



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

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## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

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Mr. Glen Hart  
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Ms. Judy Junor  
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Mr. Serge LeClerc  
Saskatoon Northwest

Ms. Joceline Schriemer  
Saskatoon Sutherland

[The committee met at 19:02.]

**The Chair:** — Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is the first meeting of the Human Services Committee in the fall session. I'm Chair Greg Ottenbreit. Tonight we'll have one substituting member for Ms. Doreen Eagles. We will have Mr. Denis Allchurch sitting in place. Still absent, soon to be here, Mr. Serge LeClerc. Denis Allchurch is here, Joceline Schriemer, and Mr. Glen Hart. And on the opposition side, we have Mr. Cam Broten, Ms. Judy Junor, and also sitting in, non-voting members, Mr. Kevin Yates and Mr. John Nilson.

Before we begin the business this evening, we will table documents already distributed to committee members — document no. HUS - 45/26, HUS - 46/26, and HUS - 47/26. So I table those documents now.

Tonight's agenda we have reviewing supplementary estimates on Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, and later this evening we'll be reviewing supplementary estimates on Social Services. Those in detail tonight, Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, we have vote 37, subvote (AE03), subvote (AE02), subvote (AE05), and subvote (AE04). And later on with Social Services, we will be voting on or we will be considering supplementary estimates on vote 36, subvote (SS03).

Just a reminder to all committee members that we are considering supplementary estimates, and debate will be confined to the reasons why the extra money is being sought, and we will be strictly kept to those parameters. Each subvote is a distinct question, and debate is strictly relevant to the subvote under consideration.

**General Revenue Fund  
Supplementary Estimates — November  
Advanced Education, Employment and Labour  
Vote 37**

**Subvotes (AE03), (AE02), (AE05), and (AE04)**

**The Chair:** — I welcome the minister this evening and his officials. And just a note of consideration for the minister that if we need to take notice, we will expect a letter provided from the minister and his officials to the committee Chair which will be distributed to committee members. I welcome the minister this evening and his officials. I would ask him to introduce his officials and open with any comments he might have.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to join you this evening. I would like to introduce the officials that have come with me tonight: Clare Isman, our deputy minister; Mr. Mike Carr, associate deputy minister, labour, employee, and labour services; Dr. Reg Urbanowski, assistant deputy minister, advanced education and student services.

In behind me: Rupen Pandya, assistant deputy minister, immigration services; Karen Allen, executive director, corporate services; Jan Morgan from career and employment services; Tammy Bloor Cavers, student financial assistance; Ted Amendt, program innovation; and Rhiannon Stromberg,

executive assistant to the deputy minister.

I would like to provide a little bit of context for the decisions that have been taken in relation to these supplementary estimates. Our budget deliberations and decisions have been guided by the following key objectives. First, a focus on learners; that is putting people first. Second, ensuring maximum use of federal stimulus dollars during the respective qualifying periods. Third, re-examine of programs for potential underutilization and again, to reiterate, a need to refocus on learners; as well an opportunity and an obligation to analyze capital programs where funding may not be required within the current fiscal year.

Another strategic imperative that has guided our thinking relates to Saskatchewan's continuing talent challenge. That is, we're working to ensure that in the face of the financial global malaise that we have seen spread around us, and certainly we have not been immune to it, we continue to stay focused on the fact that our labour market needs both for today and into the future cannot be overlooked. We are resolute in our determination and planning to fill our need for skilled labour now and well into the future. We remain committed to building a stronger Saskatchewan through strategic initiatives and investments in higher education, workforce training, employment supports, and associated development activities.

The change to the ministry's overall budget is a net increase of \$28.3 million. This reflects revisions in the following areas. The ministry saw an increase in federal stimulus funding of over \$70 million. That funding has flowed into the following areas: an additional 9.29 million under the Labour Market Development Agreement, also known as the LMDA; an additional \$4.5 million under the labour market agreement, the LMA; more than \$360,000 under the targeted initiative for older workers. What's important is that these investments are all directed to training and skill development across our province.

Regarding the knowledge infrastructure program, or what's referred to as KIP, more than \$56 million for 21 post-secondary capital projects across the province. When matched with provincial investment and federal contributions and some funding from other partners, that was more than \$117 million in capital projects right across the province of Saskatchewan to help enhance post-secondary education skills training, personal and professional development.

On the other side of the ledger, the ministry's expense forecast is over \$42 million below the original amount identified in the budget. That is more than \$42 million in savings. These savings are being achieved through a variety of measures. More than \$32 million has been returned to the province from the University of Saskatchewan related to funding that is currently not required for the Academic Health Sciences centre. And I'm happy that . . . I anticipate we'll be going back to this subject because certainly as of the weekend, the construction is very robust on both the D wings and the preparatory work that's under way for the E wings. Six point two million related to training and employment programs, 2.5 million for ministry efficiencies, and 1.5 million available because of program evolutions within Immigration.

Mr. Chair, we've seen over the past year that Saskatchewan has been affected by the global economic situation. We know we're not immune from what's going on around us, and at the same time Saskatchewan remains strong and steady, especially when compared to other provinces.

Although we have capped some of our training and employment programs, we have in fact increased the overall investment in these areas. This investment is a reflection of the priority our government places on preparing Saskatchewan people for the current and future demands of Saskatchewan's labour market. It also speaks to the value of collaboration with our federal counterparts and numerous local partners.

