



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Hansard Verbatim Report

No. 35 – May 11, 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 15:00.]

The Chair: — I call the meeting to order. The first item up on the agenda is consideration of Bill No. 56, but before we do that I have two items to table with the committee. There's a follow-up to the committee meeting on May 4 from the Minister of Advanced Education and Employment and a follow-up from the Minister of Justice from April 27. So copies of those will be distributed.

Bill No. 56 — The Residential Tenancies Act, 2006

Clause 1

The Chair: — Then the first item up for consideration is Bill No. 56, The Residential Tenancies Act, 2006. We have the Minister of Justice here alone. Hello.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Hello. We're still on The Residential Tenancies Act and not yet on The Residential Tenancies Consequential Amendment Act?

The Chair: — Right.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Okay.

The Chair: — Bill No. 56.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — If there are questions about The Residential Tenancies Act, Bill 56, which I believe are of a technical nature and it may assist to have my officials up with me, I'll call them up. But I'm not sure that there are going to be such questions.

The Chair: — All right, thank you. Any questions? Mr. Morgan.

Mr. Morgan: — On both Bill No. 56 and 57, we have no questions, and we can proceed to vote on both of them.

The Chair: — Then seeing no further questions . . . Bill No. 56 has a lot of clauses. Would it be the committee's wish to do it on . . . There's actually four divisions. Would the committee agree to do it by division?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Division 1 then, which includes the short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 103 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: The Residential Tenancies Act, 2006. Could I have a member move that we report this Bill without amendment? Mr. Borgerson.

Mr. Borgerson: — I will so move.

The Chair: — All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

**Bill No. 57 — The Residential Tenancies
Consequential Amendment Act, 2006/
Loi de 2006 portant modification corrélative
à la loi intitulée The Residential Tenancies Act, 2006**

Clause 1

The Chair: — Then we'll try and do the same with Bill 57, which is An Act respecting consequential amendments resulting from the enactment of The Residential Tenancies Act. This one is shorter. And we have no questions on that, I understand. Short . . .

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — No, I have an opening statement if you would like. It's just a very brief description of the Bill.

The Chair: — Sure, okay.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Might as well have it on the record, I think.

The Chair: — Then please do so.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — The Residential Tenancies Consequential Amendment Act, 2006 contains amendments made necessary by The Residential Tenancies Act, 2006. Although the majority of the consequential amendments are contained in the Act itself, the amendments to The Co-operatives Act, 1996 are bilingual and form a separate Bill.

The Co-operatives Act, 1996 allows a housing co-operative to make an application to the Rentalsman for an order for possession of a housing unit if a person's membership in a co-operative has been terminated. In addition the housing co-operative can apply to the Rentalsman for an order authorizing it to dispose of goods abandoned by a former member of the co-operative.

The amendments will replace references to The Residential Tenancies Act and the Rentalsman with references to The Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 and the director of residential tenancies or hearing officer under the new Act.

The Chair: — So we have no questions on that then. Short title, clause 1, is that agreed?

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 5 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan enacts as follows: The Residential Tenancies Consequential Amendment Act, 2006. Could I have member move that we report this without amendment? Mr. Borgerson, thank you. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Agreed.

**Bill No. 30 — The Film and Video Classification
Amendment Act, 2006**

Clause 1

The Chair: — The next item up for business then before the committee is Bill No. 30, The Film and Video Classification Amendment Act, 2006. Would the minister, if you have an opening statement and officials to introduce . . .

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — I do.

The Chair: — We welcome that now.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I have with me Al Dwyer, sitting to my right, Chair of the Saskatchewan Film Classification Board; and sitting to my left, Karen Pflanzner, Crown counsel, legislative services branch.

The purpose of The Film and Video Classification Amendment Act, 2006 is to protect children. It is aimed at prohibiting the sale, rental, and exhibition of violent and sexually explicit video games to children.

Currently the Act governs the approval and classification of films including videotapes and DVDs [digital versatile disc]. The proposed legislation will extend the application of the Act to video and computer games. The amendments require video and computer games to be classified under the Act and will allow video and computer game classifications made by the Entertainment Software Rating Board to be adopted and enforced in Saskatchewan.

Under the proposed legislation, it will be an offence to sell, rent, or exhibit a video or computer game classified as mature to a person under the age of 17, and to sell, rent, or exhibit a video or computer game classified as adults only to a person under the age of 18.

Over the last 20 years, the video and computer game industry has experienced dramatic growth. Along with this vast growth, the graphics have improved rapidly, and the content has become extremely realistic and visually violent.

According to industry statistics, 63 per cent of game players are over 18 years of age, and the average age of the person who plays video games is 30 years old. The industry has responded to this market by providing picture quality equal to television and developing games that are only appropriate for adult gamers.

The industry, recognizing the inappropriateness of some content for children, has developed two rating categories that reflect the notion that certain video and computer games are suitable only for adults due to graphic depictions of sex or violence. Under the ESRB [Entertainment Software Rating Board] rating system, titles rated mature are suitable for persons 17 years and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content, and/or strong language.

One such game recently released with the mature rating is *25 to Life*. The controversial game has been the subject of criticism by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. They note that the video game makes a game out of murdering police officers and that the majority of the public find it violent, disturbing, and offensive.

The Bill is designed to harmonize Saskatchewan's legislation with the legislation of other Canadian jurisdictions. Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia have all recently enacted legislation to allow for the adoption and enforcement of the ESRB classifications for video and computer games. New Brunswick has also recently passed legislation to amend its film and video classification legislation to allow for the adoption and enforcement of the ESRB classifications.

In developing the proposed legislation, the department consulted with over 300 individuals and organizations including the Entertainment Software Association of Canada which is the association representing publishers and distributors of video and computer games, the Retail Council of Canada, the Saskatchewan branch of the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses, and the Saskatchewan branch of the Consumers' Association of Canada.

We have received a number of letters of support for this Bill from interested parties including letters from the Retail Council of Canada, the Entertainment Software Association of Canada, the Consumers' Association of Canada, and the Provincial Council of Women of Saskatchewan.

Since the Bill was introduced, some concerns have been raised by local area network operators about how the Bill would apply to their businesses. As my officials and I have explained to them, it is my intention that these provisions will be harmonized in their application with legislation in other provinces. This means that I will be proposing regulations that will exempt from the application of the Act, video and computer games that have not been rated by the ESRB. We understand that many of the games provided in LAN [local area network] establishments are not classified, and thus would be exempt from the Act. I've also advised LAN operators that I am prepared to recommend that the regulations include a parental accompaniment exemption.

It is my intention to consult extensively on the proposed regulations in the fall with a view to proclaim the amendments to the Act and the regulations in 2007. I am pleased that we could arrive at an understanding with the LAN operators that meet their business needs, while ensuring that parents have control over the games that their children play.

I would like to thank all the consultees for the time, effort, and co-operation they contributed to the development of this legislation. As a result I believe that we have a Bill that responds appropriately to the business sector and to what we have heard from parents.

The Chair: — Thank you. Any questions? Mr. Morgan.

Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Madam Chair. The consultation that the minister has gone through and the undertaking to exempt LAN from the provisions of the legislation is the issue

that we have intended to raise and that was a troubling aspect for that industry. And we're pleased that the message that was put forward by those people has been heard and has been accepted.

The minister had indicated in his comments that he anticipated an effective date for that of 2007. So I guess my question is, what would the time line be for this Bill to come into force? The regulations would obviously have to be done the same time, and would there be a legislative amendment, or is this entirely going to be dealt with in the regulations?

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Madam Chair, as I said in my comments, we would be expecting to do consultations on the regulations during the fall 2006 and would be looking at having the regulations prepared early in 2007, perhaps as early as January 2007.

Mr. Morgan: — Thank you. Madam Chair, we've also had consultation and communication with a variety of entities including the Retail Council of Canada. And they've written us, and we've received a copy of a letter they've sent to the minister. And that letter says:

Canadian retailers and the Canadian video game industry are in agreement with provincial governments across Canada regarding the policy issue of preventing the sale or rental of Mature and Adults Only rated video games to children. We share a common objective with provincial governments across Canada — supporting parents in protecting their children.

Madam Chair, the opposition Saskatchewan Party shares those concerns. It is, has been, and will continue to be the position of our party to want to take every step possible to protect young people and those in our province that are most vulnerable. This legislation is consistent with what is taking place in other jurisdictions, and we want to ensure that this Bill comes into force in the most timely manner possible so that we can close this gap that exists in our legislation and give protection to children and give parents and guardians some comfort that things are taking place as soon as possible.

Another letter that we received a copy of, that was sent to the minister, was from the Provincial Council of Women of Saskatchewan, and I'd like to read one paragraph out of that letter:

When we learned that in Saskatchewan amendments to the Film and Video Classification Act were being . . . [processed] which would update it to include computer and video games, we were pleased. We support the proposed changes to classify these materials and to prohibit their sale, rent and showing to young people under the prohibited age.

Once again that's a position shared by the Saskatchewan Party, and it's something we want to see in place as soon as possible.

Other correspondence to the minister we've received a copy of was from Ruth Robinson of the Consumers' Association of Canada. I will read a paragraph from that letter as well:

We support this legislation which requires businesses to adhere to the age ratings for computer and video games by forbidding their sale, rental and use by young people excluded by the age restriction. Legitimate Saskatchewan businesses should welcome these amendments.

Madam Chair, the input that we received from businesses was that they were highly supportive of enforcing the games and videos that were classified. Their concern was with the showing or the dealing with games that were not yet classified and the effect of those. Everybody that we spoke to was highly supportive of trying to keep inappropriate material away from young people. The vast majority of games that are sold over the counter are classified and would be very appropriate to. We received a presentation from the industry that indicated how the classifications worked, and we're certainly supportive of that.

The concerns that were expressed to us dealt with the LAN or the local area network gamers. That is as yet an unclassified area because it deals with Internet. The operators of these business told us how they supervise people, had parents present, etc., when this was taking place. And it is something that will be exempted by regulation, then I think we have a situation that may be workable and that the consultation has in fact been effective.

I don't have questions to ask other than that we look forward to seeing the regulations and exemptions when they come down. I think the member from Indian Head-Milestone does have comments or questions.

The Chair: — Mr. McMorris.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes I just have one quick question, I guess, a quick comment to begin with. I will be glad to hear that there will be consultation with some of these gamers before the regulations are produced because I think they have something to say. And I know that you have met with them prior to the Bill being here today.

One other concern that they had when we met with them early in the process was the issue around penalties. They thought that some of the penalties were fairly severe. Do you mind commenting on how you came up with the terms that you came up with? Because again, according to these gentlemen, they thought they were quite severe for the offence.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Does Mr. McMorris want the short answer or the long answer?

Mr. McMorris: — Medium.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — I'll give you the short answer, and perhaps you might want a slightly longer answer.

The Act currently covers films, videos, and DVDs. And the penalty structure is for those films, videos, and DVDs is as it would be now for games. If we were to bring in a different penalty structure then — and I'm going to be slightly rhetorical here — you would have a higher potential maximum penalty for showing a film with sexually explicit content to a child than you would have for renting to a child a game where he's going to be murdering police officers.

We don't see a reason why we would have different penalties for the films that are already set out in the Act than we would have for the video games. So we're not setting penalties here. We're adopting the same penalties we have for films, videos, and DVDs.

That's the medium length answer. I can give you a longer one if you want.

Mr. McMorris: — That's fine.

The Chair: — Seeing no further questions then, Bill No. 30, the film and video classifications Act, short title, clause 1. Is that agreed?

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 14 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: The Film and Video Classification Amendment Act, 2006. Could I have a member move this, that we move this forward or report this without amendment?

Mr. Prebble: — I so move, Madam Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. Next item up on the agenda for the committee is Bill No. 50, The Queen's Bench (Mediation) Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Morgan: — Madam Chair, before the officials leave, could we just thank them for having come out today, even though it wasn't a particularly taxing exercise for this. We appreciate them coming and making themselves available for this.

**Bill No. 50 — The Queen's Bench (Mediation)
Amendment Act, 2006/Loi de 2006 modifiant la Loi
de 1998 sur la Cour du Banc de la Reine (médiation)**

The Chair: — Thank you. The minister then has a couple of new officials, if he'd like to introduce them and if you have an opening statement on this as well.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm joined now by Ken Acton, director, dispute resolution office; Madeleine Robertson, Crown counsel, legislative services branch.

The mandatory mediation provisions of The Queen's Bench Act, 1998 provide an opportunity for litigants in civil proceedings to attempt to address their issues through mediation rather than continuing with a litigation. This process has proven to be a successful mechanism for litigants to arrive at their own resolution to a dispute in a non-adversarial atmosphere. A key feature of the mediation process is the ability to speak freely and with candour. This contributes to the success of the mediation session.

The legislation provides for the confidentiality of evidence arising from the mediation session so that participants can be confident that their candid statements cannot be used against them in subsequent litigation.

The proposed amendment to The Queen's Bench Act, 1998 provides that evidence from the mediation session cannot be used in any civil, administrative, regulatory, or provincial offence proceeding. This removes the possibility that the participants will be penalized in other proceedings for their candour during the mediation session.

Consultees have suggested clarifying that only evidence directly arising from anything said during the course of mediation should be excluded. If that same evidence is obtained by other means, it is admissible. The proposed legislation includes that change.

The confidentiality component of the mediation provision has also been incorporated with respect to pretrial conferences in Queen's Bench cases. The pretrial conference confidentiality provision is amended so that it will be consistent with a confidentiality provision respecting mediation, some other statutes including mediation provision in certain types of court actions. These provisions include a confidentiality component modelled on the provision of The Queen's Bench Act, 1998.

These provisions are also being amended to ensure consistency so that the same confidentiality rules apply to the mediation and court actions regardless of whether they are Queen's Bench actions, small claims actions, custody and access applications in The Children's Law Act, 1997, or applications respecting the amount of maintenance under The Family Maintenance Act, 1997. We are confident that these amendments will improve the confidentiality provisions in the statutes and contribute to the continuing effectiveness of mediation.

The Chair: — Questions then. Mr. Morgan.

Mr. Morgan: — Thank you. Minister, the mandatory mediation has been in existence since 1998 and I'm wondering, has there been a tracking that's taken place as to the number of actions that are successfully settled through mediation, whether that's on an upward or downward trend right now?

Mr. Acton: — We track actions through the database through Queen's Bench court, through the registrar's office. And when we look at actions that have been through the mediation process, we're at about 46 per cent of actions that have no further action following the mediation process, with the exception of either filing minutes of settlement or notice of discontinuance.

So we look at not so much whether or not they actually settled in the session, but did we get them on the right track and did that allow it to proceed with settlement as opposed to proceeding with further court action. So we've been at about 46 to 47 per cent for the last couple of years, and it seems to be holding steady there.

Mr. Morgan: — So you're not noticing an improvement or . . . Do you think that these changes will give an improvement?

Mr. Acton: — I'm not sure that it will change the statistics, no. We felt it was important to introduce this to make sure that people were comfortable in the sessions, but I don't know whether we'll see a percentage shift in terms of settlement or not.

Mr. Morgan: — One of the more recent changes is to allow the mediation to take place prior to an action being commenced. Is that being used to any great extent at the present time, or do you anticipate much usage?

Mr. Acton: — We've been encouraging the legal community to look at that and that is probably a personal preference, or depends on the personal preference of the legal counsel involved. And we have a number of legal counsel that prefer to use that approach. And others, their preference is to solidify things with a statement of claim and a defence and then move forward. So it's really just the individual preferences from the legal community.

Mr. Morgan: — Do you have any numbers about how many . . . the number of files that are dealt with in that fashion prior to the action being commenced?

Mr. Acton: — No I don't, not with me. I could make those available for you if that would be helpful.

Mr. Morgan: — Because it's a new initiative and a significant money saver, because neither the plaintiff nor the defendant have to go through the cost of issuing, serving, and preparing pleadings, I (a) wouldn't mind knowing the tracking of that on an ongoing basis, and I wouldn't mind hearing feedback from people that have used it.

My other comment or suggestion was going to be, and I guess the question is, how you're notifying people of these changes and whether there's been a public education program undertaken or anything to make both lawyers and members of the public aware.

Mr. Acton: — Our education approach has been through the legal community, through mailouts with them, and attendance at CBA [Canadian Bar Association] meetings to speak to them about the changes.

Mr. Morgan: — You indicated you thought you did have some statistics that might be available, but not with you with regard to actions that are settled prior to pleadings being initiated.

Mr. Acton: — I can generate those. I'd have to have a systems person do some work on our system because we're not set up to track those specifically. But I could generate them, yes.

Mr. Morgan: — Okay. I think it would be of some benefit. I'll leave it to you and the minister to make the determination whether you want to go to that. But I think it would be a beneficial statistic to have and would be worthwhile when people are promoting mediation in a general sense to know that there is that option available and that it's successful in whatever percentage of cases that are there.

The other provinces in Western Canada, or from Ontario west, how many of them are using similar systems, and what has their

success been?

Ms. Robertson: — Are we talking about who has — excuse me, it's Madeleine Robertson — who has mediation, mandatory mediation?

Mr. Morgan: — Correct, and what their statistics are for being successful in settling actions at some point during the mediation process.

Ms. Robertson: — I can speak to who has it, and Ken may have some idea about their success. Ontario has a mandatory mediation in certain actions, mandated through their rules of civil proceeding. British Columbia has a mandatory mediation when one party initiates it. Alberta is currently running a pilot project similar to the British Columbia model. I don't have the numbers though.

Mr. Morgan: — I'm wondering if Mr. Acton would have comparative statistics with what's taking place in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Acton: — I don't have comparable statistics. Each one of the programs operate so differently it's difficult to gather those. At one point Ontario has spoken of a 60 per cent settlement rate although . . . It's difficult to compare because they were screening cases before they went in.

So in our approach, we look at this in every case that's going forward, where they were taking only a certain percentage of cases and certain types of cases and then moving them into a mediation process. So I didn't think they were valid comparisons. And in terms of the other provinces, again they use a different kind of process to identify cases. So we don't have anything in that regard that we can do a real comparison to.

Mr. Morgan: — My question then for the minister is, we now have for nearly a decade a court . . . a legislatively mandated mediation process that must be followed. We know from Mr. Acton that 40 per cent plus of the cases are either abandoned or settled by mediation. I'm wondering how much our population is static . . . But my question is, what is the average caseload per judge, and is it possible that we may be able to reduce the number of Queen's Bench judges?

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Mr. Acton was referring to the cases that are settled and the mediation that takes place after pleadings are issued. And then there's a second opportunity for mediation, formal opportunity for mediation at the pretrial conference. And I think the success rate might even be higher there. Of course that mediation at that stage is chaired, as Mr. Morgan knows, by a Queen's Bench judge. So the judges are involved in probably as much mediation work as they are trial work in some cases.

Now in resolving these cases before they actually end up in front of, usually a different Queen's Bench judge at a trial, I can certainly inquire of the judiciary whether they think their workload has decreased significantly. I will point out . . . and I don't know if this is the direction of Mr. Morgan's question. But the salaries of Queen's Bench judges are paid by the federal government, and reducing the size of that court or the size of

the Court of Appeal doesn't benefit the Saskatchewan taxpayer directly. I'm not sure that was part of the reason for asking the question.

Mr. Morgan: — I'm not trying to put judges out of business. There is always going to be work for judges. My concern is (a) I am also a federal taxpayer as you are as well, so I think we should be concerned about that.

But from a provincial point of view, even though the salary of the Queen's Bench judges is paid for by the federal government, it is the provincial government that provides the office staff, the travel expenses, the library services, and everything else related to the judges.

And I don't think it's a matter of going to them, saying are you working hard enough? Some of them will have a high caseload. Some of them, for a variety of reasons, will not. I think it should be incumbent on your department to track the average number of files that go through the system in a year and at what point they're settled.

And that's my question to you and to your officials. Is this as a result of the mediation services initiatives? Are we seeing a reduction in the number of trials and the amount of work that is done by judges?

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Madam Chair, I think all the comments Mr. Morgan made are fair. And what he was highlighting in part is that the provincial costs are the overhead, and reducing the number of Queen's Bench judges wouldn't necessarily do very much with the overhead if you didn't reduce court points. And that's always controversial, but sometimes it has to be done.

Mr. Acton made a good point to me — which I know from my own experience to be the case — that we have been successful over the last few years in developing programs that allow people to settle their disputes without going to trial. The number of files and even the number of trials that a judge sees isn't necessarily indicative if the trials are becoming more complicated or becoming longer, but even assuming that they're not and we're just seeing a reduction in the number of trials that we're seeing in general civil litigation and possibly even in criminal matters that get to the Court of Queen's Bench.

We have seen over the last number of years, and it's a growing area of legal work. I think Mr. Morgan will recall this as well as I do, being reminded of it. In the area of family law, and the family law division of the Court of Queen's Bench has become increasingly busy, and that's becoming an increasing workload for the court. It's nice if we can mediate those matters too, but sometimes those have an emotional content that civil litigation files don't have, and they are sometimes more difficult to resolve.

Mr. Morgan: — Madam Chair, our issue isn't that we're trying to go out and attack the number of judges that are there. Our issue is wanting to ensure that we're getting good value for our money and that we're putting resources where they should be.

