



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. Glen Hart, Chair
Last Mountain-Touchwood

Ms. Judy Junor, Deputy Chair
Saskatoon Eastview

Mr. Denis Allchurch
Rosthern-Shellbrook

Mr. Cam Broten
Saskatoon Massey Place

Ms. Doreen Eagles
Esteravan

Mr. Serge LeClerc
Saskatoon Northwest

Mr. Greg Ottenbreit
Yorkton

[The committee met at 15:00.]

**General Revenue Fund
Education
Vote 5**

Subvote (ED01)

The Chair: — I'll call the committee to order. Committee members, as you can see, I still have laryngitis, but it's a little better than it was yesterday, so I would greatly appreciate all members' co-operation. We have a lengthy agenda today. Our first item on the agenda is vote 5, Education. Before I call upon the minister, I have a number of substitutions we have this afternoon. We have Mr. Wotherspoon for Ms. Junor for vote 5. We also have Mr. McMillan for Mr. Allchurch for vote 5. We have Ms. Higgins for Mr. Broten.

So with that, committee members, we have the Minister of Education here with us. I would ask him to introduce his officials and if he has any opening statement, I would invite him to make his opening statement too.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I hope that your laryngitis improves because I know that must be a struggle as I went through some of that earlier on in the week. Good afternoon, committee members. It's indeed a pleasure to be here this afternoon to discuss the Education budget for 2008-2009 fiscal year.

With me this afternoon to help answer questions that committee members may pose are a number of officials from my ministry, and I want to begin with introducing Audrey Roadhouse who is the deputy minister of Education, Helen Horsman who is the assistant deputy minister, and Darren McKee right behind me who is also an assistant deputy minister.

From the financial planning and management, director is David Tulloch, on my right here. And from education finance and facilities, we have two individuals. We have Clint Repski, and behind Clint on the far side is Margaret Ball. Seated next to Margaret is Christina Stanford who is also a director within education finance and facilities; Greg Tuer, executive director responsible for HR [human resources] services, and Lois Zelmer, executive director for early learning and child care. Next to Lois is Rosanne Glass, executive director of policy and evaluation. And behind in the last row is Shirley Robertson who's the acting executive director of the Teachers' Superannuation Commission.

Mr. Chair, I have a number of remarks that I want to put on the record since this is the first opportunity for Education to meet with committee members, and it is also an opportunity for me to not only bring to the attention of the committee members but also the many people in the province of Saskatchewan who do pay attention to what goes on at the committee level. And I want to inform them of the many changes that have occurred to the Education budget for this year.

The ministry's budget is of course set in the context of the provincial budget and the province's current fiscal circumstances which are very positive. The Saskatchewan

economy is on a roll. We have experienced a remarkable turn around in a very short period of time. We have not only caught up to the rest of the country; we are leading the country in many key areas. We are number one in Canada in wholesale trade growth, retail sales growth, income growth, net home construction, overall construction, and population growth.

This growth is being felt across a broad range of sectors. The agricultural industry has experienced a resurgence with a global demand for grain at an all-time high. Our petroleum industry is gaining momentum as evidenced by record Crown land sales to oil and gas companies and a significant \$1.9 billion expansion to the Federated Co-op refinery right here in Regina. Our potash sector is also thriving with the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan having recently announced a major \$1.8 billion expansion of its operations in Rocanville. We are currently producing 25 per cent of the world's uranium and are very well positioned to take up opportunities to expand economic activity in this sector.

It is a phenomenal time to be in Saskatchewan. Everyone in our province from larger and smaller centres alike is feeling this momentum. It is our greatest responsibility to ensure that Saskatchewan's time has truly come and that we finally realize our true potential as a province.

Education is a key priority for our government. A total of \$1.185 billion has been dedicated to education, including teachers' pension and benefits, to support pre-K to 12 [pre-kindergarten to grade 12] education, the Provincial Library, and early learning and child care in the province. This is a \$241.8 million or 25.6 per cent increase over last year's Education budget.

It is clear from the government's support for the ministry initiatives that education plays a significant role in the Government of Saskatchewan's growth agenda. We recognize the learning success and achievement of our young people is vital to securing the future of our province. This increase includes an additional \$100 million for school capital in the province. Our government made the commitment to take a forward-looking approach to any government surpluses, using half to pay down debt and investing half in our province's infrastructure.

Education is a very important area of focus because it is so closely tied to economic growth. The improvement and maintenance of our province's infrastructure, including schools, is vital to creating sustainable development. The \$100 million is one-time funding to address a substantial number of capital requests currently on the ministry's capital project list. The total capital budget for the ministry is \$117.6 million.

This year we will advance new projects in Balcarres, Duck Lake, La Ronge, Oxbow, and Porcupine Plain, and at Humboldt Collegiate, Maple Creek Composite High School, St. Anne in Prince Albert, and Scott Collegiate in Regina.

Now all of these projects are significant, but I want to speak to a few of them that will really make a difference in preparing these communities for growth.

All students in Porcupine Plain will benefit from the building of a new kindergarten to grade 12 facility. This new school will replace the existing separate elementary and high schools and will serve as a focal point for the community. The north central community in Regina will benefit from the addition of a new high school to replace Scott Collegiate. The new facility is part of a larger learning-across-the-community initiative that grew out of an innovative partnership of community members and organizations, the school division, and the Government of Saskatchewan.

A new K to 12 school will replace four existing educational facilities in the communities of Oxbow and Alameda and provide an excellent learning environment for all students in that area. The community of La Ronge will benefit from the significant addition and renovation to Churchill High School. The \$100 million will also fund final payments on previously announced capital projects in Norquay and Naicam, at Prince Albert Collegiate, at Yorkton Regional High School, and Collège Mathieu in Gravelbourg. As well the \$100 million will complete three high schools in Saskatoon announced in 2003: E.D. Feehan, Nutana, and École canadienne-français de Saskatoon.

New projects were selected following the long held practices for major capital priority selection. An additional 17.6 million will be provided for smaller renovation projects over the course of the year and to support enhanced capital planning — 12.4 million will be in block funding and 5.2 million will be in enhanced capital planning.

I'm very pleased to be able to move forward with our growth agenda by providing our students with high quality schools in which they can learn for their futures.

This budget also moves the ministry forward on our government's education-related platform and Throne Speech commitments. From my own years of experience as a board member and president of what is now the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, I know that Saskatchewan property owners continue to shoulder a greater share of education costs than any other jurisdiction in Canada. This is simply unacceptable and must be changed. That is why we are taking the first steps to shift the education property tax burden from property owners to the provincial government.

The property tax rebate has been increased by \$48.7 million in 2008-09 as a bridge until a longer term answer to property tax dependency is found. This is the first step forward in the government's commitment of doubling the education property tax credit over four years. Work on a longer term strategy is being led by Legislative Secretary Jim Reiter.

The agricultural property tax credit was increased from 38 per cent to 47 per cent. The commercial and residential property tax credit was increased from 10 per cent to 12 per cent. The total cost to provide these rebates is \$156.6 million. This is a substantial commitment made by our government.

There is a \$34.6 million increase to the school operating grant for a total \$621 million in support. This 5.9 per cent increase exceeds our commitment to increase the operating grant by 5 per cent this year and is the first step toward our commitment to

increase the grant by 20 per cent in four years.

The government is also providing a total of \$194 million to fulfil its obligation in funding teachers' pensions and benefits. This is a \$58.3 million increase due in large part to an increase to the teachers' superannuation plan — again a substantial contribution made by the government.

The increase to the operating grant also includes \$1 million to fund schools of opportunity. This funding will be available to schools after the criteria for approval is finalized. Work is also under way to ensure education funding formulas are fair to all. This too addresses a commitment made by our government.

I want to make note of a few enhancements within the grant. \$4.5 million has been added to the geographic factor in recognition of major cost differences in the areas such as travel, staffing, communication, and shipping in geographically dispersed school divisions. I'm also pleased to note that the government is providing \$2.8 million in one-time funding recognition so school divisions will not be negatively impacted by grant changes.

As promised by our government, there is also a \$500,000 increase in funding for nutrition in community schools. Nutrition programs funding provides equitable opportunities for vulnerable children by improving their health and learning potential. This is the first step in fulfilling our commitment to provide \$2 million for nutrition support over four years. We do this because the research tells us that improved nutrition supports readiness to learn and increases student achievement. We see this as a very important investment.

Our government promised to maintain funding for child care and early childhood learning and development initiatives. In fact we have done better. With the addition of the new funds from the federal government, we have provided an 11.3 per cent or \$3.4 million increase in early learning and child care. We have also invested an additional \$2 million in pre-kindergarten. More and more families are recognizing the benefits of quality early learning and child care.

As well, growth in our economy is increasing the need for child care spaces. To address this, our government will be funding 500 new child care spaces for a total of 1.7 million allowing more parents to work or further their education and participate in the province's economy. Funding for each new child care space will include a capital support of \$3,000 per space. There is also \$1.7 million in the budget to fund a wage lift of 4 per cent for child care centre staff effective April 1, 2008.

\$500,000 will be made available to social services to increase child care subsidy supports. A \$2 million investment in pre-kindergarten will increase the number of programs by 38 bringing the total number in the province to 193 serving over 3,000 children. These programs are funded through the school operating grant.

And \$250,000 is available to implement the early development instrument. This instrument is used by kindergarten teachers to assess children's readiness to learn and plan community resources that can contribute to school readiness. Research has indicated that investment in the early years fosters early literacy

and school achievement. Again we see our government focusing on our growth agenda, and we are making budget commitments to support it.

There are other enhancements in this year's budget that are noteworthy as well. For this year, \$4.07 million will be provided to KidsFirst accountable partners by the Ministry of Education to support vulnerable families in nurturing their children. Services are provided to almost 1,000 families in the KidsFirst targeted sites. KidsFirst also supports community development across the province. This is a 1.8 per cent boost to KidsFirst.

We have also committed over \$3.19 million to fund early childhood intervention programs in communities across the province in the 2008-09 budget. This is an increase of 9.5 per cent and supports the number of children served in the 15 ECIP [early childhood intervention program] programs to be increased from 635 to 704.

There is an overall 9.2 per cent increase for the 10 public library systems, with over 300 individual library locations, for a total of \$8.3 million. This includes an increase of 360,000 to support library Internet connectivity through CommunityNet and a 2.3 per cent increase in support of resource sharing. CommunityNet is Saskatchewan's high-speed network connecting educational facilities, provincially funded schools and school divisions, First Nations schools, libraries, and other government ministries and public agencies. Stable government funding for 2008-09 will continue to support the capacity of the existing network.

There is a \$3 million increase to the intensive supports factor. School divisions will use these funds to help students who require specialized supports to benefit from their educational experience. In total we are providing \$67.4 million for students with learning difficulties, disabilities, and disadvantages. This addresses the increased number of students in our schools requiring specialized supports.

There is also a \$500,000 support to support school divisions to increase accountability by becoming compliant with Public Sector Accounting Board financial statement standards for local government.

I also want to speak to an issue that will be of key significance to the ministry over the upcoming year, and this is improving student achievement, including the achievement of First Nations and Métis students in our classrooms. There has been growing concern regarding Saskatchewan's student achievement compared to other provinces. Saskatchewan students are performing below those of most of their Canadian peers in science, mathematics, and reading.

To ensure that we as a province are ready to say yes to opportunity, we need to help all our students achieve their best in school. This is an important part of addressing our province's labour shortage to create sustainable economic growth. We recognize that this is a long-term challenge, but now is the time for bold initiatives and innovative thinking in the area of student achievement. I have requested that the provincial achievement panel research and recommend a made-in-Saskatchewan approach to improving students' achievement.

In Saskatchewan, as in other parts of the country, we have a young and growing First Nations and Métis population. The learning success of all of our young people is vital to securing the future of our province.

The Ministry of Education is coordinating the development of an Aboriginal education action plan. Our lead of the Aboriginal education action plan reflects the provincial government's commitment to strengthening partnerships and focusing on student achievement for all students. Ministers from across Canada agreed with Saskatchewan's proposal to host a national summit in 2009 on improving Aboriginal achievement rates. As well, we have just hosted a very successful Aboriginal literacy forum here in Regina April 13 to 15 as part of the Pan-Canadian literacy initiative.

We have also placed an emphasis on treaty education. We have set the goal of ensuring instruction on the history and content of the treaties signed between First Nations and the government becomes mandatory in the provincial K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] curriculum. I'm pleased to report the treaty education working group has been established in support of meeting this commitment.

There is also a new First Nations and Métis education branch within the ministry to help support the success of these students in our schools. I am optimistic that all of these initiatives will lead to improvement of educational outcomes for all of our students. We see improved student achievement as playing a significant role in the Government of Saskatchewan's growth agenda.

Another issue we must address to meet our growth agenda is the shortage of labour. To this end, another initiative our government is very excited to support through the AEEL [Advanced Education, Employment and Labour] ministry are the trades and skill centres projects in Regina and Saskatoon. The government is providing over \$1 million through the newly signed federal-provincial labour market agreement to these programs which help youth and young adults move directly into employment or on to post-secondary education.

Youth engagement and addressing labour market challenges are a priority for our government. We're solving the issue by more fully engaging the First Nations and Métis people, attracting back expatriates who have moved to other provinces, and recruiting and retaining skilled workers from across Canada and abroad. After losing people to other provinces for two decades, we have experienced the largest increase on record since 1961. Our new government has laid out an exciting agenda for our province, and the education sector system plays a significant role in our common sense plan for Saskatchewan.

Over the coming years, this government will ensure the ministry remains focused on its core objectives of strengthening student achievement with a curriculum that ensures our children can thrive in the changing world we live, ensuring accountability of the sector by keeping the focus on student achievement, sharing with municipal governments the responsibility to fund our education system so that all children have access regardless of location within the province, working with our sector partners to provide for facilities that support student achievement, ensuring that the very young have access

to safe and caring learning environments, supporting First Nations and the large role they will play in the future prosperity of this province, and building the literacy levels of all residents to enrich their quality of life, and finally ensuring access to libraries that provide a window to the world.

I am excited about the work that lies ahead. Our path to growth lies through investment in ourselves. This ministry budget is perhaps the greatest demonstration of this investment and the government's long-term commitment towards our future prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, fairly long opening remarks, but that is a conclusion and I know that there will be many questions from the committee members. And I thank you for patience and your understanding.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. Before I call upon members for questions, I'd just like to remind all members of a couple of things. I would ask that before members participate in debate that they be recognized by the Chair. Secondly, we are all new. We have a number of newly elected members here, but it seems to me we all have new roles to play.

So I will just remind all members that questions are to be put to the minister, not to the officials. It's inappropriate to direct questions to the officials or to try and draw them into the debate. Also I would just ask members that if they are asking questions of the minister, if it's a Q & A [question and answer], it's quite appropriate to go back and forth. But if you're entering into a debate, I would ask that you do that through the Chair. So with those few guidelines, I will open the floor for questions, and I recognize Mr. Wotherspoon.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to our minister, the Minister of Education, for his brief and concise preamble of the budget here. And thank you to our deputy minister and our assistant deputy ministers and the numerous other officials that are here today on the ministry's behalf.

I guess a couple comments just real shortly here. I'm sure with this booming economy, the resources that are available, that were was many pressures placed on this ministry as far as expectations for funding. And I know that's probably not a easy process to decide in the end what priorities do move forward. We do see some good stuff in this budget. The infrastructure stuff, investment, is really good . . . and encouraged to see the continued investment into community schools, pre-kindergarten programs, the intensive supports, early childhood supports that are there.

That being said, we do have some questions, and we don't have a whole bunch of time, so maybe we'll move into the questions.

Question for the minister: how many employees have been terminated since November 21?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Wotherspoon, I will refer that to my deputy minister who's been tracking that much more than I have been.

Ms. Roadhouse: — Since November 21, 24.2

Mr. Wotherspoon: — How many in scope?

Ms. Roadhouse: — 21.2, three out of scope.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — How many vacancies have been filled?

Ms. Roadhouse: — There have been 12 vacancies have been staffed since November 21.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — How were these vacancies filled, internally or externally?

Ms. Roadhouse: — Five were filled internally. Seven were filled externally.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — In what other ways were the external vacancies filled?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I'd need clarification. What do you mean by what other ways did the . . .

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The external, the external ones, in what manner did those proceed?

Ms. Roadhouse: — Yes, by competition, but let me just check. They were by competition.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — For the individuals that have lost their employment, have severance packages been offered, signed at this point?

Ms. Roadhouse: — Yes, severance packages were offered and yes, they're still under some under negotiation.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Would the ministry have an estimated total cost of those severance packages at this point?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — No, as indicated by Ms. Roadhouse is that, you know, there are still negotiations under way, and there will be conditions that may change the amount of severance. So until a full year goes by whereby all of the possibilities that that employee can take privilege to, we won't know those costs.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Is there any estimate that the ministry has on the cost of the severance?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — You know, it's difficult to provide an estimate because it might be . . . it's just that; it's an estimate. We think that it will be around \$700,000, but that's not to be taken as the firm number. But we think it's in that area.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And where would this be charged to? Where would the allocation come from?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Well it'll be within the ministry of course. We have a global budget that is the various sectors within the ministry, whether they be e-learning or correspondence. Each has its own specific area. But it's a global budget that's going to be accounting for any of the expenses.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Have any of these claims been filed in a court of law as a result of a severance package or terminations related to your ministry?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — In Education to my knowledge there have been no claims filed.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. I'm going to pass off some questions to Ms. Higgins.

The Chair: — The Chair recognizes Ms. Higgins.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And I'd like to welcome the minister and his officials here this afternoon. Just to go back to one of the questions that Trent has asked, to take it a little bit farther, severance packages will be charged back to the department for in scope and out of scope?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Yes, for both the in scope and out of scope, my officials have indicated that they will be charged to the ministry.

Ms. Higgins: — Some of the departments we have spoken to, or ministries, and in the discussions we've had, we have been told a variety of things — whether it will be charged to the '07-08 or whether it will be charged to '08-09, and if there has been a contingency set aside or where this amount will show up in the budget documents.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Well there is going to be a combination. Most of the changes that the deputy minister has described to Mr. Wotherspoon were as a result of this year's budget, and there are ongoing changes in three areas. I guess I can identify maybe the three restructuring areas that the ministry has undertaken, and these were under way under the previous administration.

The changing of the regional office system was under way — and it's been under way for about three years or four years — and as a result, now we have restructured to where there will be two field offices. There will be a field office in La Ronge, and there will be a field office in Saskatoon, and of course the third office will be within the ministry here in Regina. So that has made a significant difference. And there were vacancies, and there were changes, and that's where some of the human resource changes are being made.

The second one was around e-learning and the ability for development of curriculum, and we've been moving — again not a new venture — it's been moving forward. And there's been the ability then to reduce the number of individuals to deliver on that. And the third one, as the questions were posed today in question period by Mr. Wotherspoon around the technology supported learning and the changes in correspondence school. So those were the three areas that produced the largest amount of that 24.2 full-time equivalents that Ms. Roadhouse has explained.

Now there was one change made prior to the end of the fiscal year '07-08 with regards to a severance package, and that cost would be out of the '07-08 budget which will appear when the year-end was reached on March 31. But to my knowledge that was the only one.

Now the changes that we are contemplating for the revision of the services for '08-09, we've actually booked them into '07-08 budget. So my understanding is that all costs . . . [inaudible

interjection] . . . Okay. As per directions from the Provincial Comptroller, those costs will be booked into '07-08. My officials have just indicated that there will be no costs booked into '08-09.

Ms. Higgins: — So none of the costs will be booked into this budget, and where will we ultimately see an accounting of this cost?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Yes, you'll see the accounting in the Public Accounts documents that are going to be produced. But, you know, I needed to have this explained to me and I thank Mr. Tulloch . . . is that the Provincial Comptroller has indicated that as soon as there is the potential for that cost, it has to be identified as a liability. So that's where it will show up. It will show up as a liability for '07-08 for all of the instances that I've described — the one that was a result of a change made due to what I'll call the transition process and the 23.2 . . . or 24.2 others that were changed as a result of budget. But they'll be all expended as a liability for '07-08.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much. Before we get into discussions on the funding manual and the operating grant, I have a couple of comments or questions coming out of your comments. When you break it right down from what you discuss as or talk as a quarter of a billion dollar increase from last year and when you look at it, it's a \$34 million increase to the foundation operating grant. And later on in your comments, you talked about, I think it was, a couple million dollars for pre-kindergartens and that this was included in the operating grant. So would the \$2 million for the pre-kindergarten increase, would that be included in the \$34 million increase?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Yes, because it's distributed by way of the foundation operating grant, and therefore that's where it's contained.

Ms. Higgins: — Okay. Okay. That was just clarification.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Sure.

Ms. Higgins: — Also I do want to say the 3.9 million to ECIP, I'm very pleased to see that without a doubt. I think any increase in funding to the ECIP program is dollars that are well spent. And this group of very dedicated folks right across the province do a wonderful job, so I'm very pleased to see that just about \$4 million. Should have rounded it up, but whatever.

Also when you talked about the improved achievement in your comments, are you looking at the continuation or working within the continuous improvement framework? Or are you looking at restructuring it somehow?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — No. We're going to be working within the continuous improvement framework. There's no question. We have heard from boards of education and from the directors and the superintendents that are out there on boards of education that the continuous improvement framework is getting underway nicely. And the teachers are, I think, recognizing that it has potential, and it has the ability to address a lot of the concerns. And we're going to be looking at working with them with the continuation of that.

Ms. Higgins: — Okay. Thank you very much. Now on to the funding manual, a quick question. I guess when you look at the overview that starts off the manual, the unallocated funds . . . These are just not directly from the manual maybe, but some thoughts that occurred to me when I was going through it. One of the new programs that you've talked about is the schools of opportunity. What will happen or when will the criteria be finalized for this process? And when can schools, school districts, parents, communities be expecting to be able to review or have a look at the criteria? And how much money is in the pool?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you for that question, Ms. Higgins. I'm going to describe it in three phases. First phase was the changes to The Education Act that we have before us in second reading, adjourned debates, and that laid out sort of a timeline of how boards of education will now undertake a school review and a school closure or a grade discontinuance timeline, and we've made those changes.

And in The Education Act we have referenced schools of opportunity. So now what we will do is — and we're working on this right now with our stakeholders — we will put in place the criteria that will recognize what criteria will be put in place so that a community and a school board understand what has to happen for the review process. So on October 15 of a given year, when a board of education makes a decision that a school is under review, that will trigger a new set of criteria that will establish a committee, as is identified in the Act. That committee will be given parameters of what it must do and what it can do and those things will be put in place through regulation. I'm suspecting we'll have that ready by middle June, middle to end of June. That's the first part. That's regarding the school review process.

At the same time that a school gets put into the category of under review, the community may make the decision that it now has the ability to apply to the minister and become a school of opportunity. It'll work hand in hand because as the review is taking place as the committee . . . And I've described the committee in the Chamber. It's going to be a committee of eight or nine, eight where there is no First Nations students from reserve attending the school that's under review; or if there is, we're asking that the ninth member be a First Nations person.

That committee will then have the ability to apply to the minister under the criteria that we're also putting in place. And the drafts have been already developed. We are I think on about draft number three or four already because I've broadened the process not just by having the traditional stakeholders that former ministers of Education have had, but I've also asked for input from SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] and SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] and SOS [Save Our Schools], and we've had some input around what a school of opportunity criteria should be.

And we're going to be putting that into place by the same time so that next fall when a school division says that a community, community X is now under review — they've received the September 30 enrolment numbers and those numbers now have dropped below the levels that will be put in place — the board of education now will say that they have a school under review.

That triggers the process and that must be done by October 15. Then the new process kicks into place for not only the review of the school as to whether or not it should have a closure or grade discontinuance, but also the community will be able to say no, we believe that we're also a school of opportunity and they will then be able to apply for some additional funds. Sorry for that long answer.

Ms. Higgins: — No, that's fine. So then this will be money or a designation that the community applies for. And how — I mean that's the impression I got from your comments — that's how you view this process working?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Yes.

Ms. Higgins: — The community would apply for it, not the school division? And where would the money be funnelled and what are your expectations that it would be used for then?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — It will be used . . . Now I've got to back up. It's going to be the committee that is now working to achieve the result of being called a school of opportunity. It will be through the school division. It will not have to have the approval of the school division that it becomes a school of opportunity, but it will be submitted on behalf of that school division technically.

Because if it meets the criteria, and the minister — whoever the minister is — accepts that school, then funding will be provided to the school division. Additional funding will be used as a top-up to its existing formula. There will not be, you know, any changes to the foundation operating grant. It will be just additional dollars.

We are looking at how to identify that additional dollars, and Mr. Wotherspoon has made some comments about the \$1 million and up to 350,000. What we're looking at is a percentage of the current allotment per student, the basic rate that is used to identify a student right now, which is nearly \$7,000, 6,000, just under \$7,000.

So we're looking at a percentage of that as probably being the base that would be used to say then, equitably across the piece, it doesn't matter which community, if the community has 40 students or the community has 80 students, they will know, the division board will know what additional monies the ministry will provide to them for up to two years to allow them, in the community and within the school, to reach the acceptable levels of becoming a viable school.

Ms. Higgins: — Okay. It raises actually many more questions than what it answers, but I realize we're at a difficult point. So it won't be accessible to any of the school divisions or any of the communities for any discussions of any of the schools that are under review for this spring. You were looking at next fall and whatever may happen in the out years. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Correct.

Ms. Higgins: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — The Education Act amendments will kick-start this, and I'm hopeful that by the time the session ends

on May 15 that now The Education Act will be passed. And of course under the current rules of The Education Act, all the decisions regarding school closures for the coming fall will have been made.

So there is no retroactivity for 2008. Or some have asked me to make it retroactive to 2007 to closures that were made, you know, over the last number of years, and there have been a number of closures. Every year there are school closures. We're going to be starting this effective when The Education Act is passed and then we'll be developing . . .

The other thing . . . Sorry, Ms. Higgins. I do want to mention that we're also going to be developing a handbook. And the handbook is going to contain all of the regulations, and it will contain all of the guidelines regarding about the criteria that is needed for review of a school, and it will also contain the criteria for becoming a school of opportunity. This will be a public document that will be circulated, so not only will the board members know and the school will know, but so will an individual who doesn't even have a child in the school system. They will be able to know what circumstances are in place for their community to be considered a school of opportunity.

Ms. Higgins: — We'll have more of a discussion on this, I'm sure, once The Education Act and the Bill comes to committee.

But on to other things. On the pre-kindergarten program, your base program recognition for urban and rural, there's been no changes made to that? Have they remained the same I guess in this budget year and . . . Or has there been any increase in the base recognition pre-K [pre-kindergarten].

Ms. Roadhouse: — There's been an increase by 4 per cent to recognize the teacher wage increase.

Ms. Higgins: — Also on the diversity pool, it looks like there is 74 million, well was 74 million '07-08; '08-09, you've changed the diversity pool? Am I correct in saying that? The diversity pool's been changed? Where you've decreased . . . Oh sorry. Where you've decreased the per pupil recognition and decreased that pool for per pupil recognition and increased the vulnerability recognition pool. So can I ask for an explanation as to why? And obviously, you must feel that this works better for the divisions.

Ms. Roadhouse: — I may defer to another official, but I can start this. The goal over time, as you know, is to . . . the more diverse the school district, the school division, that is really where the funding is to be directed. So these changes are occurring over time and this is another change that has occurred for '08-09.

Ms. Higgins: — So how is the vulnerability pool accessed then by the divisions?

Ms. Roadhouse: — It comes through the foundation operating grant.

Ms. Higgins: — But is it done then on being . . . You're taking away the per pupil recognition. It is done on an average?