We have all acknowledged that, during this global downturn, federal and provincial stimulus funding has assisted our economy and the economy of Canada. It has not been alone. We have seen similar programs undertaken right around the world and certainly our ministry's supplementary estimates recognize this funding and its significance. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I look forward to the questions that I'm certain will be coming this evening.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I recognize Mr. Yates.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I note with some interest and I took copious notes of the introductory remarks from the minister, and in his introductory remarks, Mr. Chair, he expanded the scope considerably of the areas under review. There's been a long-standing practice in this Assembly, Mr. Chair, that when a minister opens the door in his opening remarks, that is then the scope of the questioning. I'd like you to rule on that.

**The Chair:** — As with any committee there will be some leeway, but we will stick to the supplementary estimates as described in the agenda.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Will the Chair then also instruct the minister to keep his remarks directly within the scope of the supplementary estimates?

**The Chair:** — That's fair enough. Mr. Minister, can you keep your remarks fairly succinct?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — As the members of the committee will endeavour, so will I.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten.

**Mr. Broten:** — Well thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister and his officials for being here this evening to answer some questions. I know the opposition is keen to get into the supplementary estimates and to continue the discussion from the minister's opening remarks.

So looking at the supplementary estimates, Mr. Chair, on page 11, the Advanced Education, Employment and Labour votes. In the description at the bottom there is reference to the knowledge infrastructure program which the minister referenced in his opening remarks. Could the minister please identify for the committee the funding that is identified in the KIP as it's more easily referred to — the 56.4 million — what projects that

funding went to support, please.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I will go into some detail on these but happy to take, obviously, additional questions that may emerge.

At Carlton Trail, one of our regional colleges, we certainly have some investments regarding welding shop renovations and upgrades. That's out in Humboldt. As well Cumberland, monies for a new facility in Nipawin. That was in very, very great and grave need. That was a tour that I undertook and certainly appreciated the feedback from a number of local officials both directly with the college and a number of local stakeholders that spoke directly to the infrastructure deficit that we had inherited as a government, but more importantly, those stakeholders had endured.

Great Plains, that's in Swift Current. North West out of Meadow Lake, and again that makes reference to a welding project. In the Southeast, the Energy Training Institute in Estevan, I'm happy to report that we just did the groundbreaking last Friday and a very successful start to an exciting program.

[19:15]

KIP program dollars went to Lakeland. There's a daycare teaching lab there. As well the Saskatoon Campus of SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies]; SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology], both here in Wascana — plumbing skills, that's an expansion of that program; Wascana for the nursing project; then the Woodland Campus as well as at Kelsey Campus.

At Briercrest there were some dollars for re-roofing. St. Peter's has seen the revitalization of the hall. And I was able to take a tour of that and see some of the important and exciting work there. Luther College here in Regina, academic building renewal. And at the University of Regina a number of initiatives. That is, the fifth floor of the Research and Innovation Centre, revitalization of the education auditorium, Lab Building upgrades — both in areas mechanical and electrical — and as well some upgrades to a data centre.

The University of Saskatchewan funding was available to help conclude and complete the ongoing and long-standing renovations that have been under way for years at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine. As well, significant dollars for rooftop renewal right across the campus.

I think that gives an initial overview of the breadth and scope of the KIP dollars — again, over \$117 million, 21 different projects and one of the most significant infrastructure investments in post-secondary education in the history of this province. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Broten.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you for that listing. Out of the listing that you provided, there are different types of institutions that you stated. There are universities, regional colleges, Briercrest, SIIT. How was it determined which projects would receive KIP funding? Was there a weighting between different groupings?

And then within those groupings, how was the ranking determined, please?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Appreciate the question. The initiative right from the start was a collaborative piece with information that flowed to Ottawa, from various institutions to Ottawa — from the provincial government, from the institutions, and the provincial government. Thankfully we've begun to put into place a capital priority project. That type of initiative really didn't exist, when we took over as government, within the post-secondary realm. So some of that early work had already started.

The federal government established some key elements that we were going to . . . or if you want, parameters for us to work within — a university component which identified specific dollars that were going to be directed towards universities across Canada, a college component, those focusing on colleges and technical schools across the country. There were also some cost eligibility parameters that had to be identified. Then from there, as these proposals came forward, negotiations occurred.

We had developed some principles in advance of any of the substantive dialogue that was going to go on. And what we did is offered that there would be five criteria that we should be certainly mindful of, the first addressing issues of health, health and safety for learners, faculty members, staff, if you want to help enhance the physical environment. And we can certainly think of St. Peter's College, but also Great Plains College. And Great Plains hadn't seen a substantive upgrade, if I'm not mistaken, since the 1940s.

Second, a need to address the most critical shortages of space within the post-secondary system. And we can think certainly of SIAST in this instance, both apprenticeship training in Prince Albert and here in Regina, as well as the nurse expansion that was required here in Regina.

A third element related to deferred maintenance requirements that have been building for several years, including structural repairs and building upgrades. And again any number of examples could be utilized. Dr. Urbanowski, would you like to expand on that?

**Mr. Urbanowski:** — Sure. The capital plan that we developed was related to people submitting their capital needs to us along three goals: repairing, refitting, and growing. Repairing, like the minister said, was related to health and safety. Refitting was actually looking at creating more modern and flexible spaces. And growing our capacity was there to ensure the needs of our future learners.

With regard to the KIP project, the institutions were invited by the federal government to submit KIP proposals. We received a list from the federal government, and then we compared that with our capital plan.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Dr. Urbanowski. Mr. Broten.

**Mr. Broten:** — So the applications are first received by KIP and then the federal government pass their list of applicants, eligible applicants, to the province. And then at that point, there was a determination to see where the priorities aligned. Is that a

fair summary of how it worked, the selection of successful KIP recipients?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well you know, I think some of the contours here . . . There was a lot of concurrent activity and so that dialogue, as I tried to give some shape to . . . Institutions were in touch with the provincial government and the federal government at the same time. We were in touch with the institutions and the federal government, and the federal government, the respective institutions and the provincial government, as well as other partners. And we need to be mindful of that too as it relates to KIP. Those parameters were opened by the federal government so that other funding partners could come in. That was certainly very significant when we think about St. Peter's, for example, in Humboldt. So I would say a key element of the contour is related to concurrent dialogue.

