



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
Estevan

Mr. Serge LeClerc
Saskatoon Northwest

Mr. Greg Ottenbreit
Yorkton

[The committee met at 15:31.]

The Chair: — I'll call the committee to order. Good afternoon, committee members. Once again the Human Services Committee has quite a lengthy agenda for today. For this afternoon, we'll be considering three Bills. Two Bills are brought forward by Minister Krawetz, the Minister of Education.

**Bill No. 13 — The Teachers' Life Insurance
(Government Contributory) Amendment Act, 2008**

Clause 1

The Chair: — The first Bill that we will be dealing with this afternoon is Bill No. 13, An Act to amend The Teachers' Life Insurance (Government Contributory) Act. Minister, I see you have some officials with you. Would you please introduce your officials.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and welcome this afternoon to members of the committee. I will introduce three officials that are with me today. On my right of course is Audrey Roadhouse who is the deputy minister of Education. Behind me is Shirley Robertson who is the acting executive director of the Teachers' Superannuation Commission. And right behind me is Drew Johnston. Drew is the manager of legislative services and privacy.

Mr. Minister, before we begin Bill No. 13, if I might for the benefit of all committee members but directly to you first . . . On committee meetings that were held on April 17 and April 21, on the night — I believe it was the night — of April 17, there was a request that the ministry provide information, specific information, on the grant reconciliation sheets for three school divisions: Chinook, Prairie South, and South East Cornerstone. And, Mr. Chair, I'm happy to provide that information today for your distribution to committee members.

And secondly, Mr. Chair, on April 21 Ms. Atkinson requested information on the teachers' superannuation plan specifically dealing with the previous five years going back to 2003-2004 in terms of the number of retirees that were estimated and then the actual retirees, the budget that was approved initially in the spring, and then the actual monies that were expended from the GRF [General Revenue Fund]. And I'm pleased to provide that information as well to the committee.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Minister, for providing the committee with that information. Minister, do you have any comments regarding Bill No. 13, and if so just go ahead and make those comments.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a few comments, Mr. Chair. I think I've made the comments in the Legislative Chamber regarding the need for this Bill. This Bill is directly from negotiations that took place on a new, teachers' collective agreement back in the fall of 2007. That agreement was put in place for actually three years from September 1, 2007, to August 31, 2010. And the provision for adjusting the teachers' superannuation plan and the retirement teachers' plan were part of those discussions. This was a negotiated settlement

between all groups participating at the table — the Teachers' Federation, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, and the Government of Saskatchewan. So this was agreed to; it was a negotiated item.

We were unable to fulfill that request in the fall because of course the agreement was not ratified until just before the start of the teaching year, the school year. And as a result of the election campaign, that was not able to be implemented for September 1, 2007, and that is the reason why you will see an implementation date of September 1, 2008.

So those are my only comments to begin the discussions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. I would now ask committee members if any member has some questions, and I see Mr. Wotherspoon, so I recognize Mr. Wotherspoon.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to our minister and to our ministry's officials for attending here today. We, as a party, certainly support the collective bargaining process. We're well aware that this occurred while we were in government. I'm definitely aware that this is important to the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation] and that it's agreed upon by the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association] as well. We certainly value the well-being of our educational professionals, our teachers specifically here, with this Bill here.

So there's just a little bit of a preamble, a couple of questions just to make sure we're completely clear on things. I guess my first one might be, are there any costs borne by the ministry to date or now or going forward as a result of this legislative change?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you for that question, Mr. Wotherspoon. As I indicated in the speech within the Chamber, the provisions that will be now extended beyond age 75 to age 85 will be the responsibility of the member entirely. So there are no cost implications for government whatsoever.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. Question here. Does the Act completely reflect the collective bargaining agreement? What was agreed in terms there? Is it presented completely and wholly within the legislative changes?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — As far as the negotiated items for the teachers' life insurance portion, all negotiated items are included.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. Through your consultation process, has there been any stakeholder group for which has had a negative . . . that you've received negative feedback on with this legislative change?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — We are not aware of any negative feedback. We are aware of course that the agreement was ratified by all participants in that negotiation process. So we're under the understanding that all parties support the implementation of this Act.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. I think that concludes my questions. We certainly value seeing this passed

as it reflects good practice with collective bargaining, and it's valued by our teachers. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Wotherspoon. One final comment I'd like to put on the record so that all members would understand, including the public, is that while this extends the period from age 75 to 85 for that member, for that superannuated teacher to be able to purchase the extended life insurance, as indicated, the premium is the responsibility of that member.

And the anticipation is that there will be about 100 individuals that will be eligible for this benefit so it's not . . . I've had the question, is it thousands, is it just one or two. The answer is, we estimate that about 100 individuals will be able to take advantage of purchasing that extended life insurance, from 75 to 85.

The Chair: — Are there any other committee members that have any questions for the minister dealing with Bill No. 13? If not, we will vote the Bill.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 and 3 agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly, enacts as follows: An Act to amend The Teachers' Life Insurance (Government Contributory) Act. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — May I have a member move that we report the Bill without amendment? Mr. LeClerc. It's moved by Mr. LeClerc that we report the Bill without amendment. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Thank you, committee members.

Bill No. 14 — The Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials Repeal Act

Clause 1

The Chair: — We now move into our next order of business; that is Bill No. 14, An Act to repeal The Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials Act, 2004. Minister, do you have any comments regarding this Bill?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, this Bill is pretty straightforward. It's the repeal of an entire Act. It was necessary, and of course at the request of the Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials, that this happened. And this is as a result of amalgamation of school divisions, where the number of school divisions not too long ago was up into the 119 number or thereabouts, and now we're down to 28 school divisions.

So as a result, there was a need to ensure that the associations could still conduct its business. And through a change to a

non-profit corporation, that would better reflect the people that are within this profession. We know them from different school divisions as secretaries or secretary-treasurers or business officials. So within that context, it was felt that this Act now needed to be repealed to allow these individuals to create a non-profit corporation.

The Chair: — Mr. Wotherspoon.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Chair, we certainly know that SASBO [Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials] and value the role that they've played for a long time within our province. We certainly value that role that they'll continue to play going forward to ensure that the Saskatchewan association of business officials are a viable and strong organization. We understand that this legislative change is important to them. So to add to that viability and allow for their continued strength and continued voice, we certainly support the legislative change.

Just a couple of questions, I guess, to the minister. Whom did you consult with on this Bill?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — The consultation process is with all partners in that respect, but it was primarily . . . the Act was in dealing with the school business officials. And this is fully supported by them, and no opposition has been put forward by either of the other stakeholders, whether they be LEADS, which is the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents, or the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation or the Saskatchewan School Boards Association.

So the consultation is primarily with SASBO, but all education stakeholders are fully aware of what this Act intends to do.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I believe you answered my second question. I'll just for the record verify again, have you received any negative feedback on this Bill? And if so, from whom?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — None known at this time.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Are there any costs incurred to date, now or into the future, as a result of this legislative change?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Wotherspoon, for that question. We're not aware of any costs that government will incur. We believe that there may be as much as \$3,000 savings overall as we move forward, but that's going to be, you know, in the future. Right at the moment, there are no cost implications.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The \$3,000 savings, does that reflect a funding that's received from the ministry right now that won't be received in the future? I'm not quite sure.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — No. What the current cost will be is that the government appoints a public representative to that board, and as a result now we won't require that person. So the expenditure of government is about \$3,000 to have that person on the SASBO board and as a result, now we will not have that cost for the future.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I have no further questions on this Bill.

The Chair: — Are there any other questions for the minister with regards to Bill No. 14? If not, clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 and 3 agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: An Act to Repeal The Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials Act, 2004. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Committee members, I would ask that a member move the motion that we report the Bill without amendment. Ms. Eagles.

Ms. Eagles has moved that we report the Bill without amendment. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Committee members, I believe that concludes our business with the Minister of Education. We have voted the two Bills. We will take a short recess, and when we resume we will consider Bill No. 26, An Act to amend The Midwifery Act, at which time we will have with us the Minister of Health and his officials. So we will take a short recess.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

Bill No. 26 — The Midwifery Amendment Act, 2008

Clause 1

The Chair: — I will call the committee back to order. We have with us the Minister of Health and his officials. We will now consider Bill No. 26, An Act to amend The Midwifery Act. Minister, I would ask you to introduce your officials, and if you have any opening comments about the Bill, I would invite you to do it at this time.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Seated to my left is Max Hendricks, assistant deputy minister. On my right-hand side is Donna Magnusson, executive director of primary health care services branch. Behind me, over my left shoulder, is Andy Churko, consultant, primary health services branch. And over my right shoulder is — I should have checked before I said that but yes — director of primary health services branch. So those are the officials that I have to assist me through any of the questioning today. I do have some opening statements, though, and I'll go through that now.

You will recall that last month the government proclaimed additional sections of The Midwifery Act. This made midwifery a provincially recognized and self-regulated profession. At the time, we indicated our intentions to amend The Midwifery Act to entrench provisions allowing midwives to provide postpartum care to mothers and their babies.

Right now midwives can provide postpartum care under a bylaw passed by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan and approved by the government. We certainly appreciate the co-operation of the college in passing this bylaw, but it was only intended as an interim measure. It expires at the end of this year.

Bill 26, The Midwifery Amendment Act, will further clarify the scope and practice of midwives and put the profession on a very sound footing as we move forward. Expectant mothers who seek the care of a midwife want the assurances that the midwife will be there before and during birth and in the important days after the baby has arrived.

This legislation clarifies that midwives have the authority to provide postpartum care to both mother and baby for approximately six weeks after birth. This will eliminate any uncertainties about whether postpartum care is within the scope of practice of midwives. This will make Saskatchewan's legislation consistent with the legislation in other provinces.

The legislation also clarifies that the role of the Saskatchewan College of Midwives is to regulate in the public interest and not to advocate for the profession. Finally the Bill clarifies the requirements for licensing.

Bill 26 is the last piece of the legislative framework that will allow midwives to make a full contribution to the provincial health care system. The legislation has the support of the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association, the Saskatchewan Medical Association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan, the Midwives Association of Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan College of Pharmacists, and the regional health authorities.

We expect midwives to be on the job in Regina and Saskatoon later this year. Working as employees of the regional health authority, service will be expanded throughout the province as more midwives are licensed. Midwives will apply for privileges to do the deliveries in the hospital or if applicable, may choose to do deliveries in the client's home. They are able to order tests and assessments, including ultrasounds. They are also able to prescribe and administer many common drugs that are used during pregnancy, birth, and throughout the postpartum period.

The Saskatchewan College of Midwives regulates the practice of midwives in Saskatchewan. It has the power to enact bylaws and manage the affairs and businesses of the profession.

Few moments in life are as wonderful as the moments when a mother holds her baby for the first time. Absolute joy mingles with deep exhaustion, and then there is relief when the parents are told the baby is healthy. Through their dedicated work, midwives will help to ensure that mothers and babies enjoy this special moment for years to come.

Thank you to my staff, and I will be pleased to take any questions at this time.

The Chair: — I recognize Ms. Junor.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. I just have a few questions, Minister, and thank you for your officials as well attending.

This Act of course has had a long history in Saskatchewan, and I've been part of it as it's moved its way through, wearing quite a few hats. So I understand that this is probably the last piece to fix this, so it will actually go. Some of it was proclaimed last year and some this year, and this amendment with the postpartum care was just inadvertently missed, I would assume.

And so what my question is, is how will the midwives fit into the system in Regina and Saskatoon? You said they're employees of the health authorities. Will they be members of SUN [Saskatchewan Union of Nurses]?

Ms. Magnusson: — At this point of time, the midwives will operate within the regional health authority. They will not be members of the union initially. We expect that one of the unions will be approaching them about membership down the road.

This is what happened in Manitoba. It took a year or two until they had sufficient numbers, and then they were approached, but they actually in Manitoba were part of health sciences union.

Ms. Junor: — I know SUN has a policy — at least they did — that has left it open for midwives to be in the union because they've classified them as allied personnel in one of their policies, so I'm assuming that's still there. And that was my question because I was wondering if they were going to be at a management level, or will they be in scope, in a union obviously, in one of the unions that are functioning in the health authorities. I also want to know where they're going to fit in the salary grid.

Mr. Hendricks: — The salary in Saskatchewan is based on the Manitoba rate structures, and it will be from 65,287 to \$83,973.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. And my next question is, where does the college actually reside — the college of midwifery? Does it have a specific home? Like is it a building somewhere? Where is it?

Ms. Magnusson: — No, actually it's the transitional council which is acting as the college at this point in time, meets monthly and they've been meeting actually at the Ministry of Health in one of our meeting rooms. But they don't have a physical building at this point in time.

Ms. Junor: — Can you tell me who's on the transitional council?

Ms. Magnusson: — Sure. Mr. Ray Joubert is the Chair and he's the registrar for the Saskatchewan College of Pharmacists; Sonya Duffee, she represents the Regina midwives association; Dr. Dennis Kendel from the registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons; Dr. George Carson, he's an obstetrician here in Regina; Linda Muzio from the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association; Sheila Achilles from Saskatoon Regional Health Authority; Gail Rosseker from the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Authority; Rosalind Lydiate from the Midwives Association of Saskatchewan; Darlene Arnault who represents the public; and Andy Churko from Saskatchewan Health.

Ms. Junor: — So does the transitional council have an end date in sight for when the college will be able to take over for itself?

Ms. Magnusson: — It's difficult at this time to know how long the transitional council will operate. They need to have sufficient members in order to support a college, and we will continue to support the transitional council as they move to that membership.

Ms. Junor: — And the education of midwives is still not in-province, right?

Ms. Magnusson: — No.

Ms. Junor: — Where is it most likely to occur?

Ms. Magnusson: — Currently most of the midwives that we're seeing come either from British Columbia or from Ontario.

Ms. Junor: — Are most of the midwives duly trained? So are they registered nurses first or is it straight midwifery?

Ms. Magnusson: — Most of the ones here are actually midwives, not the nurse-midwives. We do have a couple of nurse-midwives, one in Saskatoon that I'm aware of. But most of the ones that we're seeing now are coming through the four-year midwifery program.

Ms. Junor: — And where will they actually be in Regina and Saskatoon? Where are they going to be employed?

Ms. Magnusson: — In Regina they will be employed through the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region. They will have access and have office space in the Regina General Hospital, and they will have community clinic services. They're going to be linked in with Four Directions and a number of those community organizations.

Saskatoon will do a similar kind of an operation where they will have them linked in with the main, you know, office at the hospital. But they will also then be providing visiting services out to various community agencies. So part of that reason is that we want a good part of their practice to be directed at socially at-risk clients.

Ms. Junor: — Are they working out of West Winds in Saskatoon?

Ms. Magnusson: — They may work out of West Winds. They may also work out of the Westside Clinic. There's a number of different opportunities for them in Saskatoon.

Ms. Junor: — So they'll basically go where the regional health authority assigns them? Or how will their practice be determined?

Ms. Magnusson: — Largely it's through discussions with the agencies in terms of the needs that they have. For instance, I'll just use Westside Clinic as an example. They have a fairly high population of young mothers with both prenatal and postnatal care needs, and so they'll already have had discussions with the region and are sitting on their implementation committee. Same with West Winds.

Ms. Junor: — And their liability is assumed then by the regional health authority?

Ms. Magnusson: — Yes. They will have liability insurance through the regional health authority.

Ms. Junor: — As a first kind of level of . . .

Ms. Magnusson: — Yes.

Ms. Junor: — Because I know as a registered nurse you have a second level with the Canadian Nurses Protective Society. So they will just have the regional health authority as their insurer?

Ms. Magnusson: — Yes.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. And do they have to . . . they pay dues or anything to the college? Do they have any affiliation costs, or are they just represented because they're sort of transitional employees?

Ms. Magnusson: — At this point in time they're not paying dues, but it's expected that they will have to pay dues because like most professionals you have to eventually assume ownership for your college. But you know, the numbers aren't sufficient yet for them to actually do that.

Ms. Junor: — And to the numbers then, are we expecting how many to be in practice as this gets up and running in the two cities?