Ms. Roadhouse: — It's actually more detailed, more in the

funding manual, but it's based on Stats Canada factors on low income and so forth, and it's a formula.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I can give you maybe a bit broader explanation here, you know. Under the diversity factor there are two components, as Audrey has indicated. 20.2 million of the grant recognition is provided based on a per pupil rate of \$125 which you've already referenced, and the remaining 53.8 million is provided on a differentiated basis depending on the incidence within each school division of four indicators of vulnerability.

They are: percentage of families below the low-income cut-off, percentage of families with low educational attainment, percentage of lone parent families, and percentage of families with the mother tongue other than English. So there's a number of factors that kick in to determine how the \$53.8 million will be allocated to those school divisions that are calculated under these factors.

Ms. Higgins: — So do you basically go by Stats Canada information? And how current is that? Or do you have a more current and up-to-date method to use for the numbers?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — The current information that is available, even though the 2006 one is not, is 2001. So it's not that current, and we're hopeful that the 2006 Stats Canada information is going to be in our hands very quickly.

Ms. Higgins: — Is there something more timely that could be used? And I know we've talked about this in different areas. In fact we just had a discussion on this in some of the municipal funding that uses population numbers from Stats Canada, and there are other provinces that have gone to other methods of collecting more current population numbers.

So it's just a thought because I mean we always struggled with this, that Stats Canada is so slow with these numbers. And we've built a number of programs on them and they are, they sometimes leave the school divisions struggling with situations and waiting for the new Stats Canada report to come out.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — What I can indicate is that, you know, school divisions have not viewed this one as a problem area yet, even though we're using, you know, data that's old and that is of some concern. We will be looking at other provinces and seeing what latest models can be used, but currently it is the 2001 Stats Canada data.

Ms. Higgins: — Looking at the manual, there was a comment in there, a change in reporting the method for home-based students. Anything significant when it comes to home-based students, changes or . . . It says, change in reporting the method for home-based students, page B7 of the manual.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — What used to occur is that home-based students were recorded separately on the grant. Now what they've done is these students are counted in the entire grant allocation for the school division but then you'll see — and you'll see every time you look at a school division's full-time equivalents and then the adjusted full-time equivalents — two factors kick in there. It's the kindergartens that are considered 50 per cent, and they were always that, but now the home-based

students will also be at a 50 per cent. So they're in the total and then there's an adjustment for moving them out at the 50 per cent of total.

Ms. Higgins: — Sorry. I'm jumping all over the place and I know that's not the best way to do this but I'm kind of bringing things up as they popped into my mind as I've been thinking of them. But the career development program that was kicked off last year, there was a number of pilot projects that were run throughout the province and it was to help with that transition from high school into career and employment and to build a better process of having information available to students and parents. And I know I've seen a couple of press releases on it, but now I don't have any definite information as to whether there has been pilot projects selected, whether you're continuing on with the initiative to implement this province-wide.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I'll begin the answer there, Ms. Higgins. Currently the projects in Regina and Saskatoon have been under way, and I'm going to ask Ms. Roadhouse to comment significantly on especially the Regina project because that's one that she was involved with before she became the deputy minister. But the project in Saskatoon is working through SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] at Mount Royal. It's outside of the K to 12 even though K to 12 is funding it. But the one here in Regina is funded by K to 12 dollars, and I had the opportunity to tour some of the things that are occurring in Regina here. And I'll ask Ms. Roadhouse to explain the program a lot better and where we might see further development.

Ms. Roadhouse: — I guess a couple of things. Those reports, because they were the school year, right, are coming in now and just analyzing those. And I have not received details on them, but just some of the conversations that I've had with folks around those projects, it was a wonderful opportunity to try some things, as you know, to try some of the career software and so forth around that. And also in the funding manual, you asked, is it continuing? It is the expectation that school divisions meet those criteria. And I was just looking for it. I'm sorry, I read it last night and I just can't tell you exactly where it is, but I know it's in the expectations around the grant.

Ms. Higgins: — Okay.

Ms. Roadhouse: — Yes. All those, you know, the criteria that you set around grade 9 and so forth.

Ms. Higgins: — Yes.

Ms. Roadhouse: — It's all in the expectations in the funding manual.

Ms. Higgins: — And the counsellors. Okay.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Also, Ms. Higgins, I'm going to ask Darren McKee to comment on the career development because there's been extensive work. There's been, you know, an allocation last year of \$500,000 into that and Mr. McKee has been involved in that. And I'm going to ask him to do an explanation of where that program is and what its strengths are as well.

Mr. McKee: — Thank you. The projects in particular that you're referring to, there are 10 projects that are in partnership with a number of school divisions. Those are ongoing. We're expected to have completion of all of those projects by June. And there is an expectation of looking at a provincial context for those pilots in whatever context they are.

The other thing is part of the initiatives were also included in the trades and skills world competition coming up. So there is some engagement of that particular process with those dollars as well. And there is an understanding that there is going to be some continuation and meeting with the partners that develop the projects and the completion after the reports around continuing with those dollars in ways that we can develop them further.

Ms. Higgins: — I guess why I bring it up, I mean I believe it's a good program and there's many good things going in around the province in a variety . . . I mean many of the school divisions have just taken it upon themselves to move ahead with projects that suit their needs and areas that they feel needed to be addressed. But my worry is, is that are we leaving it up to the school divisions to carry on with projects, because we had talked about what could be expanded across the province.

Is there going to be some down time in between when the projects end — there's an assessment, some reporting comes in, there is an assessment — and then the department will make, or the ministry, sorry, will make a decision as to whether there will be funding available? Or is there some continuity that's going to be addressed to be able to move ahead? Or are we going to have that stop and start in these projects? Because I know I've met a number of people that are delivering projects around the province — very enthusiastic about what they are having the opportunity to do and the students that they are helping, that they feel have really fallen through the cracks in many instances and have no other resource but these pilot projects that are out there. So there's a worry out there that it's going to be a start and see what we start up later.

Mr. McKee: — I think within each of these projects there's been ongoing conversation and communication with each of the school divisions involved around what the potentials are going to be to continue the projects. I think the schools certainly have done their due diligence in terms of assessment on an ongoing basis of the effectiveness of the programs, and that will determine which projects can move to a more long-term, sustainable model. And that conversation is going to have to continue to take place because, again as the deputy had indicated, these are school year projects that are going to end in June, so we do have a bit of time to have the conversations with schools. And we've had an ongoing conversation with them about it, so the potential is there.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much. On to the next thing, transportation recognition. This is one area where you increased funding this year. I have to ask. I know last spring, could've been later in the summer, there was a meeting that was held where there was a discussion about whether the funding for the three divisions across the south of the province actually addresses the costs that they have providing educational opportunities to such geographically dispersed regions. The divisions often would call for treatment for the school divisions

across the south of the province to be more in line the way the North is treated because of the distances they have and the issues that they have.

I made a commitment then as the then minister that we would have a look at the changes that had been made to the foundation operating grant to see if the costs, the actual costs of providing the education to such a widely dispersed area were actually being addressed and properly dealt with by the changes that we had made to the operating grant. In the transportation area was this something that was looked at in, I would say, specifically for those three divisions that cover the one-third of the province, the southern part of the province?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I'll begin to provide that answer. Transportation, recognition of transportation is always a complicated factor because there are ever-increasing costs, whether they be the diesel fuel or the gasoline costs or whether the purchasing of brand new buses or labour costs. So as a result of that assessment of transportation costs, it was felt that there was a significant decline in the long-held tradition that under recognized expenditures, that the recognized cost be as close as possible to 100 per cent of real cost in the recognized expenditure. So that is why you'll see the fairly substantial increases to not only the kilometre rate, but the per pupil rate. Those have gone up significantly to account for some of that.

Now your question also is around the geographic factor. And that was something that was recognized since the amalgamations have taken place and phase 1 and phase 2 review, that you're familiar with. There was an understanding within school boards across the province that the geographic factor had to be addressed, that it wasn't adequate enough to meet those very things of distance travelling and ensuring that the school board had the capacity to do that. So as a result of that, we've changed the geographic factor significantly.

As I commented in my opening remarks, we allocated an additional \$4.6 million into the geographic factor. The rate per pupil increased from 157 to \$321 per pupil. So the three school divisions that you have mentioned would have gained substantially by the fact that per pupil there was like a 200 per cent increase in the amount of recognition per pupil to account for that geographic factor. So coupling the geographic factor with the increases to the transportation should mean that we've granted more recognition of expenditures to those rural school divisions.

But I want to say this. I want to say this because I've had this question asked of me, saying, well the government funds transportation 100 per cent under the previous government and under this government. Well that's factually not correct because when a school division receives grant, it is receiving grant on a certain percentage of its total expenses.

And the difference here is, as you would know, the formula is A minus B equals C, where A is the recognized expenditures. And yes, for transportation, as near as possible to 100 per cent of cost is in the recognized expenditures. And then B is the recognized revenue at the local level.

So if a school division is receiving — just for simplicity's sake I'll say — that if a school division is receiving 40 per cent of its

total cost in the way of grant, it's not receiving 100 per cent of busing costs. And that is always a bit of a problem for people to understand because they believe that busing is fully funded. I guess maybe to use a different word, it's a conditional grant that is strictly there for busing, and that's not true.

Ms. Higgins: — I'm wondering how many people we have lost at home if anyone watches this, because A minus B equals C sounds wonderful but you also have to realize it takes a 140-page manual to actually explain how that ... with a number of appendices that expand on that farther, and I'm sure there is a great deal more.

So what I need to, what I would like to know is how much, what a difference the transportation increase made to the divisions. And my specific interest is to the divisions across the South, if it is possible to get a calculation of the three divisions across, or however if I can do this, of what shifts in ... [inaudible interjection] ... No, I know. Okay, I know you're listening — what the shifts in transportation would be with the change of funding, with a comparison of last year to this year. Can I get that?

And also I would like to see what the change to the geographic factor has meant on a division-by-division basis to see what the improved funding, the increased funding ... because it went up to the 321, right?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Per student.

Ms. Higgins: — Per student. So can ...

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I'll share the first part of this, I'll share the first part of your question from before, because Ms. Helen Horsman has just provided me with the information around the geographic factor. Okay, I'll give you the geographic numbers for those three school divisions that you mentioned and what increase this was. For Prairie South ...

Ms. Higgins: — You're going to make me write this down?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Yes, I'm going to make you write this down. I know that you have the capacity though of keeping that within your head — 347,000 is the increase for Prairie South in the geographic factor; \$616,000 is for South East Cornerstone; and for Chinook School Division it's \$515,000.

Now as far as ... that's the increase.

Ms. Higgins: — That's just the increase. That's not the total?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — No, that's the increase. Now as far as transportation, I have Prairie South in front of me right now and Prairie South, the rural and the urban transportation has increased by 180,000 — that's the increase.

Ms. Higgins: — You've got to slow down a minute if you're not going to give me a copy, you're going to make me write it out, okay?

So Prairie South, is that what you're giving me first?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Prairie South has an increase in both the

rural and urban added together of 180,000 — \$900,000 rounded off.

Ms. Higgins: — 180; 900,000?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — \$180,900.

Ms. Higgins: — Oh, 180,000. It sounded better the first time you said it, and I'm sure Prairie South would've appreciated it. Okay. South East? Don't we love technology? — he's adding in his head and I'm writing out in longhand.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — For Chinook School Division you're looking at an increase of about \$370,000, and again that's rounded off.

Ms. Higgins: — 370.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — And you also wanted South East Cornerstone? For South East Cornerstone, it looks like about \$314,000 increase rounded off for rural and urban transportation.

Ms. Higgins: — Okay, combined. So these are increases, not totals.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Oh no, the totals are significantly higher than that because budgets at those three rural school divisions are significant for transportation.

Ms. Higgins: — Okay. Now I lost my place. Just a sec here.

The Chair: — Mr. Wotherspoon I believe has a question.

Ms. Higgins: — Oh yes. Go ahead, Trent.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you. Just while we're going through these numbers here, I wonder if you might have the same numbers and I guess the implications for the vulnerability factor, the changes that occurred for funding there, in those implications. And we could maybe just use those same three school divisions as examples if you have the hard numbers of how they've changed. And I think some would've gone up from that and I think there might've been one that might have gone down.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Sure. There will be some that will be going up and some will be going down, and we'll dig those up as we look for those three school divisions for diversity.

For Prairie South in fact there will have been a decrease for Prairie South in diversity of \$223,000. They will have less. For Chinook School Division, diversity factor has resulted in a reduction of \$122,000. And South East Cornerstone, the diversity in South East Cornerstone is a reduction of \$313,000.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Oh, I'm sorry. The Clerk and myself were having a conversation discussing procedure matters. The Chair recognizes Ms. Higgins.

Ms. Higgins: — So then if the vulnerability numbers are based

on prevalence, right, because you don't have new numbers, you don't have the '06 Stats Canada numbers, how would your vulnerability factors and your percentages drop and change that much if you're dealing with numbers that were from five years ago?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Two factors, Ms. Higgins, would have contributed to that. As I indicated to you, the per pupil rate decrease would have contributed to some of that change as well. But also in those three school divisions the prevalence rates just are not there as was anticipated. So when prevalence rates change, and it's been pointed out to me by my officials, those three school divisions that you've asked for probably have the least diverse factors of all the school divisions in the province.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much. Also it says . . . Sorry now, I'm back to where I started. Well not totally, but . . .

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — And where's that?

Ms. Higgins: — Transportation. We just went a little bit off the road here. It said also in the funding manual that the transportation factor is up for review again in '08-09. And why is that, when you've just made changes?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — A number of factors there for needing to ensure that we have the ability to re-address this question before. The entire review of transportation has not been completed. All the factors have not been able to be looked at under phase 3. And as you know, under phase 3 review of the FOG [foundation operating grant] grants, transportation was one of them. So to immediately address cost concerns of fuel especially, there was an increase provided in the rates right now. There will be continued monitoring and there will be continued assessment of the transportation criteria and that is why there may be a need to adjust things further for '08-09.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much. When we move on to the targeted funding support and we look at community schools, I believe this also is up for review this year, was reviewed this year or is targeted for next year, I'm not sure, but it seems to me that it is up for some type of a review. Is there any intention of the ministry to move community schools from what we would consider a line item and separate from the basic rates to move it into the basic rate?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I'll ask one of my assistant ministers, Darren, to come forward again and, you know, we've recognized that we're well into 100 community schools already in the province and that's a far cry from the total number so there's always this concern about whether or not every school is a community school. So I'll ask Mr. McKee to make some comments.

Mr. McKee: — Just firstly, there is not at this point a move to move it to within the grant. We're in the process of reviewing, as you'd indicated. We're looking at what is the most reasonable and effective way of funding community education in today's context. As you're aware, more schools are requiring or asking for that type of funding so we're in the process of reviewing and trying to find the best way to do that, but there's no move to move it in within the grant at this point.

Ms. Higgins: — Well and I know there was rumours previously that this was going to be moved into the grant and there was a fair bit of backlash from communities and the community schools that they felt they would be swallowed up and kind of assimilated into the whole division and would lose the value that they have as community schools. So if there's opportunity for public consultations, count that as this person from the public's comments that community schools should stay as a line item and separately funded, please and thank you.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Well I can tell you two things there, Ms. Higgins. I've met with them very recently in this very building and we had a great meeting, and since I've been the Minister of Education, since November 21, we have never entertained that. And I understand that that was something that the former government had had some discussion, and again it was a very, very vague kind of discussion. That has never been something that I have even considered.

Ms. Higgins: — Now on to my favourite fund or my favourite part of this whole work, pre-kindergarten. Pre-kindergarten and the early learning section, there's a number of new programs, pre-K, that were announced. And I believe at the back of the manual you have a number of pre-kindergartens that are listed, and comparing it with last year's, there's a number of new ones. So are these part of the ones that you are talking about increasing funding or new programs? Or are we talking about 38 totally new programs that will be initiated this year?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — The volumes that we've brought with us are so extensive, Ms. Higgins, that it takes us a little while to find everything for you, but we will try to provide the answers for you. In '07-08 there were a total of 155 pre-K programs in the province; 151 of those programs were funded through the school operating grant directly to school divisions. And then there were four programs that were funded through the federal early childhood development funding. So those 155 were there.

What we've added is we've added additional dollars to the school operating grant monies, and we've extended the 151 programs that are funded through the school operating grant to be 189. So that's where you'll see the additional 38.

The four programs that are still in existence that were federally funded are still going to be federally funded. We have not changed the numbers in that area, but we have broadened the pre-K numbers through the foundation operating grant by adding 38 more programs.

Ms. Higgins: — So then my question was, if you compare the '07-08 manual to the '08-09, at the back on appendix H you have a listing of schools with pre-kindergarten programs. So just taking last year's list to this list and looking at it, are these the new programs . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Appendix H. Like when you look at Chinook Central Elementary, that's a new listing from the last year's manual. So are these new programs this year or are they programs that have been implemented over the past year?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I think the best way we can describe that is that if you see a new program that is on the list that wasn't on a list a year ago, it will be because it was given some pre-approval in September as a result of the federal monies that

were being transferred to the province, okay.

Now this wouldn't be the inclusive list, I guess, because we're still working on the 38 programs and ensuring that we . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . So there's two situations. We're still adding to the list pre-kindergarten programs that were announced through federal funding. And we've added, as Ms. Zelmer has just indicated to me, that there were 15 programs that were added in the spring and 21 programs were added in the fall. That's under what I'll call the '07-08 budget. Now we have 38 new programs. None of the names are on this list for the new 38 because the actual sites have not been allocated yet.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much for that. You also commented . . . Like I realize there is a lag time between announcements and when we are able to implement the programs, and there's a great deal of preparation that needs to take place and planning. So thank you very much for the explanation.

You commented on the federal funding. Earlier — gee, this is what, April? — about a month and a half ago, two months ago, the Premier actually spoke a couple of times and included in his comments 31 million new dollars coming to the province of Saskatchewan for early childhood development, child care. He termed it strictly as child care. So when you look at if there . . . And he said that these dollars were unique to the province of Saskatchewan and were not in the programming. It was unique to Saskatchewan and not offered to other provinces.

So where does that \$31 million show up, and is this on top of the \$7.5 million that we are currently receiving each year for five years from the \$255 million? This is on top of? Part of?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — What we clarified was that last summer . . . And there were some letters from the former government to the federal minister asking for assurance that the \$7.5 million was there. And it wasn't there at that time until the new federal budget has come in. And my understanding is to get to about 31 million it's \$7.55 million for each of the next five years, including this year. So that's where the \$31 million comes into play. Is it additional money? It's confirmation that that old money, which was in and then not so sure it was in, is in fact going to be received by the province.

Ms. Higgins: — So then it's actually four years. If you're 7.55, that's four years money for 31, because there was already 7.5 received last year, was there not? '07-08?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — No. It's five additional years. '07-08 was outside of that announcement in this year's federal budget that says there's five years of funding at 7.55. It's outside the CST [Canada Social Transfer].

Ms. Higgins: — Outside the CST.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Yes, '07-08 was outside of that announcement of 7.5. In each of '08-09, '09-10, '10-11, '11-12, '12-13, and '13-14, in each of those years we were looking at 7.5 million. What the federal government has announced is that five years at that rate. So we'll get that beyond the year '07-08.

Ms. Higgins: — Okay, so we need to . . . Sorry, I don't mean to

be slow on this, but there was an announcement by the federal government to replace the former Liberal federal government's national child care program. And it was \$255 million over five years, I believe, for the creation of child care spaces. That's it. It was for, well I think, early childhood development it could be used for also. But I mean always the press release was for the creation of child care spaces.

So it was done on a per capita basis and it was to be \$7.5 million to the province of Saskatchewan for five years. Now the difficulty was at the time, and probably for what letters you are seeing, was that the federal government paid the first year to the province of Saskatchewan and then said they were going to roll it into the CHST [Canada Health and Social Transfer]. So what we would have got was \$7.5 million for child care spaces, but we would have lost money in the CHST.

So that was probably what you were seeing was the letters going back and forth that we were being given some money but, you know, they put it in one pocket and took it out of another. So there was a dispute over that. And I know a number of letters went back and forth between the province of Saskatchewan and the federal government. So this is a reinstatement of that money? Or I'm not quite sure how this all works.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Well I think it's best that I ask someone who's been involved in this file for a lot longer than I have. And I'll ask Lois to comment on this.

Ms. Zelmer: — That money was transferred with the recent federal budget as a trust to Saskatchewan to make up for that perceived loss of the, yes, drop in the floor payments of the CST.

Ms. Higgins: — Okay, good.

Ms. Zelmer: — And the unintended consequence of making it appear as if we didn't get our child care money. In fact we did, but the other losses overset the net gain for Saskatchewan. So that's to address the particular issue of the drop in the base. It sets it outside of that, and allows us to draw down 7.5 each year to effectively have our share of the 250.

Ms. Higgins: — Now sorry to belabour the point, but so is '08-09 the first payment? Or '08-09 should be the second payment out of the five-year program.

Ms. Zelmer: — The 7.5 to Saskatchewan came outside the CST last year, just as a cheque in July into Saskatchewan's account. So this year we wouldn't have seen the net gain without that federal transfer of the trust. So this year it's the first of the years of the 7.5 that will come from that trust.

Ms. Higgins: — So then in actual fact we'll end up with six years of 7.5?

Ms. Zelmer: — Yes. Because in '13-14, which is the last year of the original agreement, the change in the floor payments were such that it would take us back to where we would see the net gain from the 7.5 transfer. So it's to cover that period where the drop in the floor payments exceeded the child care money.

Ms. Higgins: — So then this would show up in, it would be CHST transfer payments in the budget documents. That's where we would see this money? Or would we see it in ELCC [early learning and child care], or what? Where would the money show up?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Federal transfer dollars to the province will show up in the category of other. When you look at the budget document there is a category that is referred to as federal transfers — transfers from the Government of Canada — and in the category of other. It's the fourth line item. And I note that in this year's budget, the estimate, we're estimating that there's going to be \$239.6 million coming in in that category. So therefore that will be all of these additional dollars that come in education.

Ms. Higgins: — Okay. So this addresses the base. Okay. Now that makes sense and I understand where it fits into all this. So thank you very much for the explanation.

Now back to pre-K. Sorry. One question that I get quite often is, many parents feel that there is more of a need for pre-kindergarten. And instead of having the minimum of 12 hours provided, has there ever been any discussion about extending those minimum hours, increasing the minimum hours?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — At the short time that I've been the Minister of Education, the answer to expanding the existing programs by adding more hours to existing programs has not had any discussion.

What is clear, I think, is your first comment, is there is a far greater demand in the last number of years, and you're fully aware of that, as to developing pre-K programs. There's research that shows that there's not only the short-term benefits but there's the long-term benefits for pre-K.

If we can address those special circumstances for our three-year-olds and four-year-olds long before they get to kindergarten and get them into a position where they can enter a kindergarten program with that additional, with those additional help having been provided, we know that that is going to work. And that is why one of the, you know, the decisions of the ministry was that we need to add 38 more programs. And I think when the 38 programs are fully implemented as additional programs this fall and we're up to 193, we'll be serving about 3,000 children that are going to be, you know, vulnerable children, vulnerable three- and four-year-olds in the province.

Could the program be enhanced? Sure it could be. At the level there's always a question about whether or not 12 hours is sufficient. There are parents that need some greater support and there are initiatives that are done at the community level. But that's where we're sitting at today.

We know that some school divisions do things beyond that. I had the opportunity to meet with the group of individuals that are responsible for pre-K programs throughout the province and I was very pleasantly surprised about the programs that are in place.

I had also, as you might have seen within the Moose Jaw

newspaper, I had the privilege of being at the pre-K program at Sacred Heart — just an excellent program. It's been in existence for a while. And I think that program and others that I'm familiar with in Prince Albert and other places across the province, those could be examples for communities that are going to be selected in the course of the next few months to determine what a pre-K program can deliver for those 16 students.

So it's definitely something that this ministry and officials in education have long known, that we have to address early childhood education. We know that the recognition of needs at an earlier level is going to produce far greater benefit to us as a society when we look at meeting those concerns.

The Chair: — Mr. Wotherspoon.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I don't know if you'd have this information through the ministry or not. It's my understanding that certain divisions have gone ahead with pre-K programs, knowing all the research and value behind them, despite not getting direct funding for them.

I'm just wondering if you know how many of these programs exist where the costs are borne through the division itself and not funded directly from the province or from the feds.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — My comment to Lois is, that many? There are approximately 20 programs that are being organized by schools and school divisions to meet the needs and are not receiving any funding.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Now some of those 20 there, is there any priority that those ones will be receiving through your ministry as far as receiving the funding here now that's been announced? Or will it be the — and I'm not sure what the criteria has been in the past — will it be the natural criteria into deciding who gets funding?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I'll ask Lois to provide the answer to that, Mr. Wotherspoon.

Ms. Zelmer: — The determination of which school divisions and which school areas are going to be offered funding for pre-K is based on a number of factors, including the numbers of vulnerable children, literacy level of parents, numbers of families on social assistance, other services available in the community. So when a school division is offered a new pre-K funding, there is some negotiation about, we've made a determination; we think a particular area needs it more. And they may say, well actually we'd prefer it to go over here, and we generally work that out.

In some instances when we do have new funding we offer it to the school division and their choice is in fact to say, we need you to fund the program we're already running but we've been funding. So that can happen. So that's why we use the language, new funded pre-Ks. It doesn't always make a difference in the actual number.

The Chair: — Ms. Higgins.

Ms. Higgins: — Sorry, we're flipping back and forth here. Next

onto schools of necessity which has been a bit of a hot topic over the last year and a half, now I took a great deal of care and time to go through the manuals and schools of necessity and Hutterian schools. Really not a lot has changed from the '07-08 except for one. You changed the title. You haven't changed anything in the calculations? No. Was that a no to me or a no to the deputy? I'm sure I'm going to get a longer answer than just a flat out no.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — That's a no to myself. That's a no to myself. No. As indicated on page 6 of section F, which is the schools of necessity/Hutterian schools, there was a decision made to move or to separate the schools of necessity and the Hutterian schools categories.

So what has happened is that the amounts of money that are being allocated under both the distance factor and under the enrolment factor, those conditions have been changed. Those have been implemented, not for a long period of time. Those were changes that were made within the last, I believe, two years. The small, remote schools factor as it was described included all of that.

So what we've done now is separate the Hutterian schools because they're different, and they're operating in a way different capacity than other schools of necessity. I can tell you that the funding that is now being allocated is \$5 million under this system. And that's a slight increase because there are about 37 schools that are fitting into the category of being termed as a school of necessity.

Ms. Higgins: — So no increase in funding and no change to the criteria. We have just separated Hutterian schools which . . . I mean I realize they're treated differently and are a totally different circumstance. And other than that, we've changed the name.

Well other than some real frustration — and I think we'll get into this probably a little later on and the next time that we're up for estimates — but there was a number of commitments made to Save Our Schools, some comments that were made about schools of necessity and schools of opportunity. And we're seeing now in the media a fair bit of frustration. And I believe there was a couple of folks at the legislature today feeling that while the names had changed, there really hadn't been any effect for schools that feel they are small, remote schools of necessity, call them what you will. The formula's exactly the same.

So in my view, Mr. Minister, it's a bit of a shell game to change the name but not really address any of the issues that are out there for school divisions and for families and communities while the geographic factor has changed.

Well you know, you can nod your head, but this was a pretty hot topic a year ago and over the summer, and there was expectations raised that I think many don't believe now. We can get into the academic discussion on formulas and the whys and the what fors and the rationale behind it, but when it gets right down to it, the emotion of a community and the expectations that were raised, and I'm not — rightly or wrongly — I'm not even going to get into that. But there was expectations that were raised in many small communities, not only in my school

division that I reside in, but in many others.

