to this question before, and it specifically deals with each year from 1998 forward, including 1999.

I will respond to the statistics that were provided by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. First the CCJS [Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics] police administration survey provides a snapshot of the number of police officers in the province as of June 15 of each year. It includes only fully sworn, active police officers and constables who are paid from police service's annual budget. So for example it excludes officers on long-term leave for things like education, disability, maternity or paternity, and secondment out.

Second the CCJS police officer figure excludes federal and provincial government departments that deploy personnel to enforce specific statutes, e.g., in areas such as income tax, excise and customs, fisheries and wildlife. And that also excludes enforcement personnel affiliated with the safer communities and neighbourhoods investigation unit of Saskatchewan Justice. These enforcement personnel form part of the policing promised commitment for 2004-05 through 2006-07.

There is . . . [inaudible] . . . factors familiar to any large-scale organization. One rarely finds a perfect fit between the number of funded positions and the number of personnel in the field. The timing of retirements, transfers, new hires, resignations, leaves, and the recruitment and training schedules are examples of factors that come into play here.

Fourth, the most recent CCJS figures are current as of June 15, 2005. As such, they take no account of changes in personnel after this date. In the case of Saskatchewan, this survey thus takes no account of police officer positions that were funded mid-point 2005-2006 — that's 16 — and filled in succeeding months where we funded mid-point 2006-2007. That's 27 positions.

With these caveats in mind, the available police administration survey data shows that from June 15, 2000 — two and a half months into the first fiscal year of policing promised — to June 15, 2005 — the most recent year for which data is available — the total number of officers in Saskatchewan rose from 1,864 to 2,011. This is a net increase of 147 officers.

This refers to the number of independent, municipal, and First Nation police officers and RCMP officers, municipal, provincial, and federal, as well as divisional administration in the province, but excludes RCMP training academy personnel.

Thus to repeat, according to CCJS, there were 147 more police officers in the province in June 2005 than in June 2000.

Were one to add the 43 positions promised mid-year in 2005-2006 and mid-year in 2006-2007, along with the 10 excluded SCAN [safer communities and neighbourhoods] positions, the net increase in the number of positions in the province between June 2000 and the end of 2006-2007 fiscal year will approach 200: 147 plus 28 RCMP positions plus 15 municipal positions plus 10 SCAN positions.

Of course there's no magic in these numbers. They give us a rough measure of our performance against the policing promise. The best information on this is by the detailed year-by-year funding information that we have previously provided. This said, the available CCJS data, coupled with our 2005 through

2007 funding commitment, suggests that the number of police officers in the province will increase by about 200 positions between June 2000 and March 2007.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Minister, this is like buying gasoline. When you go out and buy gas, you don't care about a coupon that says 10 per cent off or they get a free bag of Cheezies. What you care about is how many cents per litre you're actually paying. And that's what I'm trying to get at . . . is the number of police officers in Saskatchewan and what your records show for each of the years from 1999 forward.

Now I appreciate if you want to include ones that are on leave or ones that you've added for SCAN. That's a valid point. But Stats Canada is able to produce us a grid, one line long, that shows '98, '99, up to 2005. And I appreciate we've added a significant number.

Now I'm just wanting to know what your numbers are for the numbers that are there — not what we've added — just for each of those years in that same format that they have, and we can look at the differences there. And I presume that your officials can give you those numbers, that you have used the same format year after year.

And I appreciate that you can and you should include the numbers of people that you've hired for SCAN. But rather than hear about that we added this many here or that many there, that doesn't include the ones that have retired, gone off. I'd like to know what your numbers show for each of those years.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — The number of RCMP . . . And I would refer members to the letter that I sent to the Chair dated February 23, 2006, in response to questions raised at estimates last.

The number of RCMP in the province-based positions starting in the year 1999-2000 was 755. That number grows to 920 for 2006-2007. That's an increase of 165 police officers. Now there's other reasons for that increase besides increased funding directed at police commitment. The additional RCMP out of that 165 coming from the police commitment is 136.

There are 54 additional municipal police officers because of grants to municipalities. I don't think there's ever been a controversy about the municipal police officers. I think the controversy has always been about the RCMP, but we'll cover all the numbers. There is one more funded municipal officer as a result of gang suppression and two more on the missing persons task force, for a total of 57 additional officers over 1999.

As I said, of the 165 new officers for the RCMP, starting at the base of 755 back in 1999 and growing by 165 to 920 in 2006-2007, 136 of those are from funding for the provincial government for the police commitment; 13 additional officers in this budget for gang suppression in addition to the one municipal officer; six for the missing persons task force. The effect of the missing persons task force is to, as I understand it, double the historical crimes unit of the RCMP in Saskatchewan.

And there's also violent crime analysts involved in that as well. Project Hope has six additional RCMP officers in the area of

drug enforcement and education. So 161 additional RCMP officers — 136 out of the commitment — but 161 in total, 10 safer communities and neighbourhoods officers, for an increase of funded positions by the provincial government over 1999 of 228.

**Mr. Morgan:** — What I'm trying to get at . . . That's what you always seem to do, is you answer and say, well we've added this; we've added that. But I don't know what your number is for the number of police officers there. I know that in 1999 Stats Canada said there was 1,930, and I know that their number in 2005 is 2,011. And you've referenced back the 2000 figure and the 2005 figure, trying to put it over a five-year window. But I'm wondering do you know how many there are in the province with the municipal forces? You provide an on-block funding to the municipalities and . . .

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — With the additional funding . . . And I've mentioned the additional 29 police officers, gang suppression officers, the missing persons officers. At the completion of that funding, we believe there will be approximately 2,100 police officers in the province. Two thousand one hundred and fourteen is . . .

**Mr. Morgan:** — In 2006 you're saying a number of how much?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Two thousand one hundred and fourteen.

**Mr. Morgan:** — One hundred and fourteen.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — But I just wanted to be clear on the answer to Mr. Morgan's original question. As I have set out in correspondence to the committee, the number of RCMP positions in Saskatchewan in 1999 was 755. In 2006-2007 it would be 920 for an increase of 165. We don't think there has ever been a controversy about the addition of the municipal officers. I think maybe one municipality with its own municipal police service has reduced the number of police officers, but that's outside of the control of the provincial government.

**Mr. Morgan:** — These numbers are based on June 15 numbers. Using your methodology, you believe that June 15, 2006, it will be 2,114?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — As I've stated in and outside of the Assembly, we expect that police services will not be able train, employ, and deploy all the officers — the 29 additional officers — to the commitment and all the gang suppression and missing persons officers until the fall, probably October of this year.

**Mr. Morgan:** — So if we used the June 15 figure for previous years and an October 30 date for this year, you think it would be . . . 2,114 would be the correct number as at October 30? Is that what you're saying?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — As I said, I think one municipal police service has recently — slightly at least — decreased its police officers. Other municipalities may be increasing their funding for police and increasing the number of officers or deciding that they have other priorities and decreasing police. So we don't have control over that number in total. And municipalities that



contract with the RCMP may want to change their contracts with the RCMP as well. North Battleford would be an example of that. So we're not the only funder. But that figure of 2,100 should be very close.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Okay. So going back to 2005, what was your number for 2005? Was it . . . have you reconciled with the 2,011 that Stats Canada uses, or what was your number for 2005?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — I have a breakdown for this year. And March of this year would have been 2,066 officers, 2,066 funded positions in the province of Saskatchewan . . .

**Mr. Morgan:** — Two thousand sixty-six.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — With the addition of the 48 by this fall would be 2,114. Now I have a breakdown of where they are. I wouldn't have the same breakdown for 2005.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Is that information that you're holding, is that information you can provide to us, that you can give us a copy of?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — I can certainly provide . . . I could provide you the breakdown now.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Well if you can give . . . Can you give us a copy of the letter that you've got in your hand?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — I can provide you the breakdown I have in the letter. It's part of a briefing note. The provincial policing for the RCMP . . .

**Mr. Morgan:** — Rather than just read that portion of it, can you maybe just give us a copy of that portion of the briefing note?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — We can put this in a memo to you, sure. I'll address it to the Chair, but it will be available for the committee.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Madam Chair, I'm told that the next group is waiting, so perhaps we should move on.

**The Chair:** — Thank you very much to the minister and his officials. Look forward to seeing you again.

**General Revenue Fund  
Advanced Education and Employment  
Vote 37**

**Subvote (AE01)**

**The Chair:** — The next item of business before the committee is consideration of estimates for the Department of Advanced Education and Employment, found on page 27 of your budget books.

Welcome to the minister and her officials. We're doing vote 37, Advanced Education and Employment, as I said on page 27 of your budget book. I'll ask the minister to introduce her officials and if you have an opening statement, you please make it now.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Okay. Thank you. Today, I'm joined by Bonnie Durnford, the deputy minister of Advanced Education and Employment; Randy Boldt, the assistant deputy minister of Immigration; Raman Visvanathan, executive director institutions; Rick Pawliw, executive director programs; Nelson Wagner, executive director of facilities; Jan Morgan, executive director of the Can-Sask career and employment services; Brady Salloum, executive director of student financial services; Karen Allen, executive director corporate services; and Trina Fallows, director corporate services; and Kevin Veitenheimer, director university services. And I'll introduce some additional officials when we move to Immigration.

Thank you very much and good afternoon, committee members. As Minister of Advanced Education and Employment, I'm pleased to present the priorities for our department in the coming year.