**Mr. Broten:** — Would the minister be able to provide a basic breakdown of the institutions of the university, SIAST regional college, and other? What percentage of the funding in dollars — about — each group received?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — We'll offer an overview of those numbers, but I think importantly, the parameters were set out from Ottawa. And certainly the reference points related to a 70/30 split was the targeted goal. I think we, you know, certainly we were able to exercise a little bit of room within those parameters, again drawing upon our principles as well as some of the early work that we had undertaken. So it wasn't a unilateral perspective or position that was to be undertaken by the provincial government. Those parameters were set as part of the KIP program itself.

As far as some of the specifics, we'll be able to get you those shortly if you'd like to go on to the next question.

**Mr. Broten:** — With the KIP program, the projects that were selected, are there projects in that list that you provided where the funding that was provided through KIP is one portion of the project but not completing the project, and there will be expectations down the road in terms of additional funding needed to complete the projects? Or were they mostly one-time shots that allowed X amount of dollars to be used to complete project A or B?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Again, and we can walk through some of the parameters, but one of the key elements to move forward on KIP, not just within Saskatchewan but across the country, was the proviso that projects would be completed by March 31, 2011. And so there was really a sunset clause, and that contributed to part of the dialogue and deliberation again between various partners at various stages about being able to make sure that projects were started and completed on time. And if I may, there's a quarterly reporting process on progress.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. So just to confirm once again for the public record, the amount of funding that came from the federal government through KIP was?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — It was just over \$57 million.

**Mr. Broten:** — And that was matched with provincial dollars?

Or offset . . . [inaudible].

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — What's significant again is that it wasn't just simply restricted to the province to provide a partnership, that there were other parties, third parties that were made eligible by KIP that made it certainly all the more attractive to the provincial government. So the provincial allocation was up over \$54 million.

**Mr. Broten:** — So the revenue coming from the federal government through KIP was 54, or excuse me . . .

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — No, it was just over 57.

**Mr. Broten:** — Fifty-seven. In your opening remarks you said total increase of federal funding was 70 million, about?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Yes.

**Mr. Broten:** — So the remaining . . . to get from the 50 number up to the 70, in your opening remarks . . . I'm sorry. I didn't jot all those numbers down quickly enough. Could you please state how we get to that 70 million figure, please, from the 51?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Sure. And we'll walk through this. Essentially KIP was just one federal initiative, but there were other federal initiatives that came forward to supplement the investments that had already been made from within the ministry.

It's a few initiatives. Most of that came in through the LMA — that is, the labour market agreement — and the LMDA, labour market development initiative. Key distinction there is the LMA focuses mostly on those individuals who are EI [employment insurance] eligible, and the LMDA allows us to focus on some of those that perhaps have faced longer term barriers regarding labour market attachment.

Regarding the specifics . . . And we'll break this down a little bit further, but the LMA, LMDA stimulus funding, that is in addition to those dollars that we already had out of these initiatives, \$14.2 million. And if I'm not mistaken, Reg, those have a two-year time limit. And on just over \$300,000 on the target initiative for older workers, and if I'm not mistaken, that one has a three-year horizon or a three-year window on it.

[19:30]

**Mr. Broten:** — So that picks it up to 71.9 million?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Yes.

**Mr. Broten:** — So in your remarks and from the discussion we just had, we know new revenue coming in from the federal government is 72 million?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Yes, 70.6.

**Mr. Broten:** — Then in the same paragraph that discusses the knowledge infrastructure program, it talks about the savings that have occurred in the ministry and listed as 42.3 million. So in looking at the supplementary estimates amount for '09-10, the total amount that is up is \$28.315 million?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Yes. Yes, just over 28 million.

**Mr. Broten:** — So am I correct in my understanding that we arrive at the \$28 million figure by taking the new revenue from the federal government of 70.6, subtracting the savings or whatever description we want to use for that . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . You like that one? Okay. And we'll leave it at that.

And then we arrive at the 28 million figure. Am I correct in my understanding that any of the new funds that have been obtained in the ministry have been received from the federal government?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — The dollars that are associated with the LMA and LMDA have arrived, and the KIP dollars will be arriving on a quarterly basis based on the progress reports. But they are accounted for this year.

**Mr. Broten:** — So regardless of whether or not the funding is already here in a bank account or whether it's on its way now soon or in the future, in the next few years, it is correct though — any of the new funds coming into programming or infrastructure or anything, those funds are coming from the federal government? Am I correct in that understanding?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Yes. Through the initiatives that I've highlighted, those relating to the KIP dollars, knowledge infrastructure program, and the additional dollars that came in through the LMDA and LMA as well as those that came in through the older adult worker initiative, these are all coming in from the federal government.

**Mr. Broten:** — So in terms of looking at dollars which originate here in Saskatchewan, through taxation or whatever the means may be, when looking at those dollars, there's no new additional provincial funding. Am I correct in my understanding?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — There actually was an additional, if I'm not mistaken, \$5.25 million, and that was to ensure that we would maximize our KIP programming.

**Mr. Broten:** — So in order to get the 56.4 million, to maximize the potential out of that, 5.25 million of provincial dollars what was put in?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — That's right. We put additional dollars. We'd been quite aggressive on post-secondary infrastructure investments prior to KIP. And we were able to therefore maximize the KIP dollars with a relatively, I would say, strategic increase.