Ms. Magnusson: — We've actually planned for four to be initially starting in Regina, four in Saskatoon.

Ms. Junor: — Okay, I think that's all. I would like to say thank you. I'm sure that we're all happy to see this actually up and running. I know I certainly am. And I'm looking forward to seeing how women respond. I know that they . . . As the minister said, it's an experience. And I've just been through it twice in the last little while as a grandmother.

And I, as an obstetrical nurse, can certainly see the difference a midwife would have made actually, I think, in the whole process — in particular when you add the postpartum care on and some of the things that they're there to support one-on-one. I think it's an amazing opportunity and an option for women, and I think it'll be quite welcome. So thank you very much, and I'm ready to move this along.

The Chair: — Are there any other questions for the minister and his officials? Seeing none, clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 7 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: An Act to amend The Midwifery Act. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Agreed. May I have a member move that we report the Bill without amendment. Moved by Mr. Ottenbreit. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Committee members, that brings to close our agenda for this afternoon. We will take a recess, and when we resume at 6 o'clock, we will consider votes 37 and 169, Advanced Education, Employment and Labour. And later in the evening, we will also consider vote 36, Social Services. I now recess the committee till 6 o'clock this evening. Thank you.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

General Revenue Fund Advanced Education, Employment and Labour Vote 37

Subvote (AE01)

The Chair: — Good evening, committee members. I'll call the committee back to order. Before we proceed, we have a substitution — Mr. Harper for Ms. Junor.

This evening we will start the evening with considering the estimates for vote 37 and 169, Advanced Education, Employment and Labour. At this time I would ask the minister to introduce his officials, and if he has an opening statement, if he could proceed with that. Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, thank you. Legislative colleagues, let me begin by saying that along with my officials, I'm pleased to be here to answer questions regarding labour, employee and employer services division and the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board.

It's fitting that we're able to discuss issues of importance to labour relations in the province on this rather solemn occasion, the National Day of Mourning. While we are here to address questions of dollars and cents, it is vitally important that we remain mindful of our shared commitment and responsibility to healthier and safer workplaces for Saskatchewan people. Public servants in our ministry in partnership with workers and employers focus on these issues every day, and I hope our discussion reflects and reinforces our government's commitment to building a culture of safety in Saskatchewan.

I will take this opportunity to introduce some of the leading officials within our ministry. Once again Wynne Young, our deputy minister, is here; Mr. Mike Carr, associate deputy minister, labour, employee and employer services; Trina Vicq Fallows, acting executive director of corporate services, joins us.

And in a row just behind us, we have Gail Kruger, vice-president, prevention, finance and information technology of Workers' Compensation Board. Glennis Bihun will be joining us shortly, executive director of occupational health and safety. Glen McRorie, acting executive director of labour standards; Doug Forseth, executive director, labour relations

and mediation; Pat Faulconbridge, executive director, Status of Women office; Mary Ellen Wellsch, acting executive director, labour planning and policy. Margaret Halifax as well joins our officials, the office of the worker's advocate.

If I may, Mr. Chair, I'll just continue with my opening statement. Mr. Chair, this is an exciting time to live in our province and participate in our remarkable economic growth. The '08-09 budget reflects our government's vision for the future of Saskatchewan. We want to do everything we can to ensure a secure and prosperous future for everyone in this province. It is about being ready for growth, Mr. Chair — ready to become more competitive with other jurisdictions in Canada, ready to ensure that our growth is sustained, that the benefits of this growth are shared across our province, and that we're learning lessons from other jurisdictions.

As well, the budget reflects the key priority that we embrace a fair and balanced labour environment where the health and safety of Saskatchewan people, democracy, and freedom of information are key and fundamental elements of the new Saskatchewan. As we strive to realize our vision of the future and create this new era of fairness in our province, we recognize that we have talented, skilled, industrious, and innovative people who live and work in our province. People are our number one priority.

During the election the Saskatchewan Party government made a promise to secure the future for all people in our province, and that's what we mean to do within the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour with responsibility for Immigration and Workers' Compensation Board as well as other responsibilities. Worker health and safety; effective, practical labour relations; employment standards; timely, responsive, and effective services to Saskatchewan's labour relations community — together, my officials and I are making our best effort to ensure the quality of life for the people of this province. The efforts of the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board are also making a difference to Saskatchewan.

The '08-09 budget provides investments that enable us to fulfill our commitment to our fellow citizens. Advanced Education, Employment and Labour's total budget for '08-09 is \$761 million, an increase of 11 per cent over last year. Investments relating to labour, employee, and employer services include over \$7 million for occupational health and safety, for programs that support the development of healthy and safe workplaces through technical services, education and training, inspections, investigations, and enforcement of workplace safety standards. Almost two and a half million dollars for labour standards, for the enforcement of legislation related to minimum standards of employment as well as outreach programs on rights and responsibilities relating to those standards.

Almost a million dollars for the Labour Relations Board which rules on collective bargaining rights and adjudicates disputes between trade unions and employers. Over half a million dollars for labour relations and mediation services to provide conciliation and mediation services to employers, employees, and unions during the collective bargaining process and to promote co-operative labour management relations. Over \$600,000 for the office of the worker's advocate to assist and

provide advice to injured workers and their dependents who have a dispute with the Workers' Compensation Board.

I would like to take this opportunity to elaborate on some of our key priorities for this division as we move forward. Our new government has identified Saskatchewan's labour legislation as a key priority.

Going back to December '07, we put forward The Public Service Essential Services Act, that's Bill 5, and Bill 6, The Trade Union Amendment Act. The proposed legislation is about creating a path for economic growth but also is importantly creating a fair and balanced labour environment for the people of this province. I believe that this legislation is the best direction for Saskatchewan. It helps to create an effective labour relations environment again focusing on fairness and balance for the people, for families, and for communities.

Bill 5 enables negotiations between employers and unions that is really a balance between employers and workers to ensure public health and safety — they're not put at risk in the event of a labour dispute within Saskatchewan's public service. Bill 6 sets the stage for competitiveness with other Canadian jurisdictions and ensures democracy and freedom of expression within our workplaces.

Last year we campaigned on a platform of a fair and balanced labour environment, and these Bills help us to deliver on that promise. The '08-09 budget allocates a 9.7 per cent increase for the Labour Relations Board that includes support for the reporting and vote enhancements of proposed amendments to The Trade Union Act.

Labour relations and mediation will also receive an increase of 12.4 per cent, part of which will be allocated to respond to the increase in demand for services, critical services, vital services the division provides to workplaces in Saskatchewan.

Regarding occupational health and safety, our new government also realizes the importance of protecting the health and safety of Saskatchewan workers, and we fully support the work of the occupational health and safety division. Thirty-seven thousand work-related injuries occurred this past year. We must do much better than this.

Earlier today in the legislature members of this legislature took a moment to recognize the National Day of Mourning. As I had the honour of reading the names of 36 workers who died while on the job, I could not help but think about the families, the friends, their colleagues, and their fellow citizens that each one left behind. And I must say, Mr. Chair, it was a sobering experience. Each of these tragic fatalities add to the hundreds of deaths and thousands of serious injuries suffered every year by workers throughout Canada and well beyond. Our workers are extremely important to the well-being of Saskatchewan, and ensuring their health and safety is necessary to a secure and prosperous future.

The '08-09 budget includes an 11.6 per cent increase for occupational health and safety. Of this increase, 300,000 will go directly to funding programs that prevent work-related illness, injury, and death. Part of sustaining our economic momentum is ensuring that we have a talented, skilled, and experienced

workforce within Saskatchewan. We cannot afford to take the health and safety of our citizens for granted.

In the coming months we will work hard, together with employees and workers, to make sure that people go home safely at the end of each day. I believe it's about creating a culture of health and safety in all our workplaces.

Some of the increase will also go to the recently developed harassment prevention unit which focuses on educating workplaces and enforcing anti-harassment legislation. Harassment is clearly not acceptable, and our new government has designated \$350,000 for the operation of the harassment prevention unit this year.

Regarding the Workers' Compensation Board, the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board is also investing in the health and safety of workers through prevention. The WCB's [Workers' Compensation Board] '08 budget includes allocations for WorkSafe Saskatchewan, a partnership between the ministry and the WCB that is focused on making our workplaces safe and reducing the work injury rate in our province. Funds are also dedicated to the WorkSafe Saskatchewan marketing campaign, a campaign that aims to make workplace safety and prevention an important social cause in Saskatchewan.

And we'll have more to say in the coming days regarding a culture of safety within our province as being stressed and emphasized through the work of the WCB. New funds are in place to promote workplace health and safety programs through the certification developed by health and safety professionals with advice from the WCB and the occupational health and safety division within the ministry. This year the WCB will bring greater focus and attention to the prevention of work injuries among younger workers.

Our government's '08-09 budget provides the opportunity for new funding partnerships and the capacity to serve more people throughout our province. This budget clearly reflects the changing needs of the people of Saskatchewan and our new labour market realities. Mr. Chair, in closing, the ministry that I have the honour of serving has an important role when it comes to advanced education, employment, labour, and immigration. That is, enabling and assisting the residents of this province to realize their dreams and potential for the future.

The work of the WCB is also making advances to effect positive change in the lives of Saskatchewan's people. This budget will propel us forward in our goal to sustain our current economic momentum, enhance the quality of life for the people of Saskatchewan, ensure the rewards of this growth are shared right across our province, and as I've said previously, to learn from lessons of other jurisdictions.

Mr. Chair, my fellow committee members, thank you for the opportunity to join you this evening.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. I believe there's committee members who would have some questions. I recognize Ms. Higgins.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank

you, Mr. Minister, and to your officials for being here this evening to expand a little upon the Department of Labour. I've just got time for a few quick questions, but I guess first and foremost a little bit of information about the worker's advocate. Is the caseload up or down?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you for the question. What we've seen over the last five years, with an exception a couple of years ago, we've seen a relative constancy in number, and that is between 400 and 450 submissions. So we see considerable continuity in that.

Ms. Higgins: — So is the office able to keep up with the concerns that are being called in? I know there was a process gone through a couple of years ago where there was a backlog that was dealt with. Are we still having a backlog in the cases? I would assume the calls would be fairly consistent, the numbers, but are we able to deal with the calls that come in and assist people? That's the big question.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question. I'm happy to report that the oldest file waiting for assignment was received through the office on February 21, so we're keeping, of this year, we're keeping up quite nicely. Eighty-eight per cent of the total open files are active; 12 per cent of the total open files are waiting for assignment. So we're seeing certainly a very responsive team in place.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you. When we look at occupational health and safety spending, and the budget increased, I think you said, 11.6 per cent. Was the number you gave? Is that accurate? Oc health is still funded from WCB is it not? Was there anything from the GRF out of the labour budget that went into oc health, or is it still totally funded from WCB?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No. The model that was in place is the model that remains. It's funded by WCB.

Ms. Higgins: — So then formerly, I guess my big question is, is we always tried to keep a balance so that the GRF was putting the same amount of money into the Department of Labour as what WCB was. And I see we've got a real shift where you've got an overfunding from, and an increased funding from the Workers' Compensation Board but a pretty substantial drop when you add up all of the other units — whether it's mediation, labour standards, worker's advocate's office. You're just barely over \$5 million. So you've kind of shifted the balance somewhat.

Can you tell how much money would have been in central management in the Department of Labour last year, in the former Department of Labour?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — As there's been change of government, we're just simply going through some expenditures from the last government.

Ms. Higgins: — Well actually, Mr. Chair, if you could get the information to me it would be helpful. There's no point wasting time now in committee. You know, you can get together the information and we don't need to figure it all out here if there needs to be figuring done.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — If I may, I will respond with a bit of an overview and then get the deputy minister before we proceed to the next question. With the creation of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour with other responsibilities, what we've seen is a consolidation of previously more disparate ministries.

So what we've seen is we've seen efficiencies and resources maximized. For example, obviously, we have one deputy's office. We have one communications shop. We have one corporate services group and increasingly integrated policy group. So some of the efficiencies and the way that we're maximizing some of these resources helps to account for this shift that you've identified. I'll ask the deputy to comment further.

Ms. Young: — Thank you. There's just one number we're waiting for but we will get that to you. But I can tell you that the previous department's deputies and finance admin area was about \$3 million and that's now in the amalgamated corporate services or the amalgamated deputy's office. And the policy shop was about point eight and that's now in the single policy shop. The communications is the one we're just waiting on, but we will get that to you.

Ms. Higgins: — That's helpful. So once you have the numbers, if you can pass them along that would be appreciated.

Another area that I wanted to touch on was the Status of Women office, if the direction remains the same, and where you in the new government will be focusing for women's issues in the province of Saskatchewan and supporting women in the province of Saskatchewan in equity. Any ideas from you? I know you're fairly thoughtful in your comments — fairly lengthy in your comments — so I'm sure you've given this some thought.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Indeed we have, actually.

Ms. Higgins: — Good.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I certainly do appreciate the question and it's an area of interest and an area of commitment for our government. On a personal basis I've been part of international development initiatives relating to equity issues and so I come at this from at least some modest experience, that if those experiences have helped to inform some of the earlier actions that we've taken.

I'm happy to reiterate that what we see is continuing support in this area. We see continuity, there is an active interest. In fact there's a direct report from the office up into the deputy minister's office, and I'll have our deputy minister speak a little bit about that shift. What we're seeing is, during the early stages of our government, is obviously some initial thought being given, and as we approach the summer some outreach and engagement planned, to actually get out and engage some community stakeholders on this issue. For more of the details, I'll actually ask our deputy to expand on that.

Ms. Young: — Probably just to say that in fact we have been asked to look at mechanisms within government. So it is, how are we looking at gender issues? And do we need to renew or

refresh how we are looking at them across all ministries — looking at the advisory committee and revitalizing the advisory committee so that all ministries have both a stake and a voice in women's issues? And also internally looking at the research gap that we still have. We do believe we have some research gaps around First Nations and Métis women and also immigrant women. So we have some internal work to do.

And then beyond that, as the minister has said, the strategic plan, the women's strategic plan, was fulfilled in 2007. And so we are looking forward to a fulsome communication process as we put a new plan into place. And we're not sure what exactly what time we're going out, but it'll be over the next few months that we begin.

Ms. Higgins: — So then the outlook is, or as you look to the future then, you're looking at as much of an internal process. I know the Status of Women office has had a number of aspects to it over the last decade — I think one of them focusing on policy and research, which many outside stakeholders valued — later looking more internally with policy advisers and how government actually dealt with equity and issues that affected women.

So when you talk about continuity, I'm not sure which you mean. Do you mean carry on with policy advisers — which was the latest direction of the Status of Women office, was to have policy advisers in each of the Crowns and departments that also worked towards ensuring that women's issues and issues of equity were addressed on the ground floor of policy decisions before waiting until after the fact of development and having to go back and redesign and re-address some of the issues that maybe had been missed.

So I'm not sure if you're looking at more going the external research broader or if you're still continuing to look at . . . I'm not sure what you meant by the continuity.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — My suggestion as far as the approach would be a holistic approach, and that is the first request was to get down and have a refined focus and to contemplate elements of the changing Saskatchewan. And the next piece is going to be the stakeholder consultation that occurs. And so as I say, I would phrase it there's a holistic approach on a go-forward basis, and part one has been an internal analysis and part two is now the engagement of external stakeholders that would be forthcoming.

Ms. Higgins: — So for a holistic approach, I would almost think that the budget of just over \$400,000 which has been reduced 50,000 in supply and other payments — and an increase of 17,000 in wages which I would assume would just keep up with agreements that were in place or steps, increments, within the wage scale — but pulling 50,000, does that shift somewhere else and does the Status of Women have access, the office have access to that?

Is it services that may be delivered through communications or printing internally in a larger department? That's what I'm looking for. Or is it gone totally? And is there an expectation that 418 is it?

It's pretty hard to deal holistically with an issue as large as

equity in a province as varied as Saskatchewan on a budget that's been reduced.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The decrease that you make reference to actually reflects . . . It was a one-time funding initiative to the office in '07-08 regarding a northern women's forum. And that forum was recently held. It was hosted in part by our deputy minister. It was held in Prince Albert. And so that was one-time funding.