Saskatchewan Advanced Education and Employment was created to provide leadership and support in the areas of advanced education, training, employment, and immigration. Our primary job is to connect people with jobs and careers. The department responds to the needs of learners, employers, and the provincial labour market with a view towards advancing the social and economic well-being of Saskatchewan's citizens.

The new department reflects government's priority for continued opportunity for our province. And this will be achieved by providing high-quality education and training opportunities for learners so that they can participate fully in a growing economy, enhancing the role of Can-Sask career and employment centres to ensure local training and education opportunities align with employers' needs, and supporting immigrants to settle in our communities and connect to the labour market and the economy.

The province has increased the budget for the new department by \$43 million which represents an 8.3 per cent increase from last year. The training system alone will benefit from a \$15.5 million of additional funding this year, with a total budget of over 172 million. The funding increase represents the largest investment in the training sector this decade.

The province needs, obviously, skilled workers to support our expanding economy. And this need will be particularly acute as postwar baby boomers retire in significant numbers in the coming decade.

In 2003 our government made a commitment to expand the number of training opportunities by 5,400 through CareerStart. This year alone we are creating over 2,700 additional opportunities and improving supports for learners to take advantage of those opportunities. Low-income adult students enrolled in basic education and bridging programs will benefit from \$3.8 million in additional funds for provincial training allowances, and the funding will cover increases of \$60 per month for recipients and anticipated increased enrolments in the adult basic education programs.

In addition to these significant investments, government has introduced some innovative programs that will strengthen the training sector. Last week we announced the youth apprenticeship program as being expanded to all high schools in

our province in the fall, and we expect that 5,000 students will participate in a program that introduces those students to careers in the trades.

For the first time ever, our province is providing funding to the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies to deliver off-reserve adult basic education programs. And this budget also introduced a new tax credit for employed tradespeople to purchase tools and an annual maintenance tax credit for qualifying tradespeople.

In addition to our training sector, universities provide important opportunities for people to pursue their education and career objectives. Government is also supporting universities to attract students by providing \$17.8 million this year to keep undergraduate and many other graduate tuition fees at 2004-05 levels. The commitment will be continued with no increases in the coming year as well.

Our province's universities have been undergoing unprecedented revitalization and growth in recent years, and since 2000 the province has provided over \$366 million to capital projects. Another important investment is government's contributions to our universities' research priorities, and this year alone our department will provide \$9.8 million through the Innovation and Science Fund. As well this year, the government will be providing the College of Medicine at the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] \$3.4 million to support their accreditation plan.

Obviously by putting the Advanced Education and Employment department together, we are encouraging young people to stay in the province, build careers in the province, and build lives in the province. As part of this priority, there are centennial merit scholarships that have been given to high-achieving students to help them pay for tuition at our province's education and training institutions.

Government's contribution to centennial merit scholarships was doubled last year to \$1 million, and this year we've added a further half a million dollars. The funding is matched by the institutions, bringing the total amount of scholarship funding to an expected 3 million. Individual scholarships are worth an average of about \$3,200 dollars, and these scholarships will be provided to over 930 students at not only universities and training institutions but also apprentices.

Government is also increasing the amount of the graduate tax credit. And the credit was created to encourage graduates to stay in our province after their studies. And this year the tax credits certificates in the amount of \$850 — which is up from \$675 last year — and this will be issued to nearly 10,000 graduates. The credit translates to \$7,727 of income that is exempted from an individual's income tax return in the year they graduate. And next year the credit will be increased to \$1,000.

With this budget, the new department is improving the important connections between post-secondary opportunities and jobs. And before I go on to discuss our important immigration initiatives, I'd invite any questions that you might have about our department's work. And when we get to immigration, I'll have an opening statement regarding

immigration in the province.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. Before I proceed into questions, I just want to ask the officials when they speak at the mike, if they do, if they could introduce themselves for the ease of Hansard.

We're at central management and services (AE01), and I'll entertain questions. Mr. Elhard.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Minister, to you and your officials, welcome here this afternoon. I think this hour or 45 minutes of questions and answers and discussion are going to be important to not just the resolution and understanding of budget questions, but also to the whole topic of post-secondary education.

This is an area that I think is generally under-recognized in the province. I think the potential and the benefit of post-secondary education — if it's at the trade level, if it's at the vocational level, if it's at the university or post-graduate level — I think has a tremendous opportunity to contribute in an even greater way to the success of this province as we go forward.

And so, having said that, I want to put on the record that I personally appreciate the fact that the Department of Advanced Education was spun off from the Department of Learning which was, I think, just too large in some ways. And I also felt that — given the size of that department — that it under-recognized the benefit and potential of post-secondary education to the future of the province.

So if I may say so, I think this was a good move on the part of your government and moving immigration into that area is an acceptable and maybe even a wise move, and I would congratulate your government for having made that particular decision.

Having said that, there comes with the division of that department some added costs and some issues that I think we need to address this afternoon. So I guess the first thing that I would like to ask you about is the full-time equivalents. I noticed the number has risen to 452 from 412. That's a total of 40. Would the minister for the record identify where those 40 individuals are in her new department.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — The increase of 40 full-time equivalents reflects additional staff resources associated with the expansion of our immigration branch. As you know, there is a significant expansion of 37 full-time equivalents. As well — we had this conversation with the Public Service Commission — the costs for the minister's office have moved from the Public Service Commission over to the Advanced Education and Employment department, and this increase is offset by two additional FTEs [full-time equivalent] that were transferred to the ITO [Information Technology Office].

**Mr. Elhard:** — So we could say that the advanced education portion of the department has remained virtually unchanged except for the transfer of the two ITO officers and all the increases associated with immigration.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — That's correct.

**Mr. Elhard:** — The move to separate the two departments, Education and Advanced Education, doesn't come without some cost. And I notice the numbers for executive management for instance were up \$336,000. Central services have risen by about \$600,000. And accommodation has gone up by \$1 million if I read this correct.

Could the minister outline for us where those costs specifically are incurred. Can you identify for us those numbers?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Okay. The net cost of \$336,000 is the result of . . . \$40,000 for a negotiated salary increase and the management classification plan, you recall that last September we changed the class plan for out-of-scope executive people; \$308,000 and the five FTEs for the minister's office which was transferred from the Public Service Commission; \$6,000 as a result of administrative resource realignment. And that would be dividing the department. And 18,000 was transferred to centralize information technology expenditures in central services.

In terms of accommodation, the net increase of 1.01 million is a result of 987,000 for the Immigration expansion, 91 K for the increased SPM [Saskatchewan Property Management] cost due to inflation. As well, there is . . . ministers' offices pay to SPM an amount for the executive aircraft, and that's 34,000.

As well, there were some reductions. I don't know if you want to . . . We had targeted reductions of 84,000 K, \$9,000 reduction for our share of IT [information technology] for 2006-07 accommodation increase. And then 9,000 was transferred to the IT expenditures.

**Mr. Elhard:** — The numbers go by so quick, I didn't have time to write them all down, so it's hard to follow up on a lot of the information you provided. What I think I'll do is take a transcript of today's proceedings and go through them. And then if there's questions further as a result of that review, then we can raise them at another time in the future.

Let's go to some of the other areas that you addressed in your opening statement, Madam Minister. If I heard you right, you indicated that the government had committed \$15 million additional monies to training programs. Does all of that \$15 million show up in your particular department and the numbers here, or does some of that \$15 million show up in other departments?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — It's all ours. It's all in the Department of Advanced Education and Employment.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Okay. If that is the case, can you identify for me specifically where that \$15 million comes because, just looking through the post-secondary section and the training program section, I don't see a total of \$15 million additional monies.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — It is in the regional colleges, SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology], and also the provincial training allowance and apprenticeship in training, or the apprenticeship and trades.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Well if I look at, if I look at some of those

individually . . . I mean if I'm looking at the post-secondary allocations for SIAST for operating, I mean there's an increase of about \$4 million there, and accommodation services, a couple of million dollars there, and not quite a couple million dollars for regional colleges. So I don't quite understand how that totals \$15 million.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — And then there's over \$3 million for the provincial training allowance.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Okay.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — And apprenticeship, there is an increase of close to \$1 million. But we can give you the exact numbers. We'll get that for you.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Okay. I would appreciate that because that kind of increase in training programs is substantial. And I think I would recognize again that that's a decision that was well taken. I'm hoping we'll have very positive benefits to the province as a result of the additional monies. I know there's, you know, sometimes a position taken that it's never enough. It's never enough. But \$15 million is a fairly substantial amount, and I think that I want to acknowledge that today.

Can you identify . . . Let's go back, actually to some of the administration costs. One of the smaller amounts of money, but one of the real costs anyway with creating a new department, is the cost of letterhead and new business cards and those kinds of things. Can you identify for us what kind of actual costs are associated with this particular move in those smaller areas?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well I'm told that many of these officials still have their cards from Sask Learning. And when they're out, then we'll do the new letterhead and the cards. I know I do have cards, but I don't think the deputy has cards yet. So we're trying to clear up the old letterhead and then as we need to, we'll replace letterhead. We've tried to be quite frugal about this because . . . I don't think email addresses . . . maybe email addresses have changed. But it's not totally organized yet, to be blunt.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Well let me congratulate your staff on their frugality. You know I appreciate that.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Some people would say they're cheap.