And I have to tell you, I went over this manual a number of times to make sure that I wasn't missing anything because I truly, like many parents in the province, expected to see some major changes in especially the schools of necessity. Added money to the geographical factor, yes, but I truly expected to see something different in this factor, especially that would address the rural areas and some of the hopes that had been built up by you and by other members that are now sitting in government when we went through that very difficult spring of school closures. And I'm sure you remember that. I know I will, for a long, long time, and it was a very emotional time. And I guess I'm voicing some disappointment because I also, like many parents and Save Our Schools and others, expected to see other changes.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Well, madam, Ms. Higgins, I will begin by saying that schools of necessity, the term schools of necessity is a term that we used in opposition over a while, and it has always referred to a school of necessity being there because of distance. And a school of necessity, as we then looked at the existing policy, was described under what was called the small remote schools factor. And the minimum distance that that school that is now being considered whether or not it is a school of necessity, had to be 40 kilometres. And we saw that as a legitimate choice by the former government, that 40 kilometre minimum was where that should remain, and we've kept it there.

The distance factor increases to 60 kilometres where then the school in question receives the maximum amount of funding at 60 kilometres or beyond that. We did not change that and we never . . . and I don't believe that you will ever find anything in *Hansard* or any other comment from me that said that I would suggest that a school of necessity is at 10 kilometres or 15 kilometres distance away from another school.

Now the amount of money that is being provided in the way of the \$5 million that I've indicated is a significant amount of money to those 37 schools. And currently when I look at the schools that are under review, all of the schools across the province . . . And I've done some checking to see if those schools fit into the category of schools of necessity by way of the mileage factor of 40 kilometres that was put in place by your government and the answer is, there isn't any. They all are in a situation where in fact . . .

Now I'm told that the group representing, you know, the various communities within the city of Regina considered that that should be a school of necessity because it's the community school within an area within the city of Regina, and it should be a school of necessity. I don't believe that that was ever anything that your government contemplated, and it certainly isn't anything that I've contemplated.

Now when we look at a school of necessity in fact, and comparing it to the school of opportunity which we've introduced into this budget, they are also two different things. A school of opportunity is not a school of necessity because a school of necessity gets additional funding. It's because of its enrolment. It's because of its distance, and it qualifies under the existing formula.

Now you may argue — and rightfully so — you may argue with the amount of money that we're giving to what is called a school of necessity and maybe that should be higher. That's something that we'll be considering as we move forward. But the schools of opportunity will in fact be those communities that are, could be fairly close to another school, but they have for whatever reasons seen a significant decline in their enrolment and now a board of education is considering that particular school to be under review.

They will now be eligible if they believe that their enrolment is suddenly going to grow, which is what I hope for and I'm sure you do as well . . . is that those schools will now have the opportunity to receive some additional funding under the schools of opportunity criteria that we're putting in place.

Ms. Higgins: — I mean I understand why the factor is there and I also understand . . . I may not agree with your direction towards the schools of opportunity with the kind of vague criteria that you've laid out or the general notion that you've laid out of the direction that you want to take it.

I guess my frustration is with comments that the small, remote school factor or ignoring the small, remote school factor that was in place previously talking about a school of necessity, giving the impression that schools of necessity were somehow going to be different, and they were going to address the issues that are in rural Saskatchewan where it is becoming more and more difficult to have that concentration of students. So it's more the optics of the whole process. And to ignore the small school factors — remote school whatever you want to call it — change the name, portray it as doing some wonderful things and offering some new ideas to rural Saskatchewan was not accurate. And you kept the exact identical factors within the schools of necessity. That's my frustration.

Anyway I've taken up way too much time, so I will turn it over to Mr. Wotherspoon to ask some questions because he's got quite a few too.

The Chair: — The Chair recognizes Mr. Wotherspoon.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Just maybe on that, on that note there before I switch gears a little bit here and a bit of an oddball question, but I just wonder if the minister could share what he feels is the appropriate or I should say what is an appropriate length of a bus ride. In other words say, what would be too long?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Wotherspoon, if I had the answer to that, I probably wouldn't be sitting here. I'd be a consultant somewhere. That's a very difficult question, and that's a question that board members and directors of education and superintendents wrestle with quite often because I know that boards look at distance and bus rides differently for different age of children. Is it appropriate for someone who is older to be on the bus one way for 45 minutes or an hour? Is it appropriate then for that same bus route of an hour to be for a kindergarten student? And those are the concerns that the boards wrestle with.

Many boards have developed their own transportation policies and put in place guidelines, guidelines and ranges of the amount

of time that that should be spent for different age students within their system. I don't know that there's any magical number. Of course I think research will show you that if students are spending an hour and a half on a morning trip and an hour and a half in the evening trip and spending three hours a day on a bus, that is not necessarily the best use of that person's time. And that is why we have implemented . . . And the former government was involved in that. That's why there are schools of necessity because there will be situations in this province unless we're fortunate enough to see this population of this province grow from the current million to 1.5 million and add another, you know, 20,000 students to the mix and we have them disbursed across the province.

Then we'll be able to have schools maintained at a comfortable, and I'll say a comfortable distance apart. And I don't have a definition for that comfortable, so don't ask me what that means. But clearly there has to be a decision at the board level that says, we do not want to have bus routes that are longer than X number of minutes. And the boards can achieve that by the fact of making bus routes shorter. When schools close — and I've been part of a board of education that was involved in school closure — we attempted to ensure that the students that were on the buses prior to the closure were not going to spend any additional time on the bus the year following their closure of their school than what they were on before. And we achieved that. We achieved that because we were able to make smaller routes, and we were able to move students directly from point A to point B which was the school that they were now attending.

So those are concerns that boards wrestle with all the time, and I would believe that there would be a range of time that would be acceptable to a school division for kindergarten, grade 1, 2 and it will be probably different for senior grades like grade 10, 11, and 12.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I know it's not an easy question. Am I correct that your budget does nothing to reduce a bus ride this year for any student in the province?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Well as questions received from your colleague about the increase in transportation, we have provided significant increase in the recognition per pupil and the recognition per kilometre. So for a board of education now, there will be far greater recognition costs to enable a board of education to adjust its bus routes to ensure that times become shorter.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I'll maybe move on to just . . . I have lots of questions here, but maybe just . . . We did touch a little bit in-depth on some of the funding for three specific school divisions, and maybe we'll work on a couple of those just specifically. So maybe we can have a practical understanding for individuals at home, I guess, or ourselves to understand exactly where funding changes have come from.

If we look at South East Cornerstone for example . . . And I know we've talked about the geographic factor that's increased its funding by 616,000 if I heard correctly. And transportation has increased by 314,000. We're up about \$930,000. There's a reduction in funding through the re-allocation or re-jig of the vulnerability factor of 313,000 so that would indicate that that South East Cornerstone would be receiving 527,000 extra

through those three changes there.

Of course there is many other factors here to contribute to what a division gets in the end for funding. If I do look at the taxable assessment for South East Cornerstone, it's up marginally, point one per cent, so not a miniscule amount, and enrolments dropped 1.2 per cent. If I look across at the amount of increase, it would be \$3,831,139. I'm just wondering — and it might just simply be myself here that's missing this part here — I'm just wondering where the rest would be made up from.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Well you've identified a number of changes, and there are many factors that contribute to the total amount of money that is dispersed, and I can quickly give you some of the numbers that South East Cornerstone is facing. And we can supply this copy of this page for you so that you don't have to worry about writing down all of these numbers, but for the . . . There are more numbers than the numbers that I gave to Ms. Higgins, so that's why we'll provide a copy of South East Cornerstone.

The basic rate for instance in South East Cornerstone resulted in the fact that they will receive \$541,000 more. Rural transportation, as I indicated to you, the rural and urban transportation, gives them an additional three hundred and about fourteen thousand dollars. Special education transportation is up 23. Community schools are up 24. These are thousands by the way. Pre-K is up 53,000. Diversity is down 313,000. Intensive supports are up 531,000. Technology supported learning is down 17,000. Schools of necessity is up about 11,000. The geographic factor is up 616,000.

Then we had also included in that . . . This is the first year that we are taking out tuition recognition, tuition revenue, tuition expenditures. So that's basically, as far as the province is concerned, tuition expenditures. Tuition revenue were zero dollars. They were ins. They were outs, and they balanced. So now all of the school divisions are no longer going to have recognition for tuition in or out. So those are the other changes. But the net result is you add in the pluses. You add in the negatives. And South East Cornerstone's grant is determined in that fashion.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. Just with the quick numbers I was doing there, I didn't get anywhere close to the \$3.8 million increase, but I would appreciate . . . You mentioned that you could share those documents, and maybe when I'm at home here tonight I might be able to make sense of those numbers at some point.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I'll help you out right now, Mr. Wotherspoon. I just mentioned tuition fee revenue and expenditures, and I'm going to indicate to you that on the revenue side for South East Cornerstone, tuition fee revenue has dropped by \$3.300 million. And on the tuition fee expenditures, that change is about \$931,000. So those are ins and outs, and that's why you see significant change to the grant. It doesn't mean that there is significantly less monies because the tuition was an in and an out.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well thank you very much. And if you can provide those documents as you offered, I'd appreciate that.

Now there's been some school divisions that have expressed some concern regarding the new allocation. And I understand in reworking something here, you're working on what you see as best practice and making sure that it meets an end goal. And I understand the value in looking at the vulnerability factor as a piece.

If we look at, I guess, specific school divisions, Prairie South has expressed specific concerns regarding their reduction in funding. You know, in a non-adversarial way, I guess, how do you justify this reduction to Prairie South?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Prairie South diversity factor is down. The amount of money allocated in that is down by 223,000 because of the two components that we talked about before. There has been a change in the amount of per pupil and the vulnerability. The students that are identified, they are not as intensive in that school division as in other school divisions, and as a result there is a decline.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I guess it's a pretty significant decline. And absolutely I understand the value and the changes you're talking about to the vulnerability factor. In application it might seem as a slight injustice, just an application on a given year to have the change such as it is. But as it stands, just to make sure I'm straight here, the ministry supports this reduction?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — The ministry has put in place a procedure and formula to distribute the amount of money that is in the diversity factor. And there are school divisions that will receive more recognition because of the intensive situation that is prevalent within their school division, and as a result they're going to get more money. In other school division, where prevalence has been now looked at and there isn't the prevalence of vulnerable children as was initially anticipated, and they're going to receive less. So is your question that do I as the minister support the diversity factor and how it's been distributed? Of course is the answer.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. No. And I understand the justification, the research towards the vulnerability factor. The point is, it has real implications for divisions this year in its application, and as does anything when you change a regime or a structure to a new system.

To a question here . . . the food funding, we definitely welcome funding for food, meeting the needs of students in community schools and across the province. Definitely a believer that if a student's hungry or those essential needs aren't met, then learning's not possible. Just wondering how that was distributed. Is that — the 500,000 — was that basically the \$5,000? I think there's roughly a \$5,000 increase on the community schools. Is that what that number is there?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — You have it correct, Mr. Wotherspoon. As I indicated before, there's approximately 100 community schools within the province. And allocating \$500,000, we treated them equally. So therefore it does not matter whether there's, you know, one program or one particular community school has three times the enrolment of another one. If they are identified as a community school, and there are about 100, the division of 100 into the 500,000 means each community school is getting \$5,000.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well that's good. I just wanted to make sure I was clear that that 5,000 wasn't an additional increase to that \$5,000 as reflected from the 500,000 of food funding. But like I said, we definitely welcome that funding.

I guess some questions . . . And we only have seven minutes here, but maybe we can . . .

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — We'll be back.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — We can chat. That's right. We need a bit more time to chat here. And we talked about it quickly in question period today. And this is, I guess, a less adversarial or contentious place to have these conversations. But e-learning and secondary digital learning has been cut significantly here this year — or at least the budget appropriation in that place has been changed. And I know, I know, I guess the argument has been that this will be better handled or be placed into the hands of divisions to deliver the distance or online technology supported learning that has had a central hub, in the past. And I guess I ask just a very quick one at the start here, a basic one is, what's the basis for this change?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Well the full explanation about moving from what I'll call the old correspondence school method and the paper print method to technology supported learning is one that has been looked at for already four years, so this is not new. The basis is that because of what has occurred in the province, because of amalgamation and because many school divisions now have capacity, they have the capacity to deliver programs not only to the students within their school divisions, but they have the capacity to deliver that program to students in other school divisions.

So as a result of that, the interest in this is not new. The interest in this is three and four years old under the former government, and we are just moving that forward. It's not going to result in sort of the sudden collapse of the availability of programs. As I think you'll hear from Ms. Horsman right away, is that we're going to see an expansion of program and we're going to see the availability of other options for students to take that they currently don't have in some schools.

And you know, when we start talking about distance factors and we start talking about small schools and the ability to ensure that every student in the province of Saskatchewan, no matter where they live, should have the ability to get a proper education, distance education and moving to technology supported learning and the availability of more classes, I think is the answer. And that's what we're going to do.

So if could ask Helen to further comment on the whole change and how the different timelines will kick in because clearly we're not going to leave any students, you know, stranded.

Ms. Horsman: — Sure. And we certainly are not getting out of the business of distance learning at the ministry. What we're doing is looking at supporting that in a different way. And that's based on the capacity that school divisions have at this time, as our minister has said.

We know right now that school divisions in the province are offering 40 distance courses. That's more than we're offering.

We're offering 32. And we know that what they are wanting us to do is shift our emphasis to coordinating what's happening across the province in terms of distance learning. And that's what we'll be doing with the central hub, or the administrative hub that we're establishing, and so that parents, students, teachers, schools will be able to access all of the information they need in order to find out where those courses are being offered across the province, and so that we don't have a duplication of those courses.

We also have come to know that if school divisions are taking care of their own students and students that are taking distance learning through their own school divisions, with the relationship with the division, that the success rate is a lot higher and the completion rate is higher. And so we want to shift that emphasis back to our school divisions taking care of their own students.

At the same time we are starting to work with . . . and as last Tuesday and again today, we had provincial meetings with the regional colleges, with SIAST representatives, and the school divisions to look at how we're going to work together to ensure that adults as well will continue to have access.

Print resources is another thing that's important, and we know that we are going to continue offering that across the province in whichever way that will end up. So we're looking at phasing the traditional approach to distant learning out by March 31, 2009.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — You certainly have no argument here as far as the value of looking at alternative methods to education and an open, flexible system, and you mentioned adult students, absolutely, and mentally disabled or, I think, individuals with schedules or different life circumstances have often accessed the school in fact, I believe, seniors. And you know, in a economy that we have and lifelong learning is an important piece here right now. We certainly would want to make sure that all those avenues continue to be open, and I would certainly argue that we truly have an opportunity with the technology that we have to enrich and enhance what's going on.

I guess the initial response from school divisions, I'd be interested in hearing, I guess, from the minister, as far as are they feeling comfortable with this added capacity? Many divisions, for many factors, as we've talked about, aren't seeing an increase in funding. They are adding responsibilities to divisions at this point here. Are divisions feeling comfortable with that?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I'll ask Ms. Horsman to comment on that as well. But you know, what we're also wanting to make sure is that we don't expect . . . some of the smaller school divisions, some of the separate school divisions that don't have the capacity to build a program, they will have the ability to work with the larger school division that has the program. And I gave you, I think, I gave you an example in the Legislative Assembly today where Moose Jaw is in fact providing, already one teacher's providing five courses — three accounting courses and two psychology courses. Those are the five courses that she teaches, all online.

So I mean, school divisions have moved — as I think the 32

programs that we offer versus, you know, over 40 that school divisions already have — school divisions have moved ahead of the ministry. And we're going to make sure that no one falls through the cracks.

And I guess maybe I can ask you to comment on whether we've received some input from boards of education because I know I personally haven't.

Ms. Horsman: — Right. I know all boards of education were present at the consultation that we had in Regina on Tuesday, and my folks that were leading that have indicated that there were lots of good ideas that came out of that. We'll be collating those together with the ideas that come out of the provincial meeting in the North today in Saskatoon. And then we are going to continue the consultations. We've also met with the home-based education association and asked them, what are your needs, and what kinds of things do we need to keep in mind in terms of what you need in terms of distance learning? So we've touched pretty much all the bases in terms of consultation, and those are going to continue, and that we're going to build this new model together with our sector partners.

The Chair: — Committee members, we have reached the end of our time for vote 5, the estimates of Education. I would like to thank all the committee members for their co-operation. I heard the minister agree to provide some information to the committee. I would remind the minister to provide the information to the Clerk so that all committee members can have copies of the document.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, the responses that Mr. Wotherspoon was seeking was around the various factors for the South East Cornerstone School Division and the various components, and we'll provide that to the committee Clerk for distribution to all committee members.

The Chair: — Thank you. I believe Mr. Wotherspoon has a final comment.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you very much. I know we do have lots of questions, and we appreciate your patience and your time. All of the officials that attended here today, thank you very much. Thank you to fellow members and thank you to the minister and looking forward to the next meeting.

The Chair: — Minister.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And I wanted to thank the two committee members from the opposition for very good questions, for clarifying things. And it's not just for the purpose of the six committee members that are sitting here. There are also many individuals who may not have been watching the television but will look at *Hansard* and will be able to understand a little bit more about pre-kindergarten and distance education and all of those factors. So I appreciate the questions, and I also very much appreciate all of my staff being present to assist in providing, I hope, answers that you were looking for.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. This committee will recess till 6 o'clock.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**General Revenue Fund
Social Services
Vote 36**

Subvote (SS01)

The Chair: — I'll call the committee back to order. We will resume our consideration of estimates. We have before us at this time the considerations of estimates of vote 36, Social Services.

What I will do before I ask the minister to introduce her officials and make her opening statement, I'll just remind members once again as I did earlier this afternoon, we are all in new roles, and I would ask that members be recognized by the Chair before they participate in the debate, that they would put their questions to the minister not to the officials. It's improper to question an official. The minister will decide whether they want their official to answer. And also it's not appropriate to draw the officials into the debate.

And during the question and answer sections, it's certainly appropriate to go back and forth. If the discussion gets a bit more heated, as for lack of a better term, if we enter into debate of a more passionate . . . thank you, and enter into a debate, I would prefer that we do it through the Chair. And as you can realize, I still have some laryngitis so I would certainly appreciate co-operation of all members.

With that, I would ask Minister Harpauer to introduce her officials, and if she has an opening statement she should do that at this time.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to the committee members. I am pleased to appear before the committee, representing the Ministry of Social Services. With me is my senior management team: the deputy minister, Duncan Fisher; assistant deputy minister of client services, Bob Wihlidal; assistant deputy minister of housing and central administration, Darrell Jones. In addition we have some senior officials including Don Allen, executive director, finance and property management; Lynn Tulloch, executive director income assistance; Gord Tweed, assistant executive director of income assistance; Andrea Brittin, executive director child and family services; Janice Krumenacker, director post-care services; Larry Chaykowski, executive director housing program operations; Jeff Redekop, executive director community living; Trish Alcorn, director of communications and public education; and Karen Bright, executive director of human resources. And I want to thank my officials for coming out this evening.

The ministry's mandate is to work with Saskatchewan people as they build better lives for themselves through economic independence, strong families, and active involvement in the labour market and the community. Our government believes that all Saskatchewan people should enjoy the benefits of the province's economic momentum. Toward that end, we believe that as government we must make decisions today that will ensure a bright and prosperous future for our citizens tomorrow.

The Ministry of Social Services strongly supports that belief.

Many of our clients and their families are particularly vulnerable and tend to lack the skills and training necessary to move away from the margins of society. We believe those who are able to move into the mainstream workforce should have both the opportunity and the access to skills and training necessary to make that move. We must help them to be fully included in the economic and social life of the province.

The ministry's programs support employment and self-reliance; child welfare; independent living for people with disabilities and seniors; and safe, affordable housing for low- and moderate-income people through income assistance. Through its income assistance programs, the Ministry of Social Services provides a range of financial services to help people support themselves.

As I said a moment ago, Saskatchewan's economy is very strong, and it continues to grow. New jobs are being created, and for the first time in a long time more people are moving into our province than are moving out. Across the economic spectrum, we continue to hear about the shortage of workers. This has had and continues to have a very positive impact on our social assistance caseloads.

The number of people dependent on financial assistance programs continues to fall while more people move from assistance into the workforce. Given the strength of the economy and the opportunities that exist for our current or potential clients, we believe we must put forward every possible effort to assist these individuals to gain the knowledge and the skills necessary to join the workforce. It is our goal to take a more proactive approach to helping income assistance clients reach their full potential in the workforce. Therefore accelerated work opportunities including enhanced Jobs First will provide clients with the skills, training, and supports necessary to help them make the transition into the workforce.

Over the next several weeks we will also introduce parent support sessions which will be available to help parents move into employment. To enhance accountability and support current and evolving business needs, our income assistance division will be making greater use of new technology as we move towards a more integrated data system. This new system will link a range of income support programs and provide online resources to improve our services to our clients.

I have recently had some very positive and informative decisions with ministry staff, and I can tell you that my officials and I will continue to consult with both staff and stakeholders before any changes are made to the Saskatchewan assistance plan benefit structure.

Child and family services. My ministry's child and family services program provides services for children, youth, and families. The ministry is committed to protecting children and providing children in care of the ministry with appropriate residential and personal services. This year's budget includes a continuation of the 18 million investment in child and family services to help us build on the supports available to our clients.

The budget also includes just over 3 million as the first instalment of a three-year, \$15 million investment announced last month for an electronic case management system to keep

track of our children in care. Saskatchewan is the last province in the country to develop such a system. The introduction of the new system over the next three years will support the important work of the child and family service division. As a result of the new system, service providers will have access to consistent, comprehensive information in electronic format throughout a child's involvement with the ministry. This will improve our ability to collect province-wide statistics, to assist in decision making and policy direction.

We rely on a number of community-based organizations to provide sexual assault services, family outreach services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, and transition houses. Our budget contains 1.1 million of new funding for these community-based organizations, the first major funding increase targeted specifically to these important organizations.

The cognitive disabilities strategy provides support for people with cognitive disabilities and their families based on the greatest level of need. This year's budget invests \$700,000 for this important work.

Community living. The community living division supports the development of inclusive communities for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The division also partners with community-based organizations to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities in Saskatchewan.

The ministry has received a number of proposals for expansion of residential and day program spaces. Community-based organizations have indicated their willingness to partner with government to develop these resources. The 2008-09 budget will invest 2.4 million through the community living division to expand residential and day program services to support individuals with intellectual disabilities.

When a child has an intellectual disability, the stress of providing 24-hour-per-day care can take a toll on the physical and emotional well-being of other family members. In order for families to occasionally take a break, the family respite program provides alternate care for the child or children. To increase the amount of respite care available, this year's budget will provide 100,000 in additional funding for the program.

The Ministry of Social Services and the Office of Disability Issues will be developing a new community engagement process to form a new strategic framework on disability for Saskatchewan.

Housing. The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation promotes independence and self-sufficiency by providing a continuum of housing and housing services to people who could not otherwise afford adequate, safe, and secure shelter. Increased housing prices and rising rents are a reflection of the province's growing economy, growing population, and overall economic prosperity.

For many low- and moderate-income individuals and families, however, these rising costs are creating challenges. Last month our government announced the creation of a two-person task force on housing affordability. We created the task force because we believe that Saskatchewan needs new ideas to ensure housing affordability keeps pace with the province's

current economic momentum. The task force will meet with stakeholders in several Saskatchewan cities and present its recommendations to me by the end of May.

This year's budget continues with all current, affordable housing delivery programs and initiatives. The Housing Corporation has a total of 95 million available for new commitments. At this time there are 856 units representing an investment of nearly 71.5 million at various stages of development. These units will become available over the next 18-month period. Staff in my ministry are currently reviewing expressions of interest under the affordable renting development program, and we will be working with several groups to develop housing initiatives totalling more than \$50 million.

The ministry is also seeking expressions of interest under the Aboriginal housing trust fund which will result in more than 20 million of affordable housing.

Community-based organizations. The Ministry of Social Services relies heavily on hundreds of community-based organizations or CBOs to deliver human services programs to Saskatchewan people. We recognize how important it is that these CBOs have the capacity to effectively recruit and retain a well-trained and committed workforce. To support their efforts, CBOs will be given 2.9 million to cover cost-of-living increases for their employees. We will deliver on our promise to hold a CBO summit. Meetings will be held on separate days in various locations across the province. While plans and agendas for the summits have not been finalized, we do know that CBO expectations related to the summit outcomes are high.

The ministry's budget this year is 635.5 million, a 2.2 per cent increase from last year. Social Services is one of the largest ministries in the provincial government with employees across the province in five different regions.

All across the province, we have a team of dedicated professionals on staff who day in and day out serve the public with compassion and expertise. They are seldom recognized for the work they do, nor do they seek recognition. I think it's important however that we do take time occasionally to think about the significant role they play in enhancing the lives of some of the province's most challenged and vulnerable citizens. Our staff will continue to play a critical role in the initiatives that we have planned for the year ahead. As the minister, I intend to ensure that we consult with them in order to benefit from their knowledge, expertise and ideas as we seek more effective and efficient ways to deliver the programs and services we provide.

I trust that I have provided an overview of the Ministry of Social Services, the work it does, and some of our plans for the upcoming year. And now I would be pleased to answer any questions.

The Chair: — Committee members, I neglected to inform you that we have three substitutions for this evening's proceedings: Mr. Duncan for Mr. Allchurch, Mr. Yates for Mr. Broten, and Ms. Ross for Ms. Eagles.

Also, Madam Minister, if you require some of your officials to

take the table, for *Hansard* purposes, or seats beside you, for *Hansard* purposes, could you identify them? They would greatly appreciate your co-operation. And I now will recognize members that may have questions of the minister. Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. And I want to thank the minister for her overview, and I appreciate the complex nature of your work and the work that your department will be doing. And I also want to agree with you in terms of recognizing the good work that your officials do and right down to the grassroots level in their different capacities throughout the province. It's a very important job and often, as you say, thankless. So it's very, very important.

So this is your first budget and your go forward, and so I want to start out with asking some general questions about your management team, and then just I've got a couple of areas I wanted to talk about — housing and income assistance. But I know my colleagues here have some questions too, so they'll jump in at that particular time because I have some, a lot . . . There are lots of questions, but I really think that . . .

Well before I get into it, I want to first of all ask about the management team going into delivering this budget for you. Of course with the transition time that's happened, employees have been let go. How many employees were let go in this department?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Since November 21, 2007, there have been three out-of-scope employees that have been let go and five in-scope, which is eight altogether.

Mr. Forbes: — And what positions and have those positions been filled?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — . . . what positions because these weren't necessarily due to transition, so they were internal decisions. So I'll allow my deputy minister to answer that question.

Mr. Fisher: — Was the question specific to transition?

Mr. Forbes: — Actually I'm just interested in the transition ones, due to that. If they were retirements or whatever, natural changes, that's okay.

Mr. Fisher: — There were two out-of-scope employees. One of those was our executive director of strategic policy and the other was an employee who was working in the CBO area . . .

The Chair: — I would just ask Mr. Fisher, if you could speak up a bit.

Mr. Fisher: — Okay. Sorry.

The Chair: — Some of the members are having problems hearing you. Thank you.

Mr. Fisher: — I'll get closer. There were two employees terminated as a result of transition. The first employee was our director of strategic policy that was located in Regina. The second out-of-scope employee was an employee in our centre region in Saskatoon that was involved in the management of

our CBO program.

Mr. Forbes: — And I understand that the process would be that the settlements will be out of last year's budget, and if there's any differences, it will be coming forward to this year's?

Mr. Fisher: — My understanding is that once negotiations with employees or the terminated employees conclude with the PSC [Public Service Commission], we have set up accruals being . . . Accruals are being set up for the severance payments for terminations that occurred in '07-08 but weren't resolved prior to the March 31 year-end.