**Mr. Broten:** — That \$5.25 million which was used to maximize the potential of KIP, where is that number found, that figure found in the supplementary estimates?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — That 28 million . . . Yes. That 28 million, Mr. Chair, was and is on page 11. You can see the outside column, last number in bold makes reference to that overall figure.

**Mr. Broten:** — Well I realize 28.315 million is the net

increase. But you had mentioned in terms of . . . We're talking about new revenue being spent, new dollars being spent. And we had talked about the 70-odd million that was coming from the federal government.

My question was, specifically, out of new dollars coming into AEEL [Advanced Education, Employment and Labour], was there any provincial dollars? And you had referenced 5.25 million. So which subvote is that 5.25 million in?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — I'll turn it over to Deputy Isman.

**Ms. Isman:** — Mr. Chair, if I could. The \$28 million is the net amount, correct, of the money coming in from the federal government, as well as then the savings. So the \$5 million that you're referring to is actually embedded in the net dollar value. So in the federal stimulus money, it was actually \$65 million.

If you take the LMA, LMDA, and the federal KIP money, plus the \$5.25 million of provincial additional money to capitalize on the total KIP value, and that gives you the 70.6. So it's in the 70.6 on the expenditure side. And then you net out the \$42.3 million in savings to come to the 28.3. So it is all embedded in that same net number of \$28.3 million.

**Mr. Broten:** — So when I was asking about the revenue coming from the federal government and the amount that was given was 70-odd million, so is that answer correct or is that answer false? So is it 65 or is it 70 million?

**Ms. Isman:** — It actually is, when you break it down, it's \$65 million from the fed and 5.25 from the province. And we had put them all together under the KIP envelope so we hadn't described in our breakdown of the two.

**Mr. Broten:** — Okay. Are there any other instances so far this evening where we've talked about numbers, talked about funding coming from the federal government, where the description as being all from the federal government, where that wasn't perhaps accurate? Are there other examples of that or is that the one error?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Mr. Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to clarify. Certainly I had rolled in the \$5 million from the provincial side inadvertently. And thankfully, and probably as usually, the deputy's helped to refine my answer.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten.

**Mr. Broten:** — So we've spent some time talking about the new revenue, the new dollars coming in to AEEL, but we've talked roughly a figure of \$70.6 million of new funding. However the amount that we are, that at some point we'll likely be voting on for the supplementary estimates for the ministry is \$28.315 million. So there is a difference there of a significant amount of money.

In the minister's opening remarks, he made reference to why there is that difference and that's, as it's termed on page 11, ministry savings. So whether the government would like to call it ministry savings or perhaps a different term is used, there is clearly money that was earmarked for something or money that was to go out the door that is not occurring.

So I know the minister touched on this in his opening remarks in terms of detailing the \$42.3 million of savings or clawback. Could he for the record and once again please state, so we all have a chance to hear and write it down, of the \$42.3 million that's achieved through savings or clawback or cuts, could you please break that down for the committee.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — As noted, \$32.1 million has been returned to the province from the University of Saskatchewan related to funding that is currently not required for the academic health science centre, and happy to report that significant cost savings has accompanied the construction work that's under way — and welcome work that is as we endeavour to ensure that health care continues to be a key priority for this government just as it is for the people of the province.

\$6.2 million related to training and employment programs, 2.5 million from ministry efficiencies, and 1.5 million has become available due to program evolutions within Immigration. And that should give you a sense of some of the savings that we've been able to realize — most of those coming overwhelmingly from the work under way on the Academic Health Sciences centre, D wing and E wing at the University of Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Broten:** — So speaking about the Academic Health Sciences building, the money that was clawed back most recently, that \$32.1 million amount, when is it expected that those bills will have to be paid? When does the ministry expect that that 32 million, or an amount similar, I would expect, would be called upon from the ministry to continue with the project?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — If it is required, it would be '11-12 and perhaps '12-13.

**Mr. Broten:** — The minister says, if it is required. And the minister made earlier remarks about the project coming in lower than expected. Does the minister have . . . Do his officials and advisers suggest what the likelihood is that a portion of that 32.1 million will be needed?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — You know, at this stage, I don't think we would comment on it. It's just to say that competitive bidding processes being what they are, we will see how the project proceeds.

**Mr. Broten:** — For this wing, to date how much has been transferred or how much has been paid?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — There are two wings in progress, and that's significant. And we'll get to the breakdown. But the significance of moving forward with both of these, I think the reference here is very important. This was an initiative first announced in 2003. And certainly the state during that era of the College of Medicine is probably worth recapping, that the previous government had allowed that College of Medicine to be put on probation.

And so in 2003 the former premier, Lorne Calvert, said this project has the government's unwavering support, as it was first announced September 2003. December 2004 there was an action plan that reiterated this commitment. The Throne Speech from 2005 noted, "In this session, a major investment will be

made toward this project.” I note that date; that was in 2005. December 12th, a funding announcement, and that was 2005. July 12th, a photo op and sod-turning. No construction began over the course of those years.

[19:45]

What we wanted to do is make sure that the academic health science structure, the academic health science building began being undertaken in a serious fashion. And so what we’ve been able to do is invest dollars, real dollars, start the construction — in fact, I was just there this past weekend, part of my regular updates as I cross the province, as we can, keeping track of the capital investments that are under way — where D-wing is coming along nicely, and the preparatory work for E-wing has now started. And there’s considerable work there.