**Mr. Elhard:** — I know you didn't say they were cheap. And I consciously and deliberately used the word frugality because I think that, you know, those are the kinds of little things that add up after a while. And they're also the kinds of things that become a public annoyance if you're not careful in those areas. So thank you to your administrative staff for making that conscious decision to use up the old stock first.

If we can move into the student support programs, Madam Minister, I think that might be a good area to undertake right now.

One of the things that jumped out at me was, in view of the increase to training, the allocations in (AE03) under student support programs. It talks about Saskatchewan Student Aid Fund having a lower number, a couple of million actually, 2.2

million less than previous years. Can the minister explain to us why that decrease is part of this year's budget?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I think what I'll do is I'll let Mr. Salloum answer the question. But it appears as though if you're a . . . We're trying to figure this out because many students are just taking out a student line of credit at the bank because it's fast, and they don't have to qualify under the student loan program.

And this is one of the things we need to really delve into because it appears as though more and more students are taking out this student line of credit at banks, and they're not necessarily going through the student aid or student loan program. But I'll let Mr. Salloum speak to you.

**Mr. Salloum:** — Thanks. What's happened over the last year is about 1,000 fewer students have applied for assistance, and so as a result of the lower application we don't need as much money in order to help those students with their bursaries, etc. And so we have noticed that, and it's not just in Saskatchewan. We've noticed that across the country — with the exception of Ontario — that the numbers of students that are applying for student assistance has actually been going down even though the numbers of students at post-secondary institutions has been going up.

And we think that that may be due to parents are saving more for their children's schooling costs. And there's been a very concerted advertising campaign over the last several years about putting money away for your children. And some of you may have seen some of the ad campaigns in the last several months with a baby's picture, saying, I'm not getting any younger. So those kinds of things, we think, have actually got parents to save. And there's also student lines of credit available at private institutions that I think some students are tapping into.

**Mr. Elhard:** — I'm interested in your comment about student enrolments going up because the experience in Saskatchewan, I think, is not that way. I understand that at least the two universities have seen a levelling off of applications and even somewhat of a drop in the number of people applying. I'm not sure about SIAST numbers. I don't know exactly what they're experiencing. But would that also contribute to this lesser demand for student financial aid through the programs we've got — just the fact that we've got fewer students wanting to go to post-secondary institutions?

**Mr. Salloum:** — Well in student financial assistance, we provide assistance to students regardless of where they're going to school. So you know, a percentage of our students go outside of the province. But generally what we've seen is that the numbers of students at those institutions has been relatively constant, that all of them have moved down to the same extent whether they're in the province or outside of the province.

**Mr. Elhard:** — The other conclusion one might want to jump to is that students are just finding the whole student loan process far too cumbersome. Is that a possibility? Can you say one way or the other what the department is experiencing in terms of that suggestion?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I'd like to answer that. That is one of

the things that we need to sort of dig into because it appears as though it is much easier for a student to get a student line of credit. They can go into a private institution, get their line of credit immediately. They may not use it all, whereas there's a process to go through the student aid program. So one of the things that we will be speaking about in the next little bit is the need to take a look at the whole accessibility and affordability, and obviously that includes student loans.

**Mr. Elhard:** — When we've raised these kinds of questions previously, your predecessors, Madam Minister, have suggested that it's very difficult to open those negotiations or discussions because it's all part of a federal and provincial agreement and to launch into that type of discussion might be a bigger task than almost anybody is prepared to undertake. Are you suggesting that you're more willing to try and initiate that kind of reform and discussion going forward?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Yes, I am saying that. And also it appears as though the federal government wants to have a discussion with the provinces about who does what in terms of post-secondary education. And as you know, we are one of a few provinces that have an integrated Canada-Saskatchewan student loan program. And it appears, from certainly the news reports, the federal government is interested in having some significant discussions with the provinces and territories around post-secondary education.

**Mr. Elhard:** — If it helps give you any information anecdotally, the information or the caseloads that are handled by my office as it relates to student financial loans and obligations, the situation is not very pretty. It's very onerous. It's very cumbersome. It's not very reliable. It's almost impossible to get answers to questions or get problems resolved. The whole situation seems to be a boondoggle. Even though there might be large sums of money involved here, the value of these programs is what they mean to the individual who applies and how readily available their financial assistance is to them when they need it, in a timely fashion.

So I guess, Madam Minister, I would — if you are willing to take advice from me — I would encourage you to be very aggressive about approaching this reformation of the student loan program and make it much more effective and appropriate to the needs of students today. I think the outcome of those kinds of negotiations could only be positive and helpful to our students in this province.

And I don't know if maybe you can answer this question. Is our percentage of students accessing student loans higher than other jurisdictions or less?

**Mr. Salloum:** — It's comparable in Western Canada. It's about 35 per cent of the number of full-time students are accessing student loans. It's certainly higher in Eastern Canada, but between 30 and 35 per cent of students generally are the ones that are applying for student assistance across the country.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Do you have those statistics broken down any further? Can you tell urban versus rural students and how they would compare relatively speaking?

**Mr. Salloum:** — The issue of the urban and rural is a real

difficult one because as soon as the client moves into the city, if they move to a city then we would consider them to be urban. If you're basing it though on where their high school was, that kind of information we could probably get. We don't have it currently though.

**Mr. Elhard:** — I guess the reason I'm asking is, rural students by and large would have higher costs associated with their post-secondary education. But I think anecdotally they also have a tougher time getting assistance from the student loan program because of some factors that are beyond their personal control, i.e., the value of their parents' farming operation and their equipment and assets, generally speaking.

So you know, I think that if anybody would be well served by changes to this student loan program, it might be rural students who do generally experience much more costs associated with their post-secondary education.

**Mr. Salloum:** — Just clarification, parents' assets are not considered.

**Mr. Elhard:** — No longer considered at all?

**Mr. Salloum:** — They haven't been for 15 . . . 20 years. They have not been.

**Mr. Elhard:** — How about parents' gross income?

**Mr. Salloum:** — Parents' income is used minus the income tax that they pay, minus CPP [Canada Pension Plan] and EI [employment insurance], and then there's a formula that kicks in.

**Mr. Elhard:** — The issue of student aid and accessibility and those kinds of considerations made up part of the lobby and concerns raised by the University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina student unions — both undergrad and postgrad student unions. And I know that they have come to see the previous minister. I don't know if they have talked to you, Madam Minister, yet.

But they had two issues really on their agenda. One was the freeze of tuitions which they seemed to have accomplished and we'll talk about that later. But the other thing they wanted and were expecting was a full-scale review of sort of the cost and accessibility issues. And they have indicated to me that they don't feel as yet that they have received a response to that request. Where is the minister on that particular issue?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — It's a very good question. The two university student groups did come to see me after I became the minister.

There was a review of accessibility and affordability undertaken by the department. The review was quite extensive in that a number of people were consulted with. There were some issues that remained, in a sense, outstanding in terms of the Canada-Saskatchewan student loan program and how it's structured, the issues around rural students. Obviously they pay more to come into a city. It's not just tuition; it's rent and food and all of those kinds of things.

There were some issues around certainly regional colleges, where we have joint use facilities in various parts of the province where students could do a first and second year university. And that was about affordability and accessibility for rural students. That's why we have joint use facilities, particularly in the Estevans and the Swift Currents and the North Battlefords and the Melforts and the Melvilles and the Yorktons and the Biggars and the . . . I've missed, I know I've missed some. But the whole idea was that students would be able to do first and second year university or go into technical training outside of the major centres and that . . . For whatever reason, young people still want to come into the big cities in order to do their first and second year, or do their university training or their SIAST training.

So there are a number of issues besides tuition that we need to get at. And there will be some announcements in the next several days that will help us get at that.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Well without trying to usurp your good news or whatever your announcement might be, can we talk about some of the, you know, the consultation process that you went through?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Yes.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Because my understanding from the students, unless that has changed just recently, is that they weren't part of the consultative process. They didn't feel that they had an opportunity. So you indicated that you had consulted, you know, with a number of different individuals on this particular issue. Could you identify the type of consultation and where you went for that input?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Right. Well I think that there may be some disagreement on that. But I will let the deputy minister answer the question because the department underwent the consultations.

**Ms. Durnford:** — Yes. We made, I think, some significant efforts to try and involve students across the board in the consultation. And so I'll just give you a list. The consultation took place from sort of the middle of May, and we completed it the first part of November.

So in terms of the student groups that we met with, we met with the SIAST Wascana Students' Association; the University of Regina Students' Union; the scholarship, bursaries and loans committee which is a standing committee of the department, involves student representation at the table. We met with the University of Saskatchewan Students' Union on a number of occasions, the University of Saskatchewan Graduate Students' Association, SIAST-Kelsey campus students' association, the Woodland campus students' association from SIAST, the provincial youth advisory council which is a group established by the Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation which has numbers of young people that are both in the workforce but some going to school and some in high school too, I believe. And so we worked with them.

We met with the First Nations University of Canada Students' Association at the Saskatoon campus, SIAST adult basic education students, the First Nations FNUC [First Nations

University of Canada] Students' Association at Regina campus and Saskatoon campus, both adult basic education and literacy.