And my question to the minister is simply, are we doing statistical tracking on the number of cases that are . . . and this

is something that he reviews periodically to determine whether he's putting the resources in the right area and whether there's savings in one area that can be transferred to another area. And if the answer is no, there's not statistical tracking on it, then I'd like him just to say that. If there is statistical tracking being done, we'd like to have it produced.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — I think we can provide the information because it's certainly available, both on the number of cases that are going to mediation without a case or a claim being initiated. It may be difficult to determine how many of those don't result in a claim being issued. But we can certainly give the number that take advantage of the program.

We can also provide numbers, and have today, around the success rate of the early stage mediation. And we can provide information — because it's available, and it's kept — as to the success rate in pretrial conferences and how many cases. And at that point it may also be useful — and we could do this around estimates, but maybe Mr. Acton can pull this together as well — to do some kind of overview over the last period of time on the number of Queen's Bench trials, non-family and family, and provide some concrete information around the discussion we've had today.

Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Minister. What we're looking for specifically would be the number of pretrial conferences done by a judge or done in a year in aggregate — I don't want to know judge by judge of course — and the number of trials that are conducted in the year so that we can determine, you know, whether we're adequately resourced or under-resourced in that area. And I thank you for that.

I'm wondering as well what the department is doing with regard to changes in caseload that will be caused by the change in limit to small claims limits. With the increase, we would anticipate that there would be a shift away from Queen's Bench and a shift into Small Claims Court. I'm just wondering what's taking place now or what is anticipated.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — We've spoken about this before in this committee. I can't recall whether it was around legislation or whether it was in estimates. And I expressed my enthusiasm for continuing raising the limit. And I sort of have a target in my own mind of \$25,000 as an appropriate small claims limit in the province of Saskatchewan.

And I stated at that time that we are monitoring the effect of the increase of the limit from \$5,000 to \$10,000. I think it was Mr. Morgan who, on behalf of the opposition in committee, expressed equal enthusiasm for raising the limit. And I think for similar reasons, that it certainly saves costs to litigants who are involved with amounts at those levels not to have to go through the procedure of a Queen's Bench action, particularly now that mediation is more available in Small Claims Court as well.

I had an interesting conversation when I was meeting with ministers responsible for securities a while back. And I spoke to the deputy minister of Justice in British Columbia and he advised me that his experience . . . And we'll be monitoring our experience as well. He advised me that his experience was that upon increasing the small claims limit, that there wasn't a significant increase in small claims litigation.

And he suspected, I mean, he theorized that the reason for this was that approximately the same number, a slight increase, but approximately the same number of claims are going to small claims. It's simply that people were not reducing their claim by as much. So instead of reducing their claim to \$5,000 to get into Small Claims Court, they didn't have to reduce their claim or they only had to reduce it to \$10,000, but their claim still went to Small Claims Court. And that there wasn't as large an increase as you might anticipate because some of the claims there in Small Claims Court are already for over \$5,000 or already for over \$10,000. They've just been reduced to that amount because people want to use the Small Claims Court process.

That made me optimistic that we will, if we have the same experience, that we will be able to continue to increase the limit.

Mr. Morgan: — We don't have any statistical indication yet by way of a percentage or numbers at this point?

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — I don't think we're in a position to make a judgment yet. I haven't heard from small claims judges, but this would be anecdotal in any case. I haven't heard from Provincial Court judges that the workload has increased significantly because of the raise to the limit. But I think we'd want to have more precise information than the conversations I have or have not had with Provincial Court judges.

Mr. Morgan: — We had earlier indicated our support for an increase in that limit, and so we'd certainly want to restate that today, that to the extent that that's working well. We are taking the position that Small Claims Court works very well to settle resolutions at a very cost-effective manner, and the pretrial process of an initial hearing with the judge seems to be very effective at resolving issues in that court as well.

My question to Mr. Acton would be his comments on where there's an initial meeting with a judge versus an initial meeting with a mediator as to whether he feels one would be likely to be more successful than another.

Mr. Acton: — In the small claims context, I am very pleased with the structure that's there now. Often with the dollar limits lower, parties are very much looking for some direction. I mean they're asking, do I win or do I lose and give me an idea and I'll accept that and move on. And so on the smaller claims, I think that judge-led process is very helpful, particularly when a number of parties do not have legal representation with them. And so it works very well.

We also have a good working relationship so that the Small Claims Court are comfortable directing larger cases or cases where they think there's a lot of work to do through a mediation process, are prepared to send them in our direction, and we can spend some more time with those parties if that's what they need. So in small claims stuff, I think it's a good approach.

Mr. Morgan: — Madam Chair, we don't have any further questions on this Bill.

The Chair: — Seeing no further questions then, is clause 1, short title agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 6 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan enacts as follows: The Queen's Bench (Mediation) Amendment Act, 2006.

Could I have a member move that we report this without amendment?

Mr. Morgan: — I so move.

The Chair: — Mr. Morgan, thank you. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Mr. Morgan: — Madam Chair, before the officials leave I would like to thank them for coming. And in particular I want to thank Mr. Acton because he's been with this program since its inception. And my experience has certainly been that it's been highly effective and very successful in saving litigants a lot of unnecessary money. So best wishes and keep it up.

Bill No. 38 — The Settlement of International Investment Disputes Act/Loi sur le règlement des différends internationaux relatifs aux investissements

The Chair: — Thank you. The next item up for consideration before the committee is Bill No. 38, The Settlement of International Investment Disputes Act. And the minister has a new official. If he could introduce that official and give your opening statement now. Thanks.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I have with me Darcy McGovern, Crown counsel, legislative services branch.

The Settlement of International Investment Disputes Act will implement the 1965 World Bank Convention on the settlement of investment disputes between states and nationals of other states in Saskatchewan. The passage of this Bill will complete Saskatchewan's implementation requirements and in turn promote the subsequent signature and ratification by Canada of the convention so that Canadians will have access to the voluntary dispute conciliation and arbitration mechanisms offered under the convention.

The ICSID [International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes] convention is designed to facilitate the settlement of investment disputes between governments and foreign investors, thus improving conditions for international investment. The adoption of this convention by Canada would assist Canadian investments internationally by providing a dependable, voluntary, and uniform set of rules and precedents for dispute settlement by private Canadian investors with foreign states. Private foreign investors contracting with Canadian governments would in turn enjoy similar advantages.

The conciliation and arbitration mechanisms under the convention are entirely voluntary and are chosen by the parties

at the time they enter into their initial relationship. Accordingly there are no surprises for businesses or states in investment disputes, and indeed the convention would provide greater certainty for businesses involved in international business disputes.

The Chair: — Thank you. Questions? Mr. Morgan.

Mr. Morgan: — How many other provinces have enacted legislation in this fashion?

Mr. McGovern: — Madam Chair, to the member, two. We have Ontario that's passed legislation and, most recently, British Columbia which passed it actually just this spring session in their Assembly, implementing legislation.

Mr. Morgan: — Is their legislation proclaimed in force already or . . .

Mr. McGovern: — In Alberta it wouldn't be proclaimed . . . Sorry, in British Columbia I don't think it is proclaimed and in Ontario it wouldn't be proclaimed either. It's passed though in terms of . . . It has Royal Assent.

Mr. Morgan: — What is happening with Manitoba and Alberta?

Mr. McGovern: — Manitoba, to my understanding, is taking the position that they will be proceeding with the legislation in an upcoming legislative list. And Alberta, as I understand it right now, they have no concerns with respect to the content per se of the convention itself and are looking at initial discussions with the federal government in terms of some of the issues around implementation.

Mr. Morgan: — Is there a bigger problem for Alberta to implement than there would be here? I'm just wondering why we would be ahead of Alberta on this type of legislation that deals with international disputes.

Mr. McGovern: — The trick on this one is that the ICSID Convention does not have a federal states clause. And so unlike, for example, more recent conventions like the Hague Convention on adoption, it doesn't have a provision that recognized expressly federal states have different territorial units and may also have different legal systems within the federation and that they may proceed with a Bill whereby it doesn't apply all at the same time in each of the territorial units.

And the significance in this case for that being is that for implementing legislation, each province and territory needs to pass implementing legislation before the federal government will go ahead and ratify the convention. And so it becomes a bit of the chicken and the egg issue in terms of do you come forward with legislation immediately, or do you wait until it looks like there's enough gravity in terms of how many different provinces are moving forward with it?

The federal government has taken the initiative in this case to identify this Bill as a priority and that this convention is a priority for international business reasons and has brought this forward initially through the Uniform Law Conference of Canada which recommended this implementing legislation to

each of the attorney generals and also at the Attorney General table itself to encourage the provinces to move forward. And so at this point this is why Saskatchewan's decision was that we were in a position to move forward certainly at this point to provide this advantage, I guess, to businesses.

Mr. Morgan: — In the US [United States] which jurisdictions have implemented . . . Is it done on a state-by-state basis?

Mr. McGovern: — No, and that's a fair point though. And this is actually an interesting point of international law that the United States is a federal state, but for international treaties they don't proceed as a federal state. Their treaties are ratified exclusively by Congress.

And actually that is a concern that they've expressed that if the individual states started to treat international documents more like in the Canadian context — where for constitutional reasons, as you're well aware, property and civil rights matters are exclusive to the province — that it would complicate things certainly in the United States. So their State Department certainly is of the view that they prefer to have the federal state in that case acting exclusively.

Mr. Morgan: — Has it been passed in the US?

Mr. McGovern: — Yes, they've been a member of ICSID for a number of years. And it's actually quite a popular international convention. I believe 142 states have signed on.

Mr. Morgan: — I've noticed it was developed in 1965. That's a long time ago. I'm just sort of wondering why there was that kind of a timeline from when the convention was developed to now it's being considered by three Canadian provinces. When did the US come on board?

Mr. McGovern: — 1966 according to my information. And I can't speak before, say, 1990 in terms of the priority that the federal government was bringing this forward to the provinces. But I believe the answer is again the federal states clause.

If you look at a more recent convention — I use the example the adoption convention — because it's a federal state clause, what the federal government is able to do is to say when enough provinces have indicated that they're supportive of this, of a particular convention, they're able to ratify the convention at that point and have the convention come into force for — let's say — seven of the ten provinces and two of the territories. And then the other provinces can add on when their legislative agenda catches up because, as we all know, legislative agendas can be tricky in terms of when something comes forward.

Mr. Morgan: — Does the federal government sign on as a separate entity to it?

Mr. McGovern: — The issue with the federal government . . . They would sign on as the federal state party, so they're the only signatory per se to the convention. And in this case, it would be a simple signature rather than a definitive signature. They would . . .

Mr. Morgan: — Is that done by legislation?

Mr. McGovern: — In this case they need to pass federal legislation with respect, as I understand it, to some of the issues surrounding immunity for the panel members.

Mr. Morgan: — They have not yet done that?

Mr. McGovern: — No, not yet. And they're indicating that they would be in a position to do that in the near future.

Mr. Morgan: — Okay. Is it likely that the change in government federally may slow down that process?

Mr. McGovern: — I guess it's difficult for me to guess. Our contacts federally are indicating that this continues to be a priority because of the obvious benefits for international business.

Mr. Morgan: — Does it make a difference to our going ahead or the effectiveness for us if the federal government has not yet signed on?

Mr. McGovern: — By signed on if you mean if they proceed with their legislation . . .

Mr. Morgan: — Or a party to it.

Mr. McGovern: — Not really. I mean we do need all the steps to be in place. And obviously we're taking the federal government's initiative here, where they're saying this is a priority; we've brought it forward. The provinces and territories have indicated that they don't have problems with the operation of the convention — in other words, what the convention covers. So this is an appropriate time to come forward, whether you're . . . It's always a question, whether you're third or whether you're tenth, I guess.

Mr. Morgan: — Madam Chair, I want to thank the minister and his officials, for this piece of legislation is clearly one that would be regarded as progressive. It streamlines investment dispute mechanisms with other countries and with Saskatchewan and allows for arbitration rather than litigation. And it's the type of thing we think is beneficial, and we're supportive of the process and would hope that it would make our investment climate seem more friendly and more progressive. We're prepared to proceed.

The Chair: — Seeing no further questions then, is clause 1, short title agreed?

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 15 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — And is the schedule agreed? The schedule is at the end of the Bill. Is that agreed, yes?

[Schedule agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: The Settlement of International Investment Disputes Act.

Could I have a member move that we report this Bill without amendment? Mr. Elhard. All in favour? Thank you.

Bill No. 12 — The Consumer Protection Amendment Act, 2005

Clause 1

The Chair: — Welcome to the minister. The next item up for consideration is the ever popular Bill No. 12, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act, 2005. Welcome to the minister and his officials. And I understand you have amendments to present and maybe a statement of some sort. And introduce the officials again, would be good.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Yes, and the statement I think will be confined to the amendments.

I'm rejoined by Al Dwyer, director of consumer protection Act; by Karen Pflanzner, Crown counsel, legislative services branch; and joined by Susan Amrud, executive director of public law.

Further to our meeting with the committee on April 27, I prepared House amendments to address a number of the committee's recommendations. The first amendment relates to the manner in which a consumer may provide a notice of cancellation to a business regarding a personal development services contract.

Currently the Bill provides that a notice of cancellation may be given by a consumer to a supplier by any prescribed means. The proposed House amendment would specifically set out the manner of delivery of the notice in the Act, rather than the regulations, and will provide that a consumer may cancel a personal development services contract by giving written notice of cancellation by personal service, by registered mail, or by any other means that's set out in the contract.

The second House amendment relates to the cooling-off period for personal development services contracts. In order to implement the committee's recommendation, the House amendment will reduce the cooling-off period from ten days to seven business days and define business days as meaning a day on which the supplier is open for business.

The third House amendment relates to the length of term and the prepayment of fees under a personal development services contract. Under the existing provision, the term of a personal development services contract is restricted to one year. The proposed amendment would revise this provision to restrict the term of the contract to two years but would also prohibit a supplier from accepting prepayment of fees for more than one year.

The fourth House amendment relates to travel club contracts and would prohibit a travel club operator from accepting prepayment of fees of more than the prescribed amount for membership in a travel club.

I believe that the proposed House amendments reflect the consensus that was reached in our discussions.

The Chair: — Thank you. Now I'd like to propose to the committee, since we have just seen the amendments, that we go in camera for a short discussion. Would that be okay?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Agreed? Would someone move a motion to do that? Mr. Borgerson, thank you. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Okay.

[The committee continued in camera.]

The Chair: — Okay. We now have The Consumer Protection Act, Bill No. 12, short title. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 9 inclusive agreed to.]

Clause 10

Mr. Prebble: — Madam Chair, I've got an amendment for clause 10.

The Chair: — Thank you.

Mr. Prebble: — And as described a few moments ago by the Minister of Justice, I would like to move amendment to clause 10 of the printed Bill. And this will have impact on sections of the existing Bill that are on page 7, page 8, page 9, page 10, page 14, and page 17. So the amendments as spoken to the Minister of Justice are quite extensive in terms of the areas that they cover. So I will submit this amendment to you.

The Chair: — So it has been moved by Mr. Prebble that clause 10 of the printed Bill be amended as follows. And everyone has a copy of the proposed amendments, so I'll ask the indulgence of the committee that I don't read the whole document.

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — But I will say now that we amend clause 10 in section 76.30. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — In section 76.35. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — In 76.36. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — In 76.39. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — In 76.41. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — In 76.41(2). Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — (3).

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — And (4).

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — And (5).

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Well we better go to (f) as well under 76.49. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — 76.54.

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — 76.54(1).

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — 76.54(2).

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — (3).

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — (4).

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — And 76.66.

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — (i) and (ii).

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Then the motion by Mr. Prebble is to amend clause 10 as agreed. Is that now all agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

[Clause 10 as amended agreed to.]

[Clauses 11 to 14 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — Thank you. Thank you to the committee and to

the minister and his officials. This was an interesting experience. We'll now report the Bill and we'll have a motion . . . Oh.

Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: The Consumer Protection Amendment Act, 2005.

Can I have a motion to present this Bill to the House with the amendments? Mr. Elhard. Thank you. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Again thanks to everyone. This was interesting.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: — We now will stand recessed until 5:30.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

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

Subvote (AE01)

The Chair: — I call the committee back to order. Next item on the agenda is the consideration of estimates for the Department of Advanced Education and Employment. I welcome the minister and her officials. We've already seen you before, so we don't need a lot of introductions. Unless you have anything to say, we'll move straight to questions.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I have some officials if you'd like me to introduce them.

The Chair: — Sure.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — With me today are Bonnie Durnford, deputy minister; Rob Cunningham, assistant deputy minister; Raman Visvanathan, executive director, institutions; Rick Pawliw, executive director, programs; Nelson Wagner, executive director, facilities; Jan Morgan, executive director, Can-Sask career and employment services; Brady Salloum, executive director, student financial assistance; Karen Allen, executive director, corporate services; Trina Fallows, director, corporate services; and Kevin Veitenheimer, director, university services.

So again if the officials come to the mike to answer the first time, if they could just introduce themselves for the ease of Hansard. So questions. Mr. Elhard.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Just for the record, I'd like it noted that the importance of post-secondary education is not indicated by the attendance on this side of the table. My colleagues will be joining me shortly.

But thank you to the minister for coming tonight. We have a marathon session ahead of us — two and a half hours. I've never done that before. I don't know if the minister has. But I hope all of us are not completely exhausted by the time the

evening's over. Thank you for being here and for bringing your officials back once again.

Before I start, I'd like to thank the minister for providing me with a copy of the flow sheet or flow chart, the Advanced Education and Employment, of senior executive, and also for the information pertaining to the \$15.59 million that was increased for training in this year's budget.

As I mentioned when we began estimates the last time we met, it's pretty hard for me to criticize additional monies in the training budget for this province because I do believe in the importance of additional training opportunities at a variety of levels. And I think that money dedicated to that end is money well spent in the long run.

If I may, Madam Minister, I'd like to start with some of the issues that you addressed in our last time together. And I'd like to pick up from those conversations we had. I went through the numbers as I indicated, and there wasn't anything in there that really concerned me too much. I think that we would be wasting our time if we went back to that and asked for more detail. I don't think that this is . . . Even though this is called estimates, I don't think that there's anything of significance in there that troubles me.

But there are a couple of programs that you mentioned that I think we need to have a clearer understanding of for the public record and for just understanding generally of how a lot of the training and educational opportunities dovetail. There are, as most people are aware, the universities in this province and SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] and regional colleges. But when you get to some of the other training programs that are part of the educational thrust in our province, I think people might get lost in the details.

So one of the things I'd like to have you do for us is talk about the Can-Sask career and employment centres as part of this discussion and also the CareerStart program. Those are two programs that are not widely recognized or understood among the public, and I think it would be wise if we spent some time discussing those programs. Maybe the CareerStart program would be the better of the two to start with.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Can we start with Can-Sask?

Mr. Elhard: — Absolutely. We'll start there. We don't want to make shuffling of the seats a problem here.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I would ask Jan Morgan, who's the executive director of the Can-Sask part of the department, to come to the table. And I thought maybe what Jan could do is describe the program to you and the purpose and function of the program.

Ms. Morgan: — My name's Jan Morgan. I'm the executive director for career and employment services, as the minister stated. The Canada-Saskatchewan career and employment services offices are in 20 locations across the province. We receive referrals of clients who need employment services from the Community Resources department as well as from Service Canada.

EI [employment insurance] clients are referred to our office for services. We provide them with career planning services. We help them prepare a return-to-work career action plan. We offer workshops for those who are fully job ready, called Jobs First. And those sessions are held several times a week with individuals who are just needing some assistance, short-term interventions to help them prepare a resume and look for work online.

We also have career and employment consultants in each of our offices that work with individuals who are what we consider more medium term clients, who have several barriers that need to be addressed prior to their ability to seek work.

We also have clients who are longer term and with those clients, they're often cycling in and out of our system. They often need outside interventions from community-based organizations, and we have agreements in place with many CBOs [community-based organization] across the province to assist those individuals to address their barriers. They then are often returned to us and when they are prepared for employment or for further training, we then make our plans with them and assist them to connect to educational opportunities such as those that are provided through CareerStart.

Mr. Elhard: — So if we looked at the overall operations, you're not really providing a job placement service like the old Manpower offices did 20 years or more ago. That's not entirely your perspective. You have additional opportunities to influence the direction of these individuals and help them train specifically for certain job requirements that are available. Is my understanding correct?

Ms. Morgan: — We do have work placement opportunities for individuals. If their career action plan identifies the barrier that they have little or no work experience, we often partner with employers to provide wage subsidies to help those individuals to get the work experience they need.

We also have bridging projects which provide individuals with life skills, work readiness training, and basic employability that can also provide a work placement for them. Through the CBO, they'll arrange to work with a local employer to provide those individuals with short-term work opportunities just so that they can gain some basic skills.

Mr. Elhard: — How is this model divided? I would assume that because of the referral from the federal government offices — I think they're called serve offices or something of that nature — I assume that they play some role in the delivery of these programs. Or is that an inaccurate assessment? Is it just a financial commitment from the federal government?

Ms. Morgan: — The federal government provides funding to the province under the Canada-Saskatchewan Labour Market Development Agreement that was signed in 1996, I believe. Thirty-eight million dollars a year is provided to the province for provision of services to EI clients. EI clients will go to the Service Canada office and apply for benefits. They're part I benefits under the EI Act. We provide part II benefits which are employment services.