Obviously what we're seeing as well is increasing work at the policy level, and that is much more integrated across the ministry to ensure that as we address, work to address Saskatchewan's talent challenge, the effect on policy or the enrichment policy is taking place outside of perhaps streams that were considered in the past.

Wynne, maybe you can speak a little bit about the recent northern forum.

Ms. Young: — Right, I can. You give me too much credit. Pat Faulconbridge actually put together and managed the northern women's forum. It was a two-day forum and that took place on March 13 and 14. And out of that forum came sort of broad, four broad priorities and some potential action steps underneath each of those priorities. And it will be our job to put them together and work with the northern women's group to take this forward.

It was quite a powerful gathering and it was really, it was really very good to be there to understand some of the issues that the northern women are going through and are triumphing on.

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Minister, I mean status of women is always going to be a topic and there are many that will say that there needs to be a better investment in women and especially now when Saskatchewan has one of the highest attachments of women to the workforce, especially women with young children. So it's even more important that women and women's issues, which really are community and family issues, need to be integrated into the basic policy for sure of government but even beyond.

Have you given much consideration to the issue of pay equity and the pay equity policy framework that's been in place for a number of years and has done a reassessment on government pay equity? Have you given any consideration to expanding pay equity to the public sector . . . private sector, I guess, private sector?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question. Obviously under the previous government, Saskatchewan's public service had at least had pay equity implemented within elements of it. It's an issue that certainly has come up. We're giving it some consideration. But on this instance, again there's great issue of continuity from the last government.

Ms. Higgins: — So you'll maintain the pay equity policy framework within the public service, but you're not considering expanding pay equity, or pay equity legislation, in the province of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, I think that's accurate at this time.

Ms. Higgins: — Okay, I'll pass it over to my colleague.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. I have a couple of areas that I want to talk about. I'd be interested, Minister, in knowing precisely what you plan on doing when it comes to informing young people of their rights and obligations under The Labour Standards Act. I'm particularly interested in your previous comments about younger workers.

And also if you could tell me, of the names that you read into the legislature, into *Hansard* today, how many of those people were under the age of 25?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'll start with the second question first. We'll just confirm those numbers. One of the officials, Ms. Bihun, along with myself, the deputy minister, and the ADM [associate deputy minister] and a few others were actually just down at city hall for this National Day of Mourning. So she'll be here shortly and we'll be able to confirm the numbers.

But on the first question, and I appreciate the first question, it was an issue that came up during a recent federal-provincial conference in Quebec City of Labour ministers. And certainly there are some best practices and in my opinion probably Quebec is taking a leadership role in this and that is using new and enhanced media opportunities, especially electronic options. They're actually doing a pretty remarkable job of, of getting messages of empowerment, workplace safety, down into younger workers.

Certainly I've asked our colleagues to have a look at what Quebec's doing. Quebec's not working in isolation. There are a variety of other jurisdictions that are beginning to explore, I would call them new, innovative communication technologies and techniques that allow for, if you would like, the very efficient use of resources. So that's the context within which I take your question. And there is some work. Certainly we're attentive to what Quebec is doing.

Regarding the specific The Labour Standards Act, and we'll have some additional comment here shortly, but what we can see is within some of our advanced educational institutions, we're seeing some progress there. There's certainly more that needs to be done.

And importantly we're seeing some sectoral work under way and certainly in areas of retail, restaurant, and now under construction, or within this, if you want, nascent category is the construction sector. So we're seeing some, again, elements of continuity and change; we're seeing obvious elements of continuity but we are expanding our sectoral focus.

And part of that from where we sit makes some considerable sense given the current state of the Saskatchewan economy and, for example, the uptake of young workers within the construction sectors. So again elements of continuity and change. I think there's certainly some best practices out there.

Again, Quebec is using electronic medium. Importantly they're actually . . . they're taking new technologies and techniques and drafting them into, if you want, almost pure dialogues and so messages are being conveyed through other young people about rights and responsibilities in the workplace.

So I appreciate the question and certainly there's . . . As we're here on a day such as today, we all know there's a lot more work to be done. But I'm optimistic that certainly given the sharing of ideas across Canadian jurisdictions, there's progress to be made on that.

Ms. Atkinson: — So if a young person was in a workplace and they believed that what they were being asked to do was not safe and they refused to do that work, what's your understanding of the rights that they have under our legislation?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Certainly again I appreciate the question. As a young man I began working when I was 14 in a lumber yard, and these questions arrived very early on. They're not abstractions at all. There are three essential rights — the right to be informed, obviously; the right to know, that is about some of the associated risks; and obviously the right to refuse.

Ms. Atkinson: — I think a lot of young people don't know that they have the right to refuse to do unsafe work. And as a result of not knowing, they perform and work, I'm certainly not saying everywhere, but there are some young people that perform work that's not safe.

And it's my view that particularly for young men we have to tell them of their rights and obligations obviously, but also they have the right to refuse unsafe work. Because I think if you look at what's coming forward through workers' comp, this is my sense, is that we have more and more particularly young men that are coming in from industry with significant injuries that will impact them for the rest of their lives.

And I guess I'm curious to know, Minister, whether you believe it might be a problem with our expanding economy — and it is expanding dramatically — and what we might, we as government, do to ensure that these young people protect themselves as much as humanly possible from injury or death. Because we know that workplace injury can also lead to a very significant alteration of your life.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question. No, I think there's an important point that you make, and it's how do you at once educate and empower? Part of that relates to the expanding economy and part of it is just within any economic circumstance or condition.

And so the ready for work program that we have, obviously it has a focus on advanced educational institutions. There's some work being done at the high school level and that's appropriate. There's more work that needs to be done. And I take your point fully. And I would say not simply for young men, but increasingly for both young men and women as they are being invited increasingly to participate in our economy.

A couple of terms that we've come out with initially is building a culture of safety. And that culture of safety brings with it another concept and that is of shared responsibility. And how do we begin to take that responsibility, not just within government, but especially when we're looking at young people for employers to turn . . . And again, I think, certainly anecdotally what I've seen and what I've been impressed with, the Alberta government has some movement on this area, but it really is the Quebec government that has come out with a very

aggressive communications platform. The medium of the communications certainly is targeted, and a lot of it is Internet-based, so it's not TV-based and it's not billboard-based — it's Internet-based. And it focuses almost exclusively on that younger generation with a message that's consistent.

So I agree. I think that's one of the challenges of again not just sustaining our growth but making sure the benefits are shared.

Ms. Atkinson: — So one of the ways that we have in the province to ensure that there is some safety in the workplace is through occupational health and safety committees and then obviously inspections. And it appears as though . . . And it's difficult to understand the way these estimates have been set up. But I'm interested in knowing how many people you had last year in labour standards, how many full-time equivalents, how many you have this year. How many full-time equivalents you had last year for occupational health and safety and how many you have this year.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'll get those figures for you. Within occupational health and safety we see an equivalent of one full-time position and within labour standards we see the status quo.

Ms. Atkinson: — So there's one additional full-time position in OH [occupational health] . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Okay.

So I guess I ask this question: if it is clear that our workforce is growing and it's grown. I mean it grew last year and we anticipate that it will grow again this year. And given that we have more people working in the province — and we have more people certainly working in the construction industry and those sectors where we do see some injuries, workplace injuries — I'm just wondering if you believe that one full-time equivalent, an increase in one full-time equivalent to do inspections, particularly in OH&S [occupational health and safety], is appropriate enough.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question.

Again I appreciate the question. The premise here, as I've understood, it is clear that the workforce is growing, there's no doubt about that. We have empirical evidence. We see an increase in full-time jobs of 14,000, March over March. So we certainly see real and sustained growth in Saskatchewan.

The premise regarding an automatic connection or necessary connection between more people and performance outputs, I guess what we're looking at is enhanced ways of service delivery. And we're looking at that. I guess the next piece — and I'll go through some of these — what we've seen over the last several years, actually rate reductions if we go to the WCB. And so in some sectors what we're seeing is increased activity is actually being accompanied by increased attentiveness to occupational health and safety concerns. And so it's not necessary to see a connection between economic growth and accidents. And that's our aim.

Your point being, here's an indicator. There are several other indicators. And as I say, a service delivery model that we've, you know, we're certainly we're moving towards and we're putting in place, we think is going help to address this.

Obviously we're monitoring it very, very closely.

So again, we as well, we see — and I'll have Mike Carr speak to this a little bit — some orders and levels of complaints are actually on the decline as well. Now the picture is, again, it's dynamic. In large part the Saskatchewan economy is dynamic. We're monitoring this very, very closely. And I can get into more details on some of the shifts that we've seen within specific sectors, but an example might be, for example, mining.

We've seen increased mining activity and we see the stakeholders, both employer and employee, if you want, rise to that challenge. And so obviously . . .

Ms. Atkinson: — . . . construction industry, can you say the same thing for the construction industry — way more activity; fewer accidents and fewer injuries?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well what we've seen is, if I've got this correctly, from over the last five years we have seen that . . .

Ms. Atkinson: — Last year. I'm interested in last year.

The Chair: — Order, order. Ms. Atkinson, could you allow the minister to complete his comments and then ask your questions, please.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — In the construction trades we have the reduction, specific reduction of point four per cent over the last year.

Ms. Atkinson: — Over the last year?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Ms. Atkinson: — So is that '07-08 over '06-07? Or are you talking about '06-07 over '05-06?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Actually it's listed here. This has been tabled within the legislature. It's on page 17, and what it does is offer a comparative snapshot, '03 to '07. So you can see elements of continuity. And these are calendar years.

Ms. Atkinson: — In calendar years?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. So in terms of '07, so this is for '07, you're saying there was a point four per cent reduction over '06.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, that's what I'm saying.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. Okay, thank you. So your view is that just because we have more increased activity doesn't mean that we may necessarily have more accidents and injuries, and that that will be one factor but that's not going to be the only factor.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think it's fair to say that there are a number of variables that go into workplace safety, and I think what we're seeing is — you know, it's not level as I've said; it's uneven across Saskatchewan but — within specific sectors what we're seeing both employers and employees, unions, and

other stakeholders actually taking the issue of workplace safety very seriously. I think you and I would obviously be of a shared opinion — the ideal is that those numbers continue to go down as we move forward.

As I say, we're monitoring this very closely. And within the coming days we're going to see — I need to be careful here because there'll be a public announcement — but there will be a new initiative come forward regarding workplace safety within the next couple of weeks actually.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. You'll probably know that in many of the sectors that we're talking about there's not — I'm thinking particularly of the construction sector, the trucking sector — there's very little unionization. So when we talk about workplace safety, there are many workers in those sectors that do not have a union to represent them.

But I want to move on to another issue in terms of workplace safety, and that has to do with smoking in the workplace. And as you'll know, the occupational health and safety review recommended that all smoking in workplaces be banned. And we all as legislators just met with the Canadian Cancer Society, and they asked that we as legislators ban smoking in the workplace. I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on this?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you for the . . . I will go back to the remarks before the question just to, I think, to reinforce an important point. That is, whether unionized or non-unionized, workplaces have obviously again that shared responsibility of workplace safety. And so, you know, occupational health and safety committees, they're in place, you know, obviously in a formalized sense where the setting has 10 or more employees in place, and they're responsible for having an officer in place for settings with under 10 employees.

So, you know, I don't want to have the impression that there's a monopoly to be held on workplace safety. I think everyone, unionized, non-unionized, I think workers and employers, government and other community-based stakeholders including educational institutions, again there is this notion of shared responsibility.

On your specific question regarding smoking in the workplace, there were 200 recommendations from the occupational health and safety review that came forward. This one certainly came to the surface very, very quickly. Obviously Saskatchewan in the mid-'90s took on a leadership role across Canada as far as dealing with some elements, legislative elements of smoking. This was a piece, a peculiar piece that wasn't acted upon. Now Saskatchewan finds itself as one of the last provinces to move on that. Again a peculiarity from the previous government. It was one of the pieces that I turned and said, this issue has specific, obviously, out beyond workplace safety. This has a community safety element to it.

So what we did is we engaged our caucus and our Chair tonight — I want to give full credit — to help to guide our caucus work on that initiative. At the same time we ran down a second track and that was into the ministry. And we said we would like to have broader stakeholder consultation and input from across Saskatchewan. That's going on not quite literally as we speak this evening; hopefully people are at home with their families.

But it is going on, on a regular basis. We're getting feedback. And actually I was just given an update on that feedback from across the community today. I'll be engaging some stakeholders directly on this issue. And I anticipate, and I think I said this publicly, I anticipate that probably within the next four to six weeks I'll have a pretty definite position to announce publicly.

Right now we are consulting with community stakeholders. It was one of the items that did come to the fore that, of those 200 recommendations. And well, I just . . . Certainly based on the feedback that we're getting, the information we're receiving is very, very helpful.

Ms. Atkinson: — . . . in four to five weeks that you will have an announcement on smoking in the workplace? Or a policy announcement?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We may. We may. We may have an announcement.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. Okay, thank you, Mr. Minister. The other area of workplace safety is the whole area of bullying and harassment. And Saskatchewan is the second jurisdiction in Canada to protect workers against bullying, or harassment that goes outside of what's commonly known as the human rights terms — sexual orientation, marriage, gender, religion, and so on. And I heard you say earlier that you have allocated \$450,000 — I think I heard \$450,000 — for the unit.

I'm wondering if the unit is staffed yet, whether work has been done with employers on the whole issue of workplace harassment that goes beyond the human rights items. And where the state of the nation is when it comes to that unit. Thanks.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Before I get into some of the details of this, the number offered was \$350,000. And I think when you're making reference to some of the international accords, we could summarize those within the Canadian context as far as fundamental freedoms.

So what we have is we have three staff, three full-time staff in place. What we have as well, we have public education systems that began in the middle of March — 15 sessions are scheduled, and we anticipate that those will include about 800 people. Again that's a ballpark figure. So we're seeing some early outreach and engagement on this.

Certainly the element to this that's important . . . And again the issue came up in Quebec City at the federal-provincial ministers' meeting earlier this year and this is obviously a significant issue and from there, there was certainly a consensus. The overwhelming evidence is that, you know, the challenges within the workplace are really within the workplace. They're often not from outsiders. Although we hear about some of those sensational stories, it's actually the culture within the workplace.

So again we're moving forward. There's a great degree of continuity on this. We're monitoring it closely. We're satisfied with the work that's under way and as I say, the outreach and engagement piece is important.

And it's also important, and I'll have the deputy speak to this, that we're beginning to see some cultural change within some workplace. Obviously again the pattern's uneven but it is affecting behaviour so, Wynne.

Ms. Young: — I'm just going to reach for the numbers, if I can.

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Chair, while they're reaching, if I could also know whether or not a special adjudicator has been appointed? How many people have made complaints to the unit? How many complaints have been investigated, and how many complaints have been mediated? And how many have gone to the special adjudicator?

Ms. Young: — We will get those numbers for you. But just to fill out the numbers, as we all know the harassment, it is very much important that we have the education and prevention in place. From December until April, we have had 17 presentations with about 800 people in place. From April to June, we have 13 more presentations.

So we are pushing hard on the prevention front because ideally that's what we want to do. In terms of the other side of it, either inquiries or investigations, we do have the numbers to get you right now.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, thank you.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — For '07-08, 57 harassment investigations, 40 of these coming in the last quarter. To date — obviously we're to the end of the third quarter we can speak to — the number was 343. Significantly none of these cases for this year have been appealed. And so the process, again there we're monitoring it very closely; but so far there seems to be acceptance as far as the process that's in place.

Ms. Atkinson: — So there have been 343 complaints? As I understand it, 57 investigations?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Or inquiries, sorry.

Ms. Atkinson: — Inquiries? Okay.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The 57 number, '07-08, that's the full year. And then what we're seeing . . . We can speak to the inquiries up to the third quarter of this year and that is 343. And there have been no appeals.

Ms. Atkinson: — I think I'm having . . . When you say the third quarter, are you talking about up to the end of December 2007? Yes? Okay. Good. And just so I'm clear, 343 inquiries up until the end of December of '07, 57 investigations up until now. Or is this up until December?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Just given the technical nature of your questions we're just going to get the associate deputy minister to respond.