That was in addition to significant consultations with the institutions themselves across the piece, so by the time we'd finished the discussion that had started in May and completed in November, a very wide range of issues had been identified. And I don't think people, through the conversations I sat through . . . I sat through numbers of these, not all of them. But people certainly didn't restrain themselves to particular issues just with regard to the student loan program. They raised a broad range of issues for our consideration.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Well you've identified quite a large and varied group of people who discussed these issues with you. Is there reason to believe that having participated in that discussion but not necessarily having come away from the discussions with any feeling that they'd been heard, would that maybe account for the fact that they didn't feel they were fully involved in the consultative process?

I guess, you know, what I'm hearing or what I've been told by student groups is that they just didn't feel that they were playing an active part in this consultative process. And also they didn't feel that the process undertaken by the department was as large and/or public as they expected it to be. So I guess what I'm suggesting, Madam Minister, is that while it seems that there are a number of players in this process, they don't seem to have been satisfied that their part was as significant as it ought to have been in what they were hoping would be even a larger, more public process.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well I think that the department certainly undertook a review with a number of people. And I think there were several occasions where students were in the room when the discussions were taking place. One of the things that I've come to understand is, sometimes people are being consulted and they are being listened to and they don't necessarily think they are being listened to, and as a result of a broad range of issues that went well beyond just tuition . . . but the whole issue of rural students, low-income students, which parts of the province students were attending post-secondary education, which communities they weren't coming out of, low-income neighbourhoods, and young people not necessarily going on to post-secondary.

Affordability and accessibility is much broader than just tuition. It's about Aboriginal kids and do they go on to post-secondary education? It's about rural kids and where do rural kids stand relative to other parts of the province? You know, you're more likely to go to university if you live in my constituency than if you live at Landis where my family was . . . [inaudible] . . . So the review that's going to be taken and will be announced in a short while will be much broader than tuition.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Madam Minister, without divulging all your secrets, the announcement you're going to be making, is it going to be an announcement about conclusions you've reached and actions you plan to take, or talking about broadening the consultation process into a more public domain?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I would think the latter.

**Mr. Elhard:** — I think the next issue that I'd like to attend to . . . And I don't want to leave the numbers here just yet, but I need a little more time to go over some of the numbers here and some of the information you've provided.

So I think, Madam Minister, I would like to talk to you about the tuition freeze that your government introduced in this most recent budget. I frankly was surprised that your government did that. And I was surprised, I guess, based on what I had heard from the previous minister and what I had heard and read on the record from some of your other members about the likelihood and the wisdom of a tuition freeze. It didn't seem that there was a broad and fully accepted consensus on whether or not a tuition freeze was appropriate.

And I guess I would ask if the minister can identify for us when it was either the government changed its mind, or she changed the minds of her colleagues to make this tuition freeze part of the budget this year.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well obviously our caucus is no different than, I'm sure, every caucus in the country where you will have people who have a particular point of view and other people who have another point of view, and at the end of the day the majority decides what the point of view is going to be. I'm sure you have had that experience yourself in your own caucus. In the case of . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . You have never had that experience? I'm surprised . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I don't know if I believe you, anyway. But you have debates, right? And there's no doubt we've had a debate in our caucus and so we should. I mean, we are a democratic institution.

I think one of the compelling reasons for a further tuition was the reality that if you look around us, Alberta has once again instituted a tuition freeze; Manitoba has a tuition freeze. And so the two provinces that we're between have tuition freezes. As well you know, on average our tuition is about the third highest in the country. And we are trying . . . And you also noted earlier that there seems to be a small drop in attendance at our two universities.

So the discussion that we had was around . . . And by the way the two universities are very interested in getting international students to the two universities because we need to have students not only in undergraduate but also in graduate studies. So we made the announcement that we would continue the tuition freeze because we understand this is the intention of the Alberta government and the Manitoba government. We understand that Alberta will extend their tuition freeze not only this year but next year as well, as it appears as though Manitoba will as well.

And in the meantime, we need to figure out how we get more people into the universities from various parts of the province and various parts of cities. And also I think there's an opportunity here for international students, which is part of my Immigration portfolio. And the two universities have been doing a very good job of attracting international students as grad students but also undergrad students. And we need to do more of that.

**Mr. Elhard:** — In addition to the other reasons you alluded to,

Madam Minister, were you driven to this particular position by the fact primarily that our neighbours on either side of us were doing it? Is that what you would deem a response to a competitive situation, or was the decision larger than that?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I think it's clear that the students are working across the country together. The Manitoba students, the Alberta students, and the Saskatchewan students get together. And I think they did a very good job of convincing their governments that this might be something we would all want to do.

**Mr. Elhard:** — The reason I'm asking that is the history of tuition freezes in this country isn't really a very good indication of the wisdom of taking that step. We saw the impact of tuition freezes in British Columbia. The Ontario universities, many of them felt completely handcuffed by tuition freezes. Quebec is struggling in a mighty way with the consequences of a long-standing tuition freeze there.

Universities are unable to provide the renewal they need. They don't have the money to do the academic renewal. They don't have the money to do the physical plant renewal. They just don't have the money to do so much of what they need to do. And there's great fear of the long-term impact that these consistent tuition freezes will have on their post-secondary institutions in Quebec.

And I think your . . . Well maybe I should ask. Did you do a survey of the results in other jurisdictions of, you know, the negative impact of tuition freezes elsewhere?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Certainly this is an issue that we were well aware of. So it was really important for us that we backfill the loss of tuition, the increases that the two universities would have charged. And in fact I think the two universities were quite pleased with a 7.2 per cent increase or whatever average increase that they received in this budget. So they felt as though they were fully recognized by the operating grant that came from the province for tuition.

I should also tell you that we did have discussions, or I certainly had discussions with the two universities about graduate tuition. And the University of Regina wanted to restructure how they charge tuition, and we agreed to that. They wanted it to be similar to the way the University of Saskatchewan charges tuition on a semester basis. The University of Saskatchewan wanted to go to basically a full recovery for the accounting, their master's of public accounting, and we agreed to that.

So there was some flexibility. Most of the graduate programs, the tuition was frozen or stayed at the 2004-05 levels. But there was some acknowledgment that the universities needed to be able to do some things, and so we were a bit flexible.

**Mr. Elhard:** — The \$17 million that is earmarked for — I guess it's a little more than that — earmarked for tuition freeze, is that amount for this year only? So you will have a similar amount in next year's budget to address that particular issue?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Yes. Last year we backfilled the tuition, and it went into the operating grant. This year we added — the backfill from last year is there — and we added a further

17 million. And next year, we will put, the 17 million will go into the operating grant permanently, and then we'll add additional money to deal with the tuition freeze that's been extended to '07-08.

**Mr. Elhard:** — The question of sustainability is something that usually comes up as part of the discussion on tuition freezes. In fact Minister Thomson indicated that he felt tuition freezes were unsustainable and university presidents elsewhere across the country have said they feel that that kind of policy is unsustainable. I think the best way to characterize tuition freezes is, generally speaking, they're good politics. They're just not good public policy, especially when the sustainability issue is part of that long-term discussion.

So in view of the fact that we have an additional two-year tuition freeze in place now, I guess the logical question to ask is, what is the minister's intention about tuition after the freeze comes off?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I can talk about the government's intention. It's the government's intention to announce shortly a significant review of affordability and accessibility issues. That's not only about tuition. It's not only about student aid. But it's about access and affordability for lower-income students, inter-city students, rural students, northern students. Because in order to position our economy and position ourselves as a province, we need to ensure that our young people and our citizens are being educated and trained, and we want to remove as many barriers as possible to that.

So I think, I certainly understand the point that once you get on this tuition freeze, how do you get off of it. I understand that thinking. But I think what we also need to think about as a province is, how do we position ourselves in what clearly is more of a global economy to have educated and trained citizens? And so it's not just about university. It's about SIAS. It's about regional colleges. It's about do . . . For the first time we are now putting money into the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology. We have not historically put money into First Nations institutions.

We have some work to do in the whole area of literacy. I mean, how do we get to university or SIAS if we don't have basic literacy skills? We have, by putting more money into adult basic education . . . and the hope is that more people will get basic skills, and then they can go on to post-secondary. And how do you make sure that there are no impediments in the way as they make their way into those institutions of learning?

**Mr. Elhard:** — Well I would suggest to the minister that that's an appropriate line to undertake — a line of thought and action to undertake. I don't think that anybody would, at this point, disagree with the wisdom of trying to improve the educational opportunities and standards right across the board for those who go to university and those who just want to improve their basic skills, their basic literacy skills.

The issue of tuition freezes however is symptomatic of a larger problem. I mean, it's a symptom we're treating here by this freeze; it's not the whole illness. And I guess I'm going to look forward to whatever solutions that can be brought forward to address these other issues of access and affordability and so

forth. I'll be looking, you know, quite readily for your response to those issues.

I just hope though that when that response comes, it really addresses the issue so that when we look at tuition in three years time, you know, when you take the lid off something's that under some pressure, that you don't suffer the impact of collateral damage and undo some of the work you're trying to achieve by this review and study.

So I guess I just want to make the point that if in fact, as the previous minister said and as many other people have said, tuition freezes are, you know, a band-aid solution — they're short-term; they're not good public policy; they're really treating the symptoms as opposed to the disease — I want to see what you're going to do to treat the disease, the bigger problem. And I'll reserve judgment until I see that particular outcome.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well I think, I mean, this is sort of getting to another level in terms of the discussion. One of the things that I find a bit troubling is that there are so many young people that are not going into post-secondary institutions, are not going on to advanced or further learning. And when you ask them why, they talk about the affordability; oh it costs so much.