So those individuals are referred from Service Canada to our

offices. Some of our offices, like in North Battleford, were co-located with the federal government there and in Lloydminster. So we have relationships there that are very, very integrated.

From the Community Resources department, we receive referrals from their contact centre. And we work closely with them in making sure that clients are booked into our services and receive a service while they're on their income support. Both for EI . . . Individuals, their part I does run out. So we want to get those referrals done fairly quickly so that we can while they're on their income support be providing them with their service.

Mr. Elhard: — The \$38 million you referenced from the federal government, does that show up in the provincial budget at some point, and can you identify where?

Ms. Morgan: — It shows under revenue, under general revenue when transfers from the federal government. What we do with the funding at the beginning of the year is we allocate it to programs, existing provincial programs that EI clients primarily will use. And usually that's our skills training benefit program which provides tuition and books for their retraining. Many of our EI clients are job ready and have work experience and may just need some retraining or some short-term interventions. And we provide both.

Mr. Elhard: — The agreement that provides that federal money, is that a long-term agreement? Is it subject to renewal on a regular basis? Are we anticipating that kind of opportunity in the future, in the near future?

Ms. Morgan: — There is no expiration date on the agreement. The federal government has to give us two years notice I believe if they would like to withdraw from the agreement. And the province can as well, with two years notice.

Mr. Elhard: — Okay. Is that pretty much standard wording of federal-provincial agreements? Has that been the kind of notice required in other agreements that the department might have been party to?

Ms. Durnford: — Perhaps I can speak to that. Usually in federal-provincial agreements, there's usually some form of notice requirement or notice provision in it. I think the labour market development agreements were a bit different. In the late '90s, mid- to late-'90s, the federal government made a choice around devolving labour market services to the provinces. And they ended up actually devolving those part II services — as Jan has described — to the provinces for delivery in I think five provinces across the country.

In some other provinces, they chose a different model of service delivery where it was much more of a co-managed system. And so the Labour Market Development Agreement has an indefinite term on it which is to have a regular notice requirement to it.

Mr. Elhard: — I would assume from your response, Ms. Durnford, that the agreement that we have in existence now is the preferred model. Otherwise I assume that you'd be making some effort to go to the co-management approach.

Ms. Durnford: — Certainly from the provincial perspective, the completely devolved agreement is preferable because it allows us the flexibility to plan our labour market programs and to deliver labour market programs that are particularly relevant to Saskatchewan.

I think our experience has been there are many reporting requirements and accountability requirements with the federal government, under the agreement, that we must comply with. And we do that on an annual basis, and we supply them with a plan as to how we intend to make the expenditures and how we intend to provide programs. But certainly our sense of it is this form of Labour Market Development Agreement is the preferable option.

Mr. Elhard: — Can either of you give me an indication of how many people might be provided assistance through this particular approach?

Ms. Morgan: — Last year we served 19,889 individuals through the career and employment service offices across the province. Of those, 9,900 were referred to a Jobs First session. The remaining were not fully employable and were booked into our employment services.

Mr. Elhard: — Could you give us an idea or an indication of what type of work these individuals and these centres would primarily generate on behalf of individuals?

Ms. Morgan: — We have a provincial job order system called SaskJobs. The job order system is free to employers, and across the province last year we posted about 50,000 vacancies. So there's a variety of jobs on SaskJobs that are available to our clients to peruse through the computers in our resource centres. We also regularly partner with employers who are looking for or are recruiting workers, and so those partnerships help us to provide some job matching.

Many clients are in entry level job positions. Others are able to access various types of jobs. The job order system today has a wide variety of management, service sector, trades, trucking jobs right now. I think that it's fair to say that there's a wide variety of options for individuals.

We also have programs such as our employment supports that can help people who need support on the job to remain in that job. So we can provide a job coach if somebody doesn't have necessarily all the skills to do a job initially.

Mr. Elhard: — Would you provide services to clients, for instance help develop a resume or that type of job application activity?

Ms. Morgan: — Yes, we do do that. We have career services information officers in our resource centres in all our locations who help individuals to prepare a resume. We also have software on our computers that take you through how to prepare a resume and all you have to do is input the information. Our staff do spend a great deal of their time helping individuals with resumes. We also have fax machines and telephones for individuals to apply for jobs.

Mr. Elhard: — I don't know if you offered this information

previously, but I think you indicated that there are over 19,000, close to 20,000 people who access the system that is provided with the CanSask career program. But I don't know if you indicated how many jobs at any given time might be listed for the people who are in need of employment.

Ms. Morgan: — In Regina today there's about 540 jobs in the Regina location. Similar in Saskatoon. There's about 150 in Moose Jaw and similar numbers in our other locations. At any given time you'll see roughly 1,000 jobs posted. We've seen a real increase in the past few months in terms of job orders. We have probably almost doubled, over the past few years.

Mr. Elhard: — You mentioned four centres by name where you have an employment centre — the CanSask career and employment centre. Can you identify the other centres where these are located?

Ms. Morgan: — Twenty?

Mr. Elhard: — The other communities?

Ms. Morgan: — I can.

Mr. Elhard: — Twenty of them?

Ms. Morgan: — There's 20. Yes, sorry.

Mr. Elhard: — Well you won't have to do that. No, that won't be necessary. But I would assume from that number then that you've made an effort to put these in regional areas, the most likely commercial centre of various geographic parts of the province, plus some.

Ms. Morgan: — They are by location or by region. You can also search by job category, in certain trades, or certain other types of occupational codes. Primarily they're regional in nature. So in North Battleford, there would be surrounding communities. Meadow Lake, that would also have available jobs.

Mr. Elhard: — Maybe the minister can identify the additional money that is going into training. How much of that will be directed toward the Can-Sask career and employment centres or that program?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — In terms of the Can-Sask career and employment centres, the funding is essentially the same as last year with the exception of the increases to the community-based organizations.

Mr. Elhard: — The community-based organization increase though came via other departments; did it not? It came through this department?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — When the government made the decision to significantly increase funding for various CBOs, whether they were in the early learning sector or the justice sector, social services, health, education and so on, the money goes through the department that those CBOs are located in.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you. Let's talk then briefly about the CareerStart program if we could. I looked at the budget and the

press release that accompanied the documents on budget day, and there was an indication that the CareerStart program was going to benefit from 2,700 new spaces this year and that 5,400 more had been promised in 2003.

Can the minister tell us, how many spaces were there to begin with before we moved into this budgetary cycle? And how many do we anticipate having at the end of this program?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Last year we added 1,000 spaces — 1,000. And this year we've added a further 2,700 for a total of . . . I said 2,700, yes, for a total of 3,700.

Mr. Elhard: — Is 5,400 the ultimate figure that the government is anticipating?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Yes. And we have next year to complete that.

Mr. Elhard: — Okay. Would the minister describe this program, how it works, and what the component elements are that make up the CareerStart program.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I'll do is I'll ask Rick Pawliw to provide the description for you.

Mr. Pawliw: — Okay thank you. The CareerStart initiative really is an initiative which provides funding to expand existing capacity within the provincial training system. So there are programs, existing programs such as adult basic education, JobStart/Future Skills, and some of the programs that SIAST offers — apprenticeship training. By and large these programs have been . . . their capacity has been increased by X number of spaces — and I can provide you with that if you like — to deliver on the commitment of the 5,400 spaces overall.

Mr. Elhard: — Has basic adult education changed in any significant manner in the last 10 years? Can you identify for us what is included in basic adult education?

Mr. Pawliw: — Sure. The adult basic education program essentially has about three or four components. The Adult 12 program which provides . . . is equivalent to the grade 12 standing offered in the K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] system, the Adult 10 program, which currently consists of four courses and will be increased to five — and I'd like to come back to that. The third part is what we call pre-10 or literacy development. And then we also have GED preparation. GED is general educational development which is a grade 12 equivalency.

Mr. Elhard: — The content of those courses I guess is what I was primarily wondering about. Are those still just primarily basic mathematical and English language communication components, or is there something more technological about them now because we've moved into a much more technological world?

Mr. Pawliw: — The Adult 10 program is currently under revision. It has four courses, and then we'll be adding a fifth course called life/work studies. And the reason we're doing that is we evaluated the program back in 1999, and we have about 60 per cent of our enrolments are Aboriginal. So we felt that we

needed to include Aboriginal perspectives within the curriculum. As well, many of the students were telling us that the program didn't prepare them for employment. Employers were telling us the same thing. So we've added this fifth course which will help students make the transition to the labour force if they chose to do that. Some will move on to Adult 12.

Mr. Elhard: — How many students would we have taking advantage of this type of training at the very basic level, basic adult training programs?

Mr. Pawliw: — We would have over 5,000 annually.

Mr. Elhard: — And are those offered around the province through the Can-Sask career offices, or is it through regional colleges? What facilities are utilized to deliver those programs?

Mr. Pawliw: — Generally they're offered through SIAST — all four campuses in the province — the regional college system, Dumont Technical Institute, as well as the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies.

Mr. Elhard: — I take it from the various descriptions of programs that you've identified, that an individual could move through those programs in various stages, or if they're very successful, at some point might want to move well beyond at a point . . . If you pass your GED [general equivalency diploma], you're not going to do a lot of the other components of the basic adult education.

So what's our experience with the success of offering these programs, generally speaking? I don't know if you can put a hard number on it, but from an anecdotal perspective, from, you know, the 10,000-foot view, can you give us an indication of how we're succeeding in those areas?

The reason I'm asking is I know that literacy is a real concern. And we have our own literacy commissioner now, and there's a lot more effort being directed at providing basic literacy skills — just plain reading and writing skills — in this province as well. So I guess I'd like your opinion on how successful we are and what the challenges are and where we need to go on this.

Mr. Pawliw: — Well we do ask the training institutions to provide us with follow-up reports on the individuals that do enrol in the programs. So they'll be able to tell us how many have completed, how many have gone on to further education, how many have secured employment once they leave the program.

Generally, just off the top of my head, I think our completion rates are around 64 per cent. Now by completion, we mean that the individual has completed their career goal for that set period of time.

For some students, they will take for example Adult 10. They might take a couple of years to complete that program. So generally the programs end in May and June. So if they've completed the courses that they were expected to complete by that time frame, then we count them as a completer.

And so it's intended to be a continuum so that students can start in pre-10, basic literacy, and move through the system through

to Adult 10 and to Adult 12 and then potentially into post-secondary training.

Mr. Elhard: — In some circumstances then I would assume that if an individual came into the Can-Sask career and employment centre and was looking for work but was deemed to be short in some specific capacities, that that centre could refer that individual to one of these CareerStart programs.

Mr. Pawliw: — That's correct. Actually our Can-Sask offices work quite closely with the training institutions and do provide the referrals through to the institutions.

Our statistics show that about 60 per cent of our adult basic education population comes from social assistance. So as Jan Morgan had mentioned earlier that a large number of the clients that they serve through the Can-Sask centres are social assistance and employment insurance clients.

Mr. Elhard: — So is there a reciprocal situation when you have individuals go through your program and complete to everybody's satisfaction the particular program they're in? If it looks like they're prepared to go back into the job market, do you reference them back to these Can-Sask career centres?

Mr. Pawliw: — Yes. That's quite possible, yes, that they would be referred back. As well at times through the counselling process when an individual is interested in adult basic education, it may be deemed that it might not be the appropriate program for them. And they would be referred back to the Can-Sask centres for one of the programs that they offer through a community-based organization or other group.

Mr. Elhard: — Is there any delineation or qualification that is required that would maybe allow some individuals into these types of programs and others not? Is the assessment for inclusion in these programs generic, or are you looking for certain socio-economic groups for, you know, priority or are there those kind of limitations?

Mr. Pawliw: — I did mention the adult basic education evaluation that occurred in 1999. As one of the outcomes of that, we developed intake and assessment framework for our training institutions to use as a tool to be able to help them make decisions about and individuals make decisions about the programs that they are entering.

So we still have some flexibility for the institutions to tweak that framework, to adjust it to meet their needs. But essentially it's to provide them with a guide. So in essence, I think that that works for the most part.

The programs are open access. The adult basic education program is tuition-free. But as I've mentioned, there are a number of folks who come from lower social and economic conditions that are enrolled in the program.

Mr. Elhard: — Is income . . . I don't want to call it a limiting factor but are some people ruled out of these programs because they possibly have a little higher income than one would ordinarily expect? Because literacy or illiteracy is not necessarily associated with finances.

Mr. Pawliw: — Right. Not really. As well, there is an income support program called the provincial training allowance which provides living costs for individuals who are enrolled in programs. Now that's a needs-based system. So if someone has resources that they are able to draw on to attend school, then they may not qualify for the provincial training allowance.

But there we serve about just over 4,000 people annually, and I said we had 5,000 enrolments. So there are some folks who may be taking part-time or are working who are enrolled in ABE [adult basic education] programs.

Mr. Elhard: — I don't know if you maybe mentioned this and I missed it, but the provincial training allowance covers what kind of expense?

Mr. Pawliw: — Well I'm not the expert on that. But generally I can say it just covers their living costs. So there will be transportation, utilities, etc., food.

Mr. Elhard: — It's not earmarked as such though for those specific costs. It's an allowance that individuals are free to make their own spending commitments.

Mr. Pawliw: — That's correct. They self-manage the money.

Mr. Elhard: — There was mention in the budget of a \$3.8 million increase in this area, the CareerStart program. Can the minister give me an indication of what the total is that's being spent?

Ms. Durnford: — I think the \$3.8 million, it may be the reference to the increase in the provincial training allowance, which is a combination of increase capacity to have the income support match the increase in ABE seats in the provincial budget. And also there was funding in that envelope for the \$60-a-month increase on average per case.

Mr. Elhard: — So the training allowance is how many dollars per month, per individual?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, it would vary by the individual. If they have child daycare costs, if they have more than one child . . . But we can get you a little schematic of what the provincial training allowance means depending on your circumstances.

Mr. Elhard: — Would it be fair to characterize it as just a student loan in a different name? Because it would cover so many of the same kinds of expenses, would it not?

Ms. Durnford: — It covers the same kind of expenses. It's intended to act as an income support vehicle for people that are choosing to go through the ABE program. But unlike student loan, it's all grant. There's no repayment requirements.

Mr. Elhard: — All right. Most of our conversation I guess was around the basic adult education component. But you indicated too that there's a Future Skills, a JobStart/Future Skills component. If you wouldn't mind, would you describe that particular program for us?

Mr. Pawliw: — That program has a number of components.

One of the components is work-based training for the unemployed. Essentially that's designed to provide training for unemployed people into new jobs. And so there is a requirement that the employer has to create a new position. So if they have five staff, they have to be moving to six.

There was a new, sort of a reinstatement, I'll call it, of a component we used to have some time ago called JobStart/Future Skills training for the employed where we provide training assistance to . . . We targeted it to the manufacturing and processing sector where employers in that sector needed to retrain staff related to new work processes, new technology, that type of thing.

We also have an institutional-based aspect to the program whereby we provide funding to SIAST and regional colleges to deliver either certificate and diploma programming in the case of regional colleges, but also something we call Quick Skills which is intended to be just-in-time training so that if a group of, say, manufacturers in the Humboldt area collectively need 12 welders, that the college has some flexibility to deliver a program in short notice for that particular sector.

Mr. Elhard: — You mentioned now, most recently, four or five subsets of the Future Skills program, and I don't think we'll go through all of them individually now. But beside the basic adult education and the Future Skills program, was there another program that came under the umbrella that we're addressing here as part of the CareerStart program?

Mr. Pawliw: — Apprenticeship training would also be included in that and the northern health access program which is intended to assist individuals access nursing training.

Mr. Elhard: — All right. Maybe this is a political question. Maybe it's not fair to direct it to you. But in the view of the department and given the increase we've got, given the challenges we've got, if this was a perfect world and money was no question, how are we doing? And how much more effort and resource do we need to accomplish what's necessary in the province?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We need a lot more money, and I'll tell you why. If you look at the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, if you look at the Dumont Technical Institute, these are both institutions that support First Nations and Métis people. They have . . . Let's put it this way. SIIT has historically been resourced through federal resources. For the first time, we entered into an arrangement where we are providing funding for their adult basic education program off-reserve, so in urban centres.

They have a huge need for adult basic education. They have people that are waiting to access ABE, particularly on-reserve. As well once people get through those particular upgrading skills to get their basic education, then they want to be trained in various sectors. And they can go to SIAST obviously, but for SIIT, as an example, they want to be able to offer various programs on-reserve.

And so if you look at a population of people who don't yet have their grade 12, and in terms of their employment statistics relative to the non-Aboriginal population, there is a huge group

of people that need to obtain adult basic education and then obtain further skills in various fields in order to enter the workplace.

And one of our jobs will be to try and match with our new department, underemployed people or underdeveloped people with training and employment.

And we have some significant opportunities in the province in terms of jobs. We have some significant shortages, and we need to train people for those jobs. And that's why our labour market partnership agreement that we had with the federal government that was agreed to in November was going to be of a huge assist because a lot of that funding was going to be directed towards Aboriginal people.

Mr. Elhard: — I'm glad we've gotten into this area of discussion because I think there's a number of topics and subtopics that we can develop as a result of where you've gone with your response, Madam Minister.

You indicated that the funding that the provincial government has provided for the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies is a first-time effort and that largely the funding for that institute has come via the federal government. Do you anticipate that there will be some opportunity to recoup some of your investment from the federal government? Will they see the necessity to help fund the activities that you've undertaken? Are you in conversation with the federal government about that?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I have written two letters to Diane Finley who is the minister responsible for this file. As well I have a request for a meeting with Lynne Yelich who is the parliamentary secretary to Ms. Finley because we believe that there is a huge opportunity here for the federal government as well as the province to significantly resource First Nations institutions to support First Nations people in acquiring basic skills and further training.

And what I want to put on the public record is that the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology I believe has the capacity to get the job done. They seem to have the right people in place who have certainly the capacity and the professionalism and the knowledge to get the job done.

So we're very, very comfortable with the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology as a vehicle that could be used by both the federal and the provincial government to support First Nations people and Métis people because I think there are some Métis people that attend that institution as well.

Mr. Elhard: — You know when you look at the demographics of the province — and I don't have to, I'm sure, remind the minister of this — the future of our province is very closely tied to the First Nations community. And the opportunities that this province could enjoy will be limited by our ability to provide that adequate education and training for that segment of our society and will rob us of an even richer future. When I say us, I'm talking about us as a whole, as a province, as a society.

And given that set of demographics and given those challenges and opportunities facing us, I would be surprised if the federal government didn't respond with some favour to those

initiatives, those requests, because certainly I think they can see that the opportunities are pretty significant. And even if you don't do it for the right reasons, you might want to do it for political reasons.

So I would encourage the minister to, you know, to continue those dialogues that you've already undertaken as a means of securing their support and I hope some additional federal monies to achieve the objectives we need to achieve here. I don't think that it's even a matter of wanting to achieve it or hoping to achieve it. It's an absolute necessity; we have to achieve it. And I think the federal government needs to come to the table in that effort. And so I don't think you would find too much opposition from our side of the House in those efforts. I think that we would encourage that and hope for good outcomes there.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I'm hoping that the federal government simply doesn't realize the consequences of not continuing with that Labour Market Partnership Agreement because that partnership agreement had huge potential to educate and train First Nations people. And part of the requirement of the agreement was that a good portion of that funding would be directed towards Aboriginal people.

Now there was some money that was going to be directed to immigration, to immigrants, to support a labour market attachment for immigrants, particularly I think refugees, not people under the immigrant nominee program. But also a component of that was English language training for people under the immigrant nominee program.

I'm hoping . . . And I've put in calls to Diane Finley. She has not yet gotten back to me. I've written her. I'm hoping that if I can meet with Ms. Yelich the week that the parliament is adjourned, just to try and provide a briefing as to the impact of this decision and on this province, that there may be an ability to rectify the situation.

Mr. Elhard: — You also mentioned earlier the Gabriel Dumont Institute. Does the department anticipate developing similar types of funding arrangements with their activities?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We do support Gabriel Dumont institute of technology. We do . . . Or Dumont Technical Institute I guess it's called, DTI. We do provide support to DTI. We have not had the jurisdictional questions around Métis people. So there is funding that's going to DTI.

But also there is federal money that goes to DTI through METSI [Métis Employment and Training of Saskatchewan Inc.]. And once again, it appears as though the money that was going to METSI has been stopped. And we're trying to once again speak to Diane Finley about that because that has some fairly significant implications as well for people who're training right now who are at SIAST. And once again, I just hope that it's just a misunderstanding — that they don't understand the consequences of not funding METSI.

Mr. Elhard: — Are there issues of accountability though? Are there . . .

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — In the case . . .

Mr. Elhard: — To your understanding any more?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — No. In the case of METSI, there are no issues of accountability and the same with DTI. Those institutions have been managed quite properly given some of the other situations.

Mr. Elhard: — Okay. There was a reference made to the apprenticeship program here, the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission and the programs that they run in the province or for which they're responsible in the province. And I think that that's probably the next area that I would like to address tonight.

I'm really quite interested in knowing all of the workings of and the programs that make up the Apprenticeship and Trade Commission efforts in this province. Having come from a rural background and knowing how difficult it's been to get people working in farm machinery shops, people who are looking to apprentice, it is a real challenge. And I guess I understand from other tradespeople that apprenticeship programs seem to be a limiting factor as opposed to a contributing factor in some respects. And so I'd like to talk about that if we could in the next little while.