Mr. Carr: — Thank you, Minister. You are correct that there have been 343 inquiries, and that was up until the end of the third quarter, which was December 31. In the year '07-08 which ended March 31, there were 57 investigations. And 40 of those came in the fourth quarter, which would be January 1 to

December 31.

Ms. Atkinson: — Right. Well given that we passed the legislation less than a year ago, it looks as though this is a service that is going to be used by the public. And not to provide any private information, but of the 57 investigations, were any of them mediated? Did they go to the special adjudicator? How were they resolved?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think in part because of the specialized training that's been offered none have gone to a special adjudicator. So the officers are actually working through these issues — at least so far. Again we'll monitor it closely, but so far with some significant degree of success.

Ms. Atkinson: — So of the 57, are you able to indicate how many of those 57 were mediated, found not to be what would be called harassment under the legislation? Do you have any . . . Once again, not to provide any private information, but just generally, what are we looking at in terms of how these issues were resolved?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, this is again a tribute to the success of the officials. Because they were able to mediate success, essentially what we have is the number 57 and as the cases were resolved . . . What I was looking for was a categorization and the answer is they were resolved really before they were categorized.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, thank you. Minister, I just want to go back to occupational health and safety. And I think you said it earlier in that we're going to see more First Nations people in the workplace and we're going to see more immigrants in the workplace. And you made the point that of course all workplaces over 10 should have an occupational health and safety committee. And if they're under 10 they should have some, you know, some representative. Can you tell me how many occupational health and safety inspections, where our officers were out in '07-08 doing inspections to determine whether workplaces were meeting their requirements?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'll get you those. But if I could understand the question, the connection as you see it as we have newcomers, First Nation and Métis greater participation.

Ms. Atkinson: — And young people.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Okay. So a more inclusive workforce.

Ms. Atkinson: — We have more people coming into the workforce. We have a younger workforce. Older workers are being replaced with younger people, First Nations people, and also newcomers, immigrants. And so the workforce is being transformed, in essence. And I guess I'm curious to know how many inspections we had in '07-08.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Great, thank you. For the committee tonight a preliminary number — because of the year end of March 31, there'll be likely some refinement to it — but 3,658 over the last year.

Ms. Atkinson: — So, Minister, once you have a confirmed number would you be able to let the committee know? Perfect.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — And we'll do that, if appropriate, through the Chair.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. Thank you very much. I think I've concluded my questions for this evening, so I'll turn it over to my colleague, Mr. Forbes.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and good evening to all the officials. I appreciate the questions so far and I have several. But I just want to start with just a little clarity around the harassment unit. Is there a special adjudicator hired now?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'll actually have Wynne Young, our deputy minister, spell out what this process is.

Ms. Young: — We do actually have a process under way to identify two special adjudicators. We have taken a little bit different approach. And rather than hire two full-time because we're not seeing the business, if you will, which is a very good thing, and so what we're trying to do is identify two part-time individuals that will be special adjudicators and we will use them on a per diem basis going forward. And we're in that process right now.

Mr. Forbes: — A retainer type of process.

Ms. Young: — I'm not sure if there's a retainer or if it will just be a per diem. I don't know the details but it won't be a full-time occupied position.

Mr. Forbes: — That's an interesting concept. And we'll have to think about that because I know we have adjudicators and other mediators. We have a list of . . . or you have a list you go through. And I think the intention, especially in this case, is to have someone with very specialized skills. So if the ministry can do that, that would be a very good thing because it is good. It's no point having somebody sitting around not working. But you do have to be looking for someone with a specialized skill set here and that's hugely important.

I just have some very quick questions. And of course there's been a transition in government as we go forward and so we've been asking these questions. How many employees have been terminated since November 21 in the, what was formally the Department of Labour and now a branch? How many employees were terminated and what areas would they come out of?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I certainly appreciate the question. There has been obviously a transition and I'll have again Wynne Young speak to the details of that transition.

Ms. Young: — Actually we took this question the first time we were in estimates and when I answered it was for the whole of the ministry. I'm pleased to answer again, but . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Oh okay. Well I'm curious about the labour area specifically.

Ms. Young: — Oh okay. There were terminations that I was

involved with. There were seven terminations; six of them were in the former Department of Labour.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Now you could identify this or if you want to give me the information in written form, what I'm curious about is how fully staffed the department or the labour branch is right now. In the worker's advocate, the OHS [occupational health and safety] area, the Labour Relations Board, how many positions are and are you fully staffed right now? And that would be for every section.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Wynne will give you a more detailed highlight. I would say we're probably not more than about a handful and most of those are just in the midst of being filled, but Wynne can give you a breakdown.

Ms. Young: — All of the branches, it's about one that they are off. Occupational health and safety is now recruiting so it has a few more vacancies, but . . . either actively recruiting or they have just been recruited but have not yet started. So I will get the specific numbers as of today because it does change.

Mr. Forbes: — Sure, okay. I'm looking at page 171 where we talk about the FTE [full-time equivalent] restatement and that type of thing, so . . . and I know it's a challenging area. It is a very challenging area to find qualified people in these spaces, but it's a very important question that as we go forward in this very strong economy to have people in those areas.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I agree with that and I think you'll join me in, the quality around the table here is very high . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Very much, yes.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — As far as the officials that have been with us and have recently joined us.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, good. Yes, I want to go back to some of the questions. My colleague had asked several questions about occupational health and safety, and this is a very, very important one. Today of course being the day of mourning — and the minister made some very good remarks today that are very important — can you provide an analysis of what deaths were caused by in the previous year? You don't have to give it orally but, you know, a written statement would be very good.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — For the benefit of those who may be viewing and it may be worth actually reading into the record if that would be all right. I agree, it's a very . . . it's a solemn day.

Motor vehicle accidents, there were eight in the '07-08 year. A seven-year average, that would be seven, so this is one above average. Cancer relating to asbestos, there were 10 which is four higher than the seven-year average. Cancer through exposure, the number was four and that seven-year average, one. Heart disease or heart attack, seven, and that would be a seven-year average of two, so that number is up. An aircraft accident, one which is about on par with the seven-year average. Fatality through being crushed, one which is just below the seven-year average. A fall, one, consistent with the seven-year average. Struck by falling object, two, consistent with the seven-year average. Those electrocuted, three, just two above the seven-year average. And that provides us with the

number 36 for whom were killed out of province.

These numbers, as you know, come from the WCB, and so it provides a snapshot in time. And I know you share with me, and I appreciate all the work that you've done previously, obviously a very solemn day — a solemn day, a day of reflection.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you for that. That is true because, you know, as you read the names or you get your reports, it's a huge impact in some . . . You know, the work that we have to do is huge. And one that I'm looking for good results is around the falls because in construction that's a huge area, and I know that was one area where we're trying to move forward in.

And the cancers are just one that . . . and we'll see that number, unfortunately, probably will go up before it goes down again, and so that's a big, big one. It was alluded to earlier around the smoking piece, so I hope that comes out.

But I know there was a phase 3 of the occupational health and safety, and I'm curious to know where that is at right now. And one of the key pieces of that was workplace hazard assessment. So where is that?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thanks for the question.

Obviously the phase 3 initiatives relate to regulations as they pertain to hazards. There's a level of complexity. This is certainly under review. It is obviously going to provide an opportunity and obligation to get out and consult with various stakeholders. And there may be some other avenues to actually get some of the sectoral associations to do some of this work. I'll actually turn it over to Mike Carr to actually elaborate a little bit on some of that complexity and some of the challenges around this.

Mr. Carr: — Thank you, Minister. There are, as you will know, some very significant issues around trying to create an opportunity for sharing of information around hazard identification and response. And the challenge continues to be trying to find a mechanism that will allow those employers that lack the infrastructure and the support to do that, to have some venue under which they could seek advice and seek assistance in that undertaking. And we're trying to get our arms around how that might occur.

It's for that reason that we're firmly committed to the idea of going out and consulting stakeholders very broadly on all of those phase 3 activities so that we can make sure we can identify two things — one a best practice and the second a delivery mechanism that will allow that to in fact be exercised and brought forward. So we're not really sure the timing of that, but it's a fairly significant undertaking as you know.

Mr. Forbes: — For sure, because the work hazard assessment itself, that one requirement, is significant for every workplace. Many have it in place already, but it's the ones that don't that have the issue. Will you be utilizing the occupational health and safety committee? You know it's made up of both business and labour. That report they brought forward last time was huge, so it must almost be time for them to start their next report. So I don't know when it is. It might be next year. I'm not sure.

When is it? When do they start? And will you be using that group?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — It is next year. There were 200 recommendations that they brought forward. We're going through them. That's where the smoking initiative came up. What we said is, here's one that has a pretty significant impact. It's not to undervalue some of the other pieces, but it's to turn and say on that one we wanted to move forward. So yes, it is next year. And yes, the insights provided right across the policy community, you know, and the work that's being done — employers and from organized labour as well as other stakeholders — I mean there are insights to be gained and to be appreciated from every source.

Mr. Forbes: — Well they are a very thorough group, and they'll do their work. The other question I have regarding some of the regulations that had come into force . . . And actually the Health minister had made a, it would almost be a re-announcement. But he re-announced the lifts in hospitals in February. And I'm curious to know how that is going, and he seemed to have been able to provide more information. That's a very significant area because we know in the health sector back injuries are a big part. And so this is a very important area to move forward in. How is that going? And if you can provide an update, much appreciated.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question. And you're right; it's a significant area. Thank you for the question. There's an element here obviously of significant continuity — an investment that you're aware of, over \$30 million, and an impressive investment from the last government.

This initiative has a time frame of November '08, and so what we're seeing on a go-forward basis is continuing dialogue about, if you want, the most effective avenues and mechanisms that will actually help to address some of these key occupational health and safety concerns, especially as it relates to lifting and shifting within the health care setting.

Mr. Forbes: — So are you saying by November 8 we should be seeing what kind of results? What will we be seeing by then?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'll just confirm that. That's a regulatory deadline.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — And then from there on a go-forward basis we'll begin to see those specific investments.

Mr. Forbes: — Investments in the beds and all of that will be taking place over the winter? Or they should be in place by November?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, it's the Minister of Health that obviously is the lead on this. What I can say is the regulatory deadline is November, and then the rollout will be overseen by the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. But I'm just wondering, and it's interesting because we have had our first charge against a health region last spring and so when you say regulation . . . I maybe

should know this; I'm not sure. But I just want to be clear on this because I was asked to ask this question: when will the actual hardware, the beds be expected to be in the hospitals?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We'll, you know, we'll have to defer that question.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Obviously we'll have to consult with our colleagues in the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Forbes: — That would be great. Okay. And so the regulation comes in force on November 1.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Good. Thanks. Okay.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — It may not be . . . it's within November '08.

Mr. Forbes: — Oh, okay.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sorry, November 20 is the actual date.

Mr. Forbes: — Oh, okay. Okay. My next question goes to another major report — and I saw you had this in the House the other day — the committee of review.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — It's a fairly thick book. I'm just curious what the plans are of the minister in terms of implementing this and bringing it forward.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you. As it relates to the WCB, if I'm not mistaken, there were 69 recommendations included within it. It is a very significant report. We're just going to bring the vice-president from the WCB up.

There was a bit of a delay on this one, and it went about one year over what was intended. It was struck in '06, and you'll be familiar with that. Certainly the WCB has taken steps already to act on nearly 30 of the recommendations. Those are mostly administrative, so I certainly don't want to leave an impression that we've been passive on this.

The others are under review. Part of the delay is that — and I think, again, this is an area of continuity — in part because of the election. If I'm not mistaken, during the summer of '07 there was an invitation from the past government to offer stakeholders additional opportunity to provide feedback. We were still receiving stakeholder feedback into '08. And so that's been helpful, but what that's done . . . Just, again, given the scope, 69 recommendations, we are acting, so I want to make sure that it's not sitting on the shelf. Nearly 30 of those administratively the WCB has taken up, and the others are still under review based on stakeholder feedback. Again, well into January we were still getting some of that feedback. Again, part of it being the disruption from the '07 election. And you saw a limit to that as well.

Mr. Forbes: — I'm very aware of that, and it's a tough one because you want to make sure. There are some very significant ones. I'm going to ask you about some and your thoughts or specific plans. Because I know when there are 69, some, like you say, are administrative, but some are pretty fundamental and some big, big shifts.

And one that I know we wrestled with — and it would be interesting to see because I think this is one that has to be resolved — and that's the maximum wage rate. At some point we're going to have to . . . this government, this province, is going to have to bite the bullet and deal with that, deal with the indexation of that. And that's recommendation 3 and 4. And I'm curious to know what your thoughts are on that in terms of it being a priority. I understand this may have to be legislation, so it's not one that you can do outside of that. And so what are your thoughts around that?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. These maximum rates, there isn't — again, because it's under review — there isn't a definitive answer. Certainly there's a balance to be had between benefits but also working within a framework of fiscal and financial stability that I know you would have considered as well. That being said, there are also a number of options within that fiscal framework.

So it's still under consideration. It's certainly one that has our attention and we're still working on, but I think we've identified what that balance, you know, the key element here — fiscal prudence and benefits.

Mr. Forbes: — Well it's one that I would really encourage you and glad to hear that there are options being considered because this is the opportunity we have now to resolve this issue. And it's like many other things, that if things don't work out and you let it go, then it's hard to get it at a fair rate. And of course the people who are hurt are really hurting then.

A couple of other ones that I think are very important, one is about increasing the board size. They made a recommendation to increase the board membership, and of course, you know, actually you can do that as a minister and actually with cabinet approval. You don't need to change the legislation. Have you considered that?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think again there's an element of continuity here. If I'm not mistaken, the previous government opted with the status quo, and certainly that's, that's our orientation at this time. And you know, we're obviously impressed with some of the performance.

Mr. Forbes: — What was expressed to me, actually by both business and labour, was that if the board was actually bigger, more people could understand the work that the board does, and therefore the board could be supported with a smaller board and that they were left to do work really about appeals and that type of thing. People didn't see them out and about, and if the board was increased, they actually could help communicate the work of the board.

Two other areas I wanted to highlight. One was around the shift work. And it was, the board researched the effects of shift work when developing and interpreting compliance policies. I know

that the department, now the ministry, had supported some work, research in shift work, which I think will become a bigger and bigger problem in Saskatchewan especially in areas like the mines, that type of thing. As we're going full tilt in this province, that this is an area that I think needs to be explored, and I don't know if the minister has any thoughts on this. I think it's an important area, and I know that labour has often asked about this, and we had supported them. I'm not sure if we continue to support them or that there was a request, but your thoughts around shift work.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you. We're certainly monitoring developments through the WCB, but I think some significance — and I think, if I'm not mistaken, it's out of Nova Scotia — that there was a claim that originated out of shift work and it was rejected. So again, there's a bit of a balance. Obviously there are from both employers and employees within some sectors, they're more than satisfied with shift work, especially within the resource sector. They're in locations where there's a mutual agreement to continue on. It's certainly something that we're conscious of and cognizant of, and the board is doing due diligence on that. But I appreciate the question, especially in these times. You know, it's one that we'll be attentive to.

Mr. Forbes: — Good. Thank you. Now a question around the Labour Relations Board, but it's more the IT [information technology] because it's one that the Labour Relations Board has struggled with for a long, long time. And I believe you had made a comment maybe in the House around the IT part of it. Will there be increased funding to bring the IT up to speed at the board?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, I have commented on this one on occasion. There are new dollars for the LRB [Labour Relations Board]. The IT component actually is going to reside within ITO [Information Technology Office]. And the analysis that we're doing right now — and, you know, certainly this is within the purview of the LRB so we received reports on this; they're doing the work — is to turn and get a bit of a needs assessment. And I think again there would be, there would be wide support that there needs to be a much more efficient, effective system regarding the IT component. It's profoundly uneven right now, and what I'll do is I'll ask Wynne Young to expand a little bit on that element.