Mr. Forbes: — And the question I wanted to ask is, have the positions been filled? Have you refilled those positions?

Mr. Fisher: — No. Those two particular positions, one we are looking at the way we're set up internally to see whether there are better ways of organizing ourselves, and the second position, we're looking at the roles and the responsibilities of that position, and we're actually thinking that that position we may need to do a scope review on. But the plan is once we do that we will be putting them forward for competition.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Thank you. As I was preparing for this, I was using the budget, but I was also going back to the annual reports. And of course I'm familiar with the old annual reports where we would have goals and objectives and activities in our annual performance plans. Will that continue in the Social Services? Will you have performance plans for each year, or are you doing any kind of new models in terms of how you're going to organize the ministry?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Apparently that was initiated through the Ministry of Finance, and my deputy minister informs me that as of yet they have not received any direction from the Ministry of Finance to continue with that style of reporting.

Mr. Forbes: — To continue or to discontinue? Will you continue until you're told to stop or you must have had . . . Did you do one for this budget year?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No. I'll allow the deputy minister to answer this.

Mr. Fisher: — Well certainly there is a continuation of monitoring the performance within the department. The formal reporting mechanism is something separate and apart, I would say. We would set targets for each of the programs — for example, caseloads or targets for some of our other programs — and that certainly would continue.

Mr. Forbes: — And that's what I'm getting at. In terms of your annual report, you'll have to have some way of . . . Because some of the things you're going to be doing are going to be kind of interesting and I know that we hear in terms of accountability, transparency, whether you're meeting a target or whether it's providing value for the money that you're spending in an area, and so we would hope that would continue. So that's one of the things we'll be looking for a continuation of some sort of benchmarks of that.

And you had alluded to an organizational structure, that that

might change. I know in the back of this, the annual report there is a good overview of what the organizational structure is. It's very helpful to have. But you were saying that you may be looking at that. That may be changing?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, we will be looking at that as time goes forward.

Mr. Forbes: — Will it be public as it's finalized? I don't know if it's on your website or not.

Mr. Fisher: — If I could just clarify, were you asking . . . My earlier comment about looking at our organization in terms of the roles and responsibilities of the director of strategic policy, that is ongoing. But in terms of a broader restructuring of the program, I didn't mean to imply that, no.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. This is what I'm looking for. Is this still in place?

Mr. Fisher: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — And will be in place?

Mr. Fisher: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, good. Well I just . . . To continue on and to leave that area. But you know, often budget documents of course will highlight the positives and highlight the things you will do and the new initiatives, the directions you want to go into. Has there been programs that have been cut or will not be renewed in this budget of Social Services?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — As the member already knows, that there was a cut to the teen and young parent program and there was also a cut to the unemployed workers help centre. My officials assure me that that was the only two programs that we saw a cut to.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you. Now as I said, I want to go into the employment support and income assistance area. Has the minister had any opportunity since you've become minister to take part in any national conferences or any kind of federal/provincial meetings that you may be thinking about that might have inspired you to get into any kind of activities or joint initiatives around poverty reduction?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, actually. Being the minister now for only five and a half months and the member knows quite well that very shortly after the provincial election we were in a fall session. That was followed quite closely by Christmas and some time with family. And then I'm also a member of the Treasury Board. So following the new year very, very quickly I was doing my work on the Treasury Board which took two to three days every week for the months of January, February, and the beginning of March and in which case we went straight into session. So it's been rather a hectic schedule for myself for the first five and half months of being the minister.

But I am looking forward to participating in a number of forums to do with poverty, to do with housing, to do with child protection, sexual assault, and domestic violence. There is a number of areas that I'm responsible for. The area of disabilities

is very large so I am sure that I will remain extremely busy until the upcoming session once again.

Mr. Forbes: — All right. One of the areas I find very interesting . . . I think this is one, I think, the committee should be thinking about, you know. As we're in the House we debate a lot about the poverty line and who's in poverty and who isn't and how do you measure that. And it's such a hard one to get a handle on. And I know in the annual report you have different kind of benchmarks, but it's basically those people who are on different programs and who are not. And Saskatchewan sometimes has a reputation for high child poverty rates, that type of thing.

There are different ways of measuring poverty. I'm wondering if the minister would like to talk a little bit about that. I wouldn't mind spending a few minutes exploring that idea because I think this is very important for us to take a look at. And I think as a new government, to become consistent in this area would be a good thing.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I would just get Lynn Tulloch to describe the different measurements of poverty that the ministry officials use.

Ms. Tulloch: — Thank you. There is no per se poverty measure, I think, as everyone is aware. Stats Canada provides a number of different measures that are often used as a proxy for poverty. The most common one is the low-income cut-off measure — LICOs, as they're often called. And Stats Canada produces them as both a before-tax and an after-tax measure. The LICO is the one that is the most commonly used by both various stakeholders and also the department. We use it most commonly to determine what the relative state of families in low income is.

The LICO measure itself is . . . And I'll read you the definition so that I get it correct. It is a measure that is used to identify families and individuals who are in low income if a higher proportion of their income is spent on basic needs — that includes food, shelter, and clothing — than the average household. So that is one that we use quite frequently.

Another one that we also use is the market basket measure. It's a little bit newer methodology that Statistics Canada has produced. And it is based on the cost to purchase a bundle of goods that also would include food, housing, clothing, and other necessities. One of the benefits of the market basket measure is that it is more sensitive to regional variations, and of course across Canada we know there are significant variations in the regional cost of living. So that is another measure that we monitor and compare welfare incomes against. So those would be the two most commonly used measures today.

Mr. Forbes: — Actually been doing just some reading about it, especially, well both of those. The basket one is the great debate about, I know, the Fraser Institute has a view of what should be actually in the basket and so that's a little bit of a challenge.

The other one is, you've talked a little bit about is LICO, and the challenge there is the before-tax and the after-tax definition, right? And I think that's where we often get into some discussions about — especially, you know, the report card on

child poverty — is how well is Saskatchewan doing, because they use the before-tax and the department has in the past used after-tax. Do you want to talk a little bit about the difference between the two? I have a hard time understanding the difference myself.

Ms. Tulloch: — Well the difference is quite straightforward as it is described. One is before you apply income tax provisions, and one is after. We prefer to use the after-tax LICO because we believe it is a more representative number of the actual cash and resources that a family would have available to them as opposed to using the before-tax number.

Mr. Forbes: — How does that work? How do you mean, after tax for someone in low income? You mean after they've paid their taxes, they have more money?

Ms. Tulloch: — No, you'd have less, less funds available after tax. And you have to remember the LICO measure is used across the entire population. So it's measuring, you know, the percentage of the . . . all, you know, the entire population, so a large portion of the population does pay tax, and that data is obviously included in what percentage are low income.

Mr. Forbes: — And the other thing is about program transfers or program supports that . . . Where does things, programs like the employment supplement support, where does that get counted in, before tax or after tax in that . . .

Ms. Tulloch: — The employment supplement program would not typically be counted in this way. The LICO measures are used by Statistics Canada obviously based on incomes that individuals have and are reported through the income tax system. So indirectly if individuals are receiving the employment supplement, it would be reported as part of their income tax as a provincial transfer payment. We more typically use the LICO that the Statistics Canada numbers to compare what we call welfare income. So our basic social assistance payments and other federal-provincial transfers, the federal child tax benefits, and the housing supplements are what we typically compare as a welfare income to the LICO amounts.

Mr. Forbes: — So my question to the minister in all of this: so when we have the Campaign 2000 and the child poverty reports and those type of things, and they will say one thing, and what will you be saying about the before-tax and after-tax comparisons?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Generally as Ms. Tulloch said, after-tax is the actual disposable money that is available to any individual or any family. So generally the ministry looks at that amount of money.

Ms. Tulloch: — If I may elaborate for the minister, the before-tax and the after-tax, really what . . . one of the things that we would observe on is that the trend is the same regardless of which one you use. So if you look at a graph that has both the before-tax and the after-tax, the trends are the same. So that's one of the things that we would observe on.

The other thing that we would observe on would be the actual percentages that I was referencing earlier in terms of, how do welfare incomes compare to those low-income measures? And

I'd give you a range here. Depending upon the family type, the current resources available to families — if you compare them to the market basket measure for example — range between 94 and 103 per cent of the market basket measure amount.

So to give you a more specific example, a family with one disabled adult and one child would have available to them through provincial and federal programs, including our social assistance programs, about \$1,600 a month. The market basket measure for that particular type of family is about \$1,565 a month. So in that particular example we provide 102 per cent of the amount that would be identified using the market basket measure methodology.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, and I agree with you in terms of the trends. But then the question may be, where are we placed in terms of the provinces? In one case we may be quite high in terms of, for example, child poverty, but if you use the after-tax, we're quite a bit lower. We're more in the mix or even in the low end of some of the stats.

Ms. Tulloch: — Again I think regardless of whether you use before-tax or after-tax, the relative ranking amongst the provinces is about the same.

Mr. Forbes: — My point here is for the minister in terms of, to be consistent across government, are you going to be saying as a government we're going to use after-tax, or we're going to use before-tax? Because you can't have it sort of both ways, you know, when you analyze these stats.

Ms. Tulloch: — Mr. Forbes, we would just answer again. With respect to the before-tax and the after-tax, we wouldn't necessarily suggest that one is preferred over the other. They are simply different measures, and they arrive at a different rate. But we think that the trends that they both depict are the important thing that we pay attention to, and also as you point out, the relative ranking amongst other provinces and how we compare to the national averages too.

Mr. Forbes: — But my point is, and this is a political point, I understand what the department is saying, but to the minister in terms of any committee work or anything like that, I mean, this is the challenge of a new government to say, this is how we call things. You know, you can't call it one day before taxes and child poverty's horrible, and the next day you're using after-tax, and everything isn't so bad. So either you are in that boat or you're not in that boat, and as a minister, which one will you use.

And I don't need the answer tonight either because I think this is one that as you . . . This is an important area that I've discovered in terms of being consistent, though, is very important.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — And that's fair enough. And as a new minister, this is not something that we've reviewed in detail. We have the existing programs as they were under the previous administration which, quite frankly, failed in many fronts. We're looking at increases substantially in child poverty in our province over the past administration. So in time, and I will be consulting with the workers both in the ministry and within the regions to have those discussions. Have they taken place to

date? No, they have not.

So what exists right now is what was under the previous administration. Will I be shocked if I find it lacking? No, I don't think I will be shocked, you know, as I do the different discussions with different special interest groups and with the officials and the actual front-line workers themselves. No, because there has to be a fairly substantial reason why we have an increased usage over the past administration of food banks and there has to be a reason why that we have an increase in child poverty. And those things will have to be looked at. Have I sat down and, you know, crunched the numbers specifically on income assistance programs? No, I have not done that to date.

Mr. Forbes: — Well what I'd like to move to now, and of course it's one that I think that any information you share on this would be very helpful, and that's the modernization strategy. And you alluded to it in your opening remarks about the accelerated job area — Jobs First and the call centres. Can you tell us a little bit about the big picture? You said that this is the opportunity for people to move towards work and how important that is. Could you talk a little bit more about that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That will be working with the Advanced Education for skills training and so we will expand on that. That is being done already but we will have an expansion on that through the workers and their clients, and we believe that that has shown success in the past to help clients to enter into the workforce. And we believe that if we expand on that, that will also help more of the clients to enter the workforce.

As I said in my opening remarks, we will be initiating some parent training or assistance and that we're just developing that program.

Mr. Forbes: — Will the parent training or the parent workshops, will they be compulsory?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I will get Lynn, Ms. Tulloch, yet again to describe that.

Ms. Tulloch: — The way that we envision and plan to develop the parent support workshops is that they will be an expectation for non-disabled parents to attend within the first few days of applying for assistance and prior to receiving their first benefits.

Mr. Forbes: — So what will be the nature of the workshop? Will it be . . . It's some parenting, but more job, how to handle the balance of the two?

Ms. Tulloch: — Yes. The nature of the content of the parent support workshops is intended to be focused on information that parents typically need that is unique. So information such as the kinds of employment supplements that are available only to parents, rental housing supplements that are available to families, additional child care resources, information on how and where to seek out child care, and those kinds of basic informational things that are typically barriers to parents before they begin the search for a job. So it's a bit of an intermediate step for parents because they have other unique things in their circumstances that they need assistance with before they can

actually hit the streets looking for a job.

Mr. Forbes: — So when you talk about different programs or initiatives . . . One of the frustrations often people have is that when you get these kind of new things but they kind of hit a wall within that workshop. Will there be expedited . . . So if they're applying for a program, it will be even faster because you're in that workshop area? Or that, you know, if you're applying for child benefits, for example, will it be expedited? Will it be handled more quickly than it would be if you were outside that workshop?

Ms. Tulloch: — Well child benefits in particular would be a federal program but, yes, as an example. No, the application for benefits will still move as quickly as it usually does. But in addition they will be given the opportunity to attend and receive these additional informational resources. So for instance, the rental housing supplement and the employment supplement are two programs that we don't feel are as well known as they should be, so we want to ensure we make young parents aware of those resources. The rental housing supplement in particular is an additional resource that they should be taking advantage of to access additional resources to pay their rent. And so this is one way to ensure that they have additional information like that right from the very start.

Mr. Forbes: — Now this workshop or the parenting thing, is it based on a model, you're drawing it from somewhere else in Canada or anything like that?

Ms. Tulloch: — No. This one interestingly is really just a complementary workshop, I would describe it, to the Jobs First workshop that is something that has been done in different forms in Saskatchewan for some time. And we're building on the elements of the program that have been most successful for us in the past, except that in the past it's been targeted only at single employable individuals.

So we wanted to start to reach out further to the parent group, but we recognize that they had needs prior to the resumé writing, where to look for a job type of service that they needed to have dealt with, i.e., they've got children. Where do I take my kids; how do I find child care? Gee, I can't pay my rent or I can't find a good place to live. So we want to ensure that they have access to those other supports, and then they're able to focus on the employment search.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I would just like to add this. A large barrier quite often is the lack of information. And so if we can make that more accessible on what we can do, you know, places that we can take our children to that we feel is safe and they will be well looked after, that's a huge step to helping a parent to enter the workforce.

The other thing which we announced today . . . And our government has been committed that as the province prospers, that we feel that all people and those most vulnerable in our society should benefit from the prosperity of the province. So I was very happy to announce that we increased the Saskatchewan employment supplement significantly. So that will help parents that are in the workforce or entering the workforce to have extra funding available to help with the costs of raising a family. About 79 per cent of the clients that access

the Saskatchewan employment supplement are single-parent families, and this is the largest increase that has ever been made to this particular program.

So we hope that as well will help parents to remain employed or to gain employment. They will have extra supports that will help them with housing costs, with family costs because we know those are always escalating, and so that, we believe, will be a significant help to those families.

Mr. Forbes: — Will there be any sort of information shared about advocacy groups, you know — if you have concerns about the services you're being provided as a client, that you would know how to address those issues?

Ms. Tulloch: — Part of the information content, the content that would be provided, would be some basic information about being in receipt of social assistance benefits or the TEA [transitional employment allowance] benefit, including the appeal processes that they may go through if they have questions or are uncertain about the benefits.

Mr. Forbes: — What happens if they choose not to go?

Ms. Tulloch: — Choose not to attend these sessions? Their benefits will be held until they do rebook and attend.

Mr. Forbes: — So they must go?

Ms. Tulloch: — It is an expectation.

Mr. Forbes: — It's not one currently but will be one?

Ms. Tulloch: — That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — And so when do you anticipate that this will take effect?

Ms. Tulloch: — We're still in the process of developing the workshops and working with Advanced Education and Labour, which is the ministry that will actually run the sessions. And they are likely going to be seeking service providers to assist them in doing that, and they haven't yet engaged service providers so it will likely be June at the earliest before we're able to start these sessions up.

Mr. Forbes: — I don't want to go really long on this because there's lots of things to ask questions about, but was this parenting seen as a major, major issue that you needed to get to a point of saying, you must attend these workshops?

Ms. Tulloch: — I wouldn't describe it as a major, major issue. We were looking at what additional services could we provide to help ensure and accelerate helping families attach to the labour market. And getting them into a workshop where information can be provided and you can start to get them on a path to independence seemed like an important first step.

Mr. Forbes: — And of course one of the challenges is how you apply this throughout the province, and having the capacity to be giving these workshops. I anticipate that will be a challenge.

Ms. Tulloch: — Absolutely. Initially when we start this

summer we're expecting to only start in three major centres and then we'll gauge the capacity and the ability to roll it out into other centres.

Mr. Forbes: — I was concerned about the communication strategy, Minister, in terms of how this might roll out so people know. And I appreciate, first and foremost, I think the employees, so there's no concerns there — but also are the clients and what they may hear on the street and that type of thing. Of course in the communities it's very, very important so I would really urge the proper communications on this in a very sensitive, proactive way. I don't know if you have any thoughts on that.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Clients, as they apply, will be well informed as to the expectations that will be there and the assistance and supports that will be available to them. So they are now . . . I think the front-line workers are very, very good at informing the clients that are applying of what is available and what the responsibilities and the expectations are. So I have no doubt that our front-line social workers will continue to be just as informative and helpful in supporting the clients with the new program initiatives.

Mr. Forbes: — So are you saying then there won't be any special initiatives in terms of communications or anything like that? It will be just . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm not sure . . . What do you . . . I'm not sure what you're looking for. Are you looking for pamphlets? Are you looking for TV advertising? I'm not even too sure what you're suggesting. Because are we going to change the way that a client would approach application for support? I don't anticipate that so perhaps the member could help me out on what he's looking for for additional communication.

Mr. Forbes: — I could relate to you what happened in this, the modernization, the launch in mid-March. And what happened was that organizations didn't know. You know, the anti-poverty organizations in Saskatoon, Regina, had no idea of what was going on in this. They could be very helpful in terms of understanding what's out there, what are the goals, what will this mean for people they may be working with in terms of advocating for them.

And I think if not . . . You know, I appreciate the comment about television. I wouldn't go television but I think that clearly when you're launching new initiatives and I think like the Building Independence program is one that still people had a hard time coming to terms with, understanding fully what that was all about.

And so there may be lessons from that program, how the department at the time launched that program, to how you might launch this one in terms of ensuring that it's accepted. Because I mean, when you're doing a new social policy there's a lot of merit to it. And I'm not saying this is a bad idea. I'm just saying that sometimes even good ideas can get mired down in how you present it.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — My officials have assured me that the stakeholders have received letters to explain the new initiative

and I'm sure they will receive further information through probably letter form on the training program as it is designed.

Mr. Forbes: — In regards to this, one of the surprises — and this is what I heard out in the community — was of course that many people had been thinking that there would have been more work done around the disability income support area, that that clearly was an area of high needs. And I know that's something I would have liked to have seen us even do more in.

But it was kind of a surprise to see that the priority of the department had . . . When they had to kind of pick between two areas to go into, they have sort of signalled that the disability income — while I understand you will be launching some consultations — obviously got put back a little bit on the burner. And I think that you clearly . . . And you know, the stats are out there in terms of the static caseload. I think it's over 60. Is the percentage of the caseload, the static caseload, 60 per cent?

A Member: — Seventy per cent.

Mr. Forbes: — Seventy per cent. And so it's a significant, significant area.

So if there is one area from my vantage point that I would think the department would really get into in a big way would be this. So my question is to you, and I understand you will be going out and consulting, but what kind of timeline? Will you work with that with as much energy as you're working on the modernization strategy?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — You know, I'm quite actually appalled and shocked that you're even asking this question. When the budget was put together under the new administration . . . Within two months we were starting to work on the budget, coming into — and I agree with you — total failure prior because there is gaps. There is deficiencies. And there is requests that I'm hearing from the disability community that were not addressed under the previous administration. And yet even only five and a half months into a new government, the member opposite is saying, well why aren't you fixing a 16-year-old problem? And I'm not too sure . . . His expectancy is extremely high.

We campaigned on \$1.1 million to address sexual assault and domestic violence. And we did make the commitment, and we kept that promise in our ministry and our budget by adding \$1.1 million to that issue.

Very quickly, upon being elected and given the responsibility of the ministry, I was faced with a bus pass issue in Saskatoon, in particular. That was addressed very quickly with meeting with the city council of Saskatoon and coming together with the deal that would work well for both the ministry and the municipal government of Saskatoon. And we resolved the issue so that low-income people could continue to have the advantage of a discount bus pass in Saskatoon.

I met with a number of First Nations groups and individuals and with the Children's Advocate and found out that part of the problem within the ministry is the lack of availability for data. And there was sentiment that this was putting children at risk,

and that was addressed very quickly under a new government and a new minister.

A housing task force was announced very quickly under a new government and a new minister. We put 500,000 into Egadz for children at risk in Saskatoon under a new government and a new minister. And I just explained to you that we've announced an increase to the employment supplement.

But this budget was not totally remiss to disabilities, and I have committed to ongoing collaboration with the disability community to do even more. The 2008-2009 provincial budget provides over 20 million to support the inclusion of people with disabilities in the social and economic life of our province. These investments demonstrate our government's commitment to securing the future of the people with disabilities. We will continue that commitment.

In Social Services alone, in the Ministry of Social Services, we have a \$2.4 million investment to expand community-based residential and daycare program supports for individuals with intellectual disabilities, 1.6 million to community-based organizations funded through the community living division for wage increase and selected non-salary expenses, \$700,000 increase to the cognitive disability strategy to provide supports for people with cognitive disabilities and their families.

There is a \$635,000 increase for approved private service homes to provide residential services. There's \$400,000 increase to disability rental housing supplement for accessible housing, \$100,000 increase for the family respite programs so more Saskatchewan families can purchase alternative care for their child or children with intellectual disability.

In the Ministry of Education, we have 3.2 million to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in child care facilities. We have 3 million increase to the special needs and intensive support factor of school operating grants to provide individual programming and supports for students with learning disabilities, \$300,000 increase to early childhood intervention programs that deliver home-based support with children with disabilities.

In the Ministry of Health, we have the continuation of the \$3 million investment for autism programs and services and . . .

The Chair: — Mr. Forbes would like to raise a point of order.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Now I've been in a couple of these the last couple of days, and we've had some discussions about when we start to range into other departments. I don't mind hearing and I appreciate the ones that are happening in the Department of Social Services. But when we start to range in the Department of Health, my time is very limited; I have just a couple of hours, and I have some more questions that I would like to ask. So if the minister would contain her remarks to her department, I'd sure appreciate that.

The Chair: — We are discussing vote 36 Social Services. I would ask all members to keep their comments to vote 36, and if we could move forward, it would be greatly appreciated.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Fair enough. And I respect that ruling,

Mr. Chair. And I hope that the member understands that there was a significant commitment to individuals with disabilities from our government and through this budget.

Mr. Forbes: — Sure. But my point was that when you picked modernization . . . And I appreciate your campaign, and you've won the election, and so I'm not going to go revisit that. But I'm pretty sure I didn't hear out on the campaign trail anything about modernization of Social Services.

But I do want to talk about some other points underneath here, and I know the members here also have some questions. For example the decrease in the Saskatchewan Income Plan for senior citizen benefits — can you explain the decrease in the amount from 8.7 million to 8.3 million, if I'm reading this correctly.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The decrease is due to a caseload decline.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And then when you have the employment supplement . . . And today and I think that was a good announcement; I appreciate that. You also have going from 19.6 million to 18.5 million but yet an increase today of 2 million. So can you lead me through that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Certainly. The very positive news of this is that again there is a significant client decline of 3.1 million. And so 2 million is being invested into increasing benefits for less people within the program.

Mr. Forbes: — And this is my concern with the senior citizens because we're seeing and we're getting more and more letters in this area about senior citizens who are facing hardships, whether they are going into homes of different kinds. Here you're having a smaller group, but have you fixed the amount and has it increased over the last several years? What is the amount that a senior now gets? What is the maximum they can get?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Under SIP [Saskatchewan Income Plan] the maximum amount is \$90.

Mr. Forbes: — This is per month?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. And has that changed? Is that indexed . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That has not changed since the election.

Mr. Forbes: — And has it changed over the last several years too, as well?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Under the previous administration? I'd have to ask my officials if there was any changes under the previous administration.

Looking at the data made available to me from my officials, the rate has not changed throughout the entire past number of years since 1991-92.

Mr. Forbes: — This would be an area I would ask the minister to really take a look at. I know that senior citizens especially — I think it's a small group of senior citizens, how many would it be, would it be less than 10,000 — taking the benefit of SIP.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — 10,500.

Mr. Forbes: — 10,500. And it's a declining group, and it's one that's under a lot of pressure because of course these are the folks who are at the very bottom. And I think that it would be really worthwhile in terms of Saskatchewan doing so well that this is a group that really needs to be thought of.

And I know that this was sort of a small discovery of mine the last couple of years. I didn't understand this program, but it's a supplement of the Canadian pension plan, I think it is? Or what is the plan?

Mr. Fisher: — It's . . . [inaudible] . . . GIS [Guaranteed Income Supplement].

Mr. Forbes: — GIS, right. So it's a very, very important program and I think for the 10,500 seniors this is very, very important.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you and I'll take note of that.

Mr. Forbes: — The other question, then I'm going to ask my colleagues to take a few questions, is under the transitional employment allowance and, hopefully, this is the same scenario. It seems to be declining from 46 million to 23 million. Is that because of declining numbers that are requiring this program?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, it is.

The Chair: — The Chair recognizes Mr. Yates.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I have a number of questions of my own, but I also have some questions that some of my colleagues that were unable to attend tonight asked that we pass on.

Again we're facing a situation today with the unprecedented economic activity in the province is increasing costs of housing, increasing costs of individuals who are marginal in our economy and marginal within their income brackets. The federal government introduced income splitting this year. What impact will the introduction of income splitting have on departmental programs?

One of the difficulties that seems to be coming forward is that income splitting in some programs is helpful, and income splitting in other programs is detrimental. And individuals, as they're looking at making choices, aren't always clear as to what the impact is on outcomes as a result of income splitting. As an example, it may save you money on income tax, but negatively impact you on supplements that are available — rental supplements, income supplements — that are available through the province. It makes a significant difference, as an example, in long-term care fees, home care fees. And so as individuals are making choices, it may look good from an income tax point of view, but have significantly negative

impact on service delivery. So what considerations is the department taking with the issue of income splitting?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — My understanding, the officials have said that they haven't done a full analysis of this, but they feel that the income splitting that the federal government has proposed is for tax purposes, which doesn't change the way that we are doing our calculations on family income to determine eligibility for support programs.

Mr. Yates: — So there have been no changes in . . . Now I know you can't speak broader than your own department. It is an issue being raised by a number of seniors, but there is no impact on departmental programs as a result of income-splitting and the way that you would look at eligibility for programs?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No. Because our programs look at the household income.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. The concern was raised from elderly couples who are trying to maintain some semblance . . . or maintain being able to live together in personal care homes or people who are not yet in need of level 4 care, level 3 care even, but their dwindling savings because of various factors are continuing to have less and less ability to meet the need and in some cases are reaching the end of their savings prior to being suitable for movement into level 4 care. What, if anything, can the department do to help assist couples like this? And what, if anything, has been done in the past?

I do know there is reference . . . and this particular question is coming from a situation in the city of Moose Jaw. And one of my colleagues indicates they have written to you about this, so it shouldn't be a totally unfamiliar situation. And what can we do to help keep those couples together in the system to continue to meet their needs and live in the personal care homes, or at least one of these cases, Madam Minister, home care and other needs?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you for that question. To date the new government views the personal care home costs in the same manner as the previous administration had. The personal care homes are private, for-profit intermediate care facilities licensed by the Ministry of Health. And the government does not subsidize personal care homes.