I noticed in the Estimates book tonight that there is additional money going to the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission — not a lot, maybe about \$650,000 by the look of it — but that in fact there's only \$30,000 actually maybe going into the training allowance area. And I'm wondering about that discrepancy. Can somebody comment on that for our edification?

Mr. Visvanathan: — Good afternoon. My name is Raman Visvanathan. I'm the executive director of the institutions branch. The apprenticeship training allowance received a 2 per cent increase on the \$1.5 million budget. There's two components to that for students that travel from out of town into where the apprenticeship programs are delivered. They receive a travel supplement. And so there was just a modest increase for those allowances. Historically the budget has been adequate to provide for the actual draw on those costs. So it simply received a 2 per cent increase.

Mr. Elhard: — Okay. So that would explain the small increase on that side of the program. The additional money — \$600,000 roughly, I guess, for the certification board — what's the demand for that increase?

Mr. Visvanathan: — Well we would provide funding to Apprenticeship Commission to cover some of their operating costs as well as to allow them to purchase incremental programming from SIAST. There are approximately . . . well there are 50 apprenticeship programs, and 27 of the programs are brokered through SIAST. So they would have additional funds to allow them to increase their capacity to provide for apprenticeship spaces.

Mr. Elhard: — So would you say that the additional money is primarily for programming, or would it be for incidental costs?

Mr. Visvanathan: — It would be for incremental programming primarily, yes.

Mr. Elhard: — Okay. You mentioned there's a quite large number of apprenticeship programs — 50 of them.

Mr. Visvanathan: — Yes, there's 50 trades.

Mr. Elhard: — And you also indicated something about 27; I missed your comment about 27 of them.

Mr. Visvanathan: — Oh sorry. SIAST would deliver 27 of the 50 trades. Some of the other trades are brokered from out-of-province institutions.

Mr. Elhard: — Okay. So if my own experience is correct and what I'm told by people in the construction industry and many of the other industries, we're just not able to provide enough capacity in the trades field through the apprenticeship program. What is the department considering doing to increase that capacity? We are chronically short in so many of the apprenticeship and trades programs. Is there an initiative that's being considered? Is there a significant increase in capacity being considered for the future? This problem doesn't appear to be going away any time soon.

Mr. Visvanathan: — If I may answer in a couple of respects. First of all in terms of the adequacy of the budget, the Apprenticeship Commission would schedule programs based on when individuals have the requisite numbers of hours to be able to go into the institutional training. So the budget is adequate in terms of allowing people to move through the program in an orderly basis.

And we work with the commission to increase the array of programs. Rig technician, for example, is one of the new programs that's currently under development in response to industry. The minister announced it as part of the budget. And recently a new initiative called the youth apprenticeship program; incremental funding for the apprenticeship commission to hire coordinators to go and talk to high school students, explain the apprenticeship program, and encourage them to do that . . . For high schools that have the technical equipment on-site, students can enrol and take the technical training and gain 100 hours per high school year, and that will be credited towards the apprenticeship program.

In terms of encouraging people more broadly into the apprenticeship fields, to be an apprentice, you need to have an employer. So in a part we're working with the Apprenticeship Commission, and government is encouraging employers to hire new apprentices and allow them to participate into that program.

Mr. Elhard: — Have you found there's a reluctance on the part of employers to become part of the apprenticeship program?

Mr. Visvanathan: — Well we're working with them. I think generally speaking they recognize the merit of having skilled labour, and individuals gain those skills both through their time working with the employer and technical skills gained through the post-secondary institutions.

Mr. Elhard: — Is that a diplomatic answer?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Yes, it is.

Mr. Elhard: — Maybe the minister would like to respond.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I think what I would say about . . . Just to answer your question, it's my observation that, based on the numbers of people that we have indentured as apprentices and based upon their ability to acquire the number of hours needed to go on to additional in-class training, that we have enough capacity.

What we have to do is to work I think much harder with employers to convince them that when they have journeypeople in their workplaces, that they should have apprentices with those journeypeople. It also means that we have institutions, like the universities or the government or various Crowns, that have journeypeople who work in those institutions. And we're now seeing more of an effort on behalf of those institutions to have apprentices with those journeypeople.

And one of the criticisms of the private sector is that, you know, we will have an apprentice; they become a journeyperson. They work for us for a while, and then they go on to a public institution and we lose them. And, you know, then we have to train people again. Their observation is that public institutions need to be training people as well. They need to be taking on apprentices. And so we're working with public institutions to encourage them to take on apprentices in order that we can get more apprentices through the system.

Mr. Elhard: — Madam Minister, the public institutions you're talking about, I assume, are Crown corporations?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Not necessarily. It could be SPM [Saskatchewan Property Management]. It could be universities. It could be the cities, municipalities. So when I'm talking about public institutions, it's public sector, school boards.

Mr. Elhard: — Yes. This is sort of I suppose a bit of a chicken and the egg problem. You know I was at home recently talking to my former employer who suggested to me that they were having a very difficult time finding enough people to work in their shop at a critical time of the year — you know, just days away from the seeding time, and that's very hectic. And we need more people on staff because of the kind of emergency situations that can develop at that time of year, but unable to find qualified people. And I know that my previous employer did undertake apprenticeship training frequently to try and solve those kinds of problems.

And I also have heard private sector employers say, well you know really that's . . . we're paying a lot of money in taxes. That's really the government's job to train these people. And if they're not going to do that, well I guess . . . But you know there's a very short-sightedness about that approach because your business cannot prosper if you don't have qualified, capable people in sufficient numbers to do the work that's coming your way. And so I think, as was alluded to earlier, there is probably a pretty significant public awareness and kind of a recruitment effort that's required to change attitudes and to get more young people into the apprenticeship route.

Now I would also ask, as a result of that comment and in view of some of the comments previous, is there a clear and delineated message coming from the department to promote the

apprenticeship program as an alternative and an important alternative?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — When we announced the youth apprenticeship program that is going to be province-wide in September, that is all about having young people look at the possibility of becoming an apprentice and a journey person, giving young people a bigger opportunity to explore careers beyond simply university. So we think that's going to be helpful. And certainly the industry thinks that's going to be of some assist.

Secondly, I think there is a growing awareness of young people that a career in a trade is not a career-limiting move, that you can experience decent wages and you can experience a decent life. And in fact if you look at people in industry, particularly in the construction industry, most of the people who own the companies come out of the trades. They are journey people themselves. So I think there is a growing awareness. And there's been a lot of effort I think on the part of the media to talk about this, and there's been some effort on our part. And we're hoping to raise the profile for young people to think about the trades, but also young people who are out of school and haven't quite determined what they want to do.

Mr. Elhard: — When we look at the Apprenticeship Commission as such, and they develop the programs and the processes that need to be followed to achieve certification. And I guess what I'm wondering is, who all plays a role in that decision? Who all plays a role in determining what needs to be achieved as an apprenticeship or what needs to be achieved in an apprenticeship program? And who determines how long the apprenticeship period will be? And what players all come to play a part in that whole process?

Mr. Visvanathan: — Each of the trades have a trade advisory board of industry members, journey persons who would collectively assess the current and future demands of each of those trades and provide advice to the Apprenticeship Commission who would have the jurisdiction to make such determinations.

Mr. Elhard: — If that's the case, is there not the potential for a conflict of interest in some of those determinations? Because we have a serious shortage of qualified tradespeople in the province, and that's not unique to us. That's something that's being experienced everywhere.

But knowing the potential and knowing what will be the future demand for qualified tradespeople, if we underestimate our need and restrict sort of the participation in apprenticeship programs for any reason and maybe if it's just based on today's set of circumstances, are we not creating a closed shop environment and restricting unnecessarily some participation in the apprenticeship program?

Mr. Visvanathan: — The trade boards would have jurisdiction in terms of the curriculum for the particular trade. In terms of access into the apprenticeship program, that would be based on the employers hiring somebody and indenturing them, which is the contract between the worker and the employer who agrees to ensure that the individual will achieve all of the curriculum requirements in terms of the different types of tasks that they

have.

And the Apprenticeship Commission would have inspectors who would come out to the job site, look at the records, and make sure that the individual is working on that, and so that the individual would achieve and be able to write all of the exams. And they would have to be able to demonstrate both the technical knowledge as well as the theoretical knowledge for each of the different areas.

Mr. Elhard: — So if I hear you right and correct me if I'm wrong, the only limiting factor in terms of the number of apprenticeship program participants would be the willingness and availability of employers.

Mr. Visvanathan: — Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Elhard: — Then maybe our advertising campaign should be directed to them instead of the young people.

Mr. Visvanathan: — Well if I may suggest, to both, I think, both in terms of individuals wanting to pursue that, to be proactive in terms of going to employers and say, look I'm prepared to make a commitment to you. And I would ask your support and commitment to me in terms of enrolling me into the program and having one of the journey persons — one of the other employers — mentor that individual through the program.

Mr. Elhard: — Can you give me an indication of the varying requirements — especially time-wise, not so much course-wise — but in terms of length of time that the apprenticeship programs might require? Is there a significant amount of time required?

Well I know for heavy-duty mechanics or those types of fairly intricate, technical types of apprenticeships, the time frame is going to be quite long. But if you're going to be a Gyprocker for instance, drywaller, is there a significantly less amount of time required to become an apprentice?

Mr. Visvanathan: — There is some variation, so some programs, in terms of achieving journey status, three to five years. And within each of those years, there's some variation of the number of hours that you would have to have before you're allowed to take the technical training between . . . I think it's about 1,200 to 1,800 hours would be the typical.

So there is some variation. And I think that's based on the variety of tasks that you would have to do and how many . . . you know, on a typical work site, for, you know, a typical kind of employer — if there is a typical employer — the type of work that they would normally do to allow you to be able to be proficient at those tasks in terms of the number of repetitions that you'd be able to do that.

Mr. Elhard: — If you, from your perspective, could tell us roughly how many more individuals in apprenticeship programs we require, I'd like to know if you've got that kind of a handle on the demand.

Mr. Visvanathan: — I probably can't give you a number. But I can tell you that there has been a study through the Construction Sector Council, the federally-funded council. And they've come

into Saskatchewan and done a labour market information project.

And what they have done is assessed each of the three major types of construction — institutional, residential, and commercial — and then assessed for each million dollars of construction how many plumbers, carpenters, electricians, etc., you need. And then they've worked with employers and collected major projects' inventories and things like that to say okay, how much construction is likely over the next period of time, looking at GDP [gross domestic product] forecasts, etc.

And some of that is a bit of a guessing game, but you know, best guess based on the collective views of the folks around the table and project forward and try to assess the number of each of the different trades. And so they've assessed based on, you know, we have a . . . I think they have a five-point scale. We will have about enough or we need a few more. They haven't quantified that in terms of specific numbers, just sort of that rating based on the demographic profile of what they know of the current journeypersons and others out there working.

One of the issues is not everybody working in some of the trades has to be registered either as an apprentice or be a journeyperson. So it's a bit difficult to get a handle on all of that. So I can't give you, sir, a specific number. And of course it depends on how much construction activity, etc., there is as well as how many people may move to other provinces. So in terms of gearing the capacity of the apprenticeship program, it's more of an art form, we call it, than a science.

Mr. Elhard: — Anecdotally though if we were to maintain in this province the rate of growth that we've seen — particularly in the City of Regina — over the last year or 18 months even two years, would it be safe to say or fair to say that any of the projects that happened here were delayed because of a lack of qualified tradespeople?

Mr. Visvanathan: — I don't know whether I have enough information to be able to answer that so sorry, I can't answer that.

Mr. Elhard: — Because there is, you know, a negative economic impact when you have those kinds of shortages built into the economy and into the construction industry in particular. And I'm just wondering about the availability of help when it's needed on demand, and what our capacity is in that regard. I'm assuming that the minister and her government would like to see that kind of growth continue on an annual basis. So if we did experience a shortage in the last 18 months, chances are pretty good we're going to experience a similar shortage in the next 18 months and years thereafter, not to mention the complicating factor of the elephant next door that we're contending with all the time.

So having said that, it looks to me like the onus is on our employers and young people and the department to play an ever increasing role and providing the solutions to those shortages.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — If I could just say this, that I'm trying to understand how this works and I've had the opportunity in the last little while to meet with some of the building trade unions: the plumbers and the electricians and the — I can't

quite remember — the ironworkers I think, oh, the boilermakers. They will say that their workforce is aging, that many of their workers are in their late 40s, and that they as part of what they do as a . . . I think they're called craft unions, they have not only journeypeople but they also have apprentices.

So when they go out onto these large industrial jobs, they will take apprentices through their union, whether it's IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] or ironworkers or whatever, the boilermakers . . . And they're trying to do some things to get people up to speed in terms of becoming journeypeople because they're very worried that once they retire that there aren't going to be the skilled tradespeople to replace them. And these are the people who go out into the big industrial jobs. They're not the smaller commercial jobs, the residential sector, but the mines — the polygen plant if it is to go ahead or the coal gasification plant if it's to go ahead. Those kinds of large industrial jobs tend to be done by unionized workers. And when they have a journeyperson on their site, they also have an apprentice with that journeyperson.

So one of their arguments is, the more large industrial jobs that we have, the more people we require and then we'll have apprentices that go with them.

Mr. Morgan: — Madam Chair . . .

The Chair: — I'm sorry. Mr. Morgan.

Mr. Morgan: — How often during the annual cycle do you have arrangements for people to take the journeyperson exams in most of the trades? Does it vary?

Mr. Visvanathan: — I think it does vary. There would be . . . It depends by trade and the number of people coming through. So they would go through as they're ready for . . . As they've worked in the work site, they've completed their hours. They would come in to do the technical training and complete that. So each person would probably do that once in a year and, depending on the trade and the number of people in that particular trade, they would schedule the training and the exams. So usually there's not a large or a long waiting period once people have completed the hours.

Mr. Morgan: — How many times a year would it be available for the common trades like electrical or plumbing?

Mr. Visvanathan: — I would think about four or five times a year.

Mr. Morgan: — And how far in advance are they scheduled?

Mr. Visvanathan: — Well they would be given, you know, ample notice, probably two or three months.

Mr. Morgan: — And are they scheduled like . . . Do you schedule them like several years ahead, or do you schedule them just periodically as the demand is there?

Mr. Visvanathan: — Yes, I think they have a yearly cycle in terms of apprenticeship sort of planning for the training. They would have an annual cycle so people would know well in advance when those dates are and be able to adequately prepare.

Mr. Morgan: — Do you have the dates with you now for, say, the next plumbing ones or next electrical ones?

Mr. Visvanathan: — I don't have those with me, sir, but we could get those to you if you're interested.

Mr. Morgan: — Yes, if you get me the next ones for electrical and for plumbing both. Maybe the next two or three. We get calls periodically from people that say they've missed one or whatever else, and there seems to be an information disconnect at times. So if you could forward that, that would be excellent.

Then I also wanted to ask about the interprovincial status on trades. What kind of consultation or how is that exam determined, or how is that set up?

Mr. Visvanathan: — The red seal program?

Mr. Morgan: — Well the one that's recognized so that the trade would be recognized in other provinces, so that journeyman's ticket would be recognized elsewhere.

Mr. Visvanathan: — Yes. The director of apprenticeship would participate with other directors of apprentices, and they have agreed on the certain standards for each of those programs. And each of the Saskatchewan programs are recognized under the red seal.

Mr. Morgan: — And are those exams given at the same time, or is it the same exam as the provincial exam?

Mr. Visvanathan: — It's the same exam. They have an exam bank, a computer system that would generate the particular questions for the specific exam. And if I understand correctly, it's drawn from a common database so people across the country would have exams that would come from that database.

Mr. Morgan: — Okay. And that's the same through your common trades — electrical, plumbing, etc.? Those are the same . . .

Mr. Visvanathan: — I believe that's the case, yes, sir.

Mr. Morgan: — And so the same dates that you're going to provide will be the same availability of dates? They would at that time be able to write an exam that would work the same for interprovincial as it would for a provincial licence?

Mr. Visvanathan: — All of the provincial programs that are available for red seal are red seal, so you would write just one exam.

Mr. Morgan: — Okay. And how many times can you write that exam before you have to go back and retake the class?

Mr. Visvanathan: — I believe it's three times.

Mr. Morgan: — And is that like that for all the trades or . . .

Mr. Visvanathan: — I think that is the standard, but I can confirm that.

Mr. Morgan: — No, that's fine. If that's the norm, that's fine.

Is there still an industry advisory council that exists, a trade advisory council?

Mr. Visvanathan: — Yes. For each of the trades, there's a trade board.

Mr. Morgan: — Okay. And how many people would usually be on that board?

Mr. Visvanathan: — Eight to twelve people, I believe.

Mr. Morgan: — Okay. How are they selected?

Mr. Visvanathan: — The Apprenticeship Commission would organize a process, and people would be nominated onto those. I'm not familiar enough with all of the specifics how . . . Some of them may differ in terms of how people are nominated and how people are formally selected, but we could provide that information as well.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — If I could just maybe help. The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission is an arm's-length body from the province. And the people who sit on the commission come from the various sectors. So there's representatives from industry and the representatives from labour from the various unions, I guess you would say. And they are the commission. So the province doesn't appoint, if I understand this correctly . . .

Mr. Morgan: — So these aren't OC [order in council] appointments?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — No. The province does not appoint people to the commission.

Mr. Morgan: — And that's the trade advisory board; that's the examination board. Is there two separate entities, or are they the same one?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — There's the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission. And the province does not appoint representatives other than there's two government people from the department that are on the commission. And the commission would be involved in setting up sector advisory committees.

Pardon me, we do . . . yes. We do the commission by OC, but the nominations are made by the . . .

Mr. Morgan: — So they are an OC appointment.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Yes. But we don't have anything to do with it. It comes from the industry.

Mr. Morgan: — Okay.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — So they tell us who they want to sit on the commission, and we provide the OC.

Mr. Morgan: — What about people that come from out of province or out of country that have had a certificate or journeyman's licence from another country?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well this is a problem. And this is why the immigration branch has now been moved from Government Relations over to Advanced Education and Employment. And this isn't a problem just for the trades, but it's also a problem for physicians, nurses, any profession where there is a regulatory body or where there is a trade body having those credentials recognized by the trade or the regulatory body.

In the case, as I understand the case of the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission, I think people can challenge some exams. So they have the opportunity to challenge the exams if they can show that they have years of experience.

Mr. Morgan: — As in challenge their obligation to write the exam or challenge the exam itself, or I'm not sure what you mean.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Challenge the exam itself. So when I say challenge, go and write the exam.

Mr. Morgan: — Okay. Take the exam.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Take the exam.

Mr. Morgan: — So if they're not recognized sort of by virtue of some protocol or something that exists already — it's an unknown sort of thing — the norm would be for that person to retake the exam.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well we are trying to do some work with recognition of prior learning but in the meantime there are . . . you do have the ability to, as the quote "challenge the exam."

And I'll give you one example. There is a man that I met at Hitachi that came here from the Czech Republic. He was a machinist. He ran a large section of Hitachi. He was not able to have his credentials recognized. And we were able to work with the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission to give him the ability to challenge the exam and get his credential that would be recognized by the machining industry here.

Mr. Morgan: — And the shortcoming in that — if there is one — would be that if the person were to be successful in taking the exam, they may or may not have sufficient practical skills or time in the trade that . . .

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I think you'd have to be able to show that you had the time in the trade. And I just wanted to also say to the member that we do have new funding in this budget of 500,000 to support the training system's capacity to implement activities related to prior learning. It's called Recognizing Prior Learning. And we've asked SIAST to develop an RPL [Recognizing Prior Learning] practitioner training program which will, I think, increase our capacity to recognize people's prior learnings and prior credentials.

Mr. Morgan: — How this is arising is, is people that either move here or immigrate here, we hear from them in the MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] offices and an incredibly high degree of frustration, not just in building trades but in other professions as well. And there seems to be an incredible disparity of what these people are told. There seems to be no

consistency.

I had somebody that was a European doctor from, I believe, Croatia. And he came here. The College of Physicians and Surgeons weren't willing to recognize his degree, nor were they willing to allow him just to take the exam. They said he would have to go back through university. He would have to go through an internship.

That individual wanted to work. He said, okay I still want to be a Canadian. I still want to be here. Let me work as a nurse. And was not able to get an exam scheduled or whatever upgrading classes they felt were necessary and was quite prepared just to write the exam. Said he will study on his own. They wouldn't arrange it for him. And he was frustrated enough, he actually left the province. He was probably one of the more well-qualified persons that we've lost.

And I'm hoping that with your initiative for immigration, that that's something that can be addressed.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I'm really glad that you've raised this because this is a huge issue all across Canada, particularly in the health sector where we have international medical graduates that have come to Canada, not under the immigrant nominee program but under the normal entrance into Canada. Because they're a skilled worker, they get here. And they discover that because of all of our regulatory bodies . . . And in the health sector practically everything that moves and talks in the health sector has a regulatory body. I think there's 31 of them. They are here. They're highly skilled, and they can't work in their profession because of the regulations governing various professions.