What I will do is just reiterate that D-wing . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes. D-wing has come in at 157, and E-wing has come in at 121 million. And so again, through competitive bidding processes, we’re happy to see the savings of tens of millions of dollars.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. If in the future, the dates where you mentioned where additional funding would be required in the coming years, what actions, what planning is the ministry undertaking in order to ensure that the appropriate funds would be available when they would be called upon to complete the project?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — There are still outstanding requirements for both A and B wing that will be needed. Obviously those are competitive bidding processes that will roll forward as well, and so that’s certainly something that we’ll look at in the future as A and B come online. First priorities were D and E, and it’s safe to say in a very tangible, real way, construction is well under way. And it’s part of our commitment — training more doctors, training more nurses, and helping to provide enhanced health care to the people of this province.

**Mr. Broten:** — So are there actions being taken by the ministry? There’s a nice euphemism used — restraints — in some other documents that talk about some of the clawing back or the cuts that occur. Are there additional restraints being undertaken by the ministry in order to set money aside for this project? Or if there are restraints occurring, are they being used for other initiatives?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well I think the language is really important here. This is a cost savings. This was a competitive bidding process and tens of millions of dollars were saved. And so I think, to borrow from my honourable friend who quoted the price on D wing as saying, that’s not chump change, I’ll just say these are real savings for the people of this province as we move forward with these two projects, the two wings.

So you know, on a go-forward basis as part of our due diligence, we’ll certainly be mindful of the competitive bidding process that will surely accompany A and B. And in the meantime, we see the construction well under way with a great degree of momentum for both D and E. So it’s part of our due diligence on a go-forward basis.

**Mr. Broten:** — With the savings or the restraint that is occurring and if there is savings that have occurred through a bid coming in under . . . while indeed good progress has been made on the project in various, you know, many of the wings, but there is certainly more work to do.

If the government is now faced with a cash flow problem — where there is an effort to look for, not nickels and dimes but larger amounts under proverbial cushions throughout different ministries — was your view as a minister that it might be wise to keep those savings perhaps and put them towards the project at a near-future date in order to ensure that the funding was in place for the project? Or were you comfortable releasing those funds to make up for a cash shortfall at present?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Mr. Chair, certainly being mindful of fiscal prudence, we wouldn’t ascribe, in this instance, to just allowing or having taxpayers’ dollars sitting idle in an account. What we wanted to do was make sure that we were moving forward these projects. That was part of our campaign plan. It’s another promise, one of over 100 that we’ve kept.

And as we’ve seen construction go forward on both D and E wings, after an era that was long on rhetoric and short on action, we thought it was very prudent to ensure that we are mindful of taxpayer dollars and, if there are additional dollars, to make sure that those are being utilized and maximized on behalf of the people of this province.

So on a go-forward basis again, as part of our due diligence, we’ll ensure, we’ll ensure that, you know, our priorities and promises are kept and, at the same time, that we’re managing the public purse in a fiscally prudent and responsible fashion.

**Mr. Broten:** — So for the Academic Health Sciences building to date, for all the work that’s being done, how much funding has been advanced in total? And how much of that advanced funding has been spent?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — This’ll take me just a minute, Mr. Chair, just to track down.

About \$170 million has been advanced to the University of Saskatchewan, but we wouldn’t have the real time dollars as far as their rollout. That’s part of the ongoing process and construction that’s under way.

**Mr. Broten:** — So if 170 million altogether has been advanced for the project, the amount that was taken back, the 30-odd million, is that the difference of what has been spent from the total that was advanced?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Just precise as we can on addressing your question. If I’ve got it correct, you’re asking \$32 million, that has been saved, that has been returned to the province. And the money that has been advanced, at about 170 million. Does that offer clarification?

**Mr. Broten:** — Well my question is, if 170 million is the total that has been advanced for the project — . . . there have been bills to pay up and to this point for the construction that has occurred. My question is, the 32 million that has been taken back and is being used now in other places, is that the



difference? Basically from the 170, have the bills been whatever the difference is from 170 to 32 million?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — No, the 32 has come off of 201 million, for a total of about 170.

**Mr. Broten:** — And the 201 million that you just referenced, what figure is that?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Those are combined dollars that had been forwarded to the University of Saskatchewan, and 32 returned to the government, as we've highlighted here, for a total of about 170.

**Mr. Broten:** — So when I asked what the total is for the amount of funding that has been advanced for this project, I believe the answer was 170 million. Was I correct in understanding that?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — That's the net. So you could add to that, 32 million that has since been returned. But netted out, it's about 170 million.

**Mr. Broten:** — Okay. Let's backtrack to before the clawback occurred for the 32 million. At that time before that occurred, what was the total amount of funding that was advanced for the project?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Thanks very much for the clarification. It was 201 million; \$32 million saved; total advanced to date, 169 net.

**Mr. Broten:** — Okay. Thank you. So I understand the 201 million, which was the total amount advanced before the clawback, does that include the 100 million I believe that was advanced in '05-06 fiscal?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — In '05-06, there was \$1.3 million that was forwarded to the university, 1.3. Is that confirmed on '05-06, Reg?

**Mr. Broten:** — And then in '06-07, how much was advanced to the project?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — \$100 million was advanced in '06-07; \$100 million was advanced in '08-09. And that 1.3 that had been advanced previously, that gets to the 2.1; \$32 million in savings.

**Mr. Broten:** — So to get it straight in my head — and thanks for your patience — '05-06, about 1.3 million. And then in '06-07, under the previous administration, 100 million. And then in '07-08, the first year of the Sask Party government another 100 million . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Zero in which year? Sorry, if I could ask the minister, please, for the 201 million that was advanced, what is the chronology of the advancement of the 201 please, according to fiscal year?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — I'll just confirm: '08-09, 100 million; '06-07, 100 million; prior to that, 1.3.

**Mr. Broten:** — So in '07-08, there was no funding advanced for the project? Is that correct?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — That's right.