Now the officials have informed me that we are concerned with if there are gaps and so that there will be some discussions between the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Health to take a look at whether or not more can be done. And those meetings will begin in May.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the minister: in situations where people are in personal care homes, is any portion of the fees that they pay each month eligible for consideration under the rental supplement?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No.

Mr. Yates: — Would not one of the ways to potentially fix this problem, because living in that home, there is, a portion of that is for having a physical residence to live in. If those individuals were allowed that portion for consideration as a cost for rental

supplement, it may well be adequate to help many of these people. The cases that I am aware of, the need is small in nature. But if you don't have the money, even \$100 a month is a significant amount of money. And other options basically have them moving to a larger dependency upon government funding to meet the need.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — To date, as I indicated, the seniors in care homes are not eligible for the rental housing supplement. However the task force that I have commissioned to take a look at the housing issue overall is, one of the directions or the tasks that they are to do is to look at existing programs to see if there's gaps or any way that they can be strengthened. So we will see what recommendations they come forward with, and we will go from there.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Madam Minister. This is another one of those issues that is emerging over the last couple of years and getting more prevalent. I would encourage you to do what you can to look at it. I don't see it as a huge problem, but those few that fit in that gap, it is quite significant for those individuals.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My next questions have to do with . . . I have some questions to do with CBOs, specifically for an individual. Is it okay to ask those questions?

A Member: — Yes.

Mr. Yates: — The effect on CBOs in the budget in your department, is it the same as others — 2.3 per cent across the board?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Mr. Yates: — Would that same amount be what was provided for transition houses and shelters as well?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, it's not, because we had, through the . . . It was one of our promises to increase funding for CBOs that deal with sexual abuse and domestic violence, and so therefore the transition houses were part of the piece that received the 1.1 million. They also got the 2.3 per cent over top of that.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. The 1.1 million then, what would it work out to as an additional percentage — 2.3 plus how many additional percentage — or how is that money being distributed?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Additional percentage to just those organizations, or across the piece?

Mr. Yates: — I'm trying to get some semblance of how that 1.1 million is distributed among the transition houses and shelters. What capacity or what exactly is the 1.1 million for?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I asked actually the umbrella group for the transition houses to decide themselves how the money should be allocated amongst the different transition houses. They are definitely the ones that are in the know of whether or not there is more pressure in any given location than in another. And rather than allocate the money myself, when I haven't even

visited some of these transition houses, I felt that it would be more effective if the organization that oversees the different member agencies did the allocation of the funding available.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. Are all the transition houses and shelters in the province, do they all fall under the umbrella organization, or are there those that are outside the umbrella organization?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We took that into account. Ms. Brittin is just coming forward with the exact numbers.

But there was taken into account, what's deemed as other . . . There is 10 transition houses under the umbrella organization of PATHS [Provincial Association of Transition Houses Saskatchewan]. There is also seven sexual assault services under the umbrella organization of SASS [Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan]. And there is sort of other . . . There's 13 personal and family violence services.

So the money was allocated as: 720,000 was allocated to PATHS, which is 10 transition houses; 120,000 was allocated to SASS, which is seven sexual assault services; and 160,000 was allocated to the other 13 personal and family violence services.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, my next question has to do with the CPI [consumer price index] in Saskatchewan, last year was 2.8 per cent. We are seeing CBOs receiving 2.3 per cent. And within the context of that 2.3 per cent, they're also expected to deal with wage increases. How did the government arrive at 2.3 per cent?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Before I answer that question, I would just like to go back to a previous question you asked. And the officials have done the math, and they said that is approximately a 20 per cent increase to agencies and CBOs that deal with sexual assault and domestic violence.

When the call for estimates was put forward by the Ministry of Finance, it was decided at that time of a 2.3 per cent increase across all of the ministries. This budget process is the beginning, quite frankly, of starting to address the social problems and shortfalls that we stepped into as a new government. I think that previously there were shortfalls for the CBO sector, and as such we have a huge disparity within the human resources, both in recruitment and retention within the CBOs. And each and every CBO that I meet with, I'm hearing that that's one of their largest challenges that has never been recognized or addressed.

The Leader of the Opposition, even when he was premier he admitted that there's disparities. And a quote from the previous premier, the Leader of the Opposition now, is that it is, and I quote:

It is a clear signal that we certainly have not accomplished our vision or our goals on making sure that no one is . . . left behind. People are being left behind in their health status here, make no mistake about that.

I think that there has been a huge failure to address the pressures of human resources for our CBOs, and we can only just begin with this budget, to begin to address. We talk about

an infrastructure deficit that was left behind. Well there also is one in the human resource sector that bit by bit we need to address.

It's interesting that the member wants to raise the issue that we only provided 2.3 per cent when his government in 2004-05 increased CBO funding by 1 per cent. And his government in 2005-06 increased CBO funding by 1 per cent. Now that was increased in 2006-2007 by 3 per cent, and 2007-08 by a 3 per cent. But still over the four years it's only a 2 per cent average. So this budget alone, although it's not as much as I would like it to be — I know we need to do more; I recognize that wholeheartedly that we need to do more — but we've already done more than the average that the previous government did in the last four years.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Madam Minister. I don't want to get into a political argument about the last number of years, but you know given the last two, three years, we've seen the rise of our financial capability as a province. Prior to that, our capabilities were considerably less. So I don't argue with the numbers, but in the last two years it's gone up 3 per cent.

The reason I ask how you came up with 2.3 per cent . . . even at 3 per cent it was marginal what improvements were being made. Can we expect in future years greater percentage increases for community-based organizations?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I would like to point out that even in this year's budget we had to add an additional 413,000 for SARC [Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres] to backfill the shortfall from the previous government's budget, so that . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . He says now we have the money. Well we did then, and it just wasn't a priority quite frankly.

We are planning, along with the Legislative Secretary, the member from Yorkton, a CBO summit. And we will be discussing the human resource issue. We will be discussing a number of things with the CBOs to sort of put together our plan going forward. And we will be doing it in collaboration with the CBOs, and I'm sure they will have suggestions. I'm sure they will give us ideas. And I have no doubt that the human resource retention and recruitment is going to be one of those things that will be discussed.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Madam Minister. Has there been any CBOs that have had their funding substantially reduced or terminated as part of this budget?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Just the unemployed workers that I mentioned earlier. That was a cut.

Mr. Yates: — Now typically core funding agreements end at the end of the fiscal year. Have those arrangements been renewed? And if not, when do you expect to be in a position to have them renewed?

Mr. Fisher: — Could you please repeat the question?

Mr. Yates: — Core funding agreements are the service agreements, traditionally are renewed annually, right after they expire March 31 and are renewed early in the new year. Have

they now been renewed, or when can we expect that we'd see the renewal of . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm being informed that all the CBO agreements have been sent out for signatures.

Mr. Yates: — Were there any changes in this year's criteria for funding or any considerations?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No.

Mr. Yates: — Okay. Thank you very much, Madam Minister. Those end the questions regarding community-based organizations.

The Chair: — Ms. Junor.

Ms. Junor: — I have a couple of questions just for tonight. I know my colleague, Mr. Forbes, is anxious to get back in.

But one that has come recently to my attention — and I'm sorry I didn't bring the pamphlet they gave me — but they have an association, and they're private homes that take hard-to-house clients. And they are not a personal care home, and they're not a group home. They don't fall into either of those categories. But they have an association, and they house about 1,600 people in the province.

They came to me and said that there's 23 of them closing in Saskatoon, and they have approximately five of these clients per house, so that's a lot of people that are going to be without homes. And they're pretty much at their wit's end because they can't afford to keep these people any more with the amount of money that they get for housing them at a room and board kind of arrangement, I gather, but with supervision. And they do get some of the clients through Community Living and some through the mental health groups, but they are very hard-to-house people. So they're very concerned about so many of their members are giving up this, and this is going to be a lot of people out of homes that are going to be very hard to place. Could you comment on that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Because of the complexity of this, because I believe you're talking about approved private service homes, I'm going to ask my deputy minister to address this issue.

Mr. Fisher: — As you're aware, our involvement with approved private service homes are primarily providing support for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Currently provincially we have about 240 approved private service homes working with the community living division to support people with intellectual disabilities. To our knowledge we are not seeing that dramatic a decline within the Saskatoon area. Certainly there's always an ebb and flow of people leaving and coming into the sector.

Approved private service homes also support people with a mental health disability, but I won't drift into the Ministry of Health. So just to say that we have included a rate increase for the level of care rates that we provide to approved private service home operators in the '08-09 budget. I believe for each level of care that we fund for those clients, the rate has

increased by \$25 per month.

Ms. Junor: — Next time we meet I will bring their pamphlet. And I am having a meeting with their board very soon because I did not know that this existed either, and I was quite concerned when they said 23 have closed already, and more are lining up to close because of the . . . And the stories she tells about there's no access to respite. They have to stay in the home. They can't go out if someone runs away. They can't go after them. It's quite a stark life for these caregivers, and they're giving up. So I'll bring more information, but thank you. I'll just put that on your radar screen, and I will have the name.

My next question is about the CBO summit, and I'm really interested to see how this goes and the reports that come back. But I did hear when I met with a group of CBOs that they told me that they were instructed with their invitation to bring their financial statements back to '91. And they wondered what the significance of that was, and actually they were quite concerned. Their financial statements, how much money they got since '91, and where they spent it. And I know '91 is when the NDP [New Democratic Party] came into power so it does beg the question, what are they being asked for?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I find that very interesting because I know that direction wouldn't have come from either of my ministry officials, the Legislative Secretary, or myself and the employees within my office here. There has been no invitations issued.

Ms. Junor: — So the CBOs that I met with then have certainly got their information wrong obviously.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I believe that not only did they get it wrong, I have no clue who they were even talking to because there has been no invitations issued to date.

Ms. Junor: — They'll be happy to hear that this isn't the case then that they have to look up their financials from '91. And I'll make sure they see the *Hansard* of this.

My third and final question, Mr. Forbes, is — and I'm sorry if I missed it in your preamble or in some of my colleagues' questions — there is a concern in the mental health community that mentally ill people are considered still under the SAP [Saskatchewan assistance plan] rates and they're lumped together in that. And there is a real push with the Canadian Mental Health Association — and particularly the Saskatchewan branch where I have friends — that would really like to see this be a separate program and the mentally ill treated differently than the regular SAP client. Do you comment on the direction that you may be going in that regard?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you for that question. And I've met with SACL [Saskatchewan Association for Community Living], SARC [Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres], PIND [Provincial Interagency Network on Disabilities], Saskatchewan Abilities Council and DISC [Disability Income Support Coalition], both PIND and DISC being very large, encompassing organizations of organizations with disabilities. I'm hearing it with every one of them.

So going forward, and I have told the disability community that

after session is over and probably in the early fall, we're going to be looking at the programming and areas that they have shown concerns with within disability program delivery. And there's a few areas that they have expressed concern, but one that is consistent is their desire not to be under SAP.

So I think as a new government we need to review what other provinces do. We need to work collaboratively with the disability community to see how they would like that to look differently and how we can make any differences fit within our CBO sector, because of course they deliver a lot of the services for our disability community.

There's a number of areas that we will be looking at as a new government with new eyes and probably initiate that more intensely towards the fall of this year.

Ms. Junor: — I know some of them are watching tonight, so they'll be happy to hear that. Thank you. That's the end of my questions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — I want to get into housing just to finish up. But one last question. Judy reminded me of this. What kind of shape do you see these summits, what are they going to look like? Are they going to be a couple of days of working meetings, or a couple of days or a day of high-level speakers? What is your vision for what may happen at the summit?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The member from Yorkton and I have been discussing how we want this to see, and of course the member from Yorkton has a large responsibility here in taking the lead on this initiative, and is doing a great job doing so. I think, I believe— now he can correct me if he so chooses, I guess, since he's part of, a member of this committee — this would be more a working . . . I think this will be listening. This will be validating, more so than a high level of speakers and I think this hopefully will be just the beginning of a process of listening to the CBOs. And we hope that it will initiate ongoing dialogue with the CBOs on how we can strengthen the service delivery on the front line with our CBO sector.

Mr. Forbes: — I have several questions, but the first one I want to ask is about the actual page 130 in the budget book here, where it looks like there's been a reduction. I understand it's not a reduction, but how do you read this entry of housing where it says the allocations for this year is 22.1 million and last year it was 27 million. Can you explain, how does one make sense of this?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — There was a reduction in a sense. It was based on Sask Housing Corporation's estimate of the cost of operating all housing programs. The provincial contribution towards housing programs for . . . [inaudible] . . . and '08 is 10.4 million which is 5.1 million less than last year, due to the timing of the capital projects. But Darrell Jones can probably elaborate if you want a more detailed explanation of that.

Mr. Forbes: — Sure. I'll throw one more question in here as well because you had alluded to several million, and I won't say the number, but in your opening remarks, 95 million or . . . Is there any brand new money in this year's budget going into

housing, into Sask Housing for new capital?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, there isn't new money. There was a considerable amount of existing money in the Sask Housing Corporation. So in November 2007 there was a call for expression of interest under the affordable rental development program. The money available for that is 47.5 million. So we've received approximately 85 submissions from that call for expression of interest.

In addition, in March 22 there was a call for expression of interest to the Métis and First Nations community under the Aboriginal Housing Trust Fund, and we're just receiving submissions for that. So it's money . . . Well in particular the trust money was federal funding. So we haven't filled the obligation for the existing money yet.

But however I can't predict what the housing task force will come back with with recommendations. They may recommend that we add additional funds and build additional units or partner with community groups. I have no idea what their recommendations will be. But we have definitely put forward expression of interest for a considerable amount of money with the existing money that was sitting in Sask Housing Corporation's bank account.

Mr. Forbes: — I see the lists of openings that will be happening this spring. It's quite, quite impressive. And so that's very good. And I see the list in Saskatoon and that's really exciting.

So my question to the minister — and you kind of alluded to it, but not to put words in your mouth or ask you to make a commitment into future budget years — but if the task force was to come back and say, we need to continue to support affordable housing by putting money into housing in Saskatchewan, that is a viable option that you would entertain?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We will look at every recommendation that they come forward with and be making decisions as a government.

Mr. Forbes: — I understand part of the challenge in housing has been, you know, the ebb and flow of the commitments of governments, both federal and provincial, over the course of many decades. You have lots of money, then you have no money, then you have lots of money and lots of budgets and lot of projects. And so it'd be really good to see a continuation of the momentum that's going on.

Have you thought about a timeline so you'll get the response back and people . . . (a) what kind of response has the task force been getting, because they've got a website now and people have been sending to the website, I assume? What kind of responses are they getting? Are they getting some interest there? And (b) when May 30 comes and you get the report, are you going to see this as extremely high priority and this will be something that will be, or will it be something that'll be rolled into next year's budget cycle?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I can't predict, quite frankly, what will be the recommendation, so therefore I cannot say how timely they can be acted on without even knowing what they are. But I

think what we need to understand in this room is that this is not just a small affordability problem. We have a serious pressure within the market and, in particular, in specific cities, Saskatoon being the most stressed at this point in time.

So it is beyond just Sask Housing building houses. We have far more stress on the market. We need to see what we can do in talking to the industry to get the industry engaged in multi-door housing. You know yourself and I think everyone in this room, if we think back, when was the last time that we've seen any amount of apartment buildings being built? And that is now causing a fair stress for not just low-income people. It's causing a stress as is so in Saskatoon. And I know that first-hand, having a daughter who's a student in Saskatoon. It is a serious situation that goes beyond just social housing. We have a market stress which of course trickles down into our clients and the social housing client.

So I hope that they have more of a scope of the entire market, the entire climate within the province and can put forward recommendations of how we can engage the municipal level of government. And I do think Saskatoon is becoming quite engaged in looking at this piece, and need to be. What can we do in partnership with municipal levels of government, with industry, with community groups? And then as we look at the entire piece, if we can initiate something that will help the industry to look at multi-door housing once again, that will help the situation overall. And so it's beyond just building homes.

Mr. Forbes: — I think you've used a very important word though, homes. People see these as homes, and whether you're students or whatever I think that's very important. And I appreciate your comment about your first-hand experience. And it's one that I think that we really need to focus on, as a bit of a, you know, eureka moment for me too in terms of how important student housing is. And I wish I could take credit for this but it was Gerry Klein in one of his columns in *The StarPhoenix* in early January pointed out what an impact student housing could have in terms of the rental marketplace in Saskatoon.

Here you have, I think, a very legitimate area to get involved in. We haven't done an awful lot in that area, and it's one that could have a real, real major impact. I understand that there's at least one application — I was reading it in the campus news of the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] — has applied for some funding. So I'm hoping that Sask Housing is open to student housing in a major way because this is a very, very important area, and it's one that I think . . .

When I was actually talking to some of the folks at the homelessness initiative in Saskatoon where students and singles aren't considered homeless because they're not quite as in, I guess, the needy bracket. People think of students as having other resources, but of course when you look at the demographics of students, it's all the whole range. And that's very important in terms of having First Nations and Métis students having adequate housing, those with disabilities having adequate housing, that type of thing.

So my question to the minister, and if the officials, but you particularly . . . It's good to hear that you're open to student housing and that this is something I would hope Sask Housing

sees as a priority.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — As part of the rental development program, Sask Housing does provide assistance to students through targeted families, so usually single parent students and First Nations and Métis students from rural or remote areas attending school away from their home communities. So again it's more targeted. It's not just generally overall which is . . . We have to remember Sask Housing Corporation is for social housing for people with disabilities, for low income, for special needs, and so on.

And so I guess we have to really consider, do we want to become a huge housing corporation that's owning housing or do we want to remain a social housing corporation? And there's going to be significant dollar differences if we want to expand.

I do know, however, the task force has met with individuals that have put forward a proposal for quite a significant student housing unit in Saskatoon. And so we'll see what they have to say about that submission, and see what we do.

Mr. Forbes: — Well the comments, I appreciate the comment about how huge Sask Housing is. And I think I was at a conference where somebody saw how big Boardwalk was, but you compare them to CMHC [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation] or maybe even Sask Housing in this province, you know, I mean it's very important.

And I think that typically that has been the challenge — the role of Sask Housing in terms of social housing. Does that mean single students? But more and more we're finding single students are in extreme circumstances and so that is a challenge. But I just want to say that from my perspective it's a very important area for you and for Sask Housing to take a look at, what that means in these modern times, because I know that we've had to make difficult choices in terms of priorities. And that's been a challenge.

I want to just ask a couple of other questions really quickly. And one is — and we just referred to — Lighthouse, the project in Saskatoon which is a very, very good project. But I have heard, and it was sort of an alarming comment, and it was about that it may actually end up housing some students. And I thought that was a concern because it deals already with a clientele that does not have enough housing, and if it started to water down its mandate by taking others in, that would be a bit of a challenge.

But I'm curious. In terms of Lighthouse, what is the governance structure? Who is the partner in Lighthouse?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you. Actually I am familiar somewhat with the Lighthouse project as it's been evolving. And I just confirmed that the project will provide for 120 independent living units for vulnerable individuals in Saskatoon. However, there's been talks with the city of Saskatoon, and I'm going to allow Mr. Jones to explain the ongoing evolution of the Lighthouse project.

Mr. Jones: — Good evening. One of the things that we agreed to with the city of Saskatoon is that an expression of interest would be put forth seeking proponents that may be interested to

further partner on that particular site with some form of market housing, and so that expression of interest did occur and has closed. One proposal has come forward, and so there is discussions occurring right now relative to the viability of that proposal. That wouldn't necessarily mean any sort of reduction in the initial plan and the targeting of the vulnerable group, but rather an expansion of the project.

Mr. Forbes: — Just a couple of other quick questions. One, who is Living Skies Housing Authority?

Mr. Jones: — Living Skies Housing Authority is an entity that was created to assist the housing authorities in support, in property management. So across the province of course as you know, we have about 276 housing authorities, I believe it is, that are managing locally the operations of social and affordable housing in their respective communities. And in order to support this variety of housing authorities, ranging everywhere from managing 4 units through to 3,000 units, we have a housing authority where they basically have property management experience, and they provide the support and guidance and so forth directly to the housing authority system, particularly the small housing authorities.

Mr. Forbes: — The reason I ask is because when you look through the financial figures, they have much more financial activity than Saskatoon or Regina by far. It's the largest, and the address is in Weyburn? So I go, what's happening? Okay so we kind of figured it was something like that, but anyways, okay.

Mr. Jones: — I should elaborate. What the service, part of the property management service is to provide the accounting service, so that way it's an automated system and the accounting service is provided through that mechanism so that it's more efficient.

Mr. Forbes: — Well the last question I'll have, and then I think you have a couple of quick ones, and of course it's the end of the five-year action — this is from your annual report — end of the first five-year action plan for HomeFirst. And so it talks about the year 2008 will be spent reviewing the provincial housing strategy and developing a new action plan for 2009-2013. Is there anything special that's going to be happening in terms of how you develop that plan this year?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — And again I'll return to an answer that I gave previously. I have asked the task force to review existing programs and their effectiveness — if they can be strengthened, if we need to look at something different. So I hope that'll be part of the piece that they come forward with, recommendations on a direction going forward.

Mr. Forbes: — You know, and I have been kind of vocal about public hearings and the reason for that is not necessarily to get a point of view across, but to engage people. And I see this in Saskatoon where you have a lot of people who are very interested in this area who might gain a lot by being part of the process, understanding the different kind of things Sask Housing does and can do and will do. And so I hope that in the planning that there is some way, some access for people to take a look at the successes of the first five years and where you go with the next five years because I think, in many ways, HomeFirst has been a very, very successful program. But how

to continue that momentum forward is very important.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I think it was important when I asked the two gentlemen, Ted Merriman and Bob Pringle, to undertake this task. I felt it was important that they had a focus. I felt that it needed to be relatively timely. And it isn't a matter of deciding whether or not we have a problem. We know we do. And the statistics are there.

So although they're accepting submissions online, you can send a submission to them and they have set up a number of meetings. We're not going to have open public meetings and get bogged down in a story that, quite frankly, we're aware of. We know it's there.

It's interesting because just prior to the last election the member beside you, the two members beside you set forward with their own task force. They announced it August 8, 2007, and they didn't have open public meetings. Their meetings were through invitation only. They didn't make the report public. At the end of the day when they finally announced what the difference or what changes they would make, it was not a public report.

So it's interesting that you now feel that we should do much, much, much more than your own members did, what, six months ago — just six months ago.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I don't want to get into a debate about that. But I do want to say this. I do appreciate your answers. I thank you very much. And if you could pass on to your officials, their frankness, I appreciate their answers as well.

We understand this and I appreciate you taking note of the SIP. That's very important as some of the other ones we'll get together on. With that, I'm finished questions. So thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Forbes. I believe we have concluded the . . . Oh I see Mr. LeClerc would like to make a comment.

Mr. LeClerc: — Well I would just like to thank the opposition tonight for your clarity of thought and your insightful questions. I think that you've given the minister, from my understand from her response and her officials, some things to look at that you brought forward to light. And I really thank you for that view, rather than going off on rabbit trails with political stuff but actually asking real good questions on how we can help the people of this province. Thank you.

The Chair: — And as Chair, I would like to thank all members for their co-operation and in dealing with vote 36. And I believe the minister has a concluding comment.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And it goes without saying, I want to thank all my officials for coming out this evening and supporting me, because the member had thoroughly detailed questions to ask and I do too thank him for his sincerity. I don't doubt his sincerity on being concerned about those most vulnerable within our society and those, quite frankly, that we are responsible for.

So I want to thank the opposition members and the government members for sitting through the procedure and I'm looking

forward to questions for the future sessions.

The Chair: — In order to facilitate the change of officials and the new minister, we will take a recess till 8:10. And then at that time, we will start consideration of, resume consideration of Bill 5. This committee stands recessed.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

Bill No. 5 — The Public Service Essential Services Act

Clause 1

The Chair: — Members, we'll resume our sitting tonight. Before us the next item on the agenda is consideration of Bill No. 5, The Public Service Essential Services Act. We have with us Minister Norris. Minister, would you care to introduce your officials for this evening, and you've already made an opening statement. I believe we'll just proceed then to discussion of the Bill unless you have another very short statement you would like to make.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Certainly. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will introduce my officials that are joining me here this evening, which we appreciate greatly, and also I will make a few brief remarks.

Once again to introduce to everyone Wynne Young, the deputy minister; stretching over here, Mike Carr, associate deputy minister. We have Mary Ellen Wellsch, acting executive director, labour planning and policy; and behind, Pat Parenteau, who's a senior policy analyst for the ministry.

I'd obviously like to thank members for their time yesterday, and I look forward to the discussion and dialogue today. It's just to reiterate that through the discussion regarding the fundamentals of the legislation, I think we'll have an opportunity to better explain and understand the significance of the essential service legislation that's proposed for families and communities right across our province. And again I'd just like to reiterate this is really an enabling document. It's about ensuring that the people of this province are given a peace of mind that their health and safety will be protected, especially in the circumstance of labour disputes — those pertaining to key public sector agencies and those providing key elements of public services.

On that I would just like to reiterate that I'm pleased to be invited again here this evening, and I look forward to the dialogue and discussion.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. I will now open the floor to questions. I recognize Mr. Iwanchuk.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome, Mr. Minister, and to all the officials attending here tonight. I would like to start my questioning tonight on the . . . We learned today that you have instructed your deputy minister to put together a framework to narrow the scope of the four criteria, those four criteria under what essential services means — the danger to life, health, safety . . . I believe you know the section I'm referring to here.

And first, can you comment on why you made this request, and do you think it's appropriate at this late date in the game to start doing this?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question. My request to the deputy minister has been essentially to build upon the work, comparative work that's already done, and it's been quite extensive to date. The request is to go into more detail and depth regarding practices in other jurisdictions across Canada. This is consistent with the legislation and will provide us with an opportunity to see how other jurisdictions in Canada have begun to address issues of their regulations.

I think what I will do is I'll ask Wynne Young, the deputy minister, to comment on the steps that she sees moving forward.

I will just simply respond and say yes I think it's most appropriate. It builds on research that's already been done. That research has been very helpful. It's that type of research that alerts us that in fact Saskatchewan is one of the only jurisdictions in Canada not to have essential services. The other province that doesn't have essential service legislation is Nova Scotia, and it's been tabled there. So I see this being consistent with the work that's already being completed. This is simply more detailed and in-depth, and I'll ask the deputy to speak more about it.

Ms. Young: — Thank you, Minister. I guess I would just add a couple of things. There's actually . . . if I can, Minister, sort of break it into two. One of the questions that I was asked is, the legislation as tabled does not contemplate the community-based organizations or private ambulances, and the Bill you have before you doesn't contemplate that.

We did hear in the consultations that there was interest in that, and people had brought forward concerns. So the first part is the minister has asked me to begin to consider what that might be. Of course the words CBO is quite broad, and so we need to take our time to think through what that might be, how might that work, what are the implications of it. And so that's the first piece that we've been asked to look at.

The second piece is, as the minister said, because there continue to be questions about how might those four criteria play out, and I think that there seems to have not been enough understanding of it. So the minister has asked me to look at other jurisdictions — and as you would know, that we modelled quite heavily off of Manitoba — to look and see how those four criteria played out in the past 12 years that it's been in place in Manitoba. So that's the work that we're going to be doing over the next few weeks.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Am I then understanding that you simply put forward this legislation without doing that kind of background work to understand what the meaning of this section would be? Is that what I'm hearing?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No, that's not what you're hearing.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Well if you're only now starting to do the work and to look at what that might mean in Manitoba for the last 12 years, if I heard that right. Did you not . . . I mean, in my thinking if you were basing your legislation on that, would you

not have looked at that legislation to determine what that might mean? Did you just simply say, well this is, so it's good enough and we will just simply accept that? I mean, that's what it sounds like.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No. I don't want in any way to leave the impression that extensive analysis of other Canadian jurisdictions hasn't already taken place. In fact it has. What we're looking to is ensure in even greater depth. And Mary Ellen Wellsch certainly knows the comparative scene. Mr. Carr also knows the comparative scene. We've worked through this extensively.