So the federal government and all of the provinces have several projects where they are working . . . And in our Department of Health we have a unit — the health human resource planning unit — where they are engaged in several projects where they are working with the regulatory bodies to get those regulatory bodies to recognize the credentials of people that are here in the province. And we are working with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the College of Medicine and the Saskatchewan Medical Association to see if we can put in place a process to assess the capabilities of all of these IMGs [international medical graduate] that are here. And we have several. I think we have about 50 doctors that are in the province but aren't practising medicine.

As well we have nurses, registered nurses that are in the province but aren't practising.

Mr. Morgan: — How many nurses?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I can't tell you that at the moment. I'm sure someone can. I can tell you about the doctors because I've met with them. I can't tell you about the nurses.

But I just wanted to say this. We announced a couple of weeks ago at SIAST a program where they are going to assess the skills of these international nurses and then get them into the workplace and, if there are gaps, fill in the gaps with training.

So we've got a program in place for the internationally trained

nurses. Now the Department of Health and I think Kevin, who's with us tonight from our department, are working on trying to do some work with the universities to get our doctors that are here and their skills recognized.

Mr. Morgan: — You know I don't think any of us want to have a medical professional that isn't qualified, that isn't capable, that isn't professional. But if we have 50 doctors in this province that we can address and identify what their skills are and examine them and have them . . . If we lose that 50 people, that goes a long ways to solving our shortage of health care . . . [inaudible] . . . and I suspect it's the same throughout.

I'd want to encourage the minister and the department to try and move with all due haste at finding ways to appropriately measure those people's skills and determine whether their qualifications can . . . whether you do it on an interim or a probationary basis or require them to take exams or . . . [inaudible] . . . we should, to the maximum extent that we can, do it.

It's troubling to hear that there's 50 doctors in this province that aren't practising medicine, that, you know, a goodly number of them would be capable, and probably more nurses.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — It is troubling. And as you know, the College of Physicians and Surgeons determines who gets to practise as a physician in the province. And so we are working with the College of Physicians and Surgeons to put in place an assessment process where those IMGs could have their skills assessed to determine where their gaps are, are they ready to go.

We also have a situation — and this is one of the things my immigration branch is working on — we have people here who need to write their MQ1 [Medical Council of Canada qualifying examination part I], MQ2 [Medical Council of Canada qualifying examination part II] examinations in order to even begin a residency. But because they're working as, you know, cab drivers or janitors or whatever they're working at, they simply don't have the money.

And one of the things, one of the projects we're working on — and we're hoping that the College of Medicine will help us — is to have a series of programs available for those IMGs so that they could study and learn and work together to get ready for those examinations. We could use our provincial training allowance to help them. And we're hoping that we can have that up and running by the fall because once again they're here. They don't have the money to pay for these exams. They're very expensive. And they don't have the time — because they have to work — to study for those exams.

So there's a number of initiatives that are being done by the province to work with the College of Physicians because they decide who can become a physician in our province, but also the College of Medicine and the Saskatchewan Medical Association to get those doctors working.

Mr. Morgan: — They'll only drive a cab for so long, and then they'll be practising medicine in another jurisdiction, so it wouldn't behoove me to say that you should interfere with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. I've certainly taken criticism for having been . . . I've certainly been accused of . . .

[inaudible] . . . we control the legislation that the College of Physicians and Surgeons operates under, and we certainly, to that extent, control their mandate. And I would certainly want to encourage the minister to work with them or maybe review the legislation to ensure that there is a framework brought in place.

My next question deals with the consultation in there and the relationship that you have with the federal government to ensure that immigrants have their applications for immigrant status processed promptly when there's jobs that are available. And we've heard of people that have wanted to come here. In particular, there's a business in Saskatoon called Actionwear — that's a clothing company — wishes to bring people from the Far East to work in those factories doing textile work and are unable to get work permits for those people. There'll be one or two that work here already, and they have family members there that work in the same trade in Vietnam or elsewhere and are unable to bring those people here. And I don't know what advice to give those people.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well we don't have our immigration people here tonight, but what I can say is that the work permits come through Service Canada, and we are working with Service Canada to see whether or not we can facilitate the processing of work permits to get people here faster.

Mr. Morgan: — Okay. I may come back another night. It's certainly troubling for those businesses when they have people that are willing to come and would like to. And we have a shortage of work, and we can't do anything. I realize there's the federal jurisdiction on it as well.

My last question deals with the journeyman examination process. I've heard complaints or problems, particularly with truck drivers, that there's a shortage of examiners or that they're having a difficult time getting examinations in place and that the examiners are often people that have recently been taken from the trucking industry. So you'll have a person being examined by somebody that's from a competing driving school . . . will be going over from truck driver school A to be examining truck driver school B. And it sort of questions whether you've got competitors. And that's, I presume, part of the apprenticeship program or through SIAST.

Mr. Visvanathan: — Yes. The truck driver training is not an apprenticeable trade.

Mr. Morgan: — Okay.

Mr. Visvanathan: — The exams would be through SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance], and there are a number of private truck driver training schools who would provide training. You know that might be farmers wanting to upgrade to get their 1A licence and have a three week . . .

Mr. Morgan: — I'm told that SIAST does not operate the program any more, but I'm told that SIAST controls the examination process or at least that's where they . . . and maybe I'm misinformed on that.

Mr. Visvanathan: — No. The examination process would be through SGI.

Mr. Morgan: — SGI.

Mr. Visvanathan: — You are correct. SIAST no longer provides truck driver training. We do provide instructor training for those people that would be teaching truck driver training.

Mr. Morgan: — So they provide instructor training?

Mr. Visvanathan: — Yes.

Mr. Morgan: — How many instructors are taught in a year?

Mr. Visvanathan: — I believe it's 30, approximately 30.

Mr. Morgan: — Okay. And how long does that course run?

Mr. Visvanathan: — I think it's probably 20 weeks. Something like that but . . .

Mr. Morgan: — And is that where the examiners, is that where the pool of examiners would come from for SGI?

Mr. Visvanathan: — No, I think those are the people that would teach the training, and then SGI would have their own people who would set those exams.

Mr. Morgan: — Okay.

The Chair: — Mr. Elhard.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, it's amazing. You step out of the room for a couple of minutes and you go from Gyprocking to brain surgery. And I'm not sure how we accomplished that, but I must have missed a wonderful discussion in the 10 minutes I was out.

A Member: — You get a lawyer involved and . . .

Mr. Elhard: — The remaining hour or so that we have, I want to cover a number of areas. And so if it appears rather disjointed, I hope you'll forgive that. But I think that there's lots of issues yet that we need to talk about.

One question I want to ask quickly and that is the tax credit program that's been introduced as part of the benefit of taking your education in Saskatchewan and staying. Is there any implication for the Department of Advanced Education for that particular program?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — No. It's all in the Finance budget.

Mr. Elhard: — Okay. I guess the next area that we need to attend to tonight is the SIAST policy of first qualified, first accepted. As the minister will recall, that was an issue that came to the forefront on several occasions this spring. And as a result of long waiting lists in certain areas, the first qualified, first accepted policy was under some public criticism and scrutiny. So I'd like to ask the minister the origins of that particular policy if she could identify that for us.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I think what I will do is ask Raman to speak to it, but I believe the policy started in 2000. But I will let him give you the history of the policy.

Mr. Visvanathan: — Sure. It goes back to a review that was undertaken in around 1998 and '99, and in part due to some frustration of parents who had children who were put 21st on the list of 20 people that were allowed into the program. So while they met the academic qualifications, the minimum qualifications, they weren't able to get in through what's known as the competitive entry process, which is typically what universities would use.

They would rank people, all the applicants, based on their academic average and do a cut-off based on those that are most capable. The competitive entry, SIAST moved away from that. And in fact before that, they had some first qualified and some competitive entry practices at different campuses. And they moved to an institution-wide practice of first qualified, first admitted, considered to be a more equitable admission process to allow fair access to all of those that would meet the qualifications.

Mr. Elhard: — Of course even under this policy, if we had 20 positions and there were 21 applicants, somebody would be left off.

Mr. Visvanathan: — That's correct. And that's typically the case I would suggest across all institutions where there's more applications than there is capacity. So in part the wait-list is generated, you know, because of the policy, but at least you're allowed to know when you might be able to get in as opposed to the uncertainty of always having to wait until the application deadline comes and goes, and the applications are accessed, and then not knowing what your future may hold in terms of accessibility to that program.

Mr. Elhard: — I wouldn't say that the FQFA [first qualified, first admitted] policy is without merit completely. But there is a real troubling aspect to that particular policy and that is the unintended consequence of virtually forcing some of our brightest potential students to apply elsewhere.

The student that comes out of school with, you know, a 90 per cent average or greater probably isn't going to wait three or four or five years depending on what the waiting list, you know, requires of that individual because if they've got that kind of capability, they want to get at it. They're anxious to pursue their post-secondary studies and will look elsewhere for educational opportunities. They are given no advantage for their scholastic capability through the first qualified, first accepted policy regime.

And I don't know that that's really good for the province. This particular policy might be more equitable in some respects, but it isn't the best policy in terms of outcomes or results necessarily. And I guess the worst part of it in my estimation is that those highly skilled or capable or potentially very strong students are obligated to try and get their training elsewhere if they are put, you know, at a certain position on the waiting list that doesn't accommodate their demand or their desire within at least a year or two at the longest.

So that unintended consequence really has a very detrimental effect for the province of Saskatchewan. I'm wondering if there isn't at least an accommodation. You did mention earlier that that accommodation was tried where they set some seats aside

for the high achievers and then allowed a percentage of the seats to be filled on the FQFA model. And I'm wondering if we wouldn't be better off going back to that kind of arrangement here.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Maybe I should jump in here. I've been doing some thinking about this given the size of the wait-list particularly for the five programs, the dental hygienist program, the lab program in particular. And these are medical programs. And if you look at the nursing education program, because it's attached to the university, it does have a . . . The most qualified person gets to enter the nursing education program. This is something that I've been thinking that I may want to have a discussion with the board because this was a board policy.

And I had an opportunity to meet with representatives from the students' association. And what they were suggesting is that we might need to think about a combination — a combination of equity and then most qualified, their point being that while they understand equity and if you look at SIAST, there are a number of older students that are on the various SIAST campuses. On the other hand there are young people that are wanting to get technical training, and they want to get on with their lives. So I think that's something that we may want to pursue with the board, a re-examination of the policy. And is there a way for us to have a balance? And perhaps a balance in certain programs and perhaps those programs might be the health-related programs.

I just want to make this point. On the other hand, you know, I know young people who . . . or even people who are little bit older who have been trying to get into the nursing education program. They would make wonderful nurses, but they might be 28 or 29 and their marks aren't as, you know, they're not in the high 80s or the 90s. And they simply can't get in because the marks to get in are so high. And that's kind of too bad. It's kind of a sad thing when particularly there are people in rural Saskatchewan who would like to become a registered nurse and would stay and would go back to their home community. And yet their marks may have been in the 70s when they left high school 10 years ago. But they won't get in unless they significantly increase their high school marks.

Mr. Elhard: — As a result of conversations I've had with people that are very familiar with the mix of students at SIAST, that have led me to believe that a blended approach to that issue might be the most beneficial, as well as the most accommodating to the demands of the student body. I understand it's a one-third/two-third, roughly, ratio of recent graduates to mature students and people who are looking to come back and improve their capacities and skill sets.

So given that demographic ratio, then a system that would accommodate the needs of both of those might be a better result for the province ultimately.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I've thought about in terms of this policy and maybe rethinking the policy, what do you do for all of those people who have been waiting for maybe four or five years? And if the policy were to change next fall, then there's a whole fairness question for them as well. So there's some things that we need to think about if the policy is going to change.

Mr. Elhard: — Is it a policy that could be phased in?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Perhaps it could be.

Mr. Elhard: — You know, we do hold certain seats, certain numbers of seats in programs for special groups now. That's, you know, something we have agreed to do because we know that their opportunities need to be fulfilled, and so we make special consideration for those circumstances. That's at one end of the spectrum.

I don't see that it's any less important at the other end of the spectrum. I mean, we need the full capacity of anybody and everybody who wants to achieve a higher set of skills for themselves and achieve their goals, their academic goals, and their work and career goals. And I think that trying to accommodate all of those demands, while it might seem difficult, probably won't be that difficult ultimately. It's just a matter of putting our mind and will to doing it.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you.

Mr. Elhard: — I don't think we'll pursue the waiting list issue at SIAST because it seems to me that that's a direct result of the existing policy.

But I do want to ask about capital project funding for SIAST because it seems to me that we can increase our training capacity and the number of seats at those kinds of institutions like SIAST and its various campuses. But if we don't provide adequate capital funding, how are we going to achieve the fulfillment of those opportunities? Is there not a tremendous amount of pressure on SIAST to grow physically?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — There's no question that we need to recapitalize and retool two campuses in particular, the Kelsey campus and the campus at Moose Jaw — Palliser campus. We need to work with SIAST very closely to develop a capital plan, and I have asked the officials in Advanced Education and Employment, along with the leadership at SIAST, to come together and work closely together to develop a capital plan so that if there are additional funds that could be made available we're ready to go with a plan. And my understanding is that the officials in SIAST have committed to do that, and they're going to begin the process of working very closely together so that we understand very clearly what is required to retool those two campuses.

And I would say this, that our officials have developed a very close working relationship with the universities and we've been able to dramatically increase the capital and renew the capital at the two universities. And now I have asked that SIAST work very closely with our officials to do the same.

Mr. Elhard: — In the Estimates book here there's \$4.9 million earmarked for post-secondary capital transfers. That is the money that is identified for all capital projects in all post-secondary institutions this year.

Mr. Wagner: — Yes. My name is Nelson Wagner. I'm the executive director of the facilities branch within AE and E [Advanced Education and Employment]. The number you cited was correct, and it is in the estimates as shown. What is not

shown though of course is the amount of commitment in the previous six months I would say of the government to provide capital funding to the post-secondary sector.

Mr. Elhard: — Could you identify for us the amount of money that was committed previously?

Mr. Wagner: — Certainly.

Mr. Elhard: — And the projects that are earmarked specifically.

Mr. Wagner: — Yes. In fact in addition to the 4.4, we had approximately \$122 million allocated additionally to that. And the projects were for the academic health sciences centre for the University of Saskatchewan for \$100 million; the Western College of Veterinary Medicine project, \$17.5 million; and the lab building addition for the U of R [University of Regina] of 4.6 million.

Mr. Elhard: — So what do you anticipate covering with the \$4.9 million in this year's budget?

Mr. Wagner: — That particular amount of money provides \$1.8 million to SIAST . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Sorry, it provides 1.8 million for SIAST, and that's for what we call sustaining capital, both for minor capital projects and furniture, equipment, and machinery renewal. There's also another portion of that which enables the universities to borrow \$6.5 million for sustaining capital. And the remainder is \$700,000 for the regional college system for both sustaining capital and furniture, equipment, and machinery renewal.

Mr. Elhard: — Okay.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — And I might add that SIAST was given approval to use some of their reserves to expand the Kelsey Campus and to do some work at the Palliser Campus. And I believe that amounted to about \$5 million.

Mr. Wagner: — Five and a quarter million.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Five and a quarter million.

Mr. Wagner: — Sorry. Five and a half million.

Mr. Elhard: — Okay. What is the sum of the total capital requirements or needs at SIAST?

Mr. Wagner: — That's something that's a work in progress. As the minister stated, we're working very closely with them. We've established the steering committee comprised of both SPM, AE and E [Advanced Education and Employment], and SIAST to work closely on all these issues, including projects that are underway.

Mr. Elhard: — Okay. The money that you've put into the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] health science centre, \$100 million, I understand that that money is going to be used for sort of the preparatory work for the planning and development of that health sciences centre and it doesn't actually go toward hard construction. It's all the preparatory work that is necessary to make that a state-of-the-art facility.

Mr. Wagner: — No. In fact the province did provide 1.3 million towards that project in previous years to enable the planning to happen. We're at the point now where they're undertaking design work. They've selected architects, for example, for two portions of the project and are now starting that process.

Mr. Elhard: — Okay. The original estimate for the health sciences centre was \$150 million, was it not? So . . .

Mr. Wagner: — Sorry. \$120 million for the first phase was the original estimate.

Mr. Elhard: — And what about subsequent phases? Was any estimate developed for that?

Mr. Wagner: — It was a notional amount of 240 total, 120 for each. And with the planning money, they were able to reduce that entire need in fact to approximately 150 million.

Mr. Elhard: — So how does the impact of construction costs affect the original estimate?

Mr. Wagner: — That particular number I've cited does not include the impact of inflation.

Mr. Elhard: — Does not include it?

Mr. Wagner: — No it does not.

Mr. Elhard: — So if the cost of construction has gone up roughly 30 per cent this last year alone — I think that's a figure that is pretty commonly accepted — what has that done to our projections and how do we pay for that?

Mr. Wagner: — Well you're quite correct. Inflation has been phenomenal in the last number of years and certainly last year. And it doesn't seem to be letting up from what we're seeing.

Certainly we're working through a process right now with the university to come to terms with these risks, if you will. And it is a significant risk. So we're trying to come up with a memorandum of understanding between the university and the province that will help deal with this as the project unfolds.

Mr. Elhard: — Is it the department's position that the university should equally bear the cost of the construction inflation risk?

Mr. Wagner: — It'll depend on the model adopted in the MOU [memorandum of understanding], if it's one of shared risk, you know, all those types of things, who's going to contribute what to the project. Will there be research funds applied to it? Will there be other forms of money provided to the university and other sources that might be used as well? It could be contributions to the university, things like that. So all of those are in the mix to be discussed.

Ms. Durnford: — In all of the conversations that we've had with the university on this particular project, we are trying to work with them to define what the requirements of the project are and then to define what the scope of the project is and to make sure that that scope is maintained because we don't want

to see . . . you know, we are very concerned about the inflation that we've seen in this area over the last couple of years.

And we have asked the university to think about what opportunities they might have to bring research funding, for example cost matching funding, into the project to try and help manage some of the costs. So that's a conversation that I think has been ongoing and is going to have to continue, to be continued, because this project is a very large one. I think we're expecting construction, if everything works out, to start in 2007. And construction could go out for four or five or more years depending on stages of development. So it's very complicated.

Mr. Elhard: — It is very complicated. But it's also seriously exacerbated by the, you know, by the pressure on the construction industry and construction materials and labour and all those other things. You know, at one time you couldn't hardly buy cement in Western Canada because it was all being shipped overseas. And steel has just gone right through the roof. And those are the two components that you're going to need most of in this particular project.

Now if 30 per cent last year was the accepted inflationary impact, just trying to extrapolate forward over the next five years, it's going to be, well maybe the word complicated is modest to describe it.

So what I'm wondering is, does the department, does the government have a contingency plan? Are they looking at saying, I'm sorry we just can't drag this out any longer. Time is of the essence. It's going to end up costing us three times what we had proposed if we wait the four or five years. We're going to bite the bullet and do something much quicker.

Ms. Durnford: — I think that in the conversations with university, I think that the planning, my sense of it is the planning has moved along in a timely fashion, that it hasn't dragged out.

I mean, certainly the government provided upfront planning money so that we could get a good plan that had a level of due diligence attached to it, so that we had some confidence in what the nature of the building was going to look like.

And over the course of the last two years, I would say the nature of the plan has changed substantially, as the university with the communities that they work with — whether it's the research community or whether it's the Saskatoon Health Authority and their faculty and students — the nature of the plan has changed.

So I think we feel at this point that we have a robust plan in place and the job that we have in front of us now is to start to stage that. I think that in the planning structure, the steering group and the work that Nelson has done with the steering group, they have built into some of the projections, inflationary costs. I mean, we are in an extraordinary time right now relative to inflationary costs.

We don't at this point know whether that time period is, those inflationary costs are going to be the same four years out for this project. But we are applying a level, I think, of due diligence to the planning process with the university and in that

context part of it is working through the risks around this.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — If I just might be able to add something. One of the things that I think . . . I know that there have been people that have been trying to get an academic health science centre for a very long time and have been working on this for a very long time.

But what's interesting about this project is that various faculty and people at the university have come together and thought about, very clearly, how they want to structure the academic health science in terms of the research tower and then the whole approach to how we deliver health education in the province for our students in a very integrated way. And so I think what we will have as a result of the work that's been done — even though it's taken some time — we are going to have probably a leading-edge approach to research on our campus relative to other places in the country and also a leading-edge approach to how we deliver academic health education to our students in a very integrated and collaborative way.

And that's how we've tried to design the health system, where people co-operate together in teams. And you'll see a lot of collaboration between the faculties. And that's what's really exciting about this academic health science centre — the work that's been done by the various interests and how they've been able to come together and collaborate.

Mr. Elhard: — We have a similar but much less costly situation at the University of Regina with the Lab Building too. And I know that as, you know, time passes, the cost of that project is escalating fairly significantly. And I think, if I remember correct, it was thought that \$9 million might do the job to finish off the needed space now, but all of a sudden we're looking at \$16 million. Can you confirm those figures? Is that pretty accurate?

Mr. Wagner: — Yes. The initial amount we provided was 4.6 million and we're looking at an additional 7 million to complete that, to respect the original scope that was approved.

Mr. Elhard: — But that could be considerably more as a result of the . . .

Mr. Wagner: — No, this is the number I think we've finalized with the U of R recently.

Mr. Elhard: — Okay. It must be just recently.