Ms. Young: — You, I'm sure, are aware that there was some work done a couple of years ago on the automation, the state of automation at the LRB. And it would be our view that the first step is to look at that, and we understand that's what's being done too, to bring it up to date and to assess whether it's still in place. And then the work begins to try and find resources to match to that, but we don't want to start from square one. If the work done a couple of years ago is still valid or only needs some updating, that's what they'll be doing.

Mr. Forbes: — You're talking about the analysis — I can't think of the word — but the state of affairs at the Labour Relations Board in terms . . . I don't think there was any actual physical work though done, was there?

Ms. Young: — There was an assessment done.

Mr. Forbes: — An assessment done, right. Yes. And you're

right. Your word profound is right on. And I think there would be huge, wide support right across the board both from labour and from business as it was explained to me that this is a major problem over there. And all the other ones . . . And I know we've talked a lot about the other issues, but this is one that I think that significant dollars need to go into and as quickly as possible would be very, very good.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Actually I appreciate your comments. Thank you.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. And it's been raised with me an awful lot. Now we're just about five more minutes, but I just want to ask one just general question if it hasn't been asked, or if it has been asked, forgive me. But has there been any third party funding that the department or Ministry of Labour typically funded but has now cut? I know one would have been the unemployment workers centre is no longer receiving funding. Are there any other groups that will not be receiving funding this year?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You've asked a very good question. I think in the specific case that you raise there were some reductions from another ministry. This is complicated to phrase. Not complicated in concept; it's a very simple concept. It's complicated because there are some other pieces to this that are actually much more optimistic. We're still working through some stakeholders.

So the question actually identifies . . . You're right on the nexus of a very important question. And I think in the coming weeks I hope — and I'll await your judgement and assessment on this — I hope actually on the specific question that you've raised is there may be more optimism around this than at first blush.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. So what I'm hearing . . . I mean I guess what I need to know for an answer, are there specific groups that are going to see their funds cut? But am I hearing you also say that there are specific groups that will see funding that didn't get, typically, get funding?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you for the question. Actually I appreciate you rephrasing.

Thank you for the question. I'll answer generally because there are some negotiations going on with various stakeholders. I again am happy to address this, you know, at a later time, but my sense on this — and again, we'll await your observation and judgment — my sense is you'll see great continuity.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I hope so. You know I think that some of the programs, some of the things that we were able to support were really important in terms of developmental initiatives, that type of thing. You know I think of one like the We are Many: A Festival, in Saskatoon, about sustainability which is important in terms of the workplace, very important.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I agree, and certainly there are examples of the one you've just mentioned where, you know, there's certainly a lot of very solid initiatives. I guess in part it branches out into other areas of our ministry, and that's where the, you know, the privilege of having this.

As we came forward on training initiatives for example

questions, very legitimate questions have been raised about the institutional training spots. But what we've done is actually not only focused on institutional training spots but also focused both upstream and downstream, let's say, on issues relating to literacy. And I think it relates. You know if literacy is an indicator, we turn and we say, whether we're speaking about occupational health and safety or whether we're talking about the full potential of an individual being met within the labour force, it's one of the mechanisms that serves as empowerment.

And so there's a continuity. And as I say, you know, I think in the coming weeks you'll see some elements, and I welcome your feedback. From where we sit, I think you'll see significant continuity.

Mr. Forbes: — Good. Well thank you for that. And I see the clock is running out, and I have a lot of more questions. So I'm just going to make an assumption that many things like the things that happen in the North in terms of the northern overtime is going well. Some of the stuff in labour standards, the collections unit, some of those things are still in place and going well.

I'd be curious, at some point — you've talked about, you know, institutionalization and that kind of thing — if you've had a chance to take a look at the vulnerable workers report? Because in many ways that's framing . . . you know, it was an important document of how we moved forward on some very significant things across the government not just within the Department of Labour.

But I see our clock is . . . I, you know, can't pick one really good question to end on, but I just want to thank the officials. I know this is a very important ministry and branch within it, the good work they do. People want to go to work every day knowing that they'll come home every night safe and be treated fairly. So thank you, officials, and thank you for your answers. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Minister.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, I really appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee and its members this evening. As we've done in the past, it's one thing for elected officials to be working until various hours of the evening, that comes and . . . with a certain relish to it. But I wonder if I could invite the committee members in joining me to thank all of the officials that have helped us substantively and procedurally here this evening for their time and all the efforts that have gone into them being here with us this evening. So thank you all very, very much.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Chair: — Committee members, this brings us to the close of our time for consideration of vote 37 and 169, Advanced Education, Employment and Labour. The committee will take a 15-minute recess to facilitate the change of ministries and officials. We will reconvene at 8:15 at which time we will consider vote 36, Social Services. The committee stands recessed.

[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. Committee members before we continue, I'd just like to notify you that we have a substitution — Mr. Forbes for Mr. Broten. The last item on our agenda this evening is vote 36, Social Services. We have with us Minister Harpauer and her officials. I would like to welcome them, and I'd ask Minister Harpauer to introduce her officials, please.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to the committee members. With me tonight by my side is Duncan Fisher, the deputy minister. Behind me is Bob Wihlidal, the assistant deputy minister of client services; Darrell Jones, the assistant deputy minister for housing and central administration; Shelley Whitehead, assistant deputy minister for policy; Don Allen, executive director, finance and property management division; Larry Chaykowski, executive director of housing operations; Lynn Tulloch, executive director of income assistance division; Gord Tweed, associate executive director of the income assistance division; Andrea Brittin, executive director of child and family services; Janice Krumenacker, director for post care services, child and family services; Jeff Redekop, executive director of community living division; Karen Bright, executive director of human resources division; Trish Alcorn, director of communications and public education; and Jennifer Colin, director of program support, child and family services.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. Minister, I'd ask if you have officials joining you at the table from the back that you would introduce them for Hansard's purposes. And with that I will open the floor for questions from members of the committee. I recognize Ms. Junor.

Ms. Junor: — I just want to start off because the pamphlet I had promised you, Ms. Minister, is that the Saskatchewan Approved Private Homes inc. . . . just passed it around, and I apologize for the doodling on it, but I lost my clean copy so there's doodles on everybody's. And it is only one-sided; both sides are the same.

So I don't know if you have anything further to add to your answer last time about what is the status of this group and how much you know about them, having seen briefly the pamphlet.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you for that question. My understanding, in Saskatoon seven of the homes were closed last year under the NDP [New Democratic Party] government and we're expecting one closure this upcoming year. We've increased the funding per client by \$25, but I will turn it over to Jeff Redekop to explain further to see if he wants to add anything to this.

Mr. Redekop: — Well I can add that we're certainly aware of challenges around recruitment and retention of approved private service home proprietors. And we are engaged in some strategy with the provincial association, the one that is referenced in the pamphlet around recruitment and retention. We have one of

their representatives on a recruitment and retention strategy group at this point.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. Like I said, I'm going to be meeting with them so I'll pass that on to them that they do have a representative at some . . . What did you call the group that's meeting?

Mr. Redekop: — Pardon?

Ms. Junor: — What did you call the group that's meeting?

Mr. Redekop: — Saskatchewan Approved Private Homes inc.

Ms. Junor: — No the group that . . . Sorry, the group . . .

Mr. Redekop: — Oh, sorry, the name of the team? You know, I'm not sure we've established an official name for it, but it's an approved home task team which includes both representatives of the ministry and of the Saskatchewan Approved Private Homes inc.

Ms. Junor: — And this group has one representative on that?

Mr. Redekop: — Yes.

Ms. Junor: — Okay, thank you. That's my only question, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And welcome to the minister. I have a number of questions tonight all dealing with housing. While I'm preparing my preamble to my question, you might prepare your officials in that regard.

Last year I was on hand for an announcement of some affordable housing initiatives, one of which involved The Battlefords. And in the city of North Battleford there was an announcement about a \$3 million commitment towards housing over a couple of years. Can you give me some idea as to what the status of that \$3 million commitment in The Battlefords is?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you for that question. And I'll ask Darrell Jones . . . it's quite specific to a community so I will ask Darrell Jones if he could answer the details on the housing projects in Battleford.

Mr. Jones: — Thank you. Good evening. We posted an expression of interest relating to the neighbourhood revitalization initiative last fall and we've been in the process of reviewing those. We received submissions from around Saskatchewan including submissions from The Battlefords, North Battleford area, and we will be proceeding with some additional work with proponents.

Because it was an expression of interest we didn't ask for full proposals and so we will be undertaking sort of full proposal work with proponents in the very near future.

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you. That didn't quite answer my question. There was a specific commitment of \$3 million for The Battlefords. I'm wondering about that specific

commitment.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That commitment is still in place and is included in the projects going forward. And I would also like to add that there are 97 units that are in progress in North Battleford as well.

Mr. Taylor: — I'm trying to separate the projects that are sort of complete and those that are still in the works. Last year there was a \$1 million commitment that saw quite a number of units being refurbished. Most of, though, that refurbishing work I think has been complete. But I'm looking at the new projects that are in the works, and I think that's what Mr. Jones was talking about, the expression of interest. I have a couple more questions along those lines.

But am I correct, Minister, you're referring to \$1 million that was committed a year ago for specific units that are pretty much under way and have been formally announced, as opposed to what I'm talking about is money for which no commitments have yet been specifically made.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. The 97 units that are in progress is a \$2.56 million commitment. But the project that you're referring to, I believe, was in this latest expression of interest, and that expression of interest was in November 2007. That's being reviewed and finalized for further . . . like further detailed submissions. And Mr. Jones is confirming that the North Battleford project is on that list within the expression of interest and it is a priority.

Mr. Taylor: — Anything further there, Mr. Jones?

Mr. Jones: — No. I would just confirm that we are . . . When you reference the projects that were under way, those ones are still in progress and being finalized. And then there is the \$3 million that was announced under the neighbourhood revitalization initiative and that money is there and available for commitment and was included under the expression of interest.

Mr. Taylor: — Okay. Does the HomeFirst rental development program fit into that or is that separate and apart?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It all falls under the HomeFirst rental development.

Mr. Taylor: — Okay, it all falls under that. Okay. The minister may recall that I wrote a letter dated March 5 in which I made reference to a new project in The Battlefords — 96 units in a single building. The land has been purchased; no work has begun on that project yet. In the letter that I wrote to the minister, I talked about this project being . . . the desirability of the project focused on the affordability component to it.

They, the proponents, met with the planning department of the city of North Battleford and was told to make an application under the development program that we were just referring to. They were told they had just missed the deadline, and that when I wrote the letter to you, Madam Minister, you wrote back to me saying that essentially they were late and if there was ever another expression of interest, they should apply.

In the letter, you indicate that there had been an excellent

response to the EOI [expression of interest], including a number of proposals from The Battlefords area. The planning department at the city of North Battleford said they're not aware of any projects from The Battlefords other than the one that did not make the list.

I'm wondering if you could tell me how many proposals from The Battlefords area were received and are being considered under the expression of interest for this particular program?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I could tell you that there were approximately 85 submissions on the November 2007 expression of interest. The money that we were committing to that particular expression of interest was 47.5 million. And if we could meet the commitment of all of the 85 submissions, it would take closer to 190 million in order to meet the demands of all of the submissions.

However, on the specifics to North Battleford, I will again refer to Mr. Jones.

Mr. Jones: — Lots of spreadsheets here with small writing. We had four submissions, and the possibility that the municipality has not had preliminary discussions is because these are simply an expression of interest at this point in time. They're not full proposals with project viability and a requirement for commitment of funding from the municipality and so forth at this point in time. And so projects, when they're submitted as an expression of interest, are at varying degrees of completion and so sometimes the municipalities have not been consulted on a project-by-project basis. It depends on the proponent to some extent.

Mr. Taylor: — I've even been advised by the folks at city hall that no one at city hall had any knowledge of deadlines on the program, that advertisements had been placed, and so in addition to the fact that they were not aware of any other projects. And yet previously the city had been very involved in the distribution of the first \$1 million and the renovation of four apartment buildings in the city of North Battleford. So why would the city not have been made aware of deadlines, advertisements, that sort of thing? And can I be assured that advertising for projects in The Battlefords would actually have been advertised in Battlefords' media?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you. My understanding is the advertising for this expression of interest began in September under the previous NDP government. And then due to the election, it was extended into November. The officials would have to go back in the records and confirm whether or not it was advertised in the media in North Battleford.

Mr. Taylor: — Okay. Thank you. North Battleford, like some of the other communities, were chosen under this program because affordable housing is a real problem. We have a large number of seniors, large number of students coming in for North West Regional College. We have quite a few First Nations people moving into The Battlefords to take up any number of the new jobs that are being created there. And of course North Battleford now is well known under the immigrant nominee program. We've actually brought in close to 300 immigrants, about 10 per cent of the whole immigrant nominee program last year.

Affordable housing is very important in our community, and of course we're very much looking forward to any partnership with the province with regards to new, affordable rental initiatives. So this particular project that came to my attention is specifically designed for young working families. It's being designed with a community component in it, including a child care facility, a recreational facility like a gym, for the people who will live in the facility. Up to 100 families will have an opportunity to live in that project.

There's some talk now that without the capacity to be affordable . . . And that's why the partnership with the province is critical here. Because when you're financing a proposal, if you have the assistance of financing from the province you can keep your rents down. If you're doing it on your own, the rents are going to be higher. That's the reason for the initiative.

So the proponents are now talking about compounding our problem by turning some of these units into condominium units because that's where the money can be made for investors. And the best way to ensure that the apartments can remain affordable for potential renters is to be applicable under this program.

So I am disappointed that by missing a deadline by a short period of time we might be pulling quite a number of affordable units out of the marketplace. Because they're ready to, as soon as the snow melts in North Battleford, put the shovel in the ground and start work on this project. So I'm asking if there's any opportunity for this project to be included in the assessment of preliminary projects under EOI.

You've indicated they're not specific proposals that are being asked for — it's expressions of interest without details. This project is at the detail stage. The details can be provided almost immediately and these units can be in place in very short order.

Otherwise we have this compounding problem of condominiums and of course you're very much aware of what's going on in Saskatoon and other communities as conversions take place. So I simply ask on behalf of seniors and students and First Nations people and new immigrants in The Battlefords if there's any chance that this project can be reviewed with the others on the table for the expression of interest review.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I would like to say that there's considerable pressure in a number of cities from increased housing prices and rising rents. It is reflective of the province's growing economy that we're experiencing right now and are quite confident that that will accelerate into the future.

It's also resulted in a reduction of rental stock and, as you mentioned, Saskatoon is particularly feeling the stress of that because of condo conversions. I would like to just remind the member again that when the NDP were in government there was a task force put together to address this issue and come up with ideas that could be implemented to address the stress that's on the housing and rental market, and they put forward a report. It was not a public report, but the recommendations and the programming that was implemented at that time was only done so just prior to election.

Now I think that yourself and members in the NDP are recognizing that it was a failure. The new government is

understanding that it has faults. We've recognized that there are some positive programs that were put into place that maybe could be strengthened, but it isn't addressing what is a real market crisis in housing right across the board. So that is why we've put forward a task force to look at this in a relatively short period of time.

Again I'll go back to this particular expression of interest . . . was \$47.5 million, and there were 85 submissions. And in order to meet the needs of those 85 submissions, should we accept them all would cost \$189 million. To add yet another submission would mean that there would be a loser somewhere else. It's very difficult to do. So I would suggest that that wouldn't be helpful at this time.

I'm hoping that the task force will come forward with recommendations that we can act upon as a new government very quickly. We will see what those are. But North Battleford, like Saskatoon, like Swift Current, like a number of the cities are really feeling a stress in the housing and rental units.

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you, Minister. I'm sorry I used the word failure because it invites debate. I wasn't looking for a debate tonight, but in fact by the minister's very numbers the program that the NDP put in place was hugely successful. In fact when you say that there's three times the number of applications for each project that can be funded, this is huge. It's meeting a need that exists around the province.

My question was, there's \$3 million allocated for North Battleford. I'm aware that there are needs in other parts of the province, but there was money allocated for Saskatoon, money allocated for Regina, money allocated for North Battleford, money allocated for Prince Albert, and money allocated for the North. So North Battleford was specifically singled out.