And so I think we need . . . SIAST has a very interesting campaign on right now. There's some good ads, you know — is your mother embarrassed when her friends ask her what you do? — to get young people, for example, to get young people thinking about further learning. And that further learning doesn't mean that you come out with huge student loans and, you know, jobs that don't help you pay for those student loans.

Or I just think that we need to think very carefully about how we encourage young people to go to school because certainly there is a culture I think that we should be concerned about, that further learning doesn't necessarily get you that good-paying job.

**Mr. Elhard:** — I want to go back just briefly in the couple of minutes we've got left to us, about the student aid funding. We found that there are just fewer people applying. But can you give us an indication of how many people might apply? How many do apply for that type of funding on an annual basis?

**Mr. Salloum:** — In any given year between 15 and 16,000 people apply. So in previous years, we've seen about 16,000 people applying. We anticipate about 15,000 this year which is why there's a reduction.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Is there any information available as to what percentage of those people who apply would just be rejected for funding of any kind?

**Mr. Salloum:** — The number of people that . . . Those are the number of people that actually get assistance — between 15 or 16,000. There are, I believe it's about 10 per cent more, 5 to 10 per cent more people apply. And some people, they don't get rejected because they have too much money or their parents are making too much money. Oftentimes they apply on speculation and then choose not to go to school because they've . . . for a number of reasons. They've either moved or they've found a

job or they've decided to wait a year for post-secondary schooling. There's a variety of reasons that they don't take their application form to completion.

**Mr. Elhard:** — I guess you've probably answered the next question I was going to ask. You know of the people who were denied whether parents' financial resources were the number one reason. But you indicated there's a variety of other possibilities.

**Mr. Salloum:** — Out of 100 students that apply for assistance, only about 30 of them have their parents submit their income tax documents. Those students are called dependent students. They're considered to be dependent on their parents' income. And so 65 of those people are independent. They have nothing to do with their parents' income, either lack of income or supply of income.

So there's a variety of reasons going on in all of these. Whether you're a single person . . . many times the students that are single with no dependants, they have circumstances. Single parents have circumstances that may either . . . they apply and then they choose not to go or they choose to go. It really is very difficult to be precise on that.

**Mr. Elhard:** — The number of young people that you said are dependent on parents, I would assume those are usually young people that are right out of high school. Would it be fair to say that the larger number are young people that have maybe been independent and on their own for some time or are coming back to school after a number of years in the workforce — that type of applicant?

**Mr. Salloum:** — Yes, a person that's considered dependent on their parents, that person is usually between 18 and 22. So they haven't been out of the high school setting for more than four years. A person becomes independent if they've worked for two years or been out of the high school system for two years, or if they're married or if they're supporting children.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Madam Chair, it's past time I think for us to move on. I think that there are a number of other topics and issues that I want to get into in future times that we meet as a committee, and I'm looking forward to that. Some of the discussions will be pragmatic, and some will be philosophical again. But nevertheless I look forward to that opportunity and thank you, Madam Minister, to you and your officials for giving us this last hour.

**The Chair:** — Thank you then. We'll move on to discussion of immigration which is found on page 29 of your budget book, (AE06).

Before we move on, I just want to reverse what I just said. We're going to continue on under central management and services (AE01) and have a general discussion on immigration. So the minister can introduce her new officials and give the opening statement that she had prepared.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Thank you very much. Joining me this evening is Bonnie Durnford, the deputy minister of Advanced Education and Employment, as well as Randy Boldt the assistant deputy minister of immigration but under Advanced



Education and Employment.

As well, Eric Johansen is here; he's the director of the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program, and Yetunde Oke who is the manager of policy and planning, and Giovanna Pirro who is the manager for the settlement and community partnerships.

The budget makes an investment of \$6.3 million, up from \$1.7 million in the 2005-06 budget. The increase in funding is intended for a comprehensive immigration strategy that we intend to attract 5,000 new immigrants to our province by 2008. As well, this money is to assist newcomers settle in our communities and in our labour force.

As Minister Responsible for Immigration, I want to summarize the achievements and current priorities of the immigration branch. Now when I talk about achievements for '05-06, this was when we were under the Government Relations department, and now we're under Advanced Education and Employment.

Over the last year, we've accomplished the following. In '05-06, we nominated 454 immigrants under the immigrant nominee program, and that represents a significant growth from 25 people nominated in the first year of the immigration branch. Including family members, this brings about 1,350 people to the province. And right now, including nominees and their family members, about 1,300 people are in the process of becoming landed residents in our province.

So what you need to know is when we nominate someone, that does not mean that they're here. They have to land. We nominate them, and then they make arrangements to land. And when we nominate a person, they will have other people that will come with them.

In January '05, the skilled worker category was substantially revised and expanded, and the occupations directly covered under the program have increased from about 2 per cent of the population, or about 10,000 jobs, to 45 per cent of the labour force, or about 200,000 jobs. As part of the revised skilled worker category, the province has been working with communities throughout the province to develop community support plans. And these plans encourage employers and local agencies to work together in addressing the settlement needs of the nominees and their families in order to create welcoming communities.

In January 2005 we created a new family farm employee subcategory; for instance, where a farm owner-operator nominee wishes to bring an adult family member or an employee to Saskatchewan to help operate their farm. And in October 2005 the health professions category was opened to any skilled occupation in the health sector. And previously only physicians and nurses were the only health occupations eligible under the SINP [Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program].

In December '05 the Saskatchewan Trucking Association pilot project was expanded beyond the initial three companies participating to include other trucking firms. And also in December '05, we introduced a new family members category for Saskatchewan permanent residents or Canadian citizens who

would like to be reunited with family members. Supporting family members have to provide settlement assistance to the applicant and their family which could also include financial support.

As well in '05-06, we implemented pilot projects under the enhanced language training and immigrant internship project. And the pilot projects assist about 80 to 100 immigrants each year in learning about the Saskatchewan labour market, building their language skills for the workplace, gaining important Canadian work experience, and building their occupational networks through the assistance of volunteer mentors.

For 2006-07 our priorities for the upcoming fiscal year will be to continue to expand the SINP as a tool to support the province's economic and labour market objectives and to implement budget initiatives that will assist in effectively settling immigrants and refugees. The SINP application requirements are being simplified while still ensuring that Saskatchewan's security and safety is protected. The SINP business category is being revised, and it will be made more flexible to accommodate a broader range of sectors and types of businesses.

As well we are working with Citizenship and Immigration Canada and our post-secondary institutions to implement the off-campus work permit program which Monte Solberg announced last week. And this allows foreign students to gain Saskatchewan work experience. And this budget also provides funding for implementing enhancements and new programs to facilitate the settlement and integration of immigrants to our province. This includes \$1.5 million for language training, immigrant internships, career mentoring, and basic employment and literacy programs for immigrants to improve their opportunities for integration into the labour market.

As well we have \$200,000 in new funding for distance service delivery which will expand access to immigrant programs to smaller communities in rural areas across our province.

We have \$750,000 for foreign credential recognition program. We're submitting a multi-year proposal to the FCR [foreign credential recognition] program of Human Resources and Social Development Canada to build capacity within the province to recognize immigrants' knowledge and skills.

As well we have half a million dollars for community capacity building, and this allows us to work with settlement agencies and other immigrant-serving agencies in building organizational capacity to address the needs of an increased number of immigrants. This funding will also allow us to work more effectively with communities and employers to facilitate the resettlement and retention of immigrants. And we're establishing a new community partnerships program at the branch that will work with communities and employers to support their efforts in building welcoming communities and workplaces.

To make a long story short, this is the most significant increase of any budget in our ... [inaudible] ... This is a dramatic increase in our settlement capacity and also in our capacity as a branch.

It makes sense to have immigration with Advanced Education and Employment because we are the people that do prior learning assessment, foreign credential recognition, and we are working with employers who have significant shortages. They want our training institutions to align with those shortages obviously and train people. So all of this is about a comprehensive immigration strategy that's going to attract more immigrants to our province. We're going to help them settle in our province. We're going to ensure that they become active members of our labour force and that they stay here. And that's key — that they stay.

So our branch is significantly expanding, and we've got some more work to do. But we have people that are all over this province working with employers to bring people to the province. So with that, I'd be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Weekes.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Madam Minister, and welcome to your staff and your department officials. There's a number of areas we could go into, but I would like to start out by asking you and discussing issues that may not come under your direct control provincially, but with the federal government.

There's a number of problems and inequities that people have brought forward to the official opposition concerning, well, roadblocks — I guess you would say — in a number of areas concerning family members getting here from countries after the immigrant is here working. There's issues around spouses getting work visas once they're here, before they're landed immigrants, those types of issues. And I wonder if you've addressed or spoken to the new Conservative government about those types of issues and to make it just a little bit more family friendly in those particular areas.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — The answer is yes.

**Mr. Weekes:** — And what were those discussions?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well we have certainly spoken to federal officials and also the federal government about the need to ensure that when spouses come that they have access to work permits, like because that's key in terms of keeping people happy. There was some difficulty under the trucker program where the person came under a work permit, but the spouse wasn't able to work until it got through the process. And there have been discussions with the federal government about that. I don't think we're quite there yet in terms of an acknowledgement for the need for work permits as they come. And I also think it depends . . . Well we're working our way through that.