It's to turn and to begin to gain even greater detail based on the consultations. And this is very important; and that is, we did extensive research. We then obviously tabled the legislation. We then held consultations. We're going through this process now in order that we begin to prepare for regulations. We're now taking that next step as far as getting into greater detail.

Ms. Young: — Yes. I guess would just confirm. The detail, member, that we are now looking at is the specifics that we're starting to analyze, are around those new areas that aren't now covered in the Bill. And we've been asked to do this as a result of what we've heard from the consultation.

The other part of that is to, the minister has asked me to look at whether or not there are better ways yet to communicate there, to make sure that there is a very broad understanding of what these criteria are and what they could mean. And that's the work that he's asked me to do, and we will be going back and going even deeper into jurisdictional work, and we'll be considering other ways to more deeply communicate this.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Could I ask when you made this instruction to the deputy to do this?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — This has been part of an ongoing dialogue over the last six weeks to a month. It continues even, obviously, as part of an ongoing dialogue between any minister and a deputy minister. And we revisited this as recently as a couple of days ago. So this is part of an ongoing dialogue and process.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — If I understand correctly, you're simply adding CBOs, ambulances, or that. I mean the impact of adding something is not the impact of analyzing legislation. I'm confused by what you're saying because if you're simply adding CBOs and ambulances, what are you analyzing? I mean if you add ambulances and CBOs, the Act is standing. Surely you're not saying that you will find something where you're going to change the Act at this point in time. I mean the same research that you did that said that health care workers fall under there applies to CBOs.

So I'm kind of confused as to what you're now saying, that you have to do a framework to see what is under there. Do you not know what is under your legislation, what is covered? Is that what you're saying — that the Bill is now into committee, and we're into hours of debate and committee work, and this Bill perhaps will be passed, and you still are saying that there could be further amendments because you still have not finalized things? I mean what are you saying?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'll get back to you in some detail, but that's not what we're saying. So we'll make sure that our language is more clear and precise so that you can understand this specifically. If you'll give me just a minute, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate your patience. I want to start by maybe addressing your last point. We came forward with this Bill based on consultations. We have provided amendments, and there will be no further amendments. So to address directly your last question, the Bill is very clear regarding the organizations and entities that are covered by the Bill. The research that is now being added to the work that has been done — very impressively by the officials, by the way — is simply prudent statecraft, that is, based on consultations.

We're ensuring that we have the information available to best serve the public interest. In this instance regarding essential services, again this is the balance between ensuring that public safety and security is sustained and maintained within Saskatchewan during labour disruptions and, on the other hand, ensuring the right to strike remains within the Saskatchewan fabric, that is, that the parties are able to negotiate their own essential service agreement. Again this is an enabling piece of legislation.

And as well we see that, by drawing on best practices from other jurisdictions in Canada, this is a very fair, reasonable, moderate Bill that aims to simply ensure that Saskatchewan has legislation that is consistent with almost every other provincial jurisdiction in Canada.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — When can the public expect to see the framework document?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think the expectation would be within weeks. It's mostly, it's an informative piece.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Will it deal with all four criteria?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The criteria are already established directly within the legislation. And I'll ask Mary Ellen to address that.

Ms. Wellsch: — Well the criteria in the legislation, as you are aware, is services that are necessary to prevent danger to life, health or safety; the destruction or serious deterioration of machinery, equipment or premises; serious environmental damage; or disruption to the courts.

Those are the criteria that the parties will be using in determining what goes into their essential services agreement.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay. So the framework will simply give guidance as to what that is? There'll be an interpretation? Or what is the framework?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The framework is probably best conceived as a communication document. Obviously again, as we've highlighted, we'll go into more detail in depth on practices across Canada. Importantly the parties are the ones that will determine the application within any specific setting. That's how this is an enabling document.

So what we can turn and see again during the recent CUPE strike is that despite efforts to ensure that essential services . . . that an agreement was in place before the labour dispute began, the labour dispute occurred without an essential service agreement in place between, in this instance, the University of Saskatchewan and CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees], thereby obviously affecting medical care for people in this province quite significantly. Hundreds of people were affected. In fact the number was probably much greater than that. As I reiterated last night, animals had to be euthanized.

The negotiation, to call it that, spilled into the public through the media, and I think one of the lessons learned is that as a province and as a society we can do better than that. We can provide this enabling document, this piece of legislation that ensures that an agreement will be reached well in advance of a labour dispute and sets out the process and mechanism that that can occur.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — This framework agreement, what will it actually add? Will it talk about what does it mean in terms of health, what does it mean . . . Will it add anything to people's understanding of the meaning of the word health as it appears under essential services?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'll come back to you in a second on your question, but you're now inserting a term, agreement. This is not to be understood as a framework agreement. I want to make that distinction and ensure we're very clear for the record. This is meant as a communications instrument that will help to ensure that the people of this province have a better understanding of this piece of legislation. It will also provide an opportunity for us to do, again, the prudent work that . . .

The Chair: — Minister, could I ask you to speak up. Those of us on this end of the table are having some difficulty hearing you.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes certainly. I'm just wondering if we might be able to get one more microphone.

The Chair: — These microphones don't mike the room. They're for *Hansard's* purpose.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Oh are they?

The Chair: — And for the broadcast services.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Great. Sorry, I'll just simply return to the point. I will be back to the Chair shortly, but I just want to make that introductory point that, again, when we're talking about a framework, it's a communications mechanism, and any notion of it being more than that, as was hinted at by the term agreement, is not something that we've associated with this research or that document.

I think that's fine, Mr. Chair, from where we are.

The Chair: — Mr. Iwanchuk.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay. I would appreciate if you could give a detailed process leading up to the Bill being given first

reading in December and in which you mentioned, stated that the Executive Council played a role, and what branch of Executive Council. Was the Premier's transition team involved in this Bill?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question. It allows us to reiterate the point made yesterday, and that is the point that this Bill was drafted by the Ministry of Justice with input from Executive Council and obviously our ministry. And I think it's sufficient to simply say Executive Council had input into this.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Could you tell us which Executive Council staff member helped with the legislation?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, I guess this is perhaps going on a theme from last night that I thought perhaps we had addressed. And I'll approach this as diplomatically as I can.

And that is, within the British parliamentary tradition there is ministerial responsibility. We've offered an analysis, an overview of the three entities that have been involved. I believe we have documentation that we promised to deliver. We have that, and I don't know if this is the appropriate time, Mr. Chair, to deliver this documentation.

The question has elements that have been addressed previously in written questions for the House. In this instance 10 lawyers from the civil law division and public law division of the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General provided legal, constitutional, and drafting advice and services in the drafting of Bill Nos. 5 and 6 and I'm happy to distribute that as a . . .

The Chair: — We'll have the Page bring the material to the Clerk.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Wonderful. But again I will raise a flag of caution as far as naming specific individuals, whether from Executive Council or from this ministry or from Justice, for within the British parliamentary tradition, ministerial accountability — that is, my presence before this body this evening — is more than sufficient for me to speak to the Bill. If there is something I'm missing or some motive that can be articulated about identifying specific names, then I'd be happy to hear that.

But I would just raise that flag of caution to turn and say I'm not certain what would be gained by the identification of any individuals. And in fact, I had understood you yesterday — if I have, sir, — correctly that you really weren't interested in pursuing individualized names of those involved. Have I perhaps misinterpreted you yesterday, that you had considered the question within the context of the British parliamentary tradition and ministerial responsibility?

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Do you think it's customary . . . Two questions here: do you think it's customary for Executive Council to play a role in the legislative process? And can we expect the Premier's office to always now play a role in drafting legislation?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I can understand how perhaps the members of the official opposition miss being in government, miss the opportunity to understand and shape legislation. But I

want to give every reassurance and to reiterate that the Ministry of Justice drafted this legislation, and the obvious inputs from Executive Council and from this ministry are part of a process of decision making. And the question again is premised on a curious, very curious assumption. And I think it's important to reiterate that the Ministry of Justice drafted this legislation.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Chair, in terms of getting answers, it's still very difficult getting answers, but let me try again. You also, in terms of legislative process, you also said that you had not heard of a committee that . . . A member from here asked about a legislative instruments committee. You said you had no such committee. Yet I believe last night while we were in here, Justice Minister Don Morgan stated in committee that your caucus does, in fact, have a legislative review committee. Are you, sir, not aware of that? Are you saying that the Justice minister only knows about this, and you are out of this loop as well?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No, you know, the nattering from the other side is troublesome. The question that was raised yesterday from one of the members opposite about past practices of the NDP government I said I was not aware of, and I want repeat that, and nor would I have really been expected to. I wasn't elected the legislature until this election.

The processes in place within our government for the introduction of legislation and the review of legislation, I can assure you, I am certainly aware of. The specifics of that, I left purposely vague as elements of executive government, and so I think maybe you may have misheard me or misinterpreted that the question I had was about the previous government, and again I was only elected on November 7. And I'm fully aware and engaged with processes that we have within our government.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Well if . . . You believe in processes. You believe in introduction of ideas, having a process of discussion with people, having a process of passing legislation passed by your members. I mean are we here to believe today that whatever the committees are called, that you don't have processes? This is what you're asking us to believe?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think maybe there's what could be called a non sequitur; it doesn't follow. The statements that are offered don't lead to the conclusion that you've uttered.

So obviously if the question, which is a compound question, is directed at me — do I believe in processes — in fact we are here as part of a rather enduring process, respected process. The processes as far as the production of legislation or the refinement of legislation, we have those processes in place within our government. So I'm not certain the nature of your question.

We can offer a professional reassurance that indeed processes are followed every day. And on behalf of the government, we have processes in place. So if there's another element that perhaps I've missed or haven't understood from your question — again rather compound, complex; I wouldn't go all the way as far as saying convoluted, but complex question — then I'm happy to take that one again.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Chair, the minister is having some difficulty with this. Last night he couldn't remember whether there was a legislative committee, whatever name it would be. Tonight he's having trouble understanding the question. But maybe I could get more direct then, to help him out, if he's having some difficulty.

Now he did mention that John Boyd said that this was broad legislation, and that you also said that this was an earlier draft. Now can you explain how the Bill changed from broad to what you deem to be now at present, which is less than what John Boyd said. And these were your words, sir.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question. I guess to contextualize, some around the table will again wonder how we got to this point, and it's fine. If we want to spend several minutes or hours looking at the anatomy of this legislation, that's fine.

The reference to Mr. Boyd is in reference, if I understand correctly — since you've raised it, I want to make sure I understand the source — from a document that I believe you were given from a third party. The handwritten, unsigned, undated, informal musings or reflections of an official at an early stage in the drafting I think have likely been supplanted by more recent insight and input from Mr. Boyd. And a conclusion that he has drawn — unsolicited — that this legislation is moderate, offers evidence that, at least for that individual I would say, probably reflected that obviously the legislation, as any piece of legislation, goes through various iterations or drafts.

But I think maybe at this point I will ask Mary Ellen to comment about the most recent pronouncements by Mr. Boyd.

Ms. Wellsch: — Thank you, Minister. I've spoken to Mr. Boyd about this particular Bill several times and including within the last week, and during that conversation he took pains to explain to me why he thought the Bill was moderate. That was his position as recently as last week is that the Bill is moderate.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I guess what this I hope highlights is the opportunity to just reinforce that, based on a number of criteria . . . And we can point to the right to strike. We can point to the negotiations required between parties. We can point to best practices that have been incorporated from similar pieces of legislation from across Canada. By these standards, by these objective standards, this Bill is moderate.

To further expand on this, and this will take a little bit of time. And perhaps I will call upon Mike Carr and Mary Ellen to walk through a bit of a detailed comparison of essential service legislation that we see across Canada. So I will ask you, as you see fit, to just begin to highlight, either in general terms or in specifics as you see necessary, some of the comparative reference points for essential service legislation in Canada.

The Chair: — Mr. Iwanchuk.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — The minister will obviously be tabling these documents since they will be speaking from these documents that . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Just as we appreciate the efficiency of the researchers from the official opposition, I think our track record as far as making information available that you've received this evening will continue. I anticipate that within the next . . . Obviously the weekend's coming up, but within the coming days we'll have this available for you.

Ms. Wellsch: — What we find in comparing legislation . . .

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Chair, I think if they're going to be talking from ministry documents, we think they should be tabled now.

The Chair: — Mr. Iwanchuk, I don't believe that the minister is obliged to table ministry documents, and it's solely at his discretion whether he will table those documents or not.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I saw a hand up over on this side and I . . .

The Chair: — That's fine, That's fine. Just carry on.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — As I say, some of the documents that we have here have some private writing of these officials. If it's acceptable within the coming days for us to get these documents to the members of the official opposition, if that's an acceptable — as well as the other members of the government caucus — if that's an acceptable time frame, Mr. Chair, then we'll certainly move forward with that. But in the meantime I think there may be value for all members of the committee to simply have offered to them, again in some detail, but also in this comparative framework, some very relevant, helpful information, and we'll ensure that this information is distributed in the coming days.

The Chair: — I would just remind the minister, that any documents or information that he would like to table, should be tabled to the Clerk, and the Clerk will distribute them to all committee members. I would thank the minister for that.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Perfect.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Iwanchuk.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Yes, thank you very much for that, and I guess while I was doing that, there was a . . . the minister had also said he was going to table specifically where there was a . . . he had mentioned that the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses had not provided essential services, and if he . . . maybe to ask him at this point in time, as well as when he will be tabling that answer to that question, in terms of what unit and where this occurred. He had promised that yesterday, last night, and I'm just wondering when if he was going to put that together as a package.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you. If I may, Mr. Chair, I'll make reference to the information that's been distributed, and perhaps it hasn't made its way around, but the information that's been distributed under, item 1, information pertaining to the 1999 Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, SUN strike. It would read:

During the 1999 SUN strike, the former Saskatoon Health District, or the current Saskatoon Health Region, made the following requests to SUN which were denied:

Maintenance of essential services was approximately 12% of the normal staff complement plus . . . [a call on] requirements;

Nurses in two intensive care units; and,

Nurses for a cardiac care unit.

So this information has been distributed.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Chair, I just received it so I didn't recognize it. Yes, I do have that document. I have the document that the minister is talking about.

The Chair: — The minister may continue.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Great. So if and as appropriate I'll again ask these two officials that have put a lot of work into this just to elaborate as they see fit, just some comparative information that I think will help to eliminate key elements of the dialogue and discussion today. This is in reference to essential services that are provided to, again, almost every other province in Canada.

Ms. Wellsch: — What we'd see across the country is four different ways of determining how essential services will be delivered. And the first way — and this is the Saskatchewan model — is to allow strikes but require essential services agreements and essential services to be maintained. The second way is to prohibit strikes outright. The third way is to require arbitration. And the fourth way, which is an anomaly, is in British Columbia, and it also falls under the category of requiring an essential services agreement, but it allows the minister to select which public employers . . . or which employers — it doesn't even say public employers — are required to have an essential services agreement.

And I'll just speak to the jurisdictions that require essential services agreements. British Columbia in the legislation requires it for government employees and Crown corporations and any other employer that the minister designates. Manitoba, government employees; employees of a hospital; employees of a regional health authority; other prescribed government services, of which there are none; employees of employers who own or operate a personal care home; employees of a child and family service agency; employees of St. Amant Centre; and employees of Pelican Lake Centre.

In Ontario, it's government employees and Crown corporations and paramedics and ambulance services. Quebec has quite an extensive list of employers . . . [inaudible] . . . and unions where an essential services agreement is required, starting with government employees and Crown corporations, hospitals, municipalities, ambulances, paramedics, residential and long-term care centres, child and youth protection centres, and social services centres.

New Brunswick also requires essential services agreements for government employees, some Crown corporations, hospitals and regional health authorities, ambulances, nursing homes, elementary and secondary school teachers.

And in Newfoundland, essential services agreements are

required for government employees and Crown corporations; employees working for a corporation, body, or authority managing a hospital; ambulance services provided through a hospital; interns and residents in health care.

And the last one is the Government of Canada which requires essential services agreements for government employees and agencies.

Mr. Carr: — Minister, I will refer to those jurisdictions where strikes are simply prohibited by legislation. In Alberta, strikes are prohibited by government employees, employees of approved hospitals, employees of regional health authorities, police officers, and firefighters.

In Manitoba, strikes are prohibited by elementary and secondary school teachers, police officers in Winnipeg, and firefighters.

In Ontario, strikes are prohibited by employees of a hospital; employees in personal care homes, nursing homes, and alike whether publicly funded or not; municipal and regional police; and firefighters.

In Quebec, strikes are prohibited by employees of colleges, elementary and secondary school teachers, police officers employed by a municipality or inter-municipal government board, firefighters employed by a municipality or inter-municipal management board.

In New Brunswick, strikes are prohibited by police officers, firefighters employed full-time by a municipality or rural community.

In Newfoundland, strikes are prohibited by members of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and the city of St. John firefighters.

In Nova Scotia, government employees and correction employees are prohibited from entering into a strike under their Bill. The hospital employees are prevented from entering into a strike. Hospital services, nursing homes, continuing care facilities, adult residential centres, homes for the aged are also places where employees are prevented and prohibited from striking. Employees of group homes are similarly prohibited. Elementary and secondary school teachers when striking against a school board and not the province, police officers, and firefighters in Nova Scotia are also prohibited from striking.

In Prince Edward Island, government employees are prohibited from striking. Hospital employees are prohibited from striking. Nursing home and community care employees are prohibited from striking. Non-instructional school personnel are prohibited from striking. Police officers and firefighters are prohibited from entering into a strike.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I certainly appreciate that information being shared with the committee members. I think when offered in this comparative context, it helps to reiterate and reinforce whether the most recent pronouncements of Mr. Boyd, as referenced by the member, or almost any objective analysis, to turn and say in a comparative context, the essential service legislation that is being proposed for Saskatchewan, that has

already had amendments offered to it based on consultations, is fair. It's moderate. It's balanced. It's consistent with the best practices across Canada.

And most significantly, most significantly it's designed to ensure that, in a fair and balanced way, while preserving the right to strike, while encouraging the parties to come to their own negotiated settlement on what an essential service agreement looks like, most importantly — and a piece that's lacking because of inactivity or unwillingness by the previous government — it is designed to ensure that public health and safety is put first as a priority for the people of this province. I think it's more than fair to say this piece of legislation is long overdue. It's long overdue, Mr. Chair. And that's why we're moving forward with this vital piece of legislation.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Thank you for that. Now you mentioned that you have done an analysis of this, into how you arrived that this is, as you say, a moderate piece of legislation. Could you provide us with that as well?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think it will become obvious and evident based on the information that's just been offered to the members of this committee and available through *Hansard* — and we will make this document available in the coming days — I think this documentation is ample evidence of the moderation and balanced approach within this legislation. So you know, I'm convinced that the information we'll be giving you will be more than sufficient to reinforce this conclusion.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay. Mr. Chair, I'd just like to pass over the questioning to the member from Eastview.

The Chair: — I recognize Ms. Junor.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. My questions are not following any theme or any order. They'll be random, but I will start where I hadn't expected to start. But you passed out the information that we asked for last night about the '99 strike of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and in your document say that the Saskatoon Health District, or whatever it was called at the time, made the following requests to SUN, which were denied.

The first bullet is: "Maintenance of essential services with approximately 12% of the normal staff complement plus on call requirements." That is a fairly vague statement and an allegation that you're using SUN to justify the legislation and using them and their situation during the '99 strike as justification for that.

Maintenance of essential services. Having served on essential services committees at locals during a strike, I would be interested to know if you mean maintenance of essential services with approximately 12 per cent of the normal staff on all units in all facilities.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I certainly appreciate the question, and I'll have my colleague, Mike Carr, answer shortly. But I just want to reiterate and there isn't just one piece of evidence that . . . I'll just revisit, though not in detail, I will revisit that, obviously drawing on experiences from the recent CUPE strike and how that strike affected the Royal University Hospital, how that

strike affected health care in Saskatchewan, how it affected hundreds of individuals and families, how animals were euthanized because of the lack of essential service agreement.

We can go to the January 2007 SGEU [Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union] strike and the uncertainty regarding snowplow operators. Again I'm delighted to have not just the committee members present, but also some of my cabinet colleagues, one of whom, Mr. Hickie, can speak with eloquence and at great length about the SGEU strike in which RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] officers from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, along with out-of-scope staff from the government were called in to keep the province's correctional centres operating.

I can make reference to the 2002 Health Sciences Association of Saskatchewan, the strike there where because of a lack of essential services, chemotherapy — that most critical care for cancer patients — was put in jeopardy and stretched almost beyond belief as one out-of-scope pharmacist shuttled between Saskatoon and Regina.

Then as I mentioned last night, obviously there are references available from the 1999 SUN strike.

Before handing it over to Mr. Carr, I'll simply reiterate that it is at best curious . . . And I hope we can get to this level of debate and discussion because to again draw on a statement from April 14 found in *Hansard* by the member from Saskatoon Meewasin, Mr. Quennell, that he speaks about the use of back-to-work legislation in the province, obviously a reference point being that 1999 strike. We also can make reference to the member from Regina Coronation Park and his concern of the use of a sledgehammer.

Mr. Chair, what we can see is that this is an attempt to move away, to move away as practice, away from the uncertainty of previous eras and into an era of greater certainty, predictability, security, and safety.

So I just want to now turn it over to my colleague, but I will make one more reference. In that 1999 strike, it was the NDP that took action, that took action on back-to-work legislation. And it was the Saskatchewan Party, as the official opposition, that voted against ordering those nurses back. And I think it demonstrates a commitment that has been consistent and continues today regarding the support that we have for those officials that help to serve and professionals that help to serve and ensure the people of Saskatchewan have the health care that's needed. Mr. Carr.

Mr. Carr: — Thank you, Minister. My understanding of this particular statement is that it was 12 per cent of the normal staffing complement for those services considered essential at the time of the dispute.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. Who determined those?

Mr. Carr: — This was information that was provided as part of the consultation.

Ms. Junor: — So you can't name those services.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, as a matter of protocol, I believe the questions will be directed towards me and we'll then be able to ensure that the advice or answers come from the appropriate individuals. I'm sorry, was there another question?

Ms. Junor: — I'll repeat my last one, then. I know it looks like we're going to need every moment of our 20 hours because every answer repeats all of last night's *Hansard* which we could have just read.

But the 12 per cent of the essential services I asked for, you mentioned the essential services were determined, and I asked if you could name which services were deemed essential. And while you're at it, I guess we might as well add this one into it because it's going to have another, somebody looking at the exact location of the two intensive care units that were supposedly denied requests to staff up and how many nurses in each intensive care unit and which hospital were those intensive care units at, and how many nurses in the cardiac care unit and which cardiac care unit, which hospital was it at.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Is there anything else you'd like to know?

Ms. Junor: — Oh there's lots, but you can start with that one.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'll have our deputy minister respond, I guess with an important proviso regarding again on going back to a theme that we see . . . we seem to be perhaps reoccurring from the official opposition as far as issues of privacy. So I just kind of raise that flag again.

Ms. Young: — And that actually . . .

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Chair, point of order.

The Chair: — Mr. Yates, would you place your point of order in a few short comments please.

Mr. Yates: — There are certainly no issues of privacy around what would be public information. If in fact these events occurred, they occurred. And if in fact they occurred, there should be information about these events. It's not about which individual or which manager or whoever wrote the note; it's what was the context in which these things occurred.

We need to have answers to fundamental questions as part of the public process to scrutinize whether this was needed. There seems to be very vague answers, very long answers being given, and a lot of anecdotal information, but none of it fits under the issue of privacy or protected information.

The Chair: — Mr. D'Autremont.

Hon. Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the point of order, Mr. Chairman, the minister was not the minister at the time. He was not in government at the time. He was not even elected at the time. The members opposite were actually those sitting in government and perhaps some of them even at the executive table, Mr. Chairman.

The minister cannot answer for the Saskatoon Health District and how they made their determination as to who deemed or what their decision was on which categories would deem to be

essential. The minister had no responsibility for that and can't answer for the decisions made in deeming essential services by the Saskatoon Health District.

The Chair: — Members, members of the committee have the right to put their questions in the fashion they determine suitable. The minister also has the right to answer the questions in the manner that the ministers deem suitable. As far as issues of privacy, if it's information that is of a private nature, there are laws that prevent the disclosure of private information. And we will abide by those laws . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I'm not sure what information you're referring to.

Ms. Junor: — Can I ask my question?

The Chair: — Sure. Sure.

Ms. Junor: — I'll ask my question again. Since the minister used the information that I'm asking for and named the Saskatoon Health District and shared their information in part and promised to give us the information last night when we asked for the details, this is very vague information, speaks to nothing that SUN could defend since you have alleged that they have done something that is fairly, it's fairly disturbing. They've denied essential services during a strike. I think SUN would be offended and would actually want to respond.

And you have not had the . . . I've given you the opportunity — I don't know why you wouldn't take it — to name the units and name what was essential, the essential services that were required with this 12 per cent of normal staff complement. If your answer is simply no, I have many more questions to move on to.

The Chair: — I recognize the minister.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I certainly appreciate the respective points of order, and I think actually there's probably a consensus around the table that there may be issues. And we will check. And I'm sure everyone around the table would concur regarding issues of privacy. Obviously those would take paramountcy or precedence as far as providing information. But I will turn the follow-up over to the deputy minister. I can only say again the comments that have just been made, our response is not meant to be provocative; it's meant to actually be cautious. And so I'll ask the deputy minister to respond.

Ms. Young: — And, member, if I have your question correct — and we'll check to make sure I do — I will endeavour to get the information that I can. I will be checking very carefully about freedom of information and privacy to ensure that the information I give is correct but I will endeavour to do that.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. So I'll move on to my next question. I'm interested in your continued reference to the CUPE strike at the universities. And I understand and I know I've heard you say many times that 400 patients a day were turned away from services at RUH [Royal University Hospital]. I would like to know what services exactly were they turned away from, what unit or service; and how many patients per day from each of those services.

And again, Mr. Chair, I don't need the patients' names. I'm

looking at aggregate numbers.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I certainly appreciate the question regarding the recent CUPE strike. We'll reiterate with the same proviso that we will get the specific information. Certainly Dean Albritton at the recent NSBA [North Saskatoon Business Association] lunch noted — and this is to paraphrase — the ramifications of the CUPE strike are still being felt. The delays caused during the strike are still being worked out. And we will, as far as the specifics, we will get that information again in the coming days.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. My next question is another particular type of question. What happens if this legislation comes in in the middle of bargaining with SUN? How does the legislation apply and how will it evolve?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Given the hypothetical nature of the question, what I will ask Mary Ellen Wellsch to do is to provide an overview, but the overview, the mechanism will be taken out of the context within which the member asked, for obvious reasons. So this is an opportunity to have an overview of this part of the legislation without specific reference to any specific sector.

Ms. Wellsch: — Thank you. I would refer specifically to section 6 of the legislation, and that would be clause 1(b) that says:

If a public employer and a trade union do not have an essential services agreement that is in effect, the public employer and the trade union shall begin negotiations with a view to concluding an essential services agreement:

(b) as soon as reasonably possible if:

(i) on the day this Act comes into force, there are fewer than 90 days before the expiry of the collective bargaining agreement;

Ms. Junor: — And that is not the case with SUN, so what applies to a collective agreement that's already done? Because (i) or (ii) does not apply to an agreement that's already expired as of March 31.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Again I will simply say, given the hypothetical nature of the question, no specific reference is made to any sector.