Mr. Wagner: — About a month ago.

Mr. Elhard: — Yes. Well I guess the problem I suppose is balancing the available resources with the ever escalating costs associated with these kinds of projects. And I would encourage the minister and her government to attend to these projects and get them done as soon as possible within the realm of financial constraint that the department has.

I was noticing in the federal budget, just the highlights of them, I came across a little piece that I thought was kind of interesting. It talked about the current government's confirming up to \$1 billion to provinces and territories to support urgent investments and post-secondary education infrastructure. What

does that mean for Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We think it means \$31 million but we're not sure. We think that's what it means and we're not sure about the parameters of the program.

Mr. Elhard: — The amount was calculated on the basis of some formula. Or is that on conversations that you've had with federal officials?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Based upon our population.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you. Madam Minister, I've got lots of other areas that I wanted to deal with but I see we're only about half an hour away from concluding tonight's estimates.

I want to raise the topic of the announcement that the Premier and you made just yesterday on the review of post-secondary accessibility, affordability, the attendant questions around those concepts, and have a discussion with you on the suitability of the approach that your government has taken in this particular announcement.

So if I may, Madam Minister, I think as part of our discussions previously we both agreed that this kind of review is absolutely necessary and probably long overdue. And the terms of reference for this type of undertaking I don't think are in dispute. But the question I would ask you, Madam Minister, is this: was the decision to appoint a government member — in this case the member from Elphinstone — to head the student financial assistance review, that was a decision made by you, by the Premier, by the cabinet, or did you have some other specific recommendation?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — It was a decision made by the Premier.

Mr. Elhard: — Did you hold a contrary view?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well one always holds the view of the Premier.

Mr. Elhard: — That's encouraging. Can . . .

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Oh no. When you're a cabinet minister, you hold the view of the Premier.

Mr. Elhard: — Can the minister outline how that review will operate and . . .

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I think as I understand it, Mr. McCall — I think I can use his name in committee — Mr. McCall, who is the member of the legislature for Regina Elphinstone, is going to spend some time thinking about how he might approach this task, and consulting with people. And I think we'll be in a better position to know how Mr. McCall is going to approach this task come fall.

My sense is, from speaking to him and having a conversation with the Premier, that this will be an extensive consultation with students, parents, various institutions. Obviously there'll need to be some significant interaction with our student financial assistance program as well as the regional colleges. Because Northlands College, NORPAC [Northern Professional Access

College], NORTEP [northern teacher education program] . . . Because accessibility isn't just about student aid or affordability, it's also about where programs might be delivered. So my sense is that we'll have a better understanding of how Mr. McCall intends to approach this task by fall.

Mr. Elhard: — Do you anticipate that the member will employ the use of a panel?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I don't know whether he will or not. My understanding is that there are some research institutes that are interested in assisting. Or I shouldn't say research institutes, but researchers who have some knowledge in this area that are interested in assisting. But I can't respond to that question because I'm not sure of his thinking on this.

Mr. Elhard: — As the minister will be aware, these types of undertakings — maybe not on this specific type of topic but these types of undertakings — have been launched in Saskatchewan. Previously we've had, you know, two or three pretty important reviews of post-secondary education. In the '90s we had the task force on . . . oh what was that called? We had a task force that just reported last fall — I don't have the title in front of me — that was undertaken involving three members who did a review external of government. That's been, by and large, the pattern established in other jurisdictions.

And I think there's good reason for that. I think the reason that those types of panels have generally been more widely employed is that that arm's length independent capacity seems to engender considerably more credibility. It seems to be an approach that assures the public that there is a completely dispassionate or apolitical view being developed through that process.

And so I guess I know that from the briefing note I've seen from the department that there was a recommendation that that type of undertaking, that type of construct, be employed in this particular effort as well. And I guess I'm curious to know the rationale as to why that particular approach was ignored or rejected.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I think that this is a question that you might want to ask the Premier during his estimates. I think it would be inappropriate for me to speak about the Premier's thinking on this matter. I can say this to the member. There have been members of the legislature that have undertaken some very significant work on various files that have led to, I think, some significant public policy.

And I'll use Pat Lorjé when she undertook some work regarding immigration in the province. And I would say her recommendations have led to the vast expansion of the immigration branch and the work that we're doing.

Graham Addley undertook some significant work on addictions, particularly addictions among young people. I think that that has led to some significant new work that's being done in the province, and I think it'll lead to further work to advance public policy in the area of youth and addictions and mental health.

Peter Prebble undertook some work in the area of conservation. And a lot of his work formed the basis of the program that we

announced regarding the energy file last fall when the price of natural gas was skyrocketing. And I can say, having been the minister that led that file, that the work that Peter did was instrumental in shaping our thinking on the program elements.

As well, Mark Wartman led the file on ethanol. We are the most advanced in this province in terms of ethanol.

And I would also say this to the member. I have colleagues in the Alberta legislature who are Conservatives who I had an opportunity to spend some time in Germany with a couple of years ago on a parliamentary tour. And the Alberta government regularly uses members of the legislature to look at issues and consult with the public, and the work of those MLAs has led to significant public policy in the province of Alberta.

So I would say that I think Mr. McCall has the intellectual capacity to lead this file and to think clearly. He is in my point of view a very thoughtful person. And I think that he will be able to approach this task with the whole issue of affordability and accessibility in mind, particularly given the constituency that he represents. And when you think about accessibility, people coming from his constituency are far less likely to access post-secondary education than people coming from my constituency which surrounds the University of Saskatchewan. So I support this notion of Mr. McCall leading this file, this review. And I think that he will be thoughtful and he will be very careful in terms of consulting with people appropriately.

I would also say this, having observed external reviews being done, sometimes these reviews can be implemented and sometimes these . . . the recommendations coming out of reviews create many, many challenges that are far more difficult than what people who are making the recommendations understand.

Mr. Elhard: — So would you characterize this particular approach then as the Premier's preferred approach? You identified having, a number of previous occasions having, you know, done special work or undertaken special projects by individual MLAs. That seems to be the hallmark of the Premier. Could I say that that's a fair characterization?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I think once again you would need to ask him in his spending estimates which I think he . . . You'll see him next week. My sense is that the Premier thinks that it's important that members of the legislature have a . . . take an active role in public policy development. And that members of the legislature, you know, come to this, come to this area with lots of expertise, lots of experiences outside of the political process; and that they are capable of leading files, consulting with the public, and making recommendations.

Mr. Elhard: — Can the minister indicate for us how she believes this review will be different from the review that was undertaken internally by the department throughout last fall and into the winter months? I guess it was actually a year ago. It started in May last year and went through to the fall.

Because when we had this discussion the last time we met, there was a rather lengthy list of groups and organizations that department officials had met and had had discussions with on this very topic. So I guess the question then becomes, how is

this component or this review going to be different than what's been undertaken outside of just the plain visibility aspect?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I think the department did not make recommendations. Their review did not lead to recommendations. Mr. McCall's review will lead to recommendations.

Mr. Elhard: — Can the minister maybe identify for us what discussions or consultations will take place with the post-secondary institutions themselves? What role will those institutions play in this process? And will the universities and SIAST and the regional colleges be invited to put forward position papers for instance?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Absolutely. The universities, SIAST, regional colleges, the institutions, I think have a significant role to play in this. And obviously they will be consulted. And no doubt they will make recommendations to Mr. McCall as to how we can deal with the issues of accessibility and affordability. And the kinds of supports that students require, regardless of geography or income, to access post-secondary education in the province.

Mr. Elhard: — You said the departmental officials, when they undertook their internal review, weren't invited to bring forward recommendations. But will that internal review form a part of the material, part of the workings of this particular . . . Will that review inform this particular effort?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Oh I think so. Because the department will certainly provide some supports to this review. So obviously the work that the department did, the knowledge that they have . . . I don't think you can undertake a review of this kind without consulting with the department and understanding, you know, the work that the department has done and is doing.

And certainly the whole area of student financial assistance is one of the areas that will be reviewed. And so the people in student financial assistance will be key in terms of providing information to Mr. McCall in terms of understanding how our program works.

Mr. Elhard: — I guess that's what I was getting at basically. There was some time and energy committed to this internal review process previously. Would that be wasted or would it be an important part of the ongoing efforts of Mr. McCall?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I don't think the time and effort was wasted at all. And in fact I think that the information that the department has been able to collect will be very important in terms of providing information to Mr. McCall as he goes forward with his review.

Mr. Elhard: — Can you tell us anything about the staffing required for this review? Has that been determined? Will there be any full-time staff attached to the review commission?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We have notionally allocated \$200,000 to assist with the review. This would assist in the paying of staff, any research that might be done. Mr. McCall will not receive any remuneration. He is not being paid for this work. But certainly there is money available to assist with research

and staffing.

Mr. Elhard: — I was looking through the briefing note and found some interesting names of organizations that would be consulted. And one jumped out at me because I've never heard of it before. It's called the new labour-business council, TBD. Who are they?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Oh we'll have something to say about that in due course.

Mr. Elhard: — Oh this is the secret part of the document?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I'm not sure it's that secret. What I can say is . . . I'll say this. The Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board is being transitioned to a new type of organization where business and labour will, along with the various post-secondary institutions, will play a key role in labour market planning and development. And I think that's what that briefing note is referring to.

Mr. Elhard: — Okay. Madam Minister, can you tell me the timing of this review and the final report have no political overtones whatsoever?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Oh I think that's a question that you should ask the Premier.

Mr. Elhard: — Well I'm asking you now, and I want to find out if his answer . . .

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We're politicians.

Mr. Elhard: — If his answer is the same as yours.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Oh I don't think his answer will be the same as mine. I think that that is a question that you need to ask the Premier, and I'm sure you will. But we're all politicians. And I mean everything that we do I think is about ensuring that we have positive public policy. And so I think the best thing that you could do is ask the Premier in his estimates.

Mr. Elhard: — There's no coincidence in the likelihood of an election date in 2007 fall?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well the Premier can call the election . . .

Mr. Elhard: — Sooner.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Any time soon or he could go later than the fall of 2007. I suspect the Premier will be thinking about when Mr. Harper calls his election.

Mr. Elhard: — That may be a mitigating factor all right. What kind of outcomes are you, as the minister of this department, hoping for from this review?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Oh it's a very good question. What I'm hoping for from this review is that we can create a system of student supports. And when I'm talking about student supports, I'm not just talking about financial supports but student supports that will ensure that as many young people as possible

access post-secondary education in our province.

Mr. Elhard: — Are you thinking, or do you want me to respond?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — No, I'm done.

Mr. Elhard: — I guess I don't want to elaborate too much more than what you've already said and I've put my views on the record here a few times. The fact that I'm sitting in this chair right now is a tribute to good post-secondary education.

And my dad didn't have any. My dad had a grade 8 education. And after I had gone to a private school for a few years, a denominational school for a couple of years, and then to university for a couple of years, he said to me, when are you going to quit fooling around and get a real job? And I never forgot that, because for him I was wasting my time. His experience was such that he grew up in an environment and a generation where you didn't need a lot of post-secondary education. And having benefited from a number of years in those great halls of learning, I know that my own life has been enriched and I have prospered, not financially necessarily, but certainly in other ways because of post-secondary education.

I have a love and a desire to see other people benefit in an equally significant way. And I suppose that when I refer to post-secondary education I almost always naturally default to university. But I don't want to leave the impression here tonight that that is the best and primary source of good post-secondary education. So for those people who are finding their first opportunity to achieve basic literacy skills or basic job requirement skills or maybe they're getting their first opportunity to sign on as an apprentice someplace, those are important and beneficial opportunities. And so the more we can make those kinds of opportunities available to our young people in this province, not only the more enhanced and fruitful their lives will be, but our lives and the benefit to our society will be significantly improved as well.

So I would say, Madam Minister, that a study like this and an effort being undertaken, even though it comes short in my estimation of what I would have liked to have seen, will be part of the process, part of the contributing process to realizing those good goals for our society. And I will be very interested to see what comes of this. And I think I will give credit when credit is due, and I will reserve criticism for where I feel it's fallen short.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Fair enough. I just want to make this point that, you know, there are farm families in this province that have survived, you know, this province and all of the elements for the last 100 years. And their farms have been able to generate enough income to educate, say, my grandfather's generation, my father's generation, my generation, but they're not generating enough money to educate my nieces' and nephews' generation.

And what troubles me at the moment is that there are young people in this province, particularly young people in various regions of this province, that somehow believe — and maybe it's because of our, you know, our Depression mentality — that they simply can't afford to go to post-secondary education. And they don't want to take on debt nor maybe because of the assets

of that farm can they take on debt . . . or the income of that farm, the revenue of that farm, which doesn't necessarily mean profits. And they're not going. And, you know, I drive in to gas stations all the time, and you see these young people pumping gas. And you say, so are you going to go on to post-secondary education? And they say, oh no, I can't afford it; oh no, I can't afford it.

And somehow when we talk about accessibility and affordability and this review, I think what we have to do is put supports in place for young people to believe that they can afford to go to university or go to SIAST. And when young people think of tuition of \$5,000 and they think about four years of tuition at \$5,000 — \$20,000 — and then you have to have money to pay for room and board in the city if you're coming from Eastend, it's a huge thing to overcome in terms of thinking.

So I think the review needs to look at the affordability question obviously, but the accessibility question, and is there a way that we can design post-secondary education so that young people think they can access it and afford it.

Mr. Elhard: — I see we're rapidly running out of time here. There are a couple of other topics before we get too tied up in our emotions and philosophical views here.

One of the unique projects that's come to my attention recently is the University of the Arctic. And I know that they have talked to the department. They've sought funding. They were unable to get as much as they needed, or maybe none of what they needed this year because of the lateness of their approach.

But I'd like the minister to, for the record, tell us what her view is of the University of the Arctic and the funding requirements that they are looking for for future efforts.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Is it in terms of Northlands College?

Mr. Elhard: — Yes.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I think it's a wonderful idea. And once again, it sort of fits into the notion of accessibility, if you are a person living in northern Saskatchewan, to have access to a master's program or a Bachelor of Science. I think that this is something that we need to pursue. I've had an opportunity to meet with these folks and it's certainly something we're interested in.

Mr. Elhard: — I think the funding request for this year was \$382,000. Was it the amount or the timing of the request and . . .

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I mean, I would . . . Just for the record, it's really important that people get their requests in to us before October.

Mr. Elhard: — Okay. Could it be safely said that you would welcome their request for next year?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We always welcome requests.

Mr. Elhard: — Is there a good possibility that you could meet

their request?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — One never knows. It'll depend on the revenues available . . .

Mr. Elhard: — It seems the Lac La Ronge Indian Band have greeted the possibility of the Northlands College proposal to deliver a Bachelor of Arts degree quite enthusiastically. I think they've committed to 15 or 18 seats in that program for this coming year. The band is actually going to fund the full cost of those seats and it seems that they're committed. They're prepared to put their money where their interests lie and I think it would be beneficial for the department to meet that commitment.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well thank you for your observations.

Mr. Elhard: — The other area I'd like to go to quickly in the few minutes we have left is the innovation commitment of this government and its various components. The innovation potential in this province, I think, is tremendous. It was strong before the arrival of the synchrotron. It's been boosted several times by the capacity for scientific research as a result of the synchrotron, but I don't want to denigrate or belittle other very worthwhile innovation activities that are happening in the province.

The Petroleum Research Technology Centre is another fine example of what technology can achieve and the potential for it in this province. The funding, I believe, is about \$9.8 million if I recall correctly.

I'd like to know the role of the department, of the provincial government through this department in the determining the amount of funding and the projects that are funded. Does the department play any specific role in deciding what projects are worthy of financial support?

Mr. Veitenheimer: — Hi. I'm Kevin Veitenheimer from university services branch. The projects that are funded through the Innovation and Science Fund are projects that have been already approved and received funding from a federal council, the Canada Foundation for Innovation for instance, the Canada research chairs program. There's a couple of other smaller programs that also provide funding that we match. So all the projects have already been peer reviewed and approved by another body before they come to us for matching funding.

Mr. Elhard: — With the amount of the money in the budget static from last year to this year, is that based on what you know of requirements? Or how did you arrive at that figure?

Mr. Veitenheimer: — The federal councils, the federal organizations have some programs in place that we've made estimates of the amount of success that Saskatchewan institutions will have. And we have a five- or six-year plan on funding those projects as they're announced by the federal government.

Some of the programs have funds that last up until 2010, so there's a regular process for applying by the universities and for those projects being approved. Some of them are also run by direct competition. So for instance Canada Foundation for

Innovation has a major competition on right now which will see some results announced in the fall of this year. Those ones we don't have a good sense of what the success rate will be, but they won't require funding until next year.

So we have sufficient funds to cover off the projects that we know that are on the books right now, and if required for next year we'll put in a request for further funding.

Mr. Elhard: — Could you give us an indication of what type of monies might be available to innovation, based on expected demand going forward. Like, are you aware that there are projects more or less in the works in the middle of an application to other sources that eventually we'll have to contribute? Have you any indication from researchers, from universities, from departments already of what the expectation might be for innovation funding in the future?

Mr. Veitenheimer: — Yes. We work very closely with universities and as they submit projects to the Canada Foundation for Innovation, for instance, we're aware of those projects and aware of the timing of those.

In this current competition there's about \$20 million of . . . There's projects that would require about \$20 million of matching funding from the province if they were all successful. Now having said that, across Canada there's similar applications from all the other universities and there's usually . . . well there's quotas in place as far as how much they can apply for, but those quotas are about three times the amount of actual dollars available.

So from \$20 million from Saskatchewan, there may be close to \$20 million in excess projects. There may only be 1 million. There may be none. One of them is a beam line, so it has a higher probability of success, I think, than say some of the other projects.

Mr. Elhard: — Is the timing of those competitions appropriate to the budget cycle? I'm just wondering how you work that out. I don't presume to know anything about that, so can you enlighten us on that.

Mr. Veitenheimer: — Well this current major competition, the applications went in . . . Well there was notices of intent to apply went in, in the fall. The universities have to make applications just in the spring, in February, March. As I said earlier, the actual results will be announced in October 2006, with funding required about nine months to twelve . . . or funding commitments from the province about nine months to twelve months after that. So that happens to fit within our budget cycle, yes.

Mr. Elhard: — What does the department believe the potential of innovation to be in this province?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I think that we've come a very long way in terms of innovation and science in the province in the last decade, I would say. And the two universities have had a concerted effort to attract scientists and researchers to faculty, to the two universities. If you look at the public policy advancement of the two universities, they have had research agendas obviously with the synchrotron, with the petroleum

research park here in Regina, the Lab Building, and so on. So I would say that we have made great strides relative to where we were say a decade ago, particularly I think in health research, particularly in health research.

And I think with the synchrotron here now and with the medical beam line that has just been funded by both the province and the federal government, that is going to lead to some significant spinoff research. So I would say the potential is huge.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you. I think we've run out of time. But I tried to get everybody in the mix tonight, and I see I've missed a couple of faces back there. I'm going to have to go back and meet them and find out what it was I missed that couldn't involve them in the program tonight. But we've had several strong line changes, so I guess the others got to ride the bench for the evening.

I had one question I wanted to ask about student loan specific, but I think I'll defer and we'll maybe talk to the minister directly and one of her officials off camera tonight. But I thank the minister for her good answers and her patience again, and I also thank all of the officials who attended here. Two and a half hours is a long time to sit there if you're not doing anything, and I appreciate the attentiveness and the support of the minister tonight. So thank you once again.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. The committee will recess for five minutes while we change officials.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

General Revenue Fund Corrections and Public Safety Vote 73

Subvote (CP01)

The Chair: — We'll call the committee back to order. The next item on the agenda is consideration of estimates and supplementary estimates for the Department of Corrections and Public Safety. Welcome to the minister and his officials. If you want to introduce your officials, and I think this is not your first time so I don't imagine you have any statements to make.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — No it isn't. I'd just like to introduce the officials I have with me tonight. I have on my left, Terry Lang, the deputy minister; and on my right, Tom Young, who is the executive director of protection and emergency services. Behind us we have a number of officials. Starting on this end we have Bob Kary who is the executive director of the young offenders program. Beside Bob is Mae Boa, the executive director of management services. Karen Lautsch is at this end of the table; she's the executive assistant to the deputy minister. And in the back we have Barry Sockett, the director of human resources. We have Nick Surtees from licensing and inspections. We have Bob Vogelsang from adult corrections and Ken Cameron from adult corrections.

The Chair: — Thank you. We're on vote 73 on page 45 in your Estimates book and questions. Mr. Toth.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Minister and to

your officials, welcome to this deliberations on Corrections and Public Safety.

Mr. Minister, when we wrapped up our last period of debate we were discussing emergency measure services. And at the time we were in the midst of a significant flood in the Porcupine Plain area and as well one just taking place that affected, I believe, the Red Earth First Nation. And from what I remember, the flooding that took place there actually took everyone somewhat by surprise, and there was significant effort made to move people out because there wasn't enough time to actually take other precautionary measures. However on a reserve it's very difficult when the individual homes . . . it's not quite easy to try and provide protection for all the homes.

And the question I do have, Mr. Minister, regarding the most recent flooding, what actions were taken by the department in dealing with the flood outside of the fact that we know that a number of people were evacuated to ensure safety of human life. But what other actions were taken and continue to be taken to address that issue and concern?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. Were you referring at this point strictly to the Red Earth, the evacuation of Red Earth First Nation? Thank you. I'm just going to confer with Mr. Young.