Again highly successful initiative, because obviously there are projects that have expressed an interest in receiving some of the funding. We are in desperate need of affordable housing. We have a project ready to go. It's not competing with money allocated for Saskatoon or for Prince Albert or for Regina. It would be competing with other projects in The Battlefords, none of which apparently anybody outside of your office has seen.

So it just seemed to me that this would not be a significant challenge for the minister's office to throw this one into the mix with the other three or four projects designed for The Battlefords because if we're talking about a \$3 million pool, maybe it works.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I would like to suggest to the member that what he's asking for would then, number one, put the projects that we're looking at in North Battleford on hold; they would have to compete against this particular one project that you are mentioning. And I'm not sure you want to do that. There are some fine, very, very good submissions that we're considering seriously in this expression of interest. It would mean . . . The size of project that you're mentioning may mean the other projects are a no go then and would have to be turned down.

The other concern that I would have . . . And your suggestion is

then do we go back to all of the cities and open up the expression for interest for more submissions and do we start again and put everything on hold when we're talking about timing being of the essence, quite frankly, to get going on some of these projects.

Mr. Taylor: — Thanks very much. Timing is of the essence. It just occurred to me that while you were answering my questions, it did not appear that any of them had been discussed in a detailed fashion, that the expression of interest was simply, it was on the table and the review work hadn't started yet. So if I'm wrong on that, I apologize. I thought we were early enough in the review of the projects that this would not complicate matters, especially since all of the work in the community had been done through the municipal office and the municipal office had not been aware of the deadlines for the submissions.

However I do appreciate the minister's answers and I look forward to seeing some significant housing projects in a position to be announced very soon in The Battlefords. Time is of the essence.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you for that. And I'll just ask Mr. Jones again to clarify where these projects are at.

Mr. Jones: — As I expressed in my earlier comments, we have received expression of interests. We've conducted what we would characterize as a preliminary review on these and we're nearly in a position to further the development to full proposal with a number of projects, including proponents in the North Battleford area.

The Chair: — I recognize Ms. Atkinson.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you and welcome, Minister, and your officials. The question I have sort of follows up on some issues around housing. And the minister is correct that there was a group of people, or Ms. Junor I believe and others, that took a look at what we could do in the short term to deal with the housing situation in the province.

And one of the recommendations which I believe was accepted by the former government was a recommendation where people who were building houses or renovating houses, if they met the standard, could put a basement suite in their home and receive an allocation from Sask Housing on the understanding that they would have to keep that basement suite affordable for a period of 10 years. I'm wondering if you have continued with that policy.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes we have. Now my understanding from the officials is the uptake hasn't been very large. Actually I know the task force — being Ted Merriman and Bob Pringle — I asked them to look at that specific program to see if there was something in it that was making people hesitate. Because I do think it is a good idea and that is definitely one initiative that was implemented by yourselves when you were government that I think was a good initiative and I'm not sure myself as to why the uptake has been so little.

Ms. Atkinson: — I think one of the reasons may be is that it was a new program after last summer and I don't know if there's been a lot of advertising. Because I certainly have

spoken to some developers in my neighbourhood about this notion. So when you say the uptake has been small, can you tell us how many units have been approved by Sask Housing?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — For the actual details, I'll definitely turn it over to Mr. Jones. But yes, I totally agree with you. Advertising I think has been weak, and we need to get on top of that and we will.

Mr. Jones: — You're correct. One of the things that we do believe is that there hasn't been sufficient awareness under the program and so we have been working on the development of a advertising campaign which I think will be helpful. At this point, I don't believe we've actually had an approval under the secondary suite program. We have had a number of secondary suites that have been approved under some of the other traditional programs and there has been secondary suite development done, I believe, under the residential rehabilitation assistance program. So we think more advertising will pay dividends here.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, thank you. Minister, another idea that has certainly been implemented in other jurisdictions, given the concern about urban sprawl, climate change, transportation, is the ability of people to convert their garages to living accommodation in cities where it could become a small . . . I'm talking about a garage of 24 by 24 or larger, so about 500 square feet, where people who wanted to could certainly get their garage, build it to standard or get the garage up to standard and it basically becomes another way of preventing urban sprawl and also dealing with issues around people who want to be able to walk to work or take public transportation.

And I'm wondering, Minister, if this is something that your officials have looked at in terms of other jurisdictions, and is this another way that we could deal with the acute crisis? And I don't like to use that word often, but I would say we have a crisis in some cities and I'm thinking particularly in Saskatoon.

As more and more people come to the city, and even though there have been moves to expand the number of houses in the city, we have this massive problem of condo conversions. And we have to think creatively about other ways that we might be able to create affordable housing for people who don't have big incomes. And I'm wondering if this is something that your department or your ministry has looked at.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you for that. And actually I haven't had that come to my attention personally, although perhaps the task force gentlemen are hearing that. My understanding is that there are some restrictions through municipal government regulations and bylaws — if the garage is a stand-alone garage that that would have to be addressed on a municipal level; if it's an attached garage, then it would qualify for the secondary suite program.

Ms. Atkinson: — I think we have to think as much as we can outside of the box. I understand that there are municipal bylaws and regulations, but I think municipalities are interested in attracting people to the cities.

We have a shortage of workers. We need to have affordable housing. Not all workers are going to be at the 30 or 40 or \$50

an hour jobs. There are workers that are going to have jobs that are, you know, 10 to \$15, and so we need to think creatively. And I guess I would urge your ministry to start talking to municipalities, not only about the secondary suite option but also the option of people looking at other jurisdictions and what they're doing to deal with housing. And I'm particularly thinking of Vancouver. But I'll move on, Minister.

The other area that I wanted to talk to you tonight about is your CBO [community-based organization] summit. I'm interested in knowing, are all CBOs going to be invited to the summit or are there just some CBOs? That's the first question. And the second question is, have you determined a date yet?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, we haven't determined a date. And what the planning committee — and that's being steered by the Legislative Secretary, the member from Yorkton, who has been working on this very, very hard . . . The issue, I guess you can't answer that question without yourself first answering what you call a CBO. We're looking at, do . . . Food programs in schools are CBOs per se, and probably won't be included. So it is, it's very difficult. It's going to be fairly broad but I'm sure if I gave a definitive answer and said yes, all are being invited, there will be organizations that I may not consider to be a CBO that you may and it just becomes a matter of debate. It will be fairly large and extensive.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well I know that having been involved in the youth summit, the economic summit, and the tourism summit, these are issues to consider. But I guess I would say that CBOs are waiting for the summit and they're waiting to know when the summit might occur. So I guess you've answered . . . Do you have any sense when you might know when this summit will occur?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Well we definitely know it will occur this year and we feel, due to the number of CBOs within the province, we will probably maximize the effectiveness if we do regional summits. And so that's what we're looking at now due to the numbers and the broadness of the areas and services that CBOs deliver. So that is where we're leaning right now. So there are five regions within the ministry and that is most likely the format we will take.

Ms. Atkinson: — And do you have any thoughts about what format the summit might take on a regional basis in terms of the topics of discussion? What CBOs might need to think about before they get to the summit?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Very strongly. I've heard, without having a summit from the CBOs, a stress that they're having is the commitment of long-term funding. Another very major concern that CBOs have is addressing the human resource strains, and there is a great strain there.

But we will probably — again this is all going to be, sort of, solidified in the near future — be looking at three main topics as well as an open discussion. And we have to nail down what those three, minimum of three will be. And we don't want it just to be human resources, although we know that is vital, absolutely vital, and the discussion has to take place.

But we have a number of topics that we're looking at, and

around a theme of putting the client first. And so we hope within the next couple of weeks we should have more confirmed direction.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Minister. One of the issues — and this is an issue that has been around for a long time — but I guess I'm interested in knowing whether your government is still committed to this notion of regional intersectoral committees, or RICs, where we try to bring various players to the table to discuss how we could take a more holistic approach to delivering services for citizens, particularly children.

And I'm wondering how the RICs are doing. Have you any observations on the RICs and whether or not this is something that you're interested in continuing? Because as you know there are government departments that deliver services for children but there are also CBOs that deliver services for children. And trying to get everybody on the same page can be difficult, depending on who the individuals are. And I'm wondering if you have any thoughts.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The RICs are still in place as they were and they're continuing the work that they do, again meeting with different disability groups. They're asking for a new government to look even further, on perhaps some either further mechanism or a different mechanism. We haven't gone into detail of horizontal, what they call horizontal coordination between the different ministries because of course, especially in disabilities, it crosses a number of ministries. But I have not had the opportunity to look at this in detail and the system that was in place is still in place. And I will get Bob Wihlidal to speak to this further.

Mr. Wihlidal: — Thank you. Just one or two comments, I suppose. The RICs have a relationship with a provincial body as well of assistant deputy ministers entitled the Human Services Integration Forum, which has a similar function on a provincial level to effect better coordination between service providers in the province — which is the objective of the regional intersectoral committees, of course, to bring service providers together in nine different regions in the province.

These bodies have been in place for a number of years. The provincial body of Human Services Integration Forum, I think, is trying right now to get clear on what some of the barriers are to effective coordination at a provincial level that may make the work of the regional intersectoral committees easier.

One that comes to mind is information sharing between service providers. What can the province do around information sharing that might make client-based or service provider coordination more effective at a local level?

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. Thank you for that. The other question that I have, I have a number of community-based organizations in my constituency — actually 20-some years ago I came out of the community-based sector — so I want to talk about the transition houses in the province. And there's a couple of items I want to talk about.

I noticed from *Hansard* that you indicated that there was, on top of the 2.3 per cent, there was \$750,000 that was going to be allocated to the transition houses in the province and that

PATHS [Provincial Association of Transition Houses Saskatchewan] would determine how this money is going to be allocated. And I'm wondering if we have any news on the allocation to each of the transition houses across the province.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — To my knowledge they haven't. They were given quite a significant allocation of money. PATHS — and I'm just digging for the details — I believe was 750,000; 720,000, sorry. And they have as associate members 10 transition houses. My understanding is they have not made a definitive decision as to how they were going to allocate that money.

Ms. Atkinson: — Minister, I wasn't clear from the conversation that you had earlier whether there were some conditions around that money, how the money was to be allocated. Is it to increase salaries and benefits for people?

One of the issues that you referred to earlier that we've known about — and there was some attempt made to deal with this by increasing the allocation to community-based organizations — is the whole issue of pay equity or just pay. So there's an issue around recruitment and retention.

And I'm wondering, are the transition houses able to allocate some of this funding to increase the wages of the people that work there? Because I just want to use this one example that has come to my attention of people that are professionals that are working in the transition house, that they make so little money that they actually are eligible for affordable housing or rent supplements. So I'm wondering if we're going to see some significant top-up in wages to those people that work.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — What I asked PATHS to do was to come forward with recommendations of how they feel the money would be best allocated. I did not put any restrictions on it. The suggestions that they come forward can address whatever pressures that they feel need to be addressed in order to offer the services that we feel and they obviously feel are vital for women and children that are in abusive and violent situations. That may well be wages in order to have these homes open up and functional. And so that is one option that they can come forward with, and I didn't restrict them in any way.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Minister. The other allocation was to sexual assault centres. And do you have a sense of how that money is going to be allocated to the sexual assault centres across the province? Once again, they'll be able to determine how they want to allocate the funding?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, and to my knowledge again they have not come forward yet with any recommendations of how they feel it can best be spent within those associate members.

Ms. Atkinson: — Interval House in my constituency — they have the transition house on Victoria and then they also have second stage housing, Adelle House on 10th Street — and one of the things that the group has been trying to do is to move the Interval House over to the second stage housing or Adelle House which means that they require funding, money. And they had been working with the federal government through the homeless initiative to receive funding.

That did not pan out. They were not able to get any commitment from the federal government. And I'm wondering if your officials in Housing could advise me whether there have been ongoing discussions with the federal government to ensure that we can have a facility that meets the new requirements of today's world.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, and again with the details of that particular question I will turn it over to my officials to address.

Ms. Atkinson: — I think Darrell knows this one.

Mr. Jones: — Well you'll be disappointed. I'm afraid I'm not aware of any particular discussions that have been under way specific to that homelessness funding. As you're probably aware, the homelessness funding is federal and we do participate — we have representation on the community committees — but I'm afraid I don't know the particulars of the case that you're speaking to.

Ms. Atkinson: — Minister, are you going to be having meetings with your federal counterpart any time soon?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you. As you know, there's a number of federal ministers that have crossovers within this particular ministry. I have met with Minister Strahl on First Nations and Aboriginal issues, and there is a provincial-territorial ministers' meeting in October on housing. There was one earlier this year — I can't remember the exact date — on housing in Vancouver. There is another one scheduled in October. There is hopes that the federal minister will attend that, but that has not been confirmed.

Ms. Atkinson: — Just an observation. One of the observations I would have is that the federal government has a real opportunity here to step up to the plate in terms of dealing with housing problems across the country to partner with provinces and municipal governments, and I would just hope that this would be something that would be on your agenda. And if you would like detail of the initiative at Interval House, I'm sure that the board there would be quite happy to share that with you.

The other question that I wanted to ask you about is, what kind of funding did those services that provide crisis shelter to children receive this year? I'm thinking of Crisis Nursery in Saskatoon and there is another facility here in Regina, P.A. [Prince Albert]. And I'm wondering, did they receive the same 2.3 per cent? That's question number one.

And two, we have a number of people that support parents by being parent aides. And once again this is another area of recruitment that is becoming more difficult as the economy grows and there are more opportunities for people. So once again recruiting and attracting people who are prepared to be parent aides to support parents that are having difficulty.

And I note that you're having parenting sessions or sessions for parents, the department is, but one of the ongoing issues for some parents is the need to have parent support that's there over a period of time. And once again it comes to the whole funding issue and pay issue for these people, and I'm wondering if you

can provide us with any information on what we can anticipate this year for the various crisis shelters for children and then parent aides funding.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — In this budget, in this year's budget, it was still only the 2.3 per cent. As I say, we do recognize that there is a human resources pressure in the CBO sector and in other sectors. We're hearing it in health care and in a number of areas. So it definitely is something that we need to seriously look at. I dare to say, without creating a huge debate, it isn't an overnight pressure that it hasn't been addressed up until now. And it's going to now take considerable money to begin to get where we should be because we've fallen so drastically far behind.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well the minister will know that there was, I think there was \$32 million that was put into the CBO sector a couple of years ago to try and assist with the whole issue of even resources, recognizing the ability of the province at the time. But I think one of the nice things about the province at present is that we have a resource sector that's doing quite well, and it appears as though it's going to do well for some time, so there is some opportunity for the government.

My second point is, can you provide any information on what's happening with parent aides? These are people who provide ongoing support for children that are living with parents that require additional supports.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — For the details on that question I'm going to ask Ms. Brittin to answer. Thank you. We are just maintaining the status quo at this point in time. And they would have received the 2.3 per cent funding increase in this year's budget. We have not expanded that program in any way.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well this is something I might write you about before the next budget. I know you're on Treasury Board so I will write you about that.

Minister, the other area that I wanted to talk about — and your officials will know my views on this — but one of the things that we were able to do with the new resources that we had last summer was to make permanent planning available for children that were in the permanent care of the department. And I have a passion about this. And I'm wondering if that commitment that we made last summer is still there and whether the department has increased its staffing in order that we can start to ensure that small children that are permanent wards of the state basically have the opportunity to grow up in families. So I'm talking about adoption planning.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. We share that passion, there is no doubt. And the funding that was put in place remained so. I will get the officials to answer specifically. There was a number of new positions that were created to address this and my understanding is they have been unable to fill all of those positions yet. We are still working on that but they can give the details on that.

I guess what I found, though, quite alarming actually was to find out that we did not have a broad-based computer data base for the children in our care and are the only province that doesn't have one, for years. It causes all sorts of difficulties in

that workers' time is spent too often on doing the paperwork. Files and sort of the go-forward plan for these children isn't always complete. Because of the timing of filling out all the paperwork, files don't necessarily follow the child in a timely manner because, of course, many of our families are very transient now.

I can't imagine trying to work within a paper system in this day and age and that's what our social workers and front-line workers were working with. So I'm very, very pleased that we're going to address that issue because I think it's very important and I think it will help in a lot of the issues that we're seeing.