We have waited for some time to get the off-campus program going, where international students can work off-campus. We thought this was going to happen before Christmas; it didn't. It was just announced last week. That will be very . . . That's very important, international students having access to work off of the universities or off the campus and getting some Canadian work experience. So yes, discussions are ongoing.

**Mr. Weekes:** — You have said that nothing has been resolved

about obtaining these work permits for spouses at this point?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Correct.

**Mr. Weekes:** — I'd like to allow my colleague from Melfort in. He has a particular situation with a constituent and an industry in his area, and I'll let him proceed with that.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Gantefoer.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Thank you, Madam Chairman, the minister. I'd like to point to the fact in my corner of the world there's been a fair bit of experience in Tisdale and St. Brieux and Englefeld with the immigrant program, particularly with individuals coming from the Ukraine. And Mr. Walter Garchinski, formerly who was with Northern Steel and who has been working I think with your department fairly closely on a broader basis now, was very instrumental in building some of the bridges that have been quite successful.

And in terms of the workers that are over here, in my discussions with Walter, is they seem to be very satisfied and very happy and they're very productive, very conscientious, and just model citizens, if you like. And the businesses and the communities and the workers are all very pleased, with one notable problem and that is there seems to be an inordinate long delay in getting their families over here.

And, you know, the Schulte firm, I think, wrote to your office a letter in late April articulating those concerns. They have four workers and are waiting for a fifth one. They arrived in December and January. And I was actually at an event in Englefield and met these individuals.

And they were, you know, just exuberant about their opportunities — this was at the year-end — and are starting to get increasingly frustrated and lonely, and three of them have bought homes and vehicles and investments in the community. They want to stay. They're fitting in very well. The community is being very supportive. And in many of these communities, there is enough of a Ukrainian cultural base that they're finding it a very easy transition. And they are really concerned about the delay with their families.

And I wonder if the minister could comment on, has any progress been made? Because I understand the problems of federal government and perhaps the embassy in Kiev and whatever, but is there something being done and is there some signs of hope for these individuals?

**Mr. Boldt:** — The federal government is fully aware of this as an issue and has taken it on board. I can't say that there's going to be an instant resolve from the federal government. In my experience these things take an extended period of time.

But we are looking at what we can do as a province. We are looking at alternatives from a provincial point of view of developing programs that would alleviate that problem, working so that both the husband and the wife, the spouses, and even adult children, would be able to get work permits when they land all together. And we're looking at options to develop that, and that's clearly a priority.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Thank you. The delays that seem to be articulated are anywhere as a norm — if that's the case — range from 7 to 16 months. And I think, you know, clearly for families to be apart that long, that's clearly unacceptable. So is it a requirement for these workers that come over and are identified in the initial permits that they then make application for their family to join them, and are you saying that the possibility would be that this would be a joint application and everybody could come at once?

**Mr. Boldt:** — You're right in both cases. Currently under the current agreement between Saskatchewan and the federal government, when they're nominated, the entire family is nominated and come on a permanent residency basis once the federal government has fully processed the entire application. But on an interim basis, only the principal applicant can come on a work permit. And this is where the problem arises, and we recognize this is a problem.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — In the letter to the minister from Schulte Industries, they say and I quote:

However, I don't believe the majority of potential immigrant workers are aware that they could be separated from their families for such an extended period. I know all four of our immigrants weren't.

Is the program set up to sort of explain to these workers that are coming that the delay of separation on the interim basis could be as long as 7 to 16 months, and would that affect their desire to proceed if they realize that the separation could be that long?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — This morning, Mr. Garchinski was in to see me because he's on his way to Ukraine again with a number of other employers. And he raised this issue with me again because we know that this is a problem. That's why Mr. Boldt has said that we're looking, we're looking at . . . is there a way that we could do this — the immigrant nominee program — with not only in this case the husband, but the wife and the children or the adult children at the same time?

We have some problems at some of the posts, obviously. And I don't . . . We need to be very careful here in terms of making sure we don't compound the problem. So I'm not being critical, but we've got some work to do in terms of processing people because I understand that there's one person that is so desperately lonely that he may go home. So this is a problem, and we know that.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Thank you very much. I wish you well on your deliberations, and I also encourage you to try to put professional and courteous pressure on our federal colleagues to say that this is indeed an issue that is a real impediment to the success of this program going forward. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Further questions? Mr. Weekes.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you. Just to follow up a bit on that. What do you envision when you say you would try to change the nominee program provincially to adapt to allow spouses and adult children in? All this I understand would have to be negotiated with the federal government. Or are you saying within the agreement that exists now, are you able to make

some changes to facilitate spouses and adult children coming sooner and just add on that . . . They, I assume, would need certain skills that would apply to the nominee program. So if they don't have those skills, how is this all going to be sorted out?

**Mr. Boldt:** — The intention would be to renegotiate the agreement with the federal government to allow for us to obtain a work permit for the entire family once they were nominated.

**Mr. Weekes:** — I see. Just to move on to another topic. I had a concern raised by a trucking firm. And if you could just explain or elaborate on the pilot project. This trucking firm has said that there's a quota of immigrants that he can apply for and his concern that his quota has been cut back. Could you elaborate on the process that truckers are allowed in on the nominee program?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — In this case, this is not our program; this is Service Canada. And this is the numbers of truckers that they are allowed to have under their arrangements with Service Canada. So they come on a work permit and then, depending on how things work, the province will nominate them.

This is why it's a bit . . . I know it's a bit confusing for people because we have the immigrant nominee program, and once we nominate them, they can come under a work permit as I understand it. And then the federal government checks for criminality, security, health. And that might take some time.

So in order to expedite this, we make arrangements or the employers make arrangements with Service Canada to get people here quickly under a work permit. And this is the difficulty, their families can't come until they get through the process with the federal government. And that's what the member for Melfort was speaking about. But in the case . . . the trucking thing, it is Service Canada, the trucking project.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Well thank you for that. Is that something that can be negotiated, is negotiated between the province and the federal government as well, those quotas?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — No, the federal government makes that determination.

**Mr. Weekes:** — But I would assume it's based on need in the industry and each province, so there's no input from the province into those decisions.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — As I understand it, the federal government will determine how many. They look at the labour market, and they make the determination about how many we can get. And that's how the system works. And this is on a company-by-company basis.

**Mr. Weekes:** — My next topic is concerning waiting times for applications to be processed. Just looking back from the written questions reply and answer that you have supplied us, back in 1999-2000, skilled workers were a 40-day average working days; 2000-2001, 71; increased to up to 134, 2001-2002; then 2002-2003, 72 days; 2003-2004, 80 days; and 2004-2005, 79; and took another jump in this past year up to 89 days.

And that's just one of the categories that's listed here. Why a discrepancy in the time it takes to get an application processed? And even this year it's increased again. What is your department doing to streamline that process?

**Mr. Boldt:** — We're doing a great deal to streamline the process. But before I go on to answer what we're doing about streamlining . . . Also we're a victim of success. And as the province becomes more popular as a destination and as we're more successful in foreign recruitment and as our companies are more successful in foreign recruitment, the good news is that our applications are going up. And I think they're going up very, very fast.

We're making significant efforts to streamline the process through — as the minister has announced — substantial increase in the number of staff within the nominee program to process applications. We've introduced a database which will allow us to dramatically increase . . . [inaudible] . . . We just introduced that last month. And we've reduced the paperwork involved dramatically. Whereas before people would have to send substantially more documents and more original documents, and we've substantially reduced the burden on individuals, and that was as at April 1. But the legacy of our success is that we have a larger level of inventory.

We're in the process of dramatically recruiting. We've just made offers this week for six new immigration officers for the province, and they will be starting, and that'll be a doubling of immigration officers in one month. They need to be trained. They need to be brought up to speed. But we expect over the next few months to be able to say that we're effectively . . . With the measures we're taking, I believe we'll be able to quadruple the number of applications we can process in a month. But having said that, I also believe that the popularity of the programs that we're introducing will probably be at least equal to quadrupling the number of applications. So that's the challenge we face and we're looking constantly now for ways of improving our processing.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you. In that one particular skilled worker area — I stated those numbers — has your department set targets for processing, targets and goals for processing time? You've just mentioned a month, but some of these other categories, like the business category's up to 186 days. Have you set targets to have these applications processed in the future?

**Mr. Boldt:** — The business category is being dramatically changed, and it was I guess going to cabinet next week, and we'll be looking hopefully for an approval of that. And that will substantially ease the application process.

One of the problems that we face in terms of these numbers and the statistics that you see in front of you is they're somewhat of a misnomer. Up until the beginning of this fiscal year we counted every person who sent us an incomplete or complete application as an application received. Now this could be the cover page of an application. We would count that as an application received, and it wasn't including completed applications. And as at now, we're only . . . we've begun to count only those applications which are complete and that will have a significant effect on that.

This was particularly acute in the business program which had a substantial and onerous application process attached to it. With the streamlining of our process, with significantly more involvement with the applicant at the application stage during their exploratory visit, we hope to reduce that problem of incomplete applications.