Thank you very much. I would like to indicate that the evacuation and the condition on the Red Earth First Nation was first of all coordinated by the P.A. [Prince Albert] Grand Council and the local community, and the First Nation itself with the Government of Saskatchewan out there to assist, led by the Department of Corrections and Public Safety.

But there was involvement in the coordination of that effort from a number of government departments including DCRE [Department of Community Resources] who handled the actual evacuation, SaskPower, of course the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] were involved, Saskatchewan Watershed Authority.

And in the community of Nipawin itself, there was a command centre set up to deal with the situation both on the Red Earth First Nation as well as in the surrounding community around Nipawin. And we had personnel that were on hand to assist both the P.A. Grand Council and local municipal officials in a variety of ways, both on the Red Earth First Nation and in the surrounding communities around Nipawin.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess the question is, as we look at the situation that arose in regards to Red Earth First Nation, what impact did it actually have on the First Nation at the end of the day? Were a significant number of homes impacted to the point of being unlivable? What kind of damage and what kind of dollar figure do you anticipate will be forthcoming from this flooding experience?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. I'm going to let Mr. Young answer the question, who is most familiar with this topic.

Mr. Young: — Thank you. Tom Young, executive director of protection and emergency services. We don't have a specific

dollar figure at this moment in time. It being a First Nations community, it is the local band council that works with the grand council and with ourselves and INAC [Indian and Northern Affairs Canada] to actually work out what the damages were and the particular kind of a response.

We have been in discussions with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to look at the damages there. I don't have the exact figure in terms of the number of homes that were affected, but I recall it was somewhere in the order of about 11 or 12 homes I think.

We did go out on site, and we did have a look at it when it was at about its high-water mark and when the northern part of the community was cut off quite significantly from the southern part of the community. And we could see there that there was about 11 homes that were suffering from some kind of high-water mark. A lot of it was crawl spaces that were affected by some of the water, and then there were a few basements as well. We do know that the school did have some damage as well. And certainly with regard to the access road, it was under probably about a foot and a half to two feet at least of water.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you. When disasters of this nature happen on First Nations reserves, is it the responsibility of the province to provide disaster relief, or does that fall under federal jurisdiction?

Mr. Young: — We have an arrangement with the federal government generally speaking as it relates to First Nations communities, the specifics of which we will be getting into with them in more detail. But generally speaking if there is damage or a disaster occurs on a First Nations community, we activate our resources in much the same way as we would any other community. We're there for support and background during the event to help them through the event.

Now when it comes down to the disaster assistance financial part of it, the province will help administrate that process and will pay out some of that, but gets cost recovery back from the federal government. Depending on the amount that is damaged and the amount of the claim, we will either claim that back through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, or PSEPC, which is the Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada.

Mr. Toth: — So, Mr. Young, can I interpret from that response that at the end of the day the actual costs of damages, most of that money will come from the federal government?

Mr. Young: — Yes. Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Toth: — The last time we met as well, I'd asked about the amount of funding relief that would be going to the Porcupine Plain area and the amount of funding that you could expect to provide to communities and individuals affected by the flooding. Mr. Minister, you had indicated that there were cheques actually being processed. It's been a couple — two, three — weeks now since we've been there, and at that time you weren't sure what kind of dollar figure we might be looking at. Do you have a better idea of what type of dollar figure the province might be looking at to address the issues there and whether or not residents or individuals or municipalities can expect cheques to arrive in the near future and when?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — At our last meeting, I had indicated that the RM had submitted damages of approximately 1.050 million, was the estimate of damages to both municipal and private property in the RM [rural municipality] of Porcupine Plain.

At this point then there are adjusters, go out and look at each individual claim. And at that point, individuals fill claims in for damages done to their property. Adjusters then go out and adjust that damage. The estimate of damage is based on adjusters going through and looking at some of the major damage to infrastructure, to roads and bridges and some significant damage on some farms. Now we're awaiting the report from the adjuster as to what the actual damages are, actual cost of the damages. That's an estimate done to give an indication of the amount of damage at 1.050 million.

Mr. Toth: — So, Mr. Minister, as of this moment, there really hasn't been any funding flowing forward to RMs or individuals regarding problems associated with the disaster.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — From this spring, no. But as you may be aware, these areas also experienced this type of damage last fall and last spring. And in some cases, those claims have moved forward.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, you've said the claims from the fall have been moving forward, and funds have already been going out.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — In some cases, not in all. It's dependent upon when the individuals put their actual claims in. And many, many claims came in throughout the entire northeast region in late March, right at the end of the fiscal year, so many of those claims are not complete. They're in the process, but there are some claims that are being processed in all the areas of the province. They're done on a priority basis so . . .

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, last fall, when we were debating this issue, we noted that in the previous budget the government had actually cut back on funds in the disaster program and then had to substantially up the funding needed as a result of these disasters. I note this year I believe it's about half a million dollars that you have allocated for disaster relief. And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, in view of what happened last year whether or not you're comfortable . . . this is enough of a cushion to work with.

And also, Mr. Minister, are you putting your confidence in these weather forecasters who are predicting a long, hot summer and no more flooding? However with that it brings other problems and we note in Texas serious storms. So it's not just flooding and that type of disaster we've seen even in our area of the province where buildings have collapsed as a result of even high winds.

So I guess the question, Mr. Minister, is: are you confident that there's sufficient funds without having to go back to the Minister of Finance should another disaster hit the province?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. When we budget for the PDAP [provincial disaster assistance program] program for emergency funding, we budget \$500,000. That, in a normal year, is more than sufficient.

In the event of disasters that require funding greater than that, it is one of the programs which are automatic that we proceed with. And then we would seek a special warrant to deal with those costs that exceed the \$500,000. But in a normal year, \$500,000 is sufficient to deal with the difficulties experienced and to pay out claims under the program.

Mr. Toth: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, what was the total cost of funding for the provincial disaster assistance program last year? And how many claims were filed, and were any claims rejected? And were there claims from other areas outside of the major flooding in the Porcupine Plain area?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. In the last fiscal year the claims are approximately \$15,248,034. We had a total of 2,329 claims. And those claims that were rejected represent about 10 per cent of the claims.

Mr. Toth: — Of the rejected claims, what types of claims would be rejected? Why, and were any of those claims from individuals?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. Claims that were found not eligible are found not eligible for a number of reasons. The provincial disaster assistance program is a program that deals with non-insurable claims. In some cases those that were rejected were in fact eligible for insurance. In other cases they may be eligible for other programs. So when these claims are rejected, in many of the cases it was because, as an example in the city of Saskatoon, they have a program for flooding, flood relief. And in other cases, claims were also insurable. And in some other cases, there were duplicate claims put in, more than one claim put in for the same event. So those are just some of the examples.

And yes, there were claims throughout the province, outside the Porcupine Plain, northeast area of the province as well.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, when a claim is submitted, and of course no doubt the officials look at it and determine, as you indicated, whether it's an insurable type of disaster or a claim or isn't . . . When the department gets back to the individual, is the individual informed as to why and then informed as to what other steps they may take to recoup some of their losses?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — I should inform the member that the initial investigation and adjustment of a claim is done by a group of private adjusters that are hired, contract adjusters that are hired, that are experts in this field. It's not done by the department itself. The adjusters then submit those claims to the department for review. So an individual may in fact be informed by an adjuster that this is an issue that may be claimed in other means or in fact may be informed by the department when the adjuster's report comes forward.

Mr. Toth: — So thank you, Mr. Minister. If I understand you correctly then, individuals actually, when the adjuster arrives, will know fairly quickly whether or not their claim is one that would fit within disaster relief and what avenues, other avenues, they can pursue. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — They would know in a general sense. But

there may be occasions when you get into something very technical or very specific that would have to be reviewed by the program, the executive director of the program, the province, or one of the departmental staff that review these claims.

But in a general sense, that would be correct. The adjusters are experts in their field of adjusting and understand the program and its principles very well.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Just going in a little different vein in regards to emergencies, in view of what just transpired last summer, fall, and then of course again this spring, especially in the area of flooding, are you quite comfortable with the EMO [Emergency Measures Organization] and how it functions? Is it, to your knowledge, providing the services and meeting the needs of emergency situations and in addressing circumstances that may arrive?

And the reason I ask that question, an individual has contacted me who is still concerned that the department or this EMO area of the department is really not that well equipped to really meet a significant disaster. He said there's some concerns. The person that contacted me has actually been involved with the city and worked with the municipalities. He's been involved in emergency services for a number of years. So I raise the question on his behalf and ask whether or not the department is comfortable as to where we are today if we needed to really address a significant emergency.

And when I talk emergency, like flooding is something that most people can become aware of and there's sufficient warning. But we get a disaster like we've seen in the past of . . . And especially if we do happen to get a hot summer, we can tend to probably get some high storm winds or even tornados. And those are types of disasters that you can't really prepare for as well or even be significantly warned to prepare yourself.

And of course I would think the public would be looking to the province for assistance in how it would deal with these issues, and I think that's where the concern is being raised. And I just want to know where the department is, what precautionary measures or further steps the department is taking to ensure that should a disaster of just multiple storms and what have you hit the province, that we're prepared and quite capable of addressing the problems that may arise.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. As you may be aware, the responsibility for the response to any emergency is dependent upon all three levels of government. The primary responsibility rests with that of the municipality first. And we have put forward additional funds this year to assist in community support for emergency planning because many — as you'd be well aware — many of these emergencies, if it were a tornado or something of that nature that's unpredictable, it'd be some time before a provincial or national response could be initiated.

So the first and most immediate response is that of the municipality and local community. And so we are working and put additional funds in this budget to work with communities to ensure that they have good emergency plans that are well integrated with the provincial disaster assistance plan or emergency plan to assist in that response. And that of course is

connected then to our national response as the size of the, or nature of the emergency or disaster, if it were beyond the ability of us singularly as a province to respond.

So it's a multi tiered, multi-level approach starting first at the local level and moving up to the provincial level and then on to the national level, if that level of assistance is required.

We are always continuing to improve our planning. Can I say to you today that every community and every municipality across the province has adequate plans in place to deal with an emergency? I can't nor could any minister across the country today ensure that. But we are continuing to work and support communities in that planning, working with local professionals in how to respond emergencies in those particular areas.

At the provincial level we are continuing to build our resources, continuing to look at what our needs are in being able to assist those communities. And that means working through both our office of emergency management but also working with local emergency planners in communities and working with the federal government who also maintains an office here dealing with emergency management.

We've put aside this year \$100,000 toward a preliminary feasibility study of putting together a joint federal-provincial command centre or a centre here in the province to deal with emergencies. What we are doing is working towards a fully integrated emergency response system in the province that starts first at the local level and moves very rapidly up through the provincial and national level if required.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, in talking about how we respond to emergencies . . . And the individual that sent me this info also complimented the previous minister because this person felt that the previous minister had grasped the need for good emergency response and the need for careful planning at both the municipal, provincial levels to ensure the safety of Saskatchewan residents.

And his comment here is he felt the previous minister also recognized the fact the provincial government has a moral responsibility to the people of Saskatchewan to respond to their needs in times of disaster. His sense was that there was a previous minister who was beginning to understand why we need to put in place a disaster program, especially in view of the fact that we still have a large percentage of our population who lives in smaller and somewhat remote areas not usually accessible, not quickly accessible.

You mentioned a moment ago about the need to have communication. And in a lot of our small communities with first responder groups, FleetNet service is the only service that really works; it's still available. And that service is going to be discontinued in the near future. And what everyone's been asking my colleagues and I is whether or not that program will continue to function until there's something better available because we all know that cell service certainly doesn't work very well in a lot of areas of the province.

And the other thing is I'm running into a lot of people involved in first responders who are just feeling at times they're left out. And part of the problem they feel they're left out . . . It's not

necessarily the fact of working with their RMs and working with additional RMs and trying to put approaches as to how are they to respond to a disaster, but these individuals tend to work both in the area of health as well. And there are some real concerns as to how they provide emergency services and the communication back and forth right within the health regions. There is some major concerns.

And so I guess the question, Mr. Minister, is the fact of what's the department doing to ensure that we're integrating all of these services to the best of our ability to come up with the most efficient and effective way of responding to a disaster in Saskatchewan and especially in our smaller, more rural, remote communities?

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. I'd like to start by reassuring the members and the general public that the province has committed and will stand strongly behind a commitment that the current telecommunications system, FleetNet, will remain in place until a viable alternative is found and established and up and running throughout the province. FleetNet will continue until that alternative is put in place and up and operational through the entire province.

And my predecessor made that commitment many times in the House. That is still the position of the Government of Saskatchewan and will remain the position of the Government of Saskatchewan.

In the broader sense — your question about being prepared and the importance of emergency management — I should tell you, when I was given this position by the Premier of Saskatchewan, he told me the most important aspect of my job, and what he gave me as a mandate, was to continue to improve the emergency management capability of our province. And in doing so we are taking a number of initiatives, including expanding our ability this year to work with municipalities at the local level to prepare for an emergency.

We have started the process of integrating services within the department to allow us to have a greater capacity to respond. As an example, fire prevention officers from the fire commissioner's office are now working with the office of emergency management. Both these groups report to Mr. Young. In the emergencies of both Red Earth and in the Arborfield area, we had officials from the fire commissioner's office assisting those emergency management personnel we have. By doing so, increasing significantly our capacity to respond and putting on the ground significantly more staff and services to people.

We're going to continue that integration. We're going to continue to work with communities, and we are working as well with the federal government to look at how we coordinate our responses within the province in a more timely way.

We are also working with fire departments through the office of the fire commissioner, and Mr. Young again will lead these discussions. We are looking at the changes to legislation, The Fire Prevention Act, in order to better coordinate our responses between municipalities.

One of the shortfalls of our ability to respond to emergencies in

general is reciprocal agreements between municipalities. And if it is an individual . . . whether it's an individual in a car on the side of the road that's rolled over that needs to be removed from that car, cut from the car, or whether it is flooding or a tornado, the citizens of our province expect us all to work and respond to that emergency in a manner that is in the best interest of the entire province.

So one of the functions that we need to work on — and we are continuing to work on — is helping to ensure that municipalities put in place reciprocal agreements for assistance to one another so that in the event of an emergency, we have a seamless system across the province and those resources that are required, the closest to the emergency, respond first. And if it is necessary due to the size of the emergency, resources come throughout the province in order to respond to an emergency.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I am pleased to hear that the department is continuing to be proactive in working to develop even better policies and more simplified and proactive approaches to dealing with emergencies. And I can't agree with you more, Mr. Minister. It's not just a matter of reciprocal agreements with RMs. There's also issues surrounding health districts, and there's an issue in the near future that I hope to bring to the minister's attention and hopefully get a response that's more positive.

In view of the fact that if you happen to be on the very outside edge of whether it's a health district or an RM — and the closest response team is in the other jurisdiction — you should be able to confer with that jurisdiction and get the emergency services available quicker versus having to follow through with what's in the one district. And so I think it's important that we look at all of these methods as we coordinate our programs. So I appreciate that, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — I agree with you 100 per cent.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, I'm going to move to a different area of questioning for a few moments and that's in regards to back in March we noticed a news article came out in regards to a situation of financial irregularities in the department. And there was a case under investigation regarding an employee who was dismissed failing to properly account for trust fund deposits. And it's been an issue that's been ongoing in a number of departments, Mr. Minister. And over the past number of years, the Provincial Auditor has raised this concern and the potential of this possibility and been asking departments within government to put forward certain precautionary measures that would assist in ensuring these types of financial irregularities or issues of fraud would not occur. Now if I'm not mistaken, I believe this individual may have by now been dismissed. I'm not quite positive on that, but I think that's what I've heard.

My question, Mr. Minister, is: what is the department doing since . . . First of all, have there been any other cases arise that are of concern to the department? And, Mr. Minister, following that, what is the department doing to ensure that issues of this nature don't happen in the future, that the corrective measures are being put in place to ensure that individuals are indeed performing their jobs and performing it appropriately and not taking advantage of the public and public funds?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. I'd like to start by indicating that we are not aware of any other incidence of fraud or any inappropriate dealings with public funds in the department.

I would like to indicate, in this particular case, within the Department of Corrections and Public Safety, there are adequate safeguards to ensure the funds that are in possession of the department . . . This was a case where an individual didn't properly account for those funds. When supervisors became aware that there was an irregularity, they immediately launched an investigation. This was not a case of there not being adequate protection in place. It was a case of somebody going around, outside the process, and not adequately accounting for it.

I should tell you that in this particular case, the employee was fired. And as well, the managers responsible were also disciplined. So this was a case where there was appropriate policies and guidelines in place. This was a human error.

Mr. Toth: — So if I understand correctly then, Mr. Minister, the department has over the past number of years been endeavouring to ensure that adequate procedures are in place to guarantee that the public trust and public funds are being well looked after and cared for. And that individuals, to the best part of your ability — because I realize that no matter how precautionary measures we put in place, I think you'll always find someone who may find and will find, if they wilfully desire to do so, a means of usurping some of those actions. And I think you did indicate that there's a chain of command that's in place to try and deal with that issue.

So I guess, Mr. Minister, having said that and from your comments, can you give your assurances that the department, to the best of their knowledge, has adequate procedures in place to deal with situations of this nature?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. I'd like to start by indicating that these funds were in an inmate trust account fund. They were inmate trust account funds. These funds were not direct government funds. These were funds that were in fact monies earned by inmates and held in trust by the department for the use of those inmates — earned by them and used for them.

As a result of this, the department's working with the Provincial Comptroller, and we're reviewing all the policies and strengthening the procedures around these types of funds. And at this point I am confident that we have looked at all the loopholes around this particular area and we're in a better position to deal with these funds today than we were at the time of this incident.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. We'll move on to another area. We were also discussing the issue of grievances and the number of grievances outstanding in a number of our correctional facilities. And I believe you were going to get back to me with a response to, I think I asked, regarding the Regina Correctional Centre. I know the Saskatoon Correctional Centre has, and has for a number of years, had a number of outstanding grievances. And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, what is being done to date to address those outstanding grievances, and is

there a way of actually reducing the number of grievances?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Recently the parties have met and agreed to a new pilot process to deal with grievances, whereby a group of grievances would be reviewed by an agreed-upon third party to determine the likelihood of success of either side in arbitration. We're hopeful that this will assist in reducing significantly the number of outstanding grievances and result in closure of a number of grievance files as a result of this process. And we're moving forward with this process.

I would like to indicate that in the last two years there have been significantly fewer grievances, and as an example, fewer new grievances being added to the system. We're dealing with some grievances that have been backlogged for some time. And these grievances, where there is no agreement between the parties, is not easily resolved grievances.

Mr. Toth: — How many grievances in the Regina correctional facility outstanding?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Twenty-two.

Mr. Toth: — Twenty-two. How many in total?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Twenty-two.

Mr. Toth: — Twenty-two. All outstanding. Mr. Minister . . .

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Oh pardon me, are you asking how many have been received?

Mr. Toth: — How many in total and how many outstanding?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — We have them by year. So in 2003 there were 8 at the Regina Correctional Centre; 2004, 13; 2005, 6; 2006, 14.

Mr. Toth: — Already?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — We've closed 55 of the 77 that were received, for a remaining 22.

Mr. Toth: — Well it seems to me, Mr. Minister, I'm not sure what's happening in the Regina Correctional Centre, whether it's just the type of employees, but when you look at the centre versus Saskatoon, that's certainly a lot less than the number of grievances that we've seen over the years in the Saskatoon correctional facility.

Mr. Minister, you indicated I believe one time in our discussion — I'm not sure if this is something we had individually — that the problem with grievances as well is the fact that it can be the same team arguing both sides of the grievance which creates a problem. The method you had just talked about, is this one way of dealing with that issue and getting a number of these grievances off of the board?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Well the process will allow a third party qualified arbitrator to give his opinion without actually conducting an arbitration as to whether or not either party has the likelihood of them winning, which hopefully will result in either one of the parties deciding either to settle or not to

proceed with a grievance. So it's an expedited process that allows you to deal with a larger number of grievances over a much shorter period of time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. As of today with this change in policy — and maybe it hasn't been going long enough — but what results have you seen by bringing in a third party?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — At this point this process is being talked about, agreed to between the parties, but has not been put in process. But as you might, by looking at the numbers of grievances over the years in the correctional centres as alternate processes have been used — and they have been used in various centres over the years — have seen reductions in the number of grievances first being laid, as I laid out the entire grievance process last time. Local union-management committees, issues can go to local union-management committees for discussion and may be resolved at that level. They can be passed on to the provincial corrections union-management committee.

So there are other processes already in place which may or may not be used differently by each of the correctional centres and stewards councils in each of those correctional centres.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, when you mention the number of grievances in the Regina correctional facility, considering the state of the physical well-being of that facility, I might have anticipated there'd be more grievances coming out of that facility. Maybe it takes more time and effort by the employees there just to maintain and make sure the system's operating correctly in view of some of the circumstances they're facing that they don't have time to make many grievances. But it would seem to me, Mr. Minister, that the greater effort we can make in dealing with the grievances, certainly will make for a more healthier environment within correctional facilities.