However going back to the number of workers, I will get my officials to answer exactly how many of those positions we've been able to fill.

Ms. Brittin: — Good evening. I would first just like to reiterate the minister's comments that permanency is very much first and foremost in our minds as a priority for children. So out of the 60 positions that were allocated, 30 have been allocated to permanency planning. We have been able to staff 24 out of those 30. We are having some issues in the northern part of the province recruiting staff but have made some significant progress there.

I'd also like to report that just last week we had a permanency planning conference in which 125 staff from across the province attended, and there were some dynamic speakers there speaking on permanency. And the conference was very, very well received. So we believe that permanency is a part of every child welfare worker's role, in addition to the 30 staff that we got — it's their role clearly — but it's the role of all child welfare staff. And so that conference was held to reiterate that message, and my understanding is it went across well. So just a bit of an update on permanency.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well thank you. The minister talked about technology, and I think technology is important. But I also have to say, Minister, that I have some people who work in government in the department that have indicated that they're not aware that anyone's ever lost a child yet in the department. And even with the paper system, you know, people did their work and they didn't lose kids.

But just in terms of adoption, can you share with the committee how many children are now permanent wards of the province and how many of those children are under the age of five?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Before I get my official to give the detailed numbers on the member's question, it's the paper, it's the paperwork on the child and some of that's important. It's important to know the background, what's happened to this child before they're placed in another home. Or workers have said they would have more time to do the at-home visits. And I don't think we want to tonight — and nor can I give specific cases, of course, where maybe an at-home visit a little more frequently or a little more timely would have saved a child. So I think it's vitally important. I truly, truly do.

But we'll get those numbers for you. Ms. Brittin will give them to you.

Ms. Brittin: — Thank you. As of March 2008 there were 433 children that were permanent wards of the minister. I don't have the age breakdown with me at this time, but I can endeavour to answer that question for you.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. That would be very, very helpful. And did you say 433 children?

Ms. Brittin: — 433.

Ms. Atkinson: — That are permanent wards of the province.

Ms. Brittin: — That's right.

Ms. Atkinson: — I would really appreciate the age breakdown; that would be very helpful.

Now the other area that we went to work on was the whole issue around ensuring that those people . . . once again because of the economy, a robust economy, the whole issue of foster parenting. And people do this because of their passion, but you also can't be going in the hole because you do this work.

And I'm wondering how we're doing at attracting new people to become foster parents. And are we having any luck attracting people who — I'm thinking of boomers — who may have retired and who may be interested in fostering? Young people, I think it may be difficult because they're involved in the workplace or whatever, but are we having any luck with a new demographic of foster parents?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you for that question. And foster families or lack or the crisis . . . It is a crisis in some regions; it quite frankly is. And in the first five months now of being in government, I don't have a solution quite yet although it needs to be addressed. It is a huge concern and an issue.

There's only been a 4 per cent increase in the foster families, which equates to about 30 families. The recruitment initiatives that were put in place brought on 150 new families, but 120 retired. So the net gain was only 30 families. It's not enough to meet the need; I'm well aware of that. I believe the stress is particularly acute in the centre region, is my understanding, and so I need to consult with foster families going forward. And with the officials and the ministry, we need to even become more aggressive in a recruitment strategy.

There was an increase in foster families. We added 2 per cent to that, but I don't think money is the only reason. And I have talked with Vice-chief Guy Lonechild about this particular issue and asked him to give some consideration of recruitment within the First Nations community to see if he could get some, you know, within their own communities, get some interest in fostering. And he said that he would work with myself and the ministry on that initiative. But that we need to do something more than what's being done. I'll see if Ms. Brittin wants to add to that.

Ms. Brittin: — No. I think the only thing that I would add is that we certainly see the need to continue to look at ways that we can retain foster families, so recruiting foster families. We seem to get, you know, as Minister Harpauer mentioned, 150 new families recruited, so we're looking at some province-wide

sort of retention strategies and looking at what it is that we can do to retain foster families. One of the things that we're looking doing right now is exit interviews to find out what sorts of things, you know, are challenging foster families so that we can get at some of the retention issues.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thanks. A couple short snappers. The department will know about my ongoing concern about Nutana Collegiate. We have people from the department that are in Nutana. This is the whole notion of a full-service school where we have health services, social services, legal services, and then educational services in that school. It really is a school that has very much become . . . well looked at as a beacon of hope for how we deliver services to young people. And I just want to be assured that there's no thought that the social service people that are in that school are going to be taken out this year.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — There are no changes planned . . .

Ms. Atkinson: — Perfect.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — For the staffing in Nutana.

Ms. Atkinson: — Very good. Thank you. I've had to sort of keep my eye on this over a number of years, so that's good to hear.

And my final question, Minister, has to do with some comments that you made about children in need of protection. And I got the sense that there was going to be a review of Indian Child and Family Services but I don't think . . . You corrected yourself. There's going to be a review of all child services in the province. And I'm wondering if you have yet determined who is going to do this review, or will it be a group of people.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It'll be none of the above. It was a dramatization and misrepresentation by a reporter. I've had the entire interview transcribed, and I have to learn not to use the word review because I didn't mean an overall broad review.

I mean as a minister, I'm learning the ministry. Even the different homes that we have and that we fund, I don't know where they all are. There has been a couple of issues since I've taken over as minister that's arisen that we've had to address very quickly.

So it was definitely a misleading article in one news media by one reporter that caused quite a stir. And what can I say? I have the . . . I don't have it with me here tonight, but the entire interview was transcribed, and the report implied things that simply weren't said.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well I've had that experience, so I can sympathize. So we're not going to have a review of child services in the province or child protective services. You are just, as the minister, taking a look at it and determining how you want to move forward. Okay, thank you very much.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Belanger.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And I'll direct all my questions to the Chair as per instructions for the committee work.

First of all, thank you, Madam Minister, for some of the statements and comments you made in reference to child care. That's certainly very, very important we spend time to talk about that. And I'll be very brief in my questions because there's so many things we can speak on, and spend hours on many of the agenda items.

I just know that the ministry in which you are the minister responsible for is an exciting place to work. It's got some great opportunity, and of course they have, I think, a lot of good ideas. The key thing is to make sure that we finance some of these ideas and concepts as best we can.

I want to point out that there are an increasing number of children coming into care of community services, and it's a disturbing trend. I think your officials will advise you that each year the numbers go up. We're not certain whether it's changing values in society or whether it's a combination of an overworked justice system or underfunded school system. It could be a variety of problems, perhaps different and lesser parenting skills. It could be a number of issues that one could look at.

But the evidence is clear that the amount of children coming into care of Social Services is increasing. I don't know what the daily rate is. I think at one time it was 3,500 kids per day that the department is responsible. I don't know if that's the correct number, but if that's the case, you know, I think we have to really look innovatively at this problem. And there's going to be a series of steps, I think, one has to take or a government has to take to really rectify the problem.

And I want to spend a bit of time on the northern-specific problems. For example, in La Loche we see a lot of young people that are couch surfing, where they will go wherever they're able to sleep on a couch or even on an extra mat to spend a night there. And they look for another place the following night. It is one community that's having an acute problem with housing. And I know we built a lot of units over the years. But I want to ask the minister herself, have you been made aware of the dramatic need for housing in La Loche alone? I think they have something like 300 families waiting for homes.

And if you look at the situation in the community, its population is growing dramatically and yet more houses are needed. And this seems it's a difficult task to keep up to the demand. But I guess I would ask the question: in terms of the specific problems in the North, what are some of your trends that you see in terms of housing demand? What are some of the plans you have to meet those housing demands? As I strongly feel that having a decent home to live in is one of the solutions in supporting a new way of dealing with so many children coming into government care and try to keep them in their communities and with their families.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you for that question, and I find it a little surprising because again it was not that long ago when you were the minister of social services, and La Loche didn't just fall into this situation overnight. So you first-hand had the opportunity to address this and didn't, didn't address it.

However I was just at La Loche a couple of weeks ago. It was a

very positive reason. Nine school kids built a home. It was a partnership with the community, with a business in the community and Sask Housing Corporation. The good news of the story was not that it brought another house into the Sask Housing Corporation stock in La Loche; the good news was that there were nine students being recognized for the great work and achievement that they had done. There were nine proud individuals within the school who sat very proud, very proud young people. And that's the good news story of the announcement that was in La Loche.

And I'm very happy to say that we're going to repeat that program in La Loche and look at the possibility of expanding it in other northern communities because I think it's very positive. The young people that participate, they learn a skill obviously. It goes towards credits in their school, for their school credits, and a very, very positive story.

Another very positive thing for La Loche and the community in La Loche will be if there is an expansion of industry in that area, and there seems to be a very strong promise that there will be, that will open the doors to unprecedented opportunities for people who live in La Loche, and that would be the best case scenario that we could possibly have for that area.

However in March, just this past March, March 22, there was a call for, of expression of interest to Métis and First Nations community under the Aboriginal housing trust funds. And La Loche is more than welcome to make a submission and maybe has. I will ask Mr. Jones to expand on that. On housing projects, the money available is 26.4 million, and so that may expand the housing in the La Loche community.

Mr. Jones: — Yes, certainly La Loche and any of the northern communities are eligible to submit under the expression of interest. They were also eligible to submit under the expression of interest that was first issued in September. There is funding allocated and available for the North, and so there is dollars there. In La Loche, 48 housing units have been developed under HomeFirst to date at about \$4 million.

Mr. Belanger: — Over the last seven or eight or even the last 10 years, how many housing units, everything from apartments to stand-alone homes and places like the Dene apartment building that were funded by both federal and provincial dollars, how many units were built in that particular community over the last 10 years? Could you hazard a guess?

Mr. Jones: — I have a number here that is 48 units at \$4 million. Now I believe that's HomeFirst delivery. That number would be larger if we went from 2001 because we had centenary affordable housing funding starting at that point in time. I'm not sure that I have that number with me here tonight.

Mr. Belanger: — Is it safe to say that, a wild guess, in the last 10 years maybe 350 homes were built in La Loche? Or I shouldn't say homes but units because obviously you have duplexes; you have apartment blocks. Or is it 200 units?

Because I guess my point, Madam Minister, is we were doing a lot of things. We were. And we just want to see that commitment continue because La Loche, as I mentioned, is growing. And I want to say that the young people that are couch

surfing as a means of surviving and finding a place to sleep, you know, that really signifies the problem there. So I think if you and I were to debate all night, my point being we debate all night who's going to do more and who done what — when, where, and how — it's not going to find the solution to the problem. So I guess my only point is that I'm looking for solutions here, not a debate.

I think the point that I want to raise is that La Loche has an acute problem with housing, a very acute problem. And yes, it's great experience for the children to and the youth to build a house. But I think they need to build about 300 to just meet the current demand, never mind the demand five years from now or much less three years from now. So it's ideas and solutions that they bring forward like those nine students building that home to house one more family and have more children in a nice home. Those are very helpful solutions.

But we need to dramatically increase that kind of support to make a significant dent into the housing problems for La Loche. So I think that's one of the things I want to bring up in terms of the particular communities — the significant problems we have in housing.

I'm going to shift the gears here a bit in reference to the granny suites, assuming that . . . I shouldn't say granny suites. But the suites that you can renovate your home or your basement or some other part of your home that's available to accommodate more children, in particular — people not wanting to move to the cities — is that program eligible to northern residents as well?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes it is.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. The second question I have in terms of your affiliates. I know you have a number of affiliates in Saskatoon. You have a number of affiliates in the North. Particular, I'm thinking about the places like the CUMFI [Central Urban Métis Federation Inc.] Local and Sasknative Rentals. Like they have units in the cities. Would they be eligible for those programs as kind of helping them become part of the solutions towards the housing crisis in the cities themselves?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The particular organizations that you mentioned, certain portions of their portfolio is being subsidized already. Those portions that are not would be eligible.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. So example, if we have tenant A that's renting a unit of say CUMFI Local and it's a fairly big unit and CUMFI Local comes along and says look, we'll renovate the basement and we'd like you to accommodate a student here, would they be eligible for some of the program funding as I mentioned?

Because it might be an opportunity for some of the affiliates themselves to take advantage of the program to upgrade their particular units. See, a lot of the units that they have need upgrading. A lot of the folks that are involved with the Métis and First Nation housing associations . . . That's kind of where I'm coming from.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — If tenant A's unit was already being

subsidized by Sask Housing Corporation, they would not be eligible. If tenant A's unit was not, they would be eligible.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. That's good information to know. The other point before I let housing go is that, have we done a cost comparison between the operating costs for Sask Housing versus the private sector versus some of the affiliates? Like for example, CUMFI Local and SNR [Sasknative Rentals], is there a cost-factor analysis that we've done as to what it costs us to administer our unit versus theirs?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — For those details I will refer to Mr. Jones.

Mr. Jones: — Thank you. Certainly we have data. As we're working with the non-profit groups that you referred to, we have access to their operating costs as well as access to the operating costs associated with the housing units that are owned by Sask Housing and managed by the local housing authorities, and it'll certainly vary. You have non-profits that operate very, very well. You have housing authorities that operate very well.

We try to establish consistent standards, both with respect to housing authorities and non-profits so that they're effective across the board. We have on occasion historically looked at comparisons to private sector properties as well. And we try to ensure that we're getting . . . we're maximizing our efficiencies in terms of our administrative and operating costs. It's always difficult to do absolute direct comparisons because building structures are different and so forth. So it depends on the portfolio.

Mr. Belanger: — The final point I have on housing — because I've got time for two more questions — one is that I understand that your assistant deputy minister of housing is leaving Saskatchewan. And I want to point out that it was a pleasure working with him, and of course always he was a tremendous asset to the province as a whole. So I know that Saskatchewan is losing on this deal and Manitoba is certainly gaining a valuable, a valuable asset and a fine worker and a gentleman.

So I just wanted to point out from my perspective, to you as a minister, that Saskatchewan is indeed certainly well served in the services of Mr. Jones. I wish him a good life in his new endeavour. And there's many, many years and stories one could express here tonight, but I think a simple thank you and a sincere appreciation for some of his lasting work that will have, I think to a large degree, a legacy to some of his work and the people that supported him. We can't forget those as well. And I want to point out to Mr. Jones that it is indeed a loss to Saskatchewan, and I wish him well in his future endeavours. He's got some very capable people behind him that could fill in his fairly big shoes. But nonetheless, they're not going to double as a hockey player too, so I particularly look to his immediate left or his immediate right. I'm not sure if you played hockey. But certainly I think that Darrell served Saskatchewan well and I thank him for his work.

The other question I have is in reference to the Indian Child and Family Services issue. You have an excellent opportunity, Madam Minister, to find solutions for the Aboriginal people within the Aboriginal community. In northern Saskatchewan, friendship centres want to help work with you in developing a

new strategy for northern Saskatchewan.

When it comes to a community-based approach, they're really willing and wishing to speak. You mention Vice-chief Lonechild, a champion when it comes to Indian Child and Family Services. Many of the First Nations and Métis community organizations want to speak as well. The Métis nation wants to speak. As I mentioned, FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations] through Vice-chief Lonechild want to speak.

And I'll tell you one of the things that I think is really important is that we engage them dramatically. And by dramatically I'm talking about immediate, I'm talking about profound change and I'm talking about significant, significant new resources. Because the whole system needs a lot of work, whether it's housing or whether it's more community-based approaches, engaging ICFS [Indian Child and Family Services] agencies.

We instituted the Institute of Indian Child and Family Services and I think you supported them in getting \$1 million again this year, which is to be commended. But, Madam Minister, I think they need 5 or 6 million, you know, because the bottom line is we have to develop these systems within the Aboriginal communities.

Much of the problem that they have is they're not being recognized, nor are they being properly developed and properly financed to make a significant difference with their own children. So I think it's going to be a tough round, because people are really, really needing this kind of support. They need innovative and exciting approaches. And I'd just encourage you to look at the Aboriginal community to provide some of that solution. That would be my advice to you. Thanks, Madam Minister.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Again, I would like to comment. I just find this astounding. That member was a minister for a very long time and you had every opportunity to direct a new strategy, to initiate programming changes. There was every opportunity to do all the things that you're now saying I'm supposed to be ready and prepared to do in five months as the minister.