[20:00]

**Mr. Broten:** — So to date the 201 million point three that was advanced at one time, of that amount 32 million has been taken back?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — It's been saved. It's been saved. And this is really important because the contracts weren't tendered until after the election, and that's where we began to get the real construction costs. These are savings to the people of this province. Certainly \$32 million of savings, as we see a project like this go forward, is a very significant savings for the people, would be a significant savings amount for the people of the province. So it's a savings, yes.

**Mr. Broten:** — Earlier on in your remarks, Minister, you had mentioned there was some doubt whether or not additional funding will be needed for the project. You said there is a question whether or not the 32 million or a portion of it would in fact be needed. Am I correct in understanding your earlier statement?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — No, I think your interpretation is probably too pessimistic. What we're attempting to do is make sure that we're not sending any unnecessary signals because as I've said, additional components of this project will go out for competitive tender and so we just . . . I would assume that you'd be onside as well saying those are competitive processes and should proceed in due course.

**Mr. Broten:** — With the next stages of the Academic Health Sciences building, there will be costs associated with those phases of the project, right?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well what one wouldn't want to do is begin to estimate, approximate, or any way influence what those costs would be. And so it's just simply to say that, as we've seen in these two wings, we anticipate that there would be a competitive bidding process in the future. And as I say, that's just part of the due diligence and due process of undertaking an issue like this.

**Mr. Broten:** — So with the additional phases that will occur, the other wings for the completion of the entire project, would you expect — and I know we don't want to show our cards to, and in any way influence the bidding process to drive bids up — but with the wings that still need to be completed and the overall project, would it be a safe statement to make that it would likely be significantly more than 32 million?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — You know, at this stage I wouldn't comment on the additional pieces that will be added to the Academic Health Sciences building. That's, as I say, it's part of our due diligence and due process and frankly it would probably be irresponsible for me to comment much more than that because it would be pure speculation.

**Mr. Broten:** — In terms of scope of the different wings, the extent of the project, could the minister please state for the committee what are the remaining wings that need to be completed for the whole project to be done.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — That would be A and B wings.

**Mr. Broten:** — And how does A and B, how do those wings compare in terms of size and the type of facility and the nature of those wings compared to the other wings which are in progress now?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — I think there'd be . . . There are a couple of elements. We certainly don't have those proposals yet. They're still in the out years, but it's safe to say that they would be closer in nature to renovations.

**Mr. Broten:** — So your guess is that with the two wings being constructed already, in your opinion without . . . Like I'm not an architect. I'm not an engineer. I don't plan buildings. But with the nature of the renovations, you're fairly . . . Do you think they're half the expense of the other wings that have been made or are they a quarter of the expense, or is it we're talking a coat of paint or are we talking the construction of new buildings here?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well you know, when we're talking about the training of health care professionals in the province of Saskatchewan, I don't think we'd offer such clichés. I think it would be part of our responsible decision making to just simply say at this stage, we anticipate that A and B will go forward. We look forward to working with the University of Saskatchewan and affiliated stakeholders to see those projects go forward, as in due course they will.

And you know, at this stage, as I've said, certainly I don't see any particular purpose in speculating on scope nor scale nor size nor the extent of investment that would be required. This has been a promise that we've kept. We are making very real progress and it's in real time. You can see it on a daily level with D wing and E wing and we look forward to working with the University of Saskatchewan among other stakeholders on a go-forward basis.

But that would be about the extent of my comfort zone rather than offering idle speculation on potential costs.

**Mr. Broten:** — Well I suppose in looking at and I don't, I mean by using the expression coat of paint, of course the renovations that would be required would be far more extensive than that. But it is interesting as we look at this project in its entirety, if, as you would suggest, the truly large parts of the project are the wings that are under construction now and if that amount to complete that is \$170 million, that which has been advanced and that will cover the construction.

If we look at the other wings that still need to be done, say if it was 32 million, the amount that was clawed back — even if those additional wings that are needed to complete the whole project, even if they are not, the work that is needed is not as extensive or as thorough as the other wings — you know 32 million, you know, five times greater would be the two other wings that are under construction.

So even if we're looking at a smaller scope for the two wings that are still needed for the completion of the project, perhaps the \$32 million there would be useful in going towards those projects.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well I think it's a pretty significant public policy difference actually, if you're suggesting that stakeholders across the province could just simply sit on dollars, potentially to be used or not used.

Our approach is, on a project like this, let's make sure it's moving forward, first and foremost. That is happening. Let's make sure that it's being done through competitive processes. Those are certainly under way. And if there are cost savings for the people of this province, let's make sure that we're not taking those dollars for granted. Let's make sure that we're maximizing them. And certainly that's the case in this instance, where dollars have been returned because they've been saved. And as I say, that's . . . You know, it's a pretty significant approach.

For us, I think it fits squarely and firmly regarding fiscal prudence and financial responsibility to ensure that taxpayer dollars that have been identified for specific projects are utilized on those projects. And if cost savings can be realized, that those dollars are then returned to the people of this province and, in this instance, to the Government of Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Broten:** — Well thank you for that answer. I know the motivation for the question, when we look at the supplementary estimates that we're examining here and when we, on the heels of the release of the mid-year report . . . I think the uneasiness that I hear from people in Saskatchewan is that when we've seen the budget blunder that we have, and when we've seen the overall budget out by so much, there's a concern that if you can't get, if we've seen the error on the large scale, what does this mean for the smaller projects? And a worry that the funding that has been earmarked for a project, that if things are tight now and if the management continues, then there's questions that people have posed to me about the ability of the government in the future to make the payments in terms, to finish a project.

So I know that's the easiness around the clawing back. But we can leave it at that for this evening.

With the health sciences building . . .

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten, if I can interrupt you for a minute. Mr. LeClerc.