One further question in dealing with grievances. Has your department found over the year that a lot of times grievances are more almost issues of dealing with personal issues versus actual real grievances about the workplace? When I mentioned personal issues, I think we see many times where people may not, an individual may not actually get along with another person, so there's a complaint versus learning how to work together to provide the most comfortable working environment.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. It is safe to say that the majority of grievances would be individual grievances and not grievances that are policy, what we would call a policy grievance or a group grievance.

The nature of individual grievances are such that they may be as a result of differences of opinion between individuals, but the system is such that individuals can grieve anything within the workplace. But those grievances that generally are found, are validated in any way generally would be violations of the collective agreement. Grievances that are disputes between two individuals are really not the purview of the grievance process, but individuals have the ability to grieve anything.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Just one final comment, Mr. Minister. Noting '05 in Regina correctional, six; '06

already 14, is that a reflection of the change in ministerial position?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — No.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, recently the federal government — I've just got to get some notes here — the federal government announced some significant changes in fines and how they're going to deal with criminals. And I guess the issue that arises is first of all the question, as the federal government begins to implement their changes in justice and how they're going to deal with . . . Actually I believe if I'm not mistaken, they're talking of implementing more stricter sentences for a number of issues like gun-related crime or criminal activity. And my question to you, Mr. Minister, is, what does your department anticipate this may have in regards to the number of individuals that would be remanded in provincial correctional facilities? Or do you anticipate most of this will be handled in federal-controlled facilities?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. This is a difficult issue to measure. As you know, factors that contribute to where an individual is in the criminal justice system and where they're incarcerated are controlled at a number of different levels. After reviewing and analyzing to the best of our ability at this point, we do expect an increase in the number of inmates incarcerated on a daily basis within the provincial correctional system.

We do anticipate that there will be an increase in the number of days perhaps people are remanded. And as conditional sentences are removed as options for judges, we anticipate an increase as a result of that as well in our average daily counts.

The total, it is difficult to say what the total impact will be. Our best estimate at this point could see increases as high as 200 to 300 per day increase in the average daily count of that magnitude. It may not reach that magnitude. It may exceed that. And it may take some time before we feel the full impact of those changes. To some degree it is a bit of guesswork at this point. But we are going to continue to monitor this very closely as we plan to deal with those increased counts.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. As a note from the news report in the paper on May 4, it points out the fact that the government is talking about getting tough on crime by putting more people in jail and keeping there longer if they commit drug, gang, or gun crimes or reoffend while on parole. So the federal government seems to be fairly specific as to areas where they feel they need to come down tougher.

Later in the article it talks about the federal NDP [New Democratic Party] against minimum mandatory sentences, especially for drug-related crimes because they feel, as they indicate, they feel they don't work. And you indicated . . . I think I sense that you might agree with the federal NDP because it takes away the additional . . . implement by judges to implement conditional sentences.

My question to you, Mr. Minister, is, what involvement or what communication has the department had with the federal department in regards to these changes? And will these changes indeed totally eliminate the opportunity for judges to implement

conditional sentences depending on the type of crime?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. Both Minister Quennell and myself in a joint letter to the federal government earlier this year indicated that we had some concerns as to the impact that these changes would have on our average daily count. At this point we are continuing to monitor the situation, but we are also preparing briefings to send to the federal government as to what we see the potential impact within our province to be so that there's an understanding by both the officials and the federal government and ourselves as to the potential impacts of these changes.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I notice also in this newspaper report here it mentions towards the end of the article about the Liberals and New Democrats say they will not back legislation that is not accompanied by community-based crime prevention programs. And I believe it indicates a budget set aside 20 million over two years to discourage young people from lives of crime, which I would take to say they're talking about educational measures which the two federal opposition parties indicate is not enough.

In this most recent budget the Minister of Finance said there is . . . regarding safer communities, his comments:

There is need for a continuum of justice services with an increased emphasis on community-based services, including responsibility for local delivery, crime prevention, holistic treatment of offenders and victims in family violence situations, and involvement of victims in the criminal justice process.

As you may or may not be aware, the Saskatchewan Party has certainly talked about working with community-based organizations wherever possible in providing services that community-based organizations are already providing rather than setting up duplicate types of services.

Last night I had the privilege along with my colleague, Mr. Elhard, and the member from Regina Elphinstone, of attending the rescue mission fundraiser. And you may have heard my comments in the Assembly today. What I would have to add from that dinner last night was how impressed I was with the work the rescue mission has been doing over the past number of years — and it's just been a short period of time that they have been in the city of Regina — and how they have been able to provide a total turnaround for individuals who have sought their assistance.

And we're talking about people here who finally decided that the rat race of drug and alcohol and crime was something they wanted to get out of. It was destroying them, destroying their families. And they went to, in this case, the Regina Rescue Mission. I'm going to talk in a few moments as well about Teen Challenge.

And following up on the article in the paper and the emphasis on community-based services, Mr. Minister, can we anticipate that your department, based on the comments made by your minister, and looking at what the federal government's talking about, will start to look at some of the community-based organizations that are actually putting some good programs in

place?

For example, last night there are eight individuals graduated from a year's program of assistance in getting off drug and alcohol abuse and dealing with their other addictions as well. And I might add that I'm sure the 600-plus people that were at the banquet were certainly touched by the individuals who spoke of their addictions and how over the past year they've been able to, as a result of support from the Rescue Mission, been able to really change and transform their lives.

And I think that's what we're looking for, what society is looking for because we want to give people the opportunity — while they've made a mistake, they've committed a crime, or they've got involved in drug- and alcohol-related problems — that there is the ability to change.

And so what I would like to know, Mr. Minister, what steps, if any, your government and the Department of Corrections and Public Safety are looking at or pursuing in regards to addressing these needs as people come forward and saying, enough is enough; and it's time, but I need some help?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the question. I'd like to start by indicating that the Department of Corrections and Public Safety works very closely with a large number of community-based organizations in delivery of services to both youth and adult offenders throughout the province.

In this fiscal year, we'll be spending \$6,768,621 in support of community-based organizations to deliver services to offenders in our communities. These dollars go to provide valuable support to offenders to reintegrate back into their communities and in some cases to help individuals preventing, particularly young people, from getting involved in the criminal justice system.

It's money well spent. We work well with community-based organizations. We work towards a common goal of reducing the number of youth and adults in the correctional system but also in providing services to offenders upon release to help them reintegrate back into the community and deal with their problems when released from custody.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, of the six . . . if I heard you correctly, \$6.6 million?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — \$6,768,621.

Mr. Toth: — This amount of money, how many organizations and can you list the organizations that are receiving this assistance to help them put together programs to help people deal with their addictions and not reoffend?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Yes, I can. We deal with the Battlefords Tribal Council Management Corporation, the Family Service Saskatoon Inc., the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, Indian Métis Friendship Centre of Prince Albert Corporation, John Howard Society of Saskatchewan, Kikinahk Friendship Centre Inc., La Loche Community Development Corporation, Lac La Ronge Indian Band, Lloydminster Native Friendship Centre Inc., P.A. Outreach Inc., P.A. Grand Council, P.A.

Grand Council Holdings Inc., Prince Albert Métis Women's Association, Qu'Appelle Valley Friendship Centre Inc..

Rainbow Youth Centre, Regina Alternative Measures Program, Regina Treaty Status Indian Services Inc., Restorative Circles Initiative of Saskatoon Inc., Saskatoon Downtown Youth Centre, Saskatoon Indian Métis Friendship Centre, Saskatoon Tribal Council Urban First Nation Services Inc., Territorial Drive Alliance Church, Touchwood Agency Tribal Council, West Flat Citizens Group Inc., the Yorkton Tribal Council, the Elizabeth Fry Society, Young Women's Christian Association, File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council, and the Prince Albert Grand Council.

More than 34 CBO agencies in total are funded by the department.

Mr. Toth: — And, Mr. Minister, what types of services do these organizations provide?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Well I will try to give you a sense of the wide variety of services these groups will provide. They will provide community service and restitution programs to hold youth accountable to the victims and the community, also providing supervision for restorative justice and restitution programs.

They provide day programs for high-risk youth who do not have access to academic, vocational, or work placements; school re-entry programs; reintegration programs into communities; youth employment support programs; extra-judicial sanctions; alternative measures programs that hold youth accountable outside the formal justice system. Measures include educational programs, victim-offender mediations, and community justice forums where both youth and victims can in fact deal with these issues in the community.

And that's just a sampling of the types of programs that are provided by these agencies for young people and their families and for offenders in our communities.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, has the Regina Rescue Mission approached your department for some resources in dealing with the individuals that come to them?

And as we saw last night, there were individuals with criminal activity who have sought the services of the Rescue Mission and certainly been assisted in overcoming that problem?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — No, the Regina Rescue Mission has not approached our department for funding. Traditionally the Regina Rescue Mission would in fact, if it was looking for government funding, seek that funding through the Department of Community Resources and Employment.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Minister. Minister, what about the Teen Challenge Saskatchewan? I note here a article in Regina *Leader-Post*, May 10 — no it was 6; in fact that's quite recent — talking about lack of funding, questioned the director, was asking why the provincial government would not partner with this organization to help combat drug addictions. And he's quite concerned about the fact that it seems this particular government has been adversarial to the program which they

find quite startling in view of the fact that they have been welcomed in other provinces.

And I believe as well, Mr. Minister, you would've received a letter from the Evangelical Missionary Church board of Macoun asking or actually offering their support to the province and encouraging the province to provide some financial assistance to Teen Challenge Saskatchewan. The letter was sent Friday, April 14, and they have indicated that the Teen Challenge program has worked in many areas across this country and there's been a . . . their suggestion is that it provides a beneficial, cost-effective, rehabilitation program.

So my question, Mr. Minister, is: has this Teen Challenge actually talked to Corrections and Public Safety, or is this again falling into another area of where they may have talked to government, whether it's Justice or Community Resources and Employment? Like I'm not exactly sure where they, who they might have talked to, but I am sensing that there may not have been a request come to your particular department.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. At this time we are not aware of any letter that has come to the department about this issue. If you have any information that you'd like to forward to us, we can review and look into it. But at this point to our knowledge, there has been no request or letter sent to the department.

Mr. Toth: — Well I find that interesting, especially from the group at Macoun because it's directed directly to you, Mr. Yates. So whether or not it just never got . . . I can get you a copy of it just so you . . .

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Could you provide us with a copy of that letter please?

Mr. Toth: — And I think my colleague has a couple questions to follow up in regards to the services that some of these groups provide. But I'll also endeavour to do a follow-up with regard to Teen Challenge and see exactly who they have contacted or whether they have made a specific request of the Department of Corrections in regards to funding for their program and offering their services to reach out and meet the needs of offenders who really would like to get out of the issue of crime and drug addictions.

And we talked about this privilege last fall. I've been talking to the former minister. We've talked about it I believe . . . of it, the last time too about the programs in place . . . Or does the department have programs in place to help people try to move from these addictions that they're facing that cause them to get involved in criminal activity?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. Yes, there are programs in place throughout both adult and young offender systems to assist individuals who are attempting to deal with their addictions. And I will ask, if I could, Mr. Kary to come forward, who has a great deal of knowledge about our programs throughout the province, to provide more detailed information if required.

Mr. Kary: — Bob Kary, executive director of young offenders' programs. I can speak more directly about the addictions

programming with respect to young offenders' programs. We do have . . . We'll start with talking about addictions programs for youth, young people in custody. And we do work with the regional health authorities who of course work in conjunction with Saskatchewan Health to deliver programs on addictions.

These programs are . . . We work in collaboration. We have professionals coming into all of our facilities and providing assessment as well as treatment programming for young people. The programs look a little bit different in each facility. But nonetheless there is access to those programs. When offenders leave facilities, of course the young people are followed up by the addictions services and the regional health authorities.

The Chair: — Mr. Elhard.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I was, as mentioned by the member for Moosomin, in attendance at the Regina Rescue Mission event last night. And I don't think . . . Of the 600 people that were there, I don't think there were very many who weren't completely moved by the testimonials of the eight individuals who graduated from the one-year program of recovery that the Rescue Mission offers.

And I have a little personal experience with this type of endeavour, so I guess the question I would ask is, is the department aware of any studies that would compare the relative successes or failures of faith-based programs versus non-faith-based programs for recovering drug addicts and alcoholics and individuals like that. Have you studied the literature? Are you aware of the literature?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. I will again refer this to Mr. Kary.

Mr. Kary: — I'm not entirely sure what programs you're speaking to with respect to faith-based, if you're including Alcoholics Anonymous and those type of programs in the faith-based.

There is certainly a knowledge base of evidence-based programming today that is certainly available and has been studied by significantly . . . especially in the development of Project Hope, which you're certainly aware of. And there is certainly some principles I think, that have been sort of determined that are effective with offenders. And some of those principles do relate . . . some of the principles are somewhat different than faith-based programs, but they certainly do not exclude faith-based programs. And faith-based programs I think have been working for many, many years and have assisted many people to step away from alcoholism and other addictions.

Mr. Elhard: — The reason the question comes to mind is, having listened to the list of CBOs that the department currently participates in programming, there were a very large number of, I would call them, culturally based programs, but maybe only one or two what one would ordinarily call faith-based programs. And I was just wondering if there is any departmental bias against the faith-based program as part of the community-based organizations that operate in this province.

You know, there's many, many different programs existent here

in the province that are exclusively faith-based. And I'm wondering, in view of the relative successes that many faith-based programs have achieved, whether we're missing an opportunity to see bigger and even better results by working a little more closely with them.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. I'd like to start by indicating that 70 to 75 per cent of our clients are of Aboriginal ancestry. So we work very closely with the First Nations community and with elders in the formation of our programs. And in each of our correctional facilities and young offenders facilities — the majority of the young offenders facilities — we have Aboriginal specific programs, including sweats and other culturally sensitive programs to assist them in the healing process. So the programs that we are bringing forward are sensitive to the cultural and spiritual needs of those individuals who are in our facilities.

When we have 70 per cent of the population of Aboriginal ancestry, we are of course targeting our programs to be sensitive to the clients and working very closely with elders and spiritual leaders in the Aboriginal community in the formation of our programs.

Mr. Elhard: — Well I wouldn't suggest Mr. Minister, that those programs aren't appropriate to the needs of the preponderant number of individuals, you know, of Aboriginal ancestry. If in fact as you indicated the statistics suggest that you have a heavily weighted group of one sort or the other, then programs appeal to them or are designed for their specific cultural and individual needs are probably as appropriate could be. But on the other hand, the other 30 to 35 per cent of people might benefit more significantly from the availability of faith-based programs.

Now having said that there might be . . . As part of that issue, it might be the reality that many of those programs have not sought government funding of any kind and maybe prefer not to. I'm not sure. But would an application for assistance from a faith-based program such as Teen Challenge or the Rescue Mission . . . And we're not speaking on their behalf; we're using them as examples. But if applications for funding or assistance of some sort came forward from those groups, would those applications be looked upon favourably?

Mr. Kary: — I'll start by saying that the department has worked in partnership with faith-based programs in past. As you're probably aware, we did have a long-standing relationship with the Salvation Army with respect to custody at one time. We currently work with the Territorial Alliance Church with respect to alternative measures and other programming as well. So I think there's . . . We do in fact do that. The criteria we use for programming I think is, you know, doesn't favour or not favour faith-based programs. It really looks at the type of programming that is provided. Is it evidence based? Is it likely to work? And is it the programming that actually assists the offender population in which that we are providing services to?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. Before we move forward, I would just like to indicate, Madam Chair, I have now received a copy of the email that Mr. Toth has so kindly provided from the evangelical missionary church board. I'd like

to indicate that no, I was not . . . I did not receive this email. I didn't receive it because it was not appropriately sent to an email address that I would receive. So unfortunately I wasn't able to receive this, but I do thank you for forwarding this to me. And I will see that I will respond to this email as appropriate, and indicate to those individuals how to appropriately reach me through email.

The Chair: — Mr. Toth.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And as I indicated earlier, I will also do some follow-up in regards to the request Team Challenge has made. And it's quite possible that their request has gone to another department as well. My indication from observing and listening to officials is that it hasn't really come to the Department of Corrections which is quite possible. And so I'll certainly follow up, and we can move forward in that regard.

And I might add as well, of the eight graduates from the program last night — if I'm not mistaken — five of the eight were First Nations people that came to the Rescue Mission. And a number of them already have jobs and are actually pursuing careers which we certainly want to compliment. And we trust . . . And we wish them well as they move from the addictions and the problems they were facing in the past and desire to become productive individuals in our society.

At the end of the day, that's our goal — to assist those who really want to leave a life that's going nowhere, of crime and of addictions, whether it's drugs or alcohol, to be productive citizens of our communities.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — We share that goal with you.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, as well I have a question regarding Ranch Ehrlo Society. What role do they play, and is the department involved in the services they provide? And do they get funding from the department?

Mr. Kary: — Ranch Ehrlo Society has several programs for troubled youth, as we all know. The young people at Ranch Ehrlo or staying at Ranch Ehrlo are generally in . . . have a wardship arrangement or an agreement that is administered through the Department of Community Resources. They may also have sentences or have offended and have some connection with our department. The funding would come from the Department of Community Resources, or it may come from First Nations and Indian Métis.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you. Mr. Minister, I'm not sure how much time we've got to continue on, so I'm going to move in a couple of areas that we can work our way through, I think, without taking a lot of time. But there's some other areas I'd like to get into more discussion.

But a question, I believe there's . . . or in this year's budget something like \$14 million is going to the Regina Correctional Centre. Exactly what do you anticipate you will have accomplished or completed in regards to the replacing the one wing of the Regina Correctional Centre in this year's budget? And I'm anticipating that it probably won't be completed this year as well as it's a longer term project. And when will that be

completed?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Well thank you very much for the question. I think the most appropriate person to answer that question is . . . All right. We're going to tender on the project May 20 of this month, and we'll award the contract by July 16 of this year. And we are still on schedule for the completion of the project in June, 2008.

Mr. Toth: — So as I understand it then, any groundwork really hasn't actually taken place in regards to the upgrading and adding a new wing to the facility.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — There has been site preparation work done over the last several months in preparation for the tendering of the project. The tendering is going out, as I indicated, on the 20th of this month. By July 16 we will have in place the tender, the contractor in place, and at that point construction will begin. But there has been site preparation work, quite extensive site preparation at the site, at the Regina Correctional Centre.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, in view of the fact that the tenders . . . It's just going to tender shortly. In the April 1 edition of the *Star* we had an article in regards to overcrowding in our jail system. And I think you're quoted as saying there's no immediate relief coming to deal with overcrowding at the Saskatoon Correctional Centre.

What will the completion of this project at the Regina Correctional Centre do in dealing with the overcrowding? And also coming back to the question I had earlier regarding changes to the federal law and people being held longer, what kind of impact will that have in regards to the overcrowding situation that we're dealing with today?

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much for the question. I'd like to start by indicating that we have in Saskatchewan very qualified, very skilled staff.

Yes, we are experiencing significant count pressures at this time. But we have very, very highly skilled, very qualified staff who have been able to manage these levels of counts in the past. I'm very confident of their ability and their professionalism to continue to be able to deal with these count pressures.

As you know, the construction of this facility is still two years away before it will be operational in June 2008. We are going to continue to have to deal with those count pressures within the existing facilities we have. I would indicate that we are continuing to monitor the situation on a daily basis. We will be able to, if necessary, transfer individuals between institutions where the most space is available. The Regina correctional facility has capacity greater than the other facilities. And it may require, in fact, the transfer of individuals to the Regina facility.

I would also like to indicate to you in the situation at Pine Grove we are in the process of converting the Sharber unit, formerly a young offender facility, to be used as a unit at the Pine Grove correctional facility which will in fact help us significantly reduce pressures in the Pine Grove facility. We anticipate the opening of that facility within the next month or so. We had hoped we would be in a position to have it open by this time, but we are working as we speak to finalize the

preparation of that unit to be in place to relieve pressures in Pine Grove. With the adult facilities as I've previously indicated, we will have to continue to monitor the situation and relieve pressures when necessary by moving individuals to the centre where we have the most available space.

And I would like at this time just to thank all the staff that are working with us and co-operating to make this possible in sometimes difficult situations, but we are continuing to manage this process.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I was going to bring forward a question regarding Pine Grove. And I guess the one question I will ask is, with the anticipated addition of beds, will that actually address the overcrowding in Pine Grove?

And as well, Mr. Minister, last time when we adjourned, I'd asked about global questions. Can we anticipate receiving those in the very near future, prior to the next opportunity we have to meet?

And having said that, realizing we have achieved the hour of what was agreed upon as far as the sitting time tonight, I would like to extend my thanks to you and your officials for having been here to address a number of these questions. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. I would like to answer the question. Will it relieve the pressures at Pine Grove? It will relieve the immediate pressures. Again we are not in a situation to be able to fully understand what the impact of the federal changes will have on the number of individuals that will be incarcerated in Pine Grove. So does in fact the Sharber Unit relieve the immediate pressures? Yes, it does. But does it solve all the problems? I can't answer that at this time because I'm not in a position to fully understand the future impacts of the changes in conditional sentences in the federal system.

And as far as the global questions, I would anticipate before we were to meet again that those questions would be available. I will undertake to check tomorrow to see when we will be tabling the global questions and answers.

The Chair: — Thank you very much to the minister and his officials. And it now being past the time of agreed-upon adjournment, the committee is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 21:32.]