I have met with Vice-chief Lonechild on more than one occasion in those five months. I attended the conference that he hosted in Saskatoon. We have spoken several times on the phone. I have met with the First Nations Child and Family Services at La Ronge and I plan to continue all of those communications and dialogue with the First Nations community. And I do agree it is vital. I haven't had too many — in fact I've had none — tell me that this was an initiative proposed or discussed by the previous minister when the NDP government were in power and they would like to see it followed through.

So I'm starting. I definitely will have an ongoing dialogue with the First Nations community. La Ronge would like me to return and I will. I hope to return to La Loche and I know there's many other communities and many other different First Nations band leaders that have asked to meet, and we will.

But where were you? The issues are huge. I totally agree the

issues are huge. They're overwhelming in some situations. But to expect an overnight success story when I am coming into, as you mentioned yourself, a huge increase in the number of children coming into our care . . . There's a lot of areas of neglect. Boy there's a lot of work to be done. And so as the past minister, I would love to hear what programming, what changes, what strategy, what initiatives you began that you would like to see followed through.

Mr. Belanger: — Well, Mr. Chair, just to rebut the minister's comment. First of all I think I want to point out that we certainly didn't have the resources two or three years ago that this current government has at its disposal if I may add, if I may use that phrase. And let me rebut to a point that the first 12 or 13 years of the previous NDP administration was busy cleaning up the mess left in the 1980s. That's number one. Well it was a mess, \$15 billion in debt and we're supposed to do all these wonderful things. You know, and that's my point, Mr. Chair, to the Chair, is that we looked at this point and then we say, okay well why didn't you do all these things?

Second point is that when you assumed as government, when you assumed the lead role as government, you didn't start with \$15.5 billion bill hanging over your head. In fact you got almost \$2 billion in the bank. And secondly is you have an emerging Aboriginal leadership from both First Nations and Métis communities that are willing to do more and become more innovative and respectful and flexible and co-operative. And 10 years ago there was no money. There was no money. And I point out earlier that despite the fact that we had no money we still, under the former Premier Romanow, won a national award on combatting child poverty.

And one of the things that I found kind of amazing as a previous minister, when you said you increased the basic allowance to people on social assistance by \$50, it's the largest increase in social services history. Well I wasn't impressed with that; that wasn't enough. And the fact that we had the bus pass solution, well that wasn't enough either. Perhaps when you increased the rental rates, that wasn't enough either. Building Independence, that wasn't enough either. And the rental supplement, well that wasn't enough either. A child care supplement, that wasn't enough either. So you just go down the series and series and the myriad of support mechanisms we put in place. It was all helping. It was all helping.

So as soon as I reflect some of the things that we could do, given the circumstances we were faced in the early years — the province was broke — and when I assumed ministership for this particular portfolio, we began a lot of work and we put programs in place. So I've got absolutely nothing that I'm ashamed of in terms of doing what we could, given the circumstance we faced and the resources that we could afford.

But today the most significant thing is, you don't have that money problem hanging over your head. Madam Minister, you got the cash. Plans are all there, plans are all there, but you got the cash. And that's why today I sit back and I say, well you have the cash, you have the opportunity, and I wish you do well. So when you say, you guys didn't do anything when you were there, I could go on for hours about this particular issue but that's not what I'm here for.

The thing is I'm here to make sure that you understand that there's solutions out there and that I'd encourage you to engage people that can really add to them, and politicizing this debate is not going to help matters any.

So I've said what I've had to say. I have a lot more I want to say but I'll hold my tongue at this time and turn it over to my colleague, Mr. Forbes.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much and thank you, Minister, and officials, for being here. And we're getting close to the last minutes of estimates, so I have quite a few questions and just seek some clarity around some of the things.

Today you announced the National Volunteer Week, and it's a very important week. And the question I have for you — and it's been asked to me because of course in our time we had the voluntary sector initiative; it was also part of a national initiative and it was one that had done a lot of work in terms of the voluntary sector — and people are asking, are you using some of that work that's been done already in the CBO sector?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The previous provincial voluntary sector initiative was under the previous Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation so it didn't fall under this ministry.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I guess, and I don't want to belabour this because that's quite okay, but because you made the announcement today . . . Last year it would have been made by Department of Culture and Youth. It wouldn't have been made by this, the Department of Social Services.

But my question is, now I just heard you earlier talking about, I want clarity about the potential dates for the summit. You know of course it was announced that it was going to be earlier but of course there were reasons for that, and you said this year. Does that mean that potentially the summit could be held in the . . . or the summits could be held in the fall?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We don't have dates yet.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So you're not committing yourself to any, but within this calendar year.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And now I just want to go on to, and you've made comments around human services and the challenges that CBOs face with that, and my colleague talked about the announcement that was made back in '05 around the human service, CBOs could receive extra funding. Part of that was contingent on them developing human resource plans, and that Social Services be willing to accept these plans and then engage with these CBOs to develop a response to that.

Is Social Services still accepting or working with CBOs to develop human resource plans, and able to retain and recruit workers?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We absolutely will. I mean obviously we're going to continue to work with the CBOs on plans and

how they're going to address the pressure of human services. We are addressing this when they are coming out of years of not having it addressed in a very effective manner.

The 2004-05 budget only increased CBO funding by 1 per cent; '05-06, 1 per cent; '06 and '07 it was jumped to 3 per cent; and '07-08 at 3 per cent. But over the last four years, the average was only a 2 per cent increase in funding. Included in this budget alone was a over \$400,000 budgetary item to go to SARC [Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres] to address last year's issues, which was under your government.

So yes, we'll be ongoing working with the CBOs and crunching the numbers to see what funding is going to be needed. In the past, I noticed there was a number of times when . . .

Mr. Forbes: — My question, Minister, was around a specific service that Social Services were providing to CBOs. And I appreciate your comments in terms of numbers but I'm just watching the clock.

That service was being provided in terms of, if CBOs provided a human resource plan, they would engage in further work. Is that service still continuing today?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — My officials are telling me and I know because I've read the plan that was done by SARC, and there's been a couple other organizations that have as well. Like I said, we'll continue to work with CBOs and see what, what we can do, what kind of numbers we're going to be looking at. There's no specific commitment to any specific CBO right at this point of time.

Mr. Forbes: — All right. So moving on then, I just want clarity around again the modernization strategy and the press release and actually with some of the comments you made at the last time. And this is in the fifth paragraph where it talks about, changes to benefits on the Saskatchewan assistance plan are being deferred pending further consultation with staff and stakeholders. My question is: who are the stakeholders that are referenced in this press release? And second, what are the consultations?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The consultations will be myself talking to social workers.

Mr. Forbes: — Let me be clear on this because I'm not asking about the staff. I understand the staff part of it. I am asking about stakeholders which I assume are external to the department.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Stakeholders that have expressed already concerns. Stakeholders are going to be homeowners who are renting . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Sorry, this is with modernization strategy.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I understand that but part of that is then if you change the mechanism of payment then they're responsible for making their own rent payment and there was huge concerns expressed by renters saying that they're concerned that their rent won't be paid because the ministry won't be making that rent payment for the client. The other

concern has been raised by the Crown corporations.

Mr. Forbes: — So the consultations will be you. Is that what you're saying? Who will, who will . . . Describe the consultations a little bit more fully.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Consultations are going to be very, very informal. I enjoy actually the input of the front-line workers and so it will be informal. It will be regional and we will just basically have a discussion on where they see difficulties and listen to their suggestions. And I'm sure as I speak with more and more groups there will be commonalities that will come through from one area to another, and maybe these are things that we can address.

Mr. Forbes: — Now so in terms of the modernization strategy and the stakeholders that you've referenced before, so there won't be, you're not talking about any kind of like the anti-poverty organizations. You're talking about the groups that you talked about earlier?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — True.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, then can I ask . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm not precluding not meeting. I have already, I have met with some anti-poverty groups and will continue to do so. Not specific to this, like I think this is so blown out of proportion. This is a matter of even the Sask Housing Corporation. Some of the housing authorities in your smaller communities have already expressed concerns that if the clients may not make their rent payment if it is left entirely in their responsibility to do so. So they're a stakeholder. They are directly invested in this change to this particular program. And as I said, the Crown corporations are as well.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And getting back to the funds around the sexual assault centres and that, and I know there are questions asked earlier about that, but I do want to seek clarity because people have been asking and are concerned about what this is. So I heard you say earlier that what you're looking for from PATHS and from SASS [Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan] are recommendations about how the money will be distributed. So they haven't actually got the cheque; the cheques will be distributed from Social Services to the member organizations of PATHS and SASS upon the recommendations that they have?

And I guess the other question I have around that, and this is the concern that has been raised to me, is while they are really understanding where you're coming from and support that, what happens if it goes off the rails? Because you know when you do give a group a lot of — and you know, this is a very significant thing you're doing — what happens if it goes off the rails and they just simply don't have the capacity to reach a solution of how to distribute the money?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm sorry, I missed the very end of your question.

Mr. Forbes: — My question is (a) there's three parts to this, that they are making a recommendation to you about how to spend the money. So you may or may not actually accept the

recommendation, because that's what recommendations are, but the money will actually flow to the member organizations from the ministry. And (b) is what happens if things go off the rails in terms of here's a group that normally doesn't make this kind of decisions. I mean this isn't part of their group strengths. Do they have the capacity? How will you help them make this decision because it is a pretty fundamental decision, and it's a pretty significant thing that you're doing.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The minister's staff will definitely work with them. And in making the decision, I just feel that the umbrella organization, for example PATHS, I feel is very much in touch with their member organizations. They're not out of touch. They're not out of loop. I felt in meeting with the members from PATHS, I feel very confident that they know their member associations very well and understand if there has been a case load or, you know, where the pressures are within their member associations.

However the ministry staff is more than willing to work with them to give recommendations to help them with resources they may need. I guess, bottom line, if it ultimately hugely goes off the rails, then we'll go back to what's been done in the past, and we just make a decision even though we may not have first-hand knowledge. I'm hoping that doesn't have to be the case.

Mr. Forbes: — And it's reassuring that the staff will be there to help them because clearly everybody wants this to be a success story because that's very, very important. And I've been asked to make a little pitch by a couple of groups. So I just want your comment on this: the registered disability savings plan, have you heard of this?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Well maybe I'll leave this with you. About a couple of groups have asked me . . . This is a federal initiative, but really BC [British Columbia] is the first one to allow for this disability savings plan to come into force. I don't know if some of your officials have some comments about this, but it seems like a very innovative plan in terms of how to secure a good life for people living with disabilities and would be a very positive step forward. BC's the first. I think Newfoundland and Labrador have come on board.

So I can leave this with you. And if you have comments about that.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That's great. Obviously I'm not familiar. If you do want some comments tonight, Ms. Tulloch can give those to you.

Mr. Forbes: — Sure. A brief one would be good.

Ms. Tulloch: — Sure. We are aware of the program. It is a new federal program. And we are having a look at how it will impact people in Saskatchewan. We are looking for ways to ensure that it is beneficial to people in Saskatchewan that want to take advantage of it. And we will be looking at what adjustments we may need to make to our programs to accommodate that.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I'll leave this with you. And I think that

when it made a lot of sense to me and people have asked about it and when you see good ideas coming up, we should take a good look at that. Good.

The Ombudsman report. It was interesting that the number of complaints have gone down for, well Community Resources at the time, Social Services, and went from 857 to 681. And of course when they look back at the numbers — the Ombudsman talks about the work they've done — but I've seen some of the work that the ministry has done in terms of fair practices and some training around fair practices, a couple of workshops on that.

Is the ministry thinking of a fair practices office? We see this at Workers' Compensation and at SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance], and they have been very, very successful in dealing with complaints around the services people have got. And people just want to be treated fairly, and I'm just curious if you've been thinking about that.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Obviously, you know, we have advocates that sort of oversee our ministry or scrutinize the ministry. There's always clients. There's the Ombudsman and so on and so forth. Initiatives that would have been put into place to bring those numbers down, quite frankly, would have been done so when your party would have been government. So I guess I need the officials to speak to what has been done in the past because all of the numbers in the Ombudsman report reflect what's been done in the past.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I would say it's interesting the Ombudsman seems to take credit for the numbers going down and not the department, which I thought was . . . But I don't know if the deputy minister has . . .

Mr. Fisher: — Well I would say that we have an excellent working relationship with the Ombudsman's office, and when he brings an issue, a complaint to our attention, in many cases we're able to resolve that complaint without going to a formal investigation by his office. So I think that that's an example of the good work that his office is initiating, and we're able to follow up with him.

In terms of the fair practice piece, you know, the policies that we put in place we try to ensure are fair policies, good public policy. The primary mechanism we have at this point in time to ensure that fairness are our appeal boards. If someone disagrees with a decision regarding income assistance, there is a regional appeal board, and there's also a provincial appeal board that can make recommendations about whether the policies have been followed or not.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The other thing to note could be just rather a natural decline because as you noted last time in estimates last time, we've had a fairly significant decline in the number of clients needing income assistance. So there's been a decline there, and most of the complaints brought forward to the Ombudsman are in the income assistance division.

Mr. Forbes: — And I think you're right but sometimes, you know, sort of like the diminishing returns, and you have the hard ones, difficult situations. But my own experience with Workers' Comp, as a former minister there, of course we have

the worker's advocate. We have an advocate system. We have appeal systems.

But the impact of the fair practices officer has been huge in terms of being a way to explain the process — not necessarily the outcome, but have you been treated fairly. And I think SGI has had the same experience. So it's, you know, I'm aware of the appeal processes, and I'm not saying they're bad or good or otherwise. I'm aware of the Ombudsman being there.

But a fair practices officer fulfills a different role and one that's maybe more informal, more reassuring that you've been treated fairly, not necessarily commenting on the outcome but saying . . . And I actually do see in the report that actually Social Services people did take two or three days of workshops in fair practice, so that's what made me think of this this afternoon, that if you're thinking of that, that's a very good thing to be doing too.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you.

Mr. Forbes: — . . . you coming up. If you have a comment . . . But I just have one last . . . Well I see our time is . . . and I apologize because . . . But I think some people have already covered some of the things that I . . . I did want to raise the . . . And it's an opportunity to work with the First Nations and Métis people and seize that opportunity because the work is always tough and as, in my own experience in the areas of environment and labour, the world changes.

You think you know the world and then something shifts, you know, and so this is something we're having to work at. So I would really encourage you as the minister to continue to have those discussions, continue to stand up for children and those who are vulnerable because it's so important. But to seize the opportunities when they arise and that's so hugely important.

I think that I basically have covered my questions, and I know there will be many more, and I will be writing you as well about some of those concerns or opportunities. But I would say, in conclusion, unless there's other questions — may we conclude? — that I thank your officials for coming. We do have challenges ahead. You have a challenging portfolio and that's a huge one. And we look forward to seeing the results and the work you do over the months ahead. I won't say many years, though; that'll be my political comment. But anyways, thank you so much and we appreciate your time.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you very much. I want to thank you for your questions, and as I pointed out the last time that we met here for estimates, I don't question your sincerity whatsoever.

I want to thank all the committee members for the hours and hours and hours that they're putting in, not just for these estimates but for committee work as a whole. And thank you to all my officials for coming out yet again for the evening. I think we always luck out on the evening shift. So thank you.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. LeClerc.

Mr. LeClerc: — I periodically make a comment when I think the opposition has had good questions and have put the

well-being of the people of Saskatchewan ahead of political games, and I think that happened very clearly tonight.

I wish to thank you for your insightful questions, your constructive questions, your suggestions. And as you're probably aware, this is an area that I'm passionate about and hope that you continue to do so in a non-partisan manner, that we can help the minister in probably the toughest ministry in our government or any government and to try to bring all of our people along during this economic upswing. So I wish to personally thank you for your insightful questions and your constructive suggestions tonight. Thank you very much.

The Chair: — Committee members, this concludes our once again lengthy agenda for the Human Services Committee. I would ask that a member move a motion of adjournment. Mr. Ottenbreit so moves. Is the committee agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — This committee stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 22:13.]