**Mr. LeClerc:** — I've got a point of interest, Mr. Chair, about this rhetoric. And it's way off the topic of the estimates. I also have problems with the language. I think the minister has explained a number of times that it's not a clawback, it's a savings. And I think the minister has answered that particular aspect of it a number of times, that it is a savings and not a clawback. He continues to use that language in political rhetoric. It's not of the estimates. The question seems to be on the numbers and the questions need to be on the estimates. Now he's making political statements.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. LeClerc. I will . . . Mr. Broten.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. I'm not sure if that was a point of interest or a point of order, but I will comment nonetheless.

The issues that we're speaking about here, Mr. Chair, as

identified in the minister's opening remarks and as identified with the estimates . . . And I'm looking at the estimates here. It's 09-10, Saskatchewan: Strong and Steady, Supplementary Estimates November, and in this booklet which I think is the official Supplementary Estimates, there's a paragraph here and the text says:

The appropriation required is offset by ministry savings of . . . [42.3 million] achieved primarily by deferring costs not currently required by the University of Saskatchewan for the Academic Health Sciences Building along with the ministry's restraint initiatives.

So my questions, Mr. Chair, have clearly been about the Academic Health Sciences building. It's what I've . . . I've stayed to the content, and the minister and I have had a nice discussion. So I'm done discussing about the Academic Health Sciences building, but I know my colleague from Lakeview does have a few questions he would like to ask, so I'd be happy to give him the floor at this time.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Broten. Although Mr. LeClerc has some concerns, the 32.1 million that Mr. Broten has been discussing, I think has been well explained by the minister. Although it is part of estimates, the member's using his time as he so wishes. Although I would caution members not to go too far back and start bringing up budget items. Let's concentrate on the supplementary estimates. Mr. Nilson.

**Mr. Nilson:** — Thank you very much. I appreciate having a chance to ask some questions because I know that the minister was involved in the senior administration of the university at the time all of these projects were moving forward, and in the same way I was involved with the Ministry of Health and ministry of post-secondary as these things were being developed. And so I was pleased finally to get some sense of how the amounts that were rolled out were rolled out for this particular project.

Now it's my recollection and understanding that when the project first went ahead, the expected costs were to be about 120 million. Does that fit with what you remember from December of 2003?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — I won't profess to remember the specifics. I think what my hon. friend is suggesting, that, had construction started when those announcements began, probably there would have been some considerable cost savings, that wasn't the case.

**Mr. Nilson:** — So that was my understanding. But then you indicated that on December the 12th, 2005, and I think we were both around at that time when the \$100 million dollar advance was announced — which you've pointed out went over a few months later in the '06-07 time frame — but that \$100 million announced then, and that was based, as I recall, on the board of governors where, I think you were working in that field, approved a project of about \$251 million. So it was substantially more.

And what they were trying to estimate, as I recall, was the difficulty around getting contracts during the time of the heated oil sands boom construction. And so everybody was having difficulty getting estimates. But does that number sound about

right to you?

[20:15]

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Again, Mr. Chair, I certainly won't speak on behalf of the University of Saskatchewan's board at any time, most especially during those years when I did have the opportunity to serve on campus. I'll just simply say that the longer that window stretched, there were incremental increases to costs.

**Mr. Nilson:** — So now previously you mentioned the number of \$157 million plus another number for another wing. And I was trying to recall what you'd actually said to try to figure out what the cost estimate was for this particular project.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Yes, the D wing, about 157 million. And E wing, about 121 million.

**Mr. Nilson:** — So we add those two numbers together to get the total cost of this project. Is that correct, or of those two wings?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well I think this goes back to your colleague's question and I'm not going to, I'm certainly not going to be categorical because as we know, there are A and B wings yet. And rather than speculate on what those potential investments may look like, I think it's probably more prudent for everyone to be cautious — as we approach those topics — about the future competitive bidding processes on the rest of the Academic Health Sciences building, just out of prudence.

**Mr. Nilson:** — So then I was trying to recall what I heard and I was confused. And so what you have said is on those two wings, A and B, the rough estimated cost is \$278 million which is comprised of 157 million for one and 121 million for the other. And in this process, \$201.3 million had been advanced to this project as of March 31st, 2009. So they had a project that was going to cost them possibly approaching \$300 million, and they had about \$200 million advanced towards that project. Is that correct?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Yes, what I think the question really is about, the phasing and timing of the construction projects, D wing out well in advance of E wing. And so what we have is a construction schedule that is proceeding apace. And essentially what we've said is, that commitment holds but the dollars — given the construction schedule over the course of the next, close to, say, two and a half years, up to '12-13 at least — as that construction schedule rolls out, there will be various needs for capital.

And at this stage, what we've been able to do is have a \$32 million cost savings on a very competitive bid that came in on E wing, and as a result, those dollars forwarded back into the province. And as those schedules continue to roll out in the coming years, dollars that are needed will be there. But again it's not the totality of the project because we also have A and B yet to address.

**Mr. Nilson:** — Okay. Now you've totally confused me, and I've been listening carefully for quite a while here. So the project that we have has a wing that estimated 157 million.

What wing is that?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — D wing.

**Mr. Nilson:** — That's D wing. Okay. And is this the wing that's ended up costing less than what was estimated, or is it E wing which has a cost of \$121 million?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — E wing came in with considerable savings is how I would frame it.

**Mr. Nilson:** — Okay. And so E wing had been estimated to cost 121 plus 32 million, so \$153 million, and it's come in less. Is that what's going on here?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — I wouldn't draw that conclusion. There have been \$32 million in savings. There are some other associated infrastructure needs that may be required to be addressed. And so there are some funds available to take care of some of those additional infrastructure needs.