Ms. Wellsch: — Thank you. I think between clause 6(1)(a), no it's 6(1)(b) (i) and (ii), one of those two provisions will apply in the event that the collective agreement has expired. Either there are fewer than 90 days, and there are fewer than 90 days — there are no days left, or there is no collective bargaining agreement in effect. In either case the bargaining of an essential services agreement must begin as soon as is reasonably possible.

Ms. Junor: — I've also got a . . . Mr. Chair, am I still going? Can I still go?

The Chair: — Certainly.

Ms. Junor: — Okay. I have some other particular questions I want to ask about the, it's 7(2). When it talks about essential services, I know in the legislation it contemplates, there's no, there's no consultation on what is determined to be essential. And I was also at the NSBA luncheon that Bill Albritton spoke at and the minister referred to, and I asked this question of the panel.

There are people, everyone I think in the province would agree that every part of health services is essential to their health at some time or other. So it is going to be extremely difficult to determine under this legislation what is essential to protect your life, health, or safety, without seeing the definition of danger to life, health, or safety. I don't know how you're going to deem any nurse not essential, and I think this is going to be difficult.

And in (2), which I specifically want to talk about as well, it says there is no regard to "... the availability of other persons to provide essential services." And during any strikes that I have been involved in, a lot of the services provided on units in hospitals, nursing homes, home care, whatever, have been provided by out-of-scope managers and other personnel that are available. And this apparently negates that opportunity. So it will put a bigger onus on nurses to all come in to work, and essentially there will be no ability to strike.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question. As we hand it over again, we'll focus specifically on the legislation, not on a specific sector.

Mr. Carr: — Thank you, Minister. Essentially what will happen is it will be up to the parties, who are best equipped to answer the question as to what services should be provided in the event of a strike. And they will do that as a result of bargaining. They will entertain positions.

The contemplation in the legislation is that the employer will have the obligation to present a list to the union. The union will then review the list and engage in negotiations with the employer to try and reach an essential services agreement. That process will give rise to the parties determining what, in fact, are the essential services in that workplace and the number of people that should be deemed essential in the event of a labour dispute.

If the parties are unable to settle that matter through negotiation, they will seek redress to the Labour Relations Board who will then render a decision.

Ms. Junor: — That's interesting, because I understand the negotiation process. But under clause 10, it says the appeal to the Labour Relations Board may not vary the number of essential services. So if the employer decides the essential services are thus and so, your appeal to the Labour Relations Board only allows you as a union to determine a variation of the number in the classification. It has nothing to do with negotiating what is essential or not, unless I've misunderstood clause 10.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question, and there may be a couple of pieces here on our response but we'll begin with Mr. Carr.

Mr. Carr: — Thank you, Minister. The situation nonetheless remains the same. The parties would, if they're unable to reach an agreement on essential services, would make application to the Labour Relations Board. And the Labour Relations Board would, on the basis of evidence presented, render a decision that would resolve the issue for the parties.

Ms. Junor: — Okay. Then let me just read section 10:

If the trade union believes that the essential services can be maintained using fewer employees than the number set out in a notice pursuant to section 9, the trade union may apply to the board for an order to vary the number of essential services employees in each classification who must work during the work stoppage to maintain essential services.

There is nothing that says they can change anything about the classification of the essential services. It is only the number. That's all the wording I see in front of me.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We'll ask Ms. Wellsch to comment in specific reference to the legislation.

Ms. Wellsch: — You are correct in your reading of section 10 that the board ... The only thing that the union can take to the Labour Relations Board is with respect to the number of employees to deliver any particular essential service. They will only reach that point of course if they haven't made an agreement prior to that as to which services are essential, and ... which services are essential and what employees are required to deliver those essential services. We think that the board has a lot of flexibility in determining numbers actually that may be able to resolve the issue in that manner.

Ms. Junor: — I guess that's somewhat encouraging. I'm not sure then why you wouldn't put it more clearly in the legislation so it would mean something to the people reading it, because the way it is worded, it does not. The intent is not there, and I know from previous experience, legislation is interpreted as it is written. You have nothing really to fall back on for case law or precedents or whatever. You're going to end up reading it as it is literally and I think this is what goes to the heart of the matter, that if an agreement can't be reached on essential services ... And I know there's going to be vast disagreements about what is considered to be essential. I'm going to use two examples that sort of demonstrate the extreme.

I've used the nursing one because I can't imagine with your definition here how you're going to exclude any nurse from not being declared essential and having to come to work, so negating the right of SUN to strike at all. Say another employer like the ambulances. Which paramedic or EMT [emergency medical technician] will not be deemed to be essential? How will that work? That's an extreme one.

Another extreme one is I understand community clinics have been asked to give their essential services requirements. And it begs the question — community clinics deliver many, many services and I'm not sure which of them would be endangering, if you stop doing them for a certain amount of time, which of them would endanger someone's life, safety, or equipment or whatever.

So I just, I see that the two extremes and the very extreme with SUN, I don't know how you're going to find some common negotiated essential services agreement. And the Labour Relations Board will be key to doing anything about these disagreements and it's going to be a protracted process if you don't fix it.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Again we'll have a few opinions. The context within which this is framed is actually again, there's a 90-day threshold. That is, the parties are encouraged to actually reach a negotiated settlement. There's a 30-day threshold that if they haven't, then the employer provides a list. The bargaining unit then has an opportunity to review that list again. The idea and ideal is that the parties will then come to an agreement.

There's then recourse to go to the Labour Relations Board which, within a two-week frame, makes its ruling. This still gives ample time before any potential labour dispute that these issues are addressed. The member's rather categorical . . . statement of claim to knowledge could be reframed as hypothesis or hunch and appreciated as such. But the legislation is actually purposefully laid out so that the issues can be resolved before a labour dispute takes place.

The significance of this, which we go back to *Hansard*, stands in stark contrast, stark contrast, to the instrument of choice by the NDP — that is, the back-to-work legislation sledgehammer. What we see here is an opportunity to have an essential service accord reached long before a labour dispute even occurs so that these negotiations, whether protracted or actually advanced by mutual co-operation and interest . . .

You can see there is a very stark contrast between the instruments that are proposed: the NDP preference — utilized in 1999, brought up in recent days in this House, back-to-work legislation, the sledgehammer — or an essential service piece of legislation that's consistent with almost every other province in Canada, that is an enabling piece of legislation that allows and ensures that parties will have a process set out for them that they can reach mutual agreement well in advance of any labour disruption. This is one of the key fundamental differences between the proposed legislation and past practices of the official opposition.

And so that's the context within which this discussion over the role and authority of the Labour Relations Board takes place. On that we'll have a couple of comments. I just want to make sure that we'll address the specific question, Mr. Chair. I'll ask Mr. Carr to comment.

Mr. Carr: — Thank you, Minister. Whenever collective bargaining occurs, there is a focus between the parties to try and reach an agreement in what has most often been described as an adversarial setting. The legislation sets forward an opportunity in advance of the cut and thrust of bargaining for the parties to come to an agreement, an agreement, if you will, in advance of negotiations for renewal of a collective bargaining agreement. That agreement establishes the essential services that will be provided in the event of a dispute.

I think it's important to remember that the vast majority of negotiations are entered into by parties with goodwill. And in that situation they work diligently over a period of time to

arrive at an agreement. And the vast majority of those processes end up in resolution. And the circumstance that this legislation is trying to aim at is, again, simply to ensure that there is that process of sitting down and bargaining collectively to arrive at an essential services agreement prior to entering into the heat of bargaining for renewal of a collective bargaining agreement.

Ms. Junor: — I just have one more comment. I'm sorry that the minister, when he gets unable to answer questions or feels cornered, results to sarcasm and insults. My experience is not anecdotal. My experience is well documented. I have been SUN president for five years. I've sat at contract tables negotiating for many, many years. So to say my experience is anecdotal is insulting and wrong, frankly.

And I just wanted to further comment of Mr. Carr's, further to comment on his comment about how 96 per cent of strikes or work . . . collective agreements are settled in this province. It begs the question, why the legislation for the 4 per cent?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know it's with that reference that this legislation allows for even greater predictability and certainty, and therefore public safety and security for the people of this province. And it's with that very question that one wonders how the official opposition will be voting for this legislation.

The Chair: — Mr. Yates.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I want to take a step back and ask some questions around the conceptual design of this legislation.

As you have indicated earlier, there in Canada are four models that are used by provinces across Canada or other various models across North America and the world to provide essential services. We're not unique as Canadians with the issue of trade unions and strikes and so on and so forth.

Why was the particular model that was chosen chosen? And it leads to a second question, but that's the first question.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — There are some elements here that, most significant is that the model is the least intrusive instrument — the recognition of the significance of the parties themselves through negotiation reaching specific agreements regarding essential services. I think that it reflects a made-in-Saskatchewan approach building on the history of the significance of collective bargaining in Saskatchewan. So we see a piece of legislation that obviously informed by what others across Canada are doing — a specific frame or reference is Manitoba — but importantly informed by Saskatchewan's own history. And again we see the significance of the parties reaching and having the opportunity — again going back to a notion of this being an enabling document — to reach their own essential service accords and drawing on that history of collective bargaining in Saskatchewan. I appreciate the question.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. My next question has to go more specifically about the design of the legislation.

Traditionally the rights of the employer and the rights of the

workers, there's been an attempt to balance the right of the workers to strike, which is the only ability they have to get an employer to understand their needs, is to withdraw their labour. In essence by removing the right of certain people to withdraw their right to strike, it significantly changes the ability and perhaps the length of time strikes would need to occur in order to impact employers, would significantly cost labour unions more money which is money that comes from their members. So it, whether intentionally or not, may well tip the balance of what was the traditional balance in collective bargaining, an issue that's gone all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. There's been significant discussion about that particular balance.

So there are other methods to ensure that that balance would remain in place. One would be to offer arbitration, maybe even after a certain number of days on strike, or some other means that doesn't allow an employer . . . This appears to be, even if it's well intended, to tip the balance in a way that you could have an employer decide to prolong issues for a period of time. It also has the pretense of the employer . . . justice or fairness must be seen to be done, not just done.

The appellant, the only place you can appeal is to a body or to an individual where in this case uniquely the employer controls the hiring and firing and economic well-being of that individual, which is different than in other situations when the employer isn't in fact the government — again leaving some questions as to fairness and impartiality of the outcomes.

So my question goes to, do you feel that this really achieves the type of balance that will result in a good labour relations environment after? Because the end result is that the employees go back to work. You have to have a service delivered. We want to have high-quality services. We want to have a fair, impartial system. Do you truly believe that this achieves that? And if there are still concerns about that fairness, would you entertain amendments in order to try to balance this more favourably?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I certainly appreciate the question. I think all of us are profoundly interested and engaged by questions of fairness and justice, and I appreciate the question.

To begin with your final question, we're quite comfortable with where this legislation is at present. It was drafted. It was tabled. We went out for consultations. Five amendments were brought forward, three of which were informed by organized labour, and we certainly appreciated the input and insights that were offered. We feel that this document, this piece of legislation is fair and balanced.

On the question of that relationship, the approach that we have is the relationship piece, again building on the traditions and history of Saskatchewan . . . has every opportunity to actually go down a very progressive path, continue on that path because the employers and bargaining units will be informed by the legislation that in fact they are, the environment is one that's enabled. And they are meant and encouraged to negotiate.

The ministry will continue to provide the good offices of conciliators. I think again those in the room that know Mr. Doug Forseth and the work that he and his colleagues do within

that unit, very important work on behalf of the province of Saskatchewan.

So we see this legislation as being fair and balanced on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan, guaranteeing that right to strike, being balanced with public safety and security. That balance is in place, that the parties come together to negotiate, ideally without ever going to the Labour Relations Board. Again that balance written right within the document. So we see that balance there.

We're comfortable with the legislation and the amendments that have come forward — again amendments that have been informed by employers and bargaining units. And we see that as far as moving forward, this actually offers an opportunity for greater co-operation between bargaining units and employers as they just come to anticipate that this essential service piece is to be addressed through co-operation.

I'll ask if there are any comments. I'm conscious of the time. There may be some concluding comments by Mr. Carr, Ms. Wellsch. Mr. Chair?

The Chair: — Mr. Yates, I understand you have one more question, a short question. I'll allow that, and then we will conclude the discussion on this Bill.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm going to preface this by saying I've been on all sides of the bargaining process, both at the union table as an employer . . . and in the cabinet process of dealing with these issues.

We could hypothetically — and none of us know this answer at this point — but it is very foreseeable that we could have a situation at some point, most likely in health care, where entire units may be deemed as essential or for all intents and purposes 80, 90 per cent of any bargaining unit. And I'm thinking of agencies like cancer and perhaps SUN. And what impetus is there to . . . The employees are at work. What impetus is there for the employer to ever come to an agreement?

There is no balance there. The only pressure then becomes one that is applied politically at the political level because ultimately the government has the controls of the employers. Is that the best way or the best possible outcome for these types of disputes?

And I just want you to think about those things because I've been on the side of having those pressures applied; I've been on the side of applying those pressures, and I've been on the side of being the employer. So in the interest of getting the best possible outcomes, is this the appropriate balance?

Because if you have a scenario . . . and we could have a scenario where the majority if not all of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses are deemed essential or the cancer agency, which is a smaller agency where, you know, it's more likely, even more likely to occur. And you have an employer for whatever reason is stuck on an issue. And I think we've seen that before. I've been on that side of the equation too as a cabinet minister. Then the only resolution is really political pressure which puts us right back . . . you know, which creates hardships in the relationship then between the management and

the employer and the employees, and so on and so forth. And so I'd like you to think about that as we think about the balance and how we deal with this.

You have situations with individual employers such as SUN where you have all various health districts that have inputs. You have SAHO [Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations]. There's various levels of inputs so this function can be at various places. But if there is no offsetting pain to the employer, what's the impetus or what's the push to ever come to an agreement?

There's nothing in the legislation that would say that at some point you can appeal to somewhere or you can apply for arbitration or something that forces an employer to want to bargain if there's zero pressure to bargain. And that could then stretch on for months if there's no pain on the other side. Where the suggestion that I had put forward earlier that at some point perhaps it goes to arbitration or some point it gets appealed to a third party that's outside the control of the employer, then puts that desire for the employer to bargain.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question. I appreciate the question as I've heard it. One of the premises of the question relates to a lack of a third party, and it helps to highlight the significance of the Labour Relations Board in this. So that the dynamic is not simply one where . . . and Mr. Carr will comment. Just based on my remarks, he'll comment more in depth. There are some obvious pressures I think on both parties. So again the process, without going through the threshold, is to turn and say there are mechanisms in place.

The mechanism that captures our attention is the Labour Relations Board. That is the . . . This is not about unilateral action by the employer. The employer has a list. The bargaining unit has access to the list. Ideally, prior to that, there's an agreement even within the thresholds. There's then recourse to the Labour Relations Board. So if you would like that notion of a third party, there's the third party to turn and say let's come to a resolution on that. And there's a 14-day window.

The significance here and it's to turn and say . . . Obviously the recourse to unfair labour practice still remains in hand. That's part of that balance. So again we may agree to disagree, but I appreciate the question because there is this sense of do we have the right balance. And in my opinion — based on the consultations, based on the work that we've done — it is.

But I appreciate the nature of the question and certainly the focus of the question. I think it goes to some fundamental elements of Saskatchewan. I will ask Mr. Carr to comment about some of those pressures that one can anticipate within that bargaining setting.

Mr. Carr: — Thank you, Minister. Again in situations where the parties have failed to reach a collective bargaining agreement and job action is taken, there is a significant pressure brought to bear by both parties. Certainly the union who's striking or who's locked out and the employer because there is a disruption of service, there will be pressure brought to bear as a result of that. There will be avenues of mediation and conciliation. There will be opportunities for the parties to come together. The circumstances during any dispute often will be

resolved by the parties continuing to have discussions about the substantive issues that keep them apart.

In those situations, there is always an opportunity where one or the other party is going to compromise to effect a resolution, and the ebb and flow of that will change over the length of the bargaining relationship, over a succession of bargaining opportunities. And so you will find a situation where, as they build their bargaining relationship and they move forward, issues around trust and trying to get to a deal will be very important. But you'll find that that does occur in situations where disputes have happened. You'll find that people find ways to mend those fences between collective bargaining agreements and find a way to avoid that circumstance down the road.

The Chair: — Committee members, I believe we have exceeded our time on Bill 5. We will take a 10-minute recess before we move on to Bill 6. I recognize the minister. I believe he has a comment to make.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. I am, while conscious of the time, I know that perhaps we started a few minutes late and I'm just wondering . . . We're okay for time?

Mr. Taylor: — Yes, we're good.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Okay great.

The Chair: — This committee stands recessed until 10:20.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

Bill No. 6 — The Trade Union Amendment Act, 2007

Clause 1

The Chair: — Committee members, we will resume our sitting. The next item on our agenda is Bill No. 6, The Trade Union Amendment Act, clause one. Before I open the floor for comments and questions, I would just notify committee members that we have a substitution to the committee. Mr. McMillan is substituting for Ms. Eagles.

Minister, I would ask at this time if you have a short statement, if you want to make a short statement on Bill 6, you may go ahead and do that, and then we will have comments and questions from committee members.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. For the record I'd also just like to reintroduce Wynne Young, deputy minister; Mr. Mike Carr, associate deputy minister. We have Mary Ellen Wellsch, acting executive director of labour planning and policy. And Pat Parenteau is also here with us again; she is a senior policy analyst within our ministry.

Obviously I received some very thoughtful and important questions yesterday on the substance of the amendments to The Trade Union Act, and I'm looking forward to our dialogue this evening regarding this legislation. I think that our discussion and dialogue it matters significantly for the people of Saskatchewan and as we go through this dialogue that we make reference again to respecting the rights of workers and

employers, and that the changes are focused on helping to promote long-established, democratic principles, principles that resonate throughout Saskatchewan and right across Canada. The amendments that we are discussing ensure that there are clear, thoughtful, and democratic process in place that benefit workers and employers and most importantly the people of our province. On that, Mr. Chair, committee members, once again I am pleased to be here this evening.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Iwanchuk.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Yes. Thank you Mr. Chair. Just going over, as well, from some of the notes that . . . actually just from the previous Bill that we had, and the minister took it upon himself to talk about theoretical — and I'm not sure what other words he used there — in describing Ms. Junor's comments. So I actually have a few questions for him. And my first one would be, has the Minister of Labour ever spoken to somebody who expressed a desire to join a union?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I guess for the record . . . It's perhaps incidental to some but significant to many of us that the ministry actually extends . . . While it includes labour, it is the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, so I guess as a reference.

And I guess the broad question of this evening, Mr. Chair, relates — as I have come to prepare myself this evening — relates to Bill 6. And I am uncertain of a line of questioning that would be premised on a previous dialogue regarding Bill 5. And certainly I am anxious to address Bill 6 and to have that dialogue and debate and discussion. Perhaps there is some relevance to this question for Bill 6, and if so, then I'm happy to take perhaps a more complete question.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Well okay if you just won't answer it. Has the minister ever participated in collective bargaining?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I guess what's on the public record already is that I have. I have during my previous professional experiences at various times been a member of a bargaining unit or union. This specific question, I think, I think relates to having some sense of the purpose and processes of negotiation. And certainly my family, my immediate family, most specifically Dr. Martha Smith-Norris has been on the executive of the faculty association, and so I'm familiar with some of the elements that I assume the line of the questioning is proceeding towards.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Has the minister ever been involved in a union organizing drive?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I guess, Mr. Chair, I'll look in reference to you on these questions. I'm here in my capacity as the Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, and this line of questioning that focuses on professional background or personal experiences, I will simply phrase as, at best, curious. Perhaps another frame would be tangential.

I guess I turn for your guidance, our preparation for this, the time being put in by our unelected officials, our unelected officials at 10:30 at night. They're here. They're prepared. They're serving the people of Saskatchewan. I ask for your

guidance on this matter.

The Chair: — Members, we are dealing with Bill No. 6. That is what is in our agenda. This is not estimates where it is virtually wide open, I guess, as far as questions are concerned. I think if we could keep our questions more pertaining to Bill No. 6, I think would be much more useful, and we would make more progress. I would just offer that statement as advice and guidance to members.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Chair, I was talking about union organizing drives which are . . . That is what Bill 6 is about, but I've got the answer. My next question was, does the minister agree that the Labour Relations Board should be a independent, quasi-judicial body? Okay does the minister agree that the Labour Relations Board should be an independent, quasi-judicial body?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Okay we'll try to make this as concise . . . The Labour Relations Board actually is an independent, quasi-judicial body. So yes it's only fitting that it be characterized as such.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Does the minister understand the importance of decisions of the Labour Relations Board?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, the committee members as well as the citizens of Saskatchewan can have every confidence that this minister and this government understands the significance of the Labour Relations Board — I hope not naively. One would like to proceed with debate, dialogue, and discussion that moves beyond these rather elementary questions, but if this is the pace, the style, and the approach, then I guess we'll just continue at a rather glacial speed.

The Chair: — Ms. Junor.

Ms. Junor: — I have a couple of particular questions and only a few, because my colleagues are anxious to get in, and I did take up a fair amount of time in the last hour or so. But my concerns are on clause 11, and in the word opinion, an employer can offer its opinion.

Having had a fair amount of experience in the workplace with the employers and their actions towards employees, in particular myself — so this isn't anecdotal — I have been bullied. And as I said in my speech to The Trade Union Act, I've been taken aside and told it was in my best interest . . . his best advice to me was to keep my mouth shut, my girl, was to keep your mouth shut.

So I've also been part of an unfair labour practice that was filed, and it arose from the employer gathering the employees to give his opinion. So I'm really worried about the ability of the employer to give his or her or its opinion.

And so what I want to know is — because you've qualified it by saying, nothing that should interfere, restrain, or intimidate or threaten or coerce — but I would like to know then an example of an acceptable employer opinion to an employee. Just give me an example of what an employer would be able to say to an employee. Give me an example of the range that this could go, keeping in mind the parameters you've set and the

restrictions you've put on.

And the second part of the question then is, does this allow the employer to speak to individual employees? Or does it contemplate a group of employees? Or does it allow an employer to take aside an individual employee and say something to them with no witnesses?

I have had this experience, so I'm asking. I would hate to see an employer allowed to speak to an employee alone because I know what happens. And I think that we should contemplate in some way that there should be no one-on-one, and there should be an ability of either the employee to bring a representative or some such person with them.

And my first part I would really like to get into then is your definition of opinion and what type of opinion you think would be acceptable to share that wouldn't contravene these other things.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question. I think it's pertinent and contributes to the public policy dialogue, so we'll just confer for a couple of minutes here, and then we'll come back. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. The intention of this clause really relates to allowing for responsible, respectful communication. And as the member noted, the element within the clause that is profoundly significant is as long as the employer does not "... interfere with, restrain, intimidate, threaten, or coerce an employee ...". So that's the specific intention.

The notion of an example, that is the purview of the Labour Relations Board as far as making a ruling on what would be considered to either fall within or beyond those parameters. And at this point I'd like to invite Mr. Mike Carr to comment, just given some of your previous professional experience as well as your current professional insights.

Mr. Carr: — Thank you, Minister. The provision allowing for communication simply is designed to ensure that there is an opportunity for an informed decision at the end of the day. And when you think in terms of communication and you think in terms of what goes on day to day, day in and day out in workplaces, the simple truth is that employers and employees have the primary relationship inside the workplace. There are discussions taking place every day. If those discussions are inappropriate, if those discussions verge on threat or intimidation, then there is remedy not only for a union involved in an organizing campaign to undertake, but for the individual employee to undertake.

And the circumstances, I'm sure, would be followed to a remedy if there were any doubt at all about the quality and the nature of those discussions.

Ms. Junor: — The second part of my question, the ability of the employer to speak to the employee alone?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well I'll let Mr. Carr speak first and then I'll add a comment.

Mr. Carr: — Again there is an ability for the employer to

speak to employees alone every day. And there's nothing wrong or inappropriate about that discussion as long as it does not cross the line and engage in threat or intimidation.

Ms. Junor: — This would be a subjective thing then. If I would feel I was threatened, coerced, or whatever or intimidated, then it would be subjective. I would have the option then to go and say so to someone that was organizing or to someone else? And that's the redress?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I will just simply say that redress for poor behaviour or inappropriate behaviour — that is interference, any notion of restraining or intimidating, threatening, or coercing — there are any number of remedies, and those can take the form of representation through a bargaining unit or union. They can take redress through the Human Rights Commission. They can take redress through the OH&S [occupational health and safety] mechanisms that are in place. They can go through criminal processes that are in place. So remedies are available and in place for such actions.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. That assumes that I, if I'm using my own experience, could have provided a witness to what was said. Otherwise how do I as a lone employee defend or, yes, go to the Labour Relations Board and prove that?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — In the instance of the incident being taken to the Labour Relations Board, obviously there are processes and Mr. Carr can comment on that. The notion of an individual being able to take action is one based on empowerment. And again depending on which avenue of remedy, there would be various steps, but regarding the Labour Relations Board which seems pertinent to the discussion right now, I'll have Mr. Carr make some comments.

Mr. Carr: — A trade union bringing an application before the board alleging an unfair labour practice related to improper employer communication would, as a matter of evidence, bring the person forward, have them provide sworn testimony before the board, and then have the board apply the decision based on the evidence before it. And certainly in that circumstance it would be a question of fact determined by the adjudicative body in the person of the labour relations Chair or Vice-Chair hearing the case and the board empanelled to hear the case.

Ms. Junor: — In my experience, and I know my colleagues are saying the same thing, it's a he-said-she-said. So it would really be difficult which is why I'm zeroing in on this particular one because I know how hard this would be from an employee's point of view.

And I really have a lot of concern that the employer can now ... And I understand Mr. Carr's comment that employees and employers converse daily on different things. This would be particular I would assume to the topic of organizing that we're interested in. I'm not going to worry about if I feel threatened that there's a comment about the weather that I don't like. So it would be particular to this topic.

So I think there is some merit in looking at how you protect employees in the workplace since I think from our conversations last night I understand that the union cannot come and speak to employees at the workplace or during work hours.

So the employer does have fairly good access to the employees. You're almost a captive audience.

And as I was in a side room of the cafeteria, you know, that's where I work. That's where I eat. So I was fair game. And I think that this really worries me.

My other question about this particular thing, so I don't go on and on and take up all the time, which other jurisdictions allow this?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — What I'll do is I'll address the jurisdictional question, and then again I'll turn this to Mr. Carr.

There are eight jurisdictions where legislation includes provisions stating that communication is allowed with employees as long as the employer does not use coercion, intimidation, threats, or promises or undue influence. And those are Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and federally. And federally the notion is the employer's personal point of view. So there are eight jurisdictions of reference. Mr. Carr.

Mr. Carr: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Just to provide the detail. In Alberta the employer's views may be expressed. In British Columbia a statement of facts or opinion reasonably held is the standard within which employer communication will occur. In Manitoba it is the employer is free to express a fact or opinion. In New Brunswick it is the employer's views may be expressed. In Nova Scotia it is the employer's views may be expressed. In Ontario it is the employer's views that may be expressed. And finally in Prince Edward Island it is the employer's views that may be expressed.

Again in all of these situations, those views expressed are appropriate as long as they do not use coercion, intimidation, threats, promises, or undue influence.

Ms. Junor: — I have some more questions on this line, but I think I'll turn it over to another one of my colleagues. I'll continue mine the next time we're together. Thank you very much.

The Chair: — I recognize Ms. Morin.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good evening, Mr. Minister, and officials. This is my first question this evening, so it's my first chance to welcome you here this evening. I know that you answered the question yesterday, and unfortunately *Hansard* isn't available yet, so I'm wondering if you could just jog my memory. But can you just illuminate again when Bill 6 was drafted?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The window on this obviously would stretch from a reference point in November into the middle of December, so there's a window there where the drafting took place.