Within the business category, the main reason why you see that length of time is because the majority of the applications, because of the arduous process, relates to them being incomplete. The issue though is the small numbers of business applications. It's not the length of time. It's the numbers and the numbers are very, very small. And we hope through the streamlining of our process and the opening up of our program that we're going to be seeing huge increases in those volumes. And with our new process I would expect, based on my experience, that two to three months is the length of time it should take to process a business application.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you. Could you explain the business . . . It's the business nominee program, is that what you'd call it? Could you explain who is eligible for this program and what criteria is involved for applicants?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well it has not yet gone to cabinet. So I can explain the old program, but I think what you're really interested in is the new program. And we'll have something to say about that in a couple of weeks.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Well I guess that's fair enough. I was going to ask some more questions about that, but you couldn't help out on levels of financial resources and those types of things that nominees would have to come in with. Okay, that's fair enough.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — No, it's going to be changed. And I think what we should do is just wait.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Yes, okay. Well that's fair enough. Now in your budget document you speak of the new family members category. Could you explain that, what exactly that means as far as . . . We've just spoken about families that are having troubles getting to Canada. But I take it this is something to do with the families that are still back in their home countries.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — What this is, is under the family category, if you live in the province of Saskatchewan and you are a permanent resident or a Canadian citizen and you've lived here for one year, and if you have family back in your homeland — your country of origin — you can, under the immigrant nominee program, nominate a brother, sister, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, mother, father, cousin under the family category.

And as result of that there are literally hundreds of people, literally hundreds of people that have nominated or are in the process of nominating their family to come here. This is a roaring success and in fact it has contributed to our backlog.

And they are coming with skills. They are coming with incredible skills. And many of the families are linking up their family member with businesses. So in a sense, it has helped business sort of not have to go through all of the expense of going to certain countries and trying to get people. So families

and immigrant communities are linking up with various businesses to have their relative have a job when they get here.

**Mr. Weekes:** — So this category would be for more of an extended family's members and they would have to have skills that would fall under the existing nominee program?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — No, no. They don't necessarily have to have skills, but they are coming with skills.

**Mr. Weekes:** — So how is that different from our discussion about the immediate family, the spouses and adult children? It seems to be . . . There seems to be a difference there. Why can't the two . . .

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — No. That . . . Okay. I think you're missing the point. Okay. The people that you're talking about are the people that have come under the immigrant nominee program, the skilled worker category. And they're working at Schulte's or Bourgault or Northern Steel and they're trying to get their wives and kids here. It's mostly husbands that are trying to get their wives and kids here.

This program is the family class under the immigrant nominee program where people who are already here, they've been here maybe 20 years. They may have been here 10 years. They have relatives back home. And under the program they can nominate, they can have the province nominate their brother, their sister, their aunt, their uncle, their cousin, their niece, their nephew. And the whole idea is to create communities of people, families.

You're more likely to have people stay here if you have relatives here. And immigrants and newcomers are no different than the rest of us. We like our brothers and sisters around, our nieces, our nephews, our cousins. And so this is about creating communities of people. And it's a roaring success because people are just coming through the doors wanting to get their relatives here.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Okay. I think I understand. This category would be to bring in relatives under the nominee program, but the citizens here would have come on their own not to the nominee program initially. They would be just immigrants that have been here for a number of years.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Or they may be, in years to come, they'll be people who came under the immigrant nominee program. They're settled here. They have work. They have jobs. They can show that they can look after them from a financial point of view, or the relatives that are coming have money.

So down the road, I expect that once our nominee program is successful, people will become permanent residents or citizens. They'll be nominating family. And in fact that's what's happening at Northern Steel. They're now trying to figure out — according to Walter who was speaking to me this morning — they're trying to figure out how to bring their cousins, their sisters, their brothers here.

**Mr. Weekes:** — The long-haul truck driver project, is that what you referred to as a truck driver pilot project? And could you explain that pilot project?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I think I'm going to ask Eric to explain the pilot project. He's been at this since the beginning.

**Mr. Johansen:** — The pilot project was initiated three years ago by agreement with the Saskatchewan Trucking Association and it was initially limited to three companies in Saskatchewan, all of whom were selected by the Trucking Association itself. And the thought was let's . . . this is a new area for both the province and for the Trucking Association and we should test it on a limited basis with a limited number of companies to see how it works.

The way the project worked at the outset was, as the minister had mentioned earlier, companies need to get approval from Service Canada. And that's I think what the reference was that you had an earlier question on, to a quota. You have to get approval from Service Canada to bring in workers. So they need to make an application under the foreign temporary worker program to Service Canada who analyzes their wages and benefits, looks at their domestic recruitment efforts, looks at their internal training programs, etc. and then establishes on a company-by-company basis, a requirement or a number of foreign workers that they'll approve for that particular company.

Following that, the individual can apply to come to Canada with a temporary work permit. Our program then kicks in after a six-month period. When they've been here for six months working successfully for the company and are given a permanent job offer, then they can apply to the nominee program for permanent landed status.

As of December the decision had been made to move beyond the initial pilot project phase and to open the program up to other trucking companies in Saskatchewan, so the program is now available to any company that's doing long-haul trucking in Saskatchewan.

They need to, as with the initial phase of the pilot project, they need to make an application to Service Canada for a labour market opinion and we also ask them to make an application to us that will describe to us — us being the SINP program — their recruitment plans: where they intend to recruit, how they intend to recruit, are they going to use consultants, are they going to go over and recruit themselves, or what is their plan.

And also a settlement plan. How are they going to work with their community to ensure that the trucker is well integrated into the workplace and the family is well integrated into the community. So those are the two aspects that companies and applicants need to go through to participate in the program.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you. In the past there's been limits to the nominee program, and I still want to speak generally about the trucking aspect. You just said that there has to be an application to Service Canada. They'd have to get a labour market opinion. So is there a limit on how many truckers we can attract to Saskatchewan? If not a formal limit, but it would be a limit based on what their opinion is of the need in the province.

**Mr. Johansen:** — It would be established company by company. So each employer has to make an application and

based on the information they provide to Service Canada, Service Canada will make a determination at that time. They can reapply at a later date and would have to show additional information as to whether they still have an unmet labour need in the province at that time. So Service Canada is not establishing a province-wide quota. They're looking at . . . They make their decision based on their evaluation of each separate company.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — If I could just say something. Trucking is considered a low-skill or semi-skilled occupation. So it's not a skilled occupation and that is why it requires the employers to receive approval from Service Canada. And the immigrant nominee program is about skilled workers and trucking at this stage is seen as a semi-skilled occupation.

**Mr. Weekes:** — So this category's obviously been negotiated with the federal government then to set up this pilot project because it's not a so-called skilled position, it's a semi-skilled position.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Yes. Yes.

**Mr. Weekes:** — In discussions or procedures or however it's arrived at, every year there's not only young people but older people are getting their A-1 licence I believe. Is that a factor in what Service Canada, how they determine how many applications that will be approved then to Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Yes. Their policy requires the employer to show that they've tried to hire a Canadian, that they have . . . and also that they're paying wages that are the industry norm. And that's their policy.

**Mr. Weekes:** — What I'm getting at is, given what's happening with Saskatchewan workforce in general is the attraction to go mainly to Alberta but other places because of higher wages and better job opportunities. I'm just wondering how that's affecting Service Canada's decision on allowing higher quotas for trucking firms in Saskatchewan. And really how has your department sought to address those types of concerns with Service Canada and the federal government?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I just want to challenge you a little bit in terms of your previous comment. I acknowledge your comment about higher wages in Alberta. I don't acknowledge your comment on better opportunities. There are literally thousands and thousands and thousands of jobs here. And that's why we are just inundated by employers looking for immigrants to come to our province to provide skilled workers.

And we somehow have to get the message out to our own citizens and our young people that there are jobs here and lots of them, thousands of them, tens of thousands of jobs. The trucking industry will tell you that they would require over 1,000 truckers. We met with them a couple of weeks ago. They need 1,000 truckers. Now these are quote, "semi-or low-skilled jobs."

Service Canada wants to ensure that they have tried to hire Canadians, tried to hire our First Nations people, tried to hire anybody. And they have to show that they've undergone some sort of process before they would be eligible to bring people in

under a work permit.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Yes fair enough. You agree that there is higher wages in Alberta, but that may be the attraction. Everything is not rosy in Alberta, but that certainly is the attraction. That certainly is a concern from every business in Saskatchewan that needs truckers or drivers — from agriculture right through — that there is that draw to Alberta or other places as well. But that was my reference to that point.

Just on a different topic. I believe you said there is 454 nominees so far this year. Could you clarify that?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Last year, 2005-06, we nominated 454 individuals under the nominee program. Okay, so that was the last year. It's our intention this year to nominate 800, but we think we'll do better than that.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Okay. Thank you for that. So when you're talking about a total of 5,000, you're talking about a total of 5,000 nominees? That's not including their families?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I'm talking about 5,000 including their families.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Including their families. So by 2008, how many nominees are you expecting?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Between 1,500 and 2,000.

**Mr. Weekes:** — 1,500 and 2,000. So the 5,000 is the total of people coming that would include the families.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Yes.

**Mr. Weekes:** — So could you give me the breakdown of your target for this year and next year and 2008 of nominees?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — This year is 800, that's '06-07; '07-08 I believe is 1,100; and '08-09 is 1,500 to 2,000.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you. Certainly was left . . . I think we were left with the impression that that was the total, 5,000 was nominees.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — No, you shouldn't have been left with that impression. You shouldn't have been left with that. I've been very clear that the 5,000 includes the nominee plus their family members.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Okay, thank you. Discussion around the community support plans, the settlement needs, that's always been a big issue with community groups. And I've attended a number of meetings and that was the main topic, that . . . the drain on the community groups. The first thing, the community groups want to do this work or look forward to it. They're dealing with people from their native culture, language, country, and certainly want to help in every way. But there's just . . . It's all volunteer work and there's a considerable need for some support. So you have said that you've increased . . . I'm not sure if you've increased funding or help for these people. Could you just elaborate on helping in those areas.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I think what I'll do is I'll ask Giovanna to sort of address your question. She is our director of program for settlement, and she'll be able to give you the detail.