Ms. Morin: — And remind me again who drafted Bill 6.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Bill 6 is drafted, as all legislation is drafted, out of the Ministry of Justice.

Ms. Morin: — So was it only the members or the officials out of the Ministry of Justice that assisted with the drafting of Bill 6, or were there others? For instance, you said you had Kevin Wilson on staff as well providing assistance to you. Was he also involved in the drafting process or in the suggestive process in terms of giving you guidance on this particular Bill?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Again I'll just reiterate, the drafting occurred within the Ministry of Justice consistent with written submission to a question. I think you have this information on some material that was distributed earlier this evening. There were, I believe, 10 individuals within the Ministry of Justice. Obviously there were also officials from the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour involved. There were individuals from Executive Council involved.

Regarding specifically Mr. Wilson — again a very respected lawyer within not just his profession but within the community of Saskatchewan — Mr. Wilson offered myself and other officials within the ministry advice and provided some research. But just for the record, I mean, he did not draft the legislation. That was drafted within Justice.

Ms. Morin: — Just so I understand correctly, but he did offer advice and research with respect to how Bill 6 would be crafted and moved forward in terms of the process of the drafting. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Wilson offered advice and research to our ministry on various issues as we moved forward.

Ms. Morin: — I understand that, Mr. Minister. I'm just trying to get . . . My question was quite specific, so I'm actually looking for a specific answer. So you had said that he offered advice and research with respect to Bill 6 and I just wanted to reiterate that I understood that correctly. So are you now changing the answer or is it in fact that he did provide some support through advice and research for Bill 6 specifically?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I've not used the term supports. I will just simply reiterate that he offered advice and research on issues pertinent to Bills 5 and 6 as well as a number of other issues.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you for that answer. Were there any other lawyers on retainer providing advice and research or any working in any other capacity outside of the Justice officials and lawyers that you were speaking of that also provided support — as I put it, but you're saying it's advice and research — with respect to Bills 5 and 6? Were there any other lawyers that you had on retainer to do so as well?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Within the, as I've understood the question, the drafting of Bills 5 and 6, the advice and research offered by Mr. Wilson . . . There were obviously other lawyers. Ms. Mary Ellen Wellsch is a lawyer. You have access to information that there were 10 lawyers within Justice that worked on these. So I guess I just want to, I want to understand that . . .

An Hon. Member: — I can ask the question more directly if you'd like.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Okay, sure.

Ms. Morin: — Okay. So other than the 10 Justice lawyers, or 10 Justice officials and lawyers — because I don't know if they are all lawyers — and Ms. Wellsch, were there any other lawyers on retainer that provided advice and research in the crafting of Bills 5 and 6?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The answer is no. We had no other lawyers on contract or retainer to draft these.

Ms. Morin: — You said yes or no? It was hard to hear you.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No. The answer is there were no other lawyers on retainer. Now that being said, there may have been other lawyers but they would be within the purview of the government, of Justice. That I won't speak to but I think the question focuses on an external relationship.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you very much for an answer. Before you decided to draft Bill 6, who did you consult with with respect to the need for this piece of legislation?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The answer — and we've gone through this previously — it was a very broad consultation. It was an election. It was an election. It was November 7 that the outcome of that election was realized and I think welcomed by the people of Saskatchewan. And the impetus, the imperative, the driving force behind this legislation is the platform.

Ms. Morin: — So am I to understand correctly then, outside of the election mandate that you say you were given, you . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well no I'm going to complete the question actually first. It just didn't . . . in a matter of saving time because we're running short and I have lots of things I want to cover. Anyways so outside of the notion or the answer that you've given with respect to the mandate being given to you through the election results, did you consult anyone else with respect to the need for this legislation before it went into the drafting process?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — There may be a couple of elements here I'll go to. One specifically, the consultations took place after the Bill was tabled. That was part of our promise as we moved forward with it. And the question, I guess I'll begin by saying, it's not an opinion. It's an empirical fact about the government having a mandate, quite a significant mandate, and us moving forward on that mandate. I'm not certain of your level of analysis or your scope of focus as you're presenting the question . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Please.

Ms. Morin: — So as I've stated, you have your mandate through the election in terms of moving forward on this legislation. Were there any consultations that took place with respect to Bill 6 before the drafting took place?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Perhaps I can phrase the question regarding the counsel the government kept, and that was its own counsel. We had just won an election, and on a go-forward basis that's . . . Again there's a lack of clarity on the question. The election ushered in a new era and a new government. The new government boldly began fulfilling its promises. We've now fulfilled over 50 of those promises and this comes directly out of the platform.

Ms. Morin: — So we can't quite agree on how the question should be phrased with respect to establishing the consultation that took place for the need for Bill 6. Let's try this one then. How about who was consulted with respect to the amendments to Bill 6, before it was introduced at first reading? Specifically, who was consulted with on the amendments to Bill 6 before first reading?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Okay. I'll just simply reiterate that public consultations occurred after the Bill was tabled. And through processing that, you know, that we've spoken about, Justice drafted this Bill with obvious input from the Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, as well as input from Executive Council.

Ms. Morin: — So, given the member from . . . Well Ms. Higgins last evening talked about the role that you're now playing as minister, that it's supposed to be one of a neutral role and that you're governing for all the citizens of the province. What research then did your government provide or what research can your government provide on the need for The Trade Union Act to be amended?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Okay. Thank you for the question. If I heard a term correctly, was the term neutral? Did you say neutral?

Ms. Morin: — Yes.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — And again I appreciate the question. Actually it's an important point, a point that probably people of this province should reflect on at least every four years — now much easier to do because of set election dates — that is, what is the role of an elected representative? As I said, one of your colleagues actually offered an insightful, helpful dichotomy. The literature is a little richer than just simply a dichotomy, but it was very helpful.

That is, the role of trustee or the role of delegate, and the role of being an MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] under and within a party offers an individual an opportunity to wear three or four different elements of representation. And that representation, obviously in part one has elements of being a trustee. One has part of being a delegate. A key part is being mandated to actually move forward on a specific platform within a specific team, to deliver on specific promises.

So the role of representation — a key role — and the role of government is . . . you know the purpose of governing is not a neutral activity. That is, it is a purposeful activity and the reference point actually goes back to the ancient Greeks and likely well beyond, and that is there is a notion of the good life. And so this does not come down through the ages with a notion of neutrality simply waiting for events or activities. This is to be purposeful, to help direct and steer a jurisdiction towards a notion of the good life. So that's the first point, and it's helpful to actually be able to talk about that.

The notion from there regarding research or impetus, if we begin then to have a notion that a role of the state is to work towards that notion of the good life, then we begin to turn and say that notion articulated in the contemporary context has some broad outlines within an election campaign, that those

would be referred to as competing platforms. And so the impetus actually comes not from interests — and this is absolutely key — not from interests, specific interests but actually from ideas, ideas about the good life. So within our campaign platform that notion of a good life included a more fair, balanced labour environment with more democratic workplaces. There's the impetus. Those are the ideals.

The research as evidenced more eloquently by Mr. Carr than by myself and in greater detail, we begin to turn and say, based on the former member's question, that is, what other jurisdictions? We turn and say, is this notion of democratic workplace — that is a notion of communications within the workplace — is it consistent with what we see in Canada? The answer is yes, eight jurisdictions. So what we begin to see is comparative data stretching from right across Confederation that informs us that in fact this notion allows us to meet national norms.

And whether we're speaking about Bill 5 and essential services where it was an anomaly, or more specific to this Bill where we see a threshold of 25 per cent — a glaring anomaly, a glaring exception — where we turn and say this is peculiar, peculiar to Saskatchewan, what we see is that the steps we're taking actually allow us to move towards that national norm, whether we're talking about communications or other elements contained within these amendments to The Trade Union Act.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Perhaps I'll give you my reflections as an MLA, and one who's been re-elected, so I've already had the privilege of serving my constituents for over four years. And that is one that I can assure them, if they're watching this evening or if they like to read *Hansard* transcripts — God help them — but that I do take a position of neutrality when they come to my office with concerns. I do not impose my opinions or my biases or anything upon them when they come to see me to seek help with their individual situations. Whether I agree with their opinions or not, I do do my role as best I can as an MLA to make sure that they are being serviced in a non-discriminatory fashion.

And that is why, Mr. Minister, my office, nor hopefully any other office in the province of Saskatchewan, shows the colours of the party . . . I mean shows the emblem, sorry, of the logos of the party on the awnings outside of those offices. They show crests, they show other things, but they do not show whether it's an NDP office or a Sask Party office because we are supposed to be neutral servants to the public that we serve.

So that was what I meant by the neutrality that you are, in the position that you're in, you are the Minister of Labour. That doesn't mean you're the minister for the workers of the province. It doesn't mean that you're the minister for the employers of the province. It means that you're the minister for everyone — all of them. That was what I was implying.

So now that we've established that, I want to remind the minister of various quotes that he said yesterday. Unfortunately they're not coming from *Hansard*, they're coming from my verbatim notes. And I can't say that I take shorthand but I can do a pretty good job when it's just a few words here and there. But the minister said yesterday that he was interested in a fair and balanced labour environment. You refer to Tony Blair, quote, "flipping from favouritism to fairness." I mean the

minister is a strong proponent of that, is what he said yesterday.

The minister said yesterday, quote, that he believes in taking a respectful tone and having fruitful dialogue. Those are your words from . . . those are the minister's words from yesterday. The minister's words from yesterday are also speaking of serving the public interests of this province. So from the minister's words yesterday I assume that you believe in the same things that I believe, which is to make sure that we are serving the public to the best of our abilities to ensure that they are getting the best service that they need when they ask for it.

So anyways, having said that, other than anecdotal evidence that is supplied to the minister's party prior to the election — because that seems to be what the minister is referring to as the mandate for Bill 6 — and other than the anecdotal . . . actual evidence that is obviously provided to our party prior to the election, there is evidence that is acquired, that is investigated, that is researched as to what the actual need is other than the anecdotal evidence that one has provided.

So other than the comparators that you've provided for us today, which we've now been given in great length and I appreciate that, is there any other research or evidence that you can provide that shows — that the minister can provide — that shows that The Trade Union Act is not fair and balanced?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The issue of neutrality — and again the literature is quite rich on this — there are a number of notions of the functions and roles of an MLA and you're exactly . . . I agree and concur with you on roles and responsibilities.

One of those is often known in the literature as a social service role — that is helping to serve our constituencies and communities and that's certainly a fundamental role of any elected official. Of course being an elected official within our context usually, not always, but usually comes with representation of a party and so it's not simply usually — unless a person is elected as an independent — usually that's within a broader caucus serving a broader mandate. So we see that there are, I call them, complementary roles. And this is, again, it's a helpful discussion, helpful dialogue. I appear before you, not simply as an MLA — though foundationally as an MLA, an MLA that's honoured to be recently elected — I appear before you as a cabinet minister with additional responsibilities and roles.

That being said, the broader question that you've raised — and I'll just take a minute to consult with the officials; actually I appreciate the question — that is do we find within the existing, if I understand it correctly, do we find within the existing trade union Act that notion of fair and balance? The answer — and we'll elaborate on this — the answer is that notion of balance is often very nuanced. And we see that through these amendments. We see a refinement, if you want, a recalibration, modest in its intent but fulfilling our mandate. So what we see is again that recalibration of balance that to this long serving piece of legislation. But let me just confer for a minute, Mr. Chair, and I'll come back to this.

The notion of fair and balanced, we think that the amendments help to improve upon notions of fairness, which ultimately is rooted in the notion of justice, again a very ancient notion. That

is there's something of significance to running on a platform, keeping the promises in that platform and moving forward with a focus on the ideas and ideals embedded within that platform, specifically to the amendments to The Trade Union Act. We can see some very fundamental values reflected in this. Accountability. We want to make sure that the Labour Relations Board offers an annual report to this legislature, a report on its activities. We want to ensure that it issues decisions in a timely fashion within a six-month window.

What we've seen, I think all of us would agree that as we look back and we see that cases have lingered — one going back to 2004 and a number of others proceeding forward since that date of the Labour Relations Board — we turn and we say that isn't in the interest of the people of this province. Timely decisions, increased transparency, increased accountability, secret ballot provisions where people can consult their own conscience, a greater freedom for responsible and respectful communications in workplaces — these are ideas and ideals that inform these amendments and again I use the word moderately recalibrate, improve upon, enhance The Trade Union Act as we see it.

Ms. Morin: — I have two last questions. I believe I'm only going to be able to get another two last questions in — is that not right?

Do you believe these enhancements will be more advantageous to the employers or the employees? That's part one of the question. So I've actually got three questions. So this question will be a two-part question. Do you see the rate of unionization increasing or decreasing? Or should I say, do you see the rate of unionization increasing at the same rate it has been traditionally with these new amendments, or do you see it not? So it's a two-part question.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Again I appreciate the question. To paraphrase the opening statement, these amendments are seen as benefiting workers, employers, and, more broadly, the people of Saskatchewan. That is, moving Saskatchewan towards that notion of a good life. As far as what I would categorize as an interesting indicator, I wouldn't begin to hypothesize about the effects of union membership or other such indicators.

These amendments have been put in place, again with the purpose of fulfilling specific ideas and ideals relating to responsible communications which relates to a fundamental right and freedom of expression. They relate to accountability and transparency.

What we can say, if we want indicators, if we want indicators we can see that Saskatchewan's profile and prestige is on the rise. We can see that based on some steps taken by the previous government and certainly new steps taken by this government, more people are coming to Saskatchewan — over 16,000. We can see that in areas of immigration, we're making tremendous strides. In areas of investment attraction, largest land sales; April's land sales, natural resources, exceeded all of 2007. So we can see a number of indicators. We can see a \$1 billion infrastructure initiative, so there are a number of indicators that are emerging.

The question you've asked, I have no evidence at this stage because we are proceeding with this process at present, and we

will see what this robust, thriving, dynamic, cosmopolitan Saskatchewan has to offer. Whether there will be an increase in union membership, whether it will stay the same or there will be a decrease, only time will tell.

Ms. Morin: — In the discussions we've already had about the role of an MLA and the role of a minister and such, and we seem to be on the same page on that — that's a nice change — I'm assuming then that you would show that level neutrality, if I'm going to be able to use the word in that regard, with respect to being respectful to both groups. So can we come to an agreement also in terms of assuring the public that you will be attending both business forums and labour forums, so that they both have equal access to their Minister of Labour? Can we assure the public of that?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — If I may, I think my track record is well known. Certainly my presence at the recent CUPE convention was noted in the media and recognized well beyond. In fact I just received a letter of thanks from Mr. Tom Graham at that CUPE convention. CUPE promised to donate some monies to a children's camp and I asked how much that was, and I promised that I would double those dollars. I did that, and I just received a note of thanks from Mr. Graham for that contribution.

The first letter dispatched from my office . . . I look back, and I can only take credit or bear the responsibility — I wish it was better written — but the first letter dispatched from my office that I wrote was to Mr. Hubich. And we endeavour to ensure that our ongoing dialogue is reflective and responsive to the many stakeholders that our ministry is attentive to.

So as I say, we're attentive to that. Certainly in recent days I've been asked, and we've responded. We met with a couple of very specific unions that came in and had some very specific issues. And I have to say, on one of them I wasn't alone. I made sure that some of my cabinet colleagues were there. And so the answer is — although not perfect, and that goes to one of the other issues of being an MLA or cabinet minister, and that is competing demands on time — that although not perfect, we endeavour to ensure that access, availability is shared, you know, and distributed evenly and equally, equitably right across that policy community.

Ms. Morin: — I'd like to commend the minister for attending the CUPE convention and for making that donation to the children's camp. That is well received, and I thank you for doing that. And I'm glad to hear that that's something you're looking forward to doing well into the future as well. So thank you for that answer.

Where to go to next? I just found out we have an extra half . . . I mean we have a half-hour more. I thought we were finished at 11:30 but we're actually going until 12. So let's see what I can do in a half-hour . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . What's that? Oh, my colleagues are saying we can go longer. I don't know if that's something that your officials would be really keen on since we've kept them here long enough tonight.

Okay. Why don't we look at some of the sections of the Act. Section 6 that's replacing section 11(1)(a). Is it the intention of this particular section to open up employer communication during organizing drives or during bargaining or at any time in

the workplace? Can you kind of . . . can you clarify that for us please?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Again I appreciate the question. This is a general clause. And again it's premised on that notion of responsible, respectful communication.

Ms. Morin: — Sorry, I was distracted at the moment. Could you just repeat that again if you don't mind? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I don't know if I'll get it verbatim but the . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, exactly. The clause is open. It extends beyond any specific situation. And it's again premised on respectful and responsible communication.

Ms. Morin: — So in essence what it's then saying is that the employer has the ability to communicate with the employee regarding any topic at any time. Is that the essence of the clause then?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I would reframe, if I may, the question to turn and say that notion of responsible, respectful communication within the parameters of the clause and I'll ask Mr. Carr to actually comment a little bit further.

Mr. Carr: — Certainly in terms of employer communication, it creates the situation where the employer will be able to exercise an expression of fact or opinion as long as that expression does not coerce or intimidate or threaten. It can occur around any activity in the workplace or at a bargaining table, but again it cannot cross the line into an unfair labour practice. That situation has been well established in terms of the context of collective bargaining and in the context of union organizing.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you for that response. I'm somewhat concerned . . . Oh sorry, did you want to add to that?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Actually just a point of order especially for the unelected officials that joined us, just on the timing of tonight's session . . . And it again I think for all of us, we're here and we're engaged. Mr. Chair, I'm conscious that we began somewhere in and around 20 after 10, again not for our benefit, but I would just like to, if we are going to go longer, just to be clear what that is and perhaps if we could ask just for a couple of minutes that if the unelected officials need to make contact with their families. It may be getting late now, but it would be better now than, than an hour from now to say that they may be staying late. I just I . . .

The Chair: — Mr. Minister, for your information and for your officials' information, we will conclude the committee's consideration of this Bill at or very near 12 o'clock.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you for the clarification. Is that, are you comfortable with that?

Okay. So getting back to what Ms. Junor was saying with respect to Bill 5 about — well actually it was Bill 6, I apologize — with respect to employer communication with employees and how that can sometimes be done so in a way where the employee feels threatened but doesn't really know or is unsure about recourse and how the recourse might even affect that employee. So I guess this would probably be a question for Mr.

Carr because he'd certainly have more experience in this area. Is the minister aware that there are currently employers that are already being found guilty of unfair labour practices for being coercive with employees?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We'll give Mr. Carr a brief respite and actually turn to the deputy minister for her insight and input on this one.

Ms. Young: — Although Mr. Carr absolutely has it on me in terms of experience, I have some experience in the area and I do know that yes, there are employers who have been found guilty of unfair labour practices around this. There have also been unions found guilty of failure to represent. Both of those use the LRB [Labour Relations Board] and rely on the LRB for its fairness and integrity to handle that. So we would see it going forward too.

Ms. Morin: — That's true, Ms. Young, but the failure to represent is not during an organizing drive, and given that this is the . . . So far the unfair labour practices with respect to being coercive with employees has fallen within the parameters of organizing drives for the most part, it's a little bit like comparing apples and oranges.

So given that we've already established the fact that there are already employers that have been found guilty of an unfair labour practice for being coercive with employees, is the minister's government concerned that by expanding the ability for employer communication — falling within the parameters I do understand — but really at any point in time whatsoever that that might lead to more coercive activity with those employees that are currently protected? Because it's within a window that we're talking about now, and it's being expanded that much more.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Again I appreciate the question. The key theme on this one relates to elements of continuity and that notion of concern. There is no loss to employees as far as protection. And I'll ask Mr. Carr to elaborate further, but it is to say there's continuity here and there is no loss.

Mr. Carr: — Clearly in the context of adjudication, employees will continue to enjoy the right — whether it's in the context of organizing campaigns or collective bargaining — from undue intimidation, threat, or interference by employers. That will be a matter of fact brought before the Labour Relations Board and resolved through the process of a hearing.

The other point, I think, to be made is that in terms of other avenues, there are significant differences between the workplaces of today and the workplaces of 20, 30, 40 years ago, in that there are very clear policies within most workplaces of any size that deal with the issue of respect, communication, integrity, and the opportunity to treat each other with a dignity and respect that we all desire. And so from the perspective of the Bill and what's being dealt with in terms of communication, we're quite confident that we will see, once the Bill is passed into law, a very clear continuing voice exercised by unions — whether in organizing campaigns or in collective bargaining — to exercise their rights and ensure that their members are protected.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, I appreciate your answer because that leads me right into another question, quite frankly. You're absolutely correct . . . Sorry, Mr. Minister, your official is absolutely correct that there is still that protection in place for employees to be able to pursue in the event that the employer's communication falls outside the parameters that are laid out. They do have recourse through the Labour Relations Board.

That is causing me reason for concern because the Labour Relations Board is now going to be going down to one Vice-Chair. And if there's going to be increased activity to the Labour Relations Board — and the government has clearly stated that the government wants to have quicker decisions rendered from the Labour Relations Board — I'm not getting the math, quite frankly. I'm not understanding how, when we're going down to one Vice-Chair from two Vice-Chairs, and we know that there's going to be increased activity in terms of complaints being brought to the Labour Relations Board, how we are going to create that efficiency of rendering quicker decisions. I'm wondering if you could elaborate.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Again I appreciate the question. Obviously the purview of the efficiencies and effectiveness of the LRB falls to the Chair. You've correctly identified that we are shifting to one Vice-Chair. The premise that the only way to — no, I shouldn't say that; I won't phrase it like that — a principled way to address efficiencies is to have a second Vice-Chair, we actually have a different view of. And that is efficiencies at the LRB frankly with two Vice-Chairs, which was a relatively recent phenomenon, we've seen since 2004 actually a backlog build up of cases that were not completed. So the amendment not included within this package but what we've done is we've said let's move towards one Vice-Chair. Out of prudence we've said, and it's really only a few words that we're changing, that there's still flexibility if in the future the Chair comes back and says within the mandate I've been given in fact there is scope or need then we can review that and probably the legislation could have had that built into it. So we have seen that.

But some of the efficiencies for example, a lack of a database within the LRB, that they're using the equivalent of a card catalogue for drawing on research and reference cases, that is a significant, you know, piece as far as increasing efficiencies at the LRB. So we have every confidence in Mr. Love. He is addressing that backlog, and he's getting down to work on some of the broader contextual issues. I'll ask Mr. Carr to make some comments about the LRB's performance.

Mr. Carr: — Thank you, Minister. Certainly the issue of the methods used within the board and its business plan are something that will be reviewed by the new Chair. And he, in consultation undoubtedly with his colleagues on the board and the folks within the administration of the board, will find a way to look at the opportunity to improve the effectiveness and the operation of that board.

As they embark on that undertaking, they are certainly taking note of the significant time that it has taken to issue decisions, and they're trying to find ways to streamline issues such as research and issues around the writing of decisions. And those are things that Mr. Love, in his capacity will be addressing.

In terms of looking at the potential of backlog, it is within, as the minister has said, the purview of the Chair acting in the capacity of chief executive officer of the board to look at developing a business plan and look at making effective representations with respect to budget and being in a position where they can move ahead to provide those types of resources that are essential to meet the mandate set in the legislation.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you. I would like to ask a few more questions on this, but before I do I just want to raise something because it just dawned on me about an upcoming event that I'm not sure if the minister has yet received an invitation on, but I know the minister will be receiving an invitation on. It's April 21, and it's the Regina & District Labour Council, is going to hold a public discussion and it's at 7 p.m. I know that I will be attending as an interested party, and I know that the minister will be invited as someone to be able to speak to the evening. So I'm certainly advocating and hoping that the minister can attend this discussion in Regina for the community of Regina to be able to hear the minister's responses.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes certainly. I'm not certain if our office has received that invitation or not. And I appreciate the heads-up or the advance invitation. Thank you.

Ms. Morin: — As I said, I know that the minister is receiving an invitation because I've just received mine yesterday. So, you know, we'll see if we can hook up at the same event then.

So continuing on with the employer communication with respect to the amendments in Bill 6 now. Is it fairly common for union organizers or does . . . is there information that the minister has about union organizers being fired, being terminated, during organizing drives as a means of intimidating the other workers into not signing on to the union cards, etc.?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The short answer — but one that should be elaborated on — the short answer is yes, obviously there are those unfortunate cases. I will ask again Mr. Carr to elaborate, I guess anecdotally, to offer some insights.

Mr. Carr: — Thank you, Minister. There are certainly cases that I am aware of, as a former member of the Labour Relations Board of the province of Saskatchewan, where unions brought applications on behalf of individuals who had been terminated for an improper purpose, constituting an unfair labour practice during an organizing campaign. The board has rendered decisions in those cases that reinstated the individual, and there is no reason to believe that that won't continue to be the case under the current board.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, to your official. I know your official answered the question for me yesterday as to whether or not you're aware of any of those reinstatements happening and he confirmed that he was, yesterday already.

My concern, I just want to reiterate before I ask one last question, is with respect to the amount of activity that I perceive will increase with the broad scope of employer communications that this amendment regarding Bill 6 will allow, given that it is . . . My information for instance, that out of the last 12 organizing drives for a particular union in the province, all 12 organizers were terminated and then reinstated by the Labour

Relations Board.

So like I said, I just want to reiterate my concern about the level of increased activity given that that's already happening with respect to the current trade union Act without these amendments. So I'm, like I said, I'm not clairvoyant but I perceive that there will be increased activity because of the expansion of the employer communication clause.

So just one last question, and that is with respect to an agreement that my colleagues and I . . . I've had a really quick little consensus-building situation with my colleagues, and that is with respect to one of the advice givers for the minister, that being Kevin Wilson, who provided advice and research with respect to Bill 6. You've elaborated that it's also with respect to Bill 5.

My colleagues and I would be in agreement if the minister would like to bring Kevin Wilson to our sessions here, and provide . . . appear before us as a witness. We would certainly be in agreement to have him sworn and have him appear before us so that we can be more comprehensive in the scrutiny of the processes that were followed with respect to Bill 6. It would certainly be appropriate given that he was on the public payroll through the advice and research giving situation with respect to Bills 5 and 6. And I just want to assure the minister that you have the full co-operation of the opposition in terms of having him sworn in to appear before the committee as well.

So I just want to thank the minister and his officials for their co-operation this evening and for your responses. It's always informative and I appreciate the co-operation that I've received, so thank you.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Iwanchuk.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Just one quick request. In terms of the unfair labour practices, would it be possible to have a breakdown of the unfair labour practices in terms of the communication piece that existed under the previous legislation?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The deliberations were ones regarding how to bridge a technological gap. If appropriate, we'll take this request under advisement. We will get back to the committee with an approximate time frame — the snow may be back.

Because of the lack of a database within the LRB, this would be very intensive paper-based research that . . . well some of the recent cases may be able to draw on some electronic files. Apparently the sorting mechanism would be very labour intensive. So if I could just simply take that under advisement, we would come back with an approximate time frame for that data to be available. And then we could inform the committee and perhaps have a dialogue on . . . Yes, there may be some cost to that as well, but it's mostly at this stage the time frame.

The Chair: — Committee members, we have reached our time for consideration of Bill 6, and we have had a long day. I believe it's been a productive day. I know the minister would like to make a concluding comment and I will recognize the minister.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you and it's . . . Again we, we the elected officials have a great, a great resource to draw upon and those are officials from the ministry; those are officials, officers of the legislature. And given the time, I would just invite all members of the committee to offer a round of applause and thanks for the real yeoman service that's been offered by all our public officials tonight.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Chair: — Committee members, this committee is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 00:03.]