**Ms. Pirro:** — Good evening. Part of the budget includes funding for increasing community capacity. And some of the work that we are starting to do is work with the communities to identify how can we better support what they are trying to do locally. We have just established, basically last week, a community partnerships unit.

What we're going to have is a staff from the branch that is going to be available to a specific community across the province to deal with them, help them identify, first of all, what are their resources that they have. It might not necessarily be using . . . [inaudible] . . . volunteers. It might be paid staff in different agencies that can also work with some of the issues and then identify if there is a need for some kind of additional supports. And we will then try to assist as much as we can.

To give you an example, we were in Tisdale probably about two weeks ago. We were talking with the chamber of commerce, the local economic development authority, the employer, Northern Steel, and there were other people at the table. And one of the issues that came up was employment for the spouses.

In this case, the chamber of commerce already is an umbrella organization for a number of employees in the area. So it will be very easy or it will be feasible for them to coordinate, identify opportunities for the spouses amongst their members. In this case they don't need a particular person to do that. There is somebody that can take on that role. And that's the kind of analysis that we want to help the communities do. At times, yes, there will be need for supports. At times the supports are already there. It's a matter of finding them, identifying them. I hope that answers your question.

**Mr. Weekes:** — So is there any financial assistance given?

**Ms. Pirro:** — There might be at times.

**Mr. Weekes:** — To community organizations, is there any particular criteria that would include certain groups?

**Ms. Pirro:** — Setting criterias. When you have a brand new program and you want to set the criterias, the risk that you take is that you are going to set criteria that might not fit the needs. So what we are trying to do at this time is trying to find out what are exactly those needs before we commit to a very restrictive criteria.

Once again I want to emphasize what we are trying to do is to work with specific communities on a local basis to identify what will work for them. What might work for Tisdale might not work at all in Englefeld. It might be a completely different solution. So if we have very narrow criteria, it might work fine for Tisdale; it may miss the target in Englefeld. So again has to be very local criterias, very local needs being addressed, very local solutions, and also deploying the resources as best as we can to address those local needs.

**Mr. Weekes:** — And have you consulted with these local

groups, these community groups?

**Ms. Pirro:** — That's precisely what the community partnership units will do and is doing. They will go to a community. It will be early on at times when for example an employer is identifying that they're going to bring a large number of immigrants through the nominee program. We will be working very closely with our officers in the nominee program side of the branch to work with the employer early on to identify who else in the community needs to get involved. It is a process that is ongoing. There are people that come to the table. Then you need to identify more people that might need to be at the table and so forth depending on what are the needs that need to be addressed.

And the needs at the beginning might be simple things as making sure somebody's going to be picking the nominee at the airport. As you move on the needs change a little bit. Later on it might be the spouse's employment. It might be the support for the kids at school. So you will need to be bringing the stakeholders to your table on an ongoing basis. And that's the process we are trying to engage into.

**Mr. Weekes:** — And I assume part of that is language skills training. I mean they would help to identify and help them find training places.

**Ms. Pirro:** — Some of the . . . [inaudible] . . . initiatives speak directly to language training. What I was referring to is the community capacity building side. We have also initiatives around co-shared language training, language training for employment purposes. To give you an example, we are, just this Monday, we set up a language training project in Kinistino with Farm World Equipment. They have also brought, in this case it will be, heavy-duty mechanics through our nominee program.

What this particular project is going to do is take a look at a person that is a mechanic, is a farmer, understands the procedures, understands the machinery and have this person help the nominees go through the process of learning how to do heavy-duty mechanics in the particular workplace called Farm World Equipment.

This mechanic obviously is not an ESL [English as a second language] teacher, but the advantage of this model is that you have somebody from your local community. So you are building local community capacity. What we are trying to do is take this person, this farmer/mechanic, and give him a little bit of extra training and support, help him become familiar with techniques and strategies for teaching language training, and have him have access to staff at our end or at a local regional college.

It might work in different ways to provide the support in terms of the actual language training. So we are trying to experiment with new models because we do not have ESL teachers all over the province either. And we don't have ESL teachers that happen by coincidence to be mechanics or welders or what have you. So there is a lot of this building capacity that needs to happen here.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you. Just to change the subject again, move on to another topic that I get a lot of calls from. Minister,

how do private immigration consultants fit in with your department's plan to attract immigration to Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well employers are using private immigration consultants to assist them in finding the people that they are looking for in terms of skilled workers. So there are private consultants that are assisting employers each day in our province.

**Mr. Weekes:** — I understand that in Manitoba their program is done mostly in-house and did not actively involve private immigration consultants. Is that the direction that Saskatchewan is wanting to go?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Randy's the expert on the Manitoba program. I'm not sure that you're correct, but maybe you are.

**Mr. Boldt:** — In Manitoba . . . I mean I just moved from there, and so I'm familiar with that. We worked with private consultants, but there was no contract with any consultants. The federal government works with consultants, but there's no contract with consultants.

The rule that we've adopted in Saskatchewan, which I think is becoming the universal rule right across the country, is that we'll only work with consultants who are members of CSIC, Canadian Society of Immigration Consultants. Working with them doesn't mean paying for them. That I think has to be clearly articulated. Working with them means meeting them. It means meeting their clients. It means meeting them in overseas trips. But it doesn't mean entering into any contract relations with them. That was never done in Manitoba, and I can't envisage that being done here.

One province — or more than one province — has entered into contracts specifically with consultants. But I think that's a very narrow way of doing it. You're limiting to what one consultant can provide you. There's thousands of consultants in the world. So to me it makes sense just to work with people who are advisers to it. Many employers, many business immigrants, many immigrants of all types would hire a consultant. I would think that the majority of the people in this room, if they were emigrating to another country, would look to use an expert to help them with that. And that's no different than what people are doing when they move to Canada and to Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you. I guess the point is, is Manitoba doing their own . . . Basically a public consultant in competition with the private consultants, is that what has been taking place in Manitoba?

**Mr. Boldt:** — Well having done the vast majority of recruitment in Manitoba, I can tell you that we worked with consultants. We would travel with consultants and lawyers. We wouldn't specify whether they were foreign or local consultants. But it's worth pointing out that the number of consultants, I mean, the consultants in Manitoba are larger than they are here in Saskatchewan. But that represents a tiny fraction of consultants, and so we would work with people all around the world.

I don't know how that would be excluding anybody from Saskatchewan. In Manitoba if we did a marketing trip to Korea

or to Europe, we would take people with us if they chose to come. We would work with local people in those places, or we would work with people from Manitoba if they chose to come.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I think what I just want to say is that we're not anti-consultant. Consultants are very important, and we have some good consultants in the province, immigration consultants. And we have some immigration consultants that are living in Quebec for instance but are very connected to this province and have contacts from all over the world.

So just to put it on the public record, we are not anti immigration consultant. We do want to make sure that the person who's doing the work is recognized by the profession because it's now moved to a profession because there have been some people that weren't above board. And so under the federal program, there is now a national organization which is important for immigrants, that you know that your immigration consultant meets the standards of the profession. And those are the people we want to work with.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Just slightly off that topic, but what are your department's plans as far as sending officials . . . Or you mentioned taking trips and inviting business groups to go with you. What are your plans in the next year concerning that to attract immigration to the province?

**Mr. Boldt:** — We're formulating those plans now. But we will be working with communities, and we will be working with overseas governments. Recently in March we were working with the German government. We're working with a non-profit organization extensively out of the Ukraine. And we're looking at working with the Philippine government to recruit from the Philippines.

I think probably most people would agree with this. In many ways it would be preferable to work government to government than it would be to work with local consultants. I mean when you're working with a government, there's a certain standard. When we worked with the German government, they provide services without costs to either us or to the client. When we're working with the Government of the Philippines, there's no cost to us; there's no cost to the employer. And there's no cost to the applicant. The resources they provide for those kinds of services are far more, far greater. It's like working with our CanSask people. It's that magnitude. And the service that we can get, our employers can get, and our potential immigrants can get is fantastic.

So the federal government has just written to us and indicated that they would be prepared to advocate for provinces who identified regions and would find non-profit organizations and governments who would be prepared to work with provinces in order to help their recruitment.

**Mr. Weekes:** — I'll make just one last question. Time has ran out. It's interesting that many countries were going over their provinces to attract skilled workers from countries that desperately need skilled workers. The Philippines . . .

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Here's what's interesting, just so you have this information. In the case of the Philippines, they want Filipinos to go to other countries, become citizens, because they



send foreign currency back to the Philippines to support their economy. In the case of Korea, Ukraine, the old East Germany  
...

So I certainly understand your point of view if we're talking about maybe physicians from South Africa. But in the case of the countries that we have a relationship with or we're building relationships with, they are keen — and I've had several of the ambassadors come through my office — they are keen to enter into a relationship with the Government of Saskatchewan because they want their people to come here because they will send Canadian money home.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. That's all the questions I have.

**The Chair:** — Thank you very much. It now being time of the agreed-upon adjournment, I'll thank the minister and her officials for coming. And the committee is now adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 19:02.]