Again this is where the complexity . . . And I'm not purposefully in any way avoiding the question. What we don't want to do is tie the hands nor kind of tip the cards of a competitive bidding process on some of that additional infrastructure piece. And that infrastructure piece could relate to both issues of water and heating for the campus proper.

**Mr. Nilson:** — Okay. So now this project has gone from a renovation in the University Hospital complex with the Academic Health Sciences to something that's tied in with the whole university campus. Is that what you're saying?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well again to explore this is to actually potentially undermine the bidding process. It's just to say there are some components of this that certainly are up for consideration out beyond . . . They relate to the specifics, but they're more broadly based infrastructure needs.

**Mr. Nilson:** — Well I am confused, and I think I'll continue to ask some questions. And one of the reasons that I'm asking the questions is that people right across the province who are receiving government services — not just in your department, in many departments — are being asked to account for tens of thousands of dollars. And here we're talking about hundreds, tens of millions and hundreds of millions of dollars, and we don't seem to be getting very much clarity on what is happening.

Is it possible that you can provide us with a detailed rollout of the capital requirements? You seem to have been referring to something like that. And I know it's common with most projects that there would be some kind of a detailed statement so we can actually see when these capital requirements are there. Is that possible?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Mr. Chair, I'm not . . . the question's a curious one about . . . sitting down. That's what we're doing tonight. There's a distinction between if you want cash flow requirements for this initiative and the construction costs.

So as far as sticking to the issue at hand, what's here in supplementary estimates, we've been asked to account for those

dollars. That's exactly what we've been spending the better part of an hour doing, Mr. Chair. And so there have been \$32 million, about \$32 million in savings. We have D Wing proceeding, E Wing proceeding, and I'm not certain if the member is asking that we sit down and hypothesize about some future projects. All I'm saying, the scope and scale of the initiative is going to continue. I've already highlighted A and B and that those are going to move forward on a competitive bidding process. What those include I wouldn't pretend to speak to. All I am saying is it seems to me that the member is asking a question for which we've been spending the better part of an hour in addressing, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Nilson:** — Well with respect, my question is simply to ask for the rationale around what you've said here which is, there are going to be capital requirements over the next couple of years. And you're obviously basing that on some kind of information, and so I was asking you if we could have a copy of that so that we can look at it as well.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — I think that would be the prerogative of cabinet actually, and I think it would probably be something that we review on a regular basis and on a go-forward basis as the future needs of this project roll out.

**Mr. Nilson:** — Well can you provide a copy of this for this, of your capital requirements for this project for the committee so that we can look and try to figure out what you're doing here in the supplementary estimates?

**The Chair:** — Mr. Minister, before you reply, in reviewing the supplementary estimates, the details of what Mr. Nilson is asking for really isn't specified here so I'd ask you to stick to the supplementary estimate items.

**Mr. Nilson:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's the whole point. If it was a proper supplementary estimate, this would be in here so we would understand what you're talking about. So let me ask this another way, okay? Let me try and ask in a way where maybe we can get an answer.

We know that, according to what you've told us tonight, in '05-06, 1.3 million went as a capital grant for this project to the U of S [University of Saskatchewan]. We know that in '06-07, from what you've said tonight that 100 million went forward for this project. In '07-08 there were zero dollars that went forward because probably the 100 million was enough to cover the kinds of costs that were taking place during that year. In '08-09 another \$100 million went forward. Can you tell me when the \$32.1 million went back? What date did that happen?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Those dollars would be returned during the last quarter.

**Mr. Nilson:** — Okay, so now we have a different answer than what we had just an hour ago which was that only 170 million was with the U of S. Now you're telling us the whole 201 million is still at the University of Saskatchewan. Is that correct?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Yes, I think the nature of the question, it will in this fiscal year. Hence it's provided for in these supplementary estimates as we've discussed.

[20:30]

**Mr. Nilson:** — So the answer is the money is still at the U of S and is available for them for this project. Now I think in your opening remarks or in some of the initial questions that were asked there was a comment that I interpreted to mean that we may actually be looking at — meaning the government — at this \$32.1 million figure and may have to make some adjustments for that because of the speed of the project. And they may actually require that money still in this fiscal year. Is that what I understood you to say before?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Mr. Chair, I'm not certain to what point in the deliberations my honourable friend is making reference to. We've talked about \$32 million in savings out of the Academic Health Science building. Those savings are going to be realized and returned to the provincial government, the timing of which is going to be forthcoming. I'm not certain to which statement he's making reference to.

**Mr. Nilson:** — Well I guess we'll both have to look at the transcript, and we can see the point where I was a bit confused earlier. Now I'm not usually one that gets confused by these kinds of subjects, but this one has kind of flummoxed me from a lot of different angles even though I've got a long history in trying to understand what's going on.

Basically then we have a project that is in the 2 to \$300 million range, as far as cost. And that we're not certain, we haven't heard how much they've actually spent yet because I know my friend asked that question. And we've now, in a situation where as a government in these estimates, you were asking to take back 32 million of the 100 million that the new government provided to them. Is that correct?

**Ms. Isman:** — Mr. Chair, I'm not sure if I can help clarify the situation. In terms of the overall projected costs — which is the budgeted items, right? — I think that they are as you've described.

What the university said to us was that they had the \$200 million that government had advanced that they were utilizing for the long-term capital project, that as a result of the tender bids coming in, they didn't need all the cash that they had been advanced. And so they were offering back \$32.1 million of cash that is currently unneeded and would not be required until at least '11-12 or '12-13. And that was an open-ended question. So it's simply a matter of cash flow coming back to government of unrequired cash at this point in time.

**Mr. Nilson:** — Okay. And that goes right to the question that I asked was, can you give us something that would explain why this money isn't required for another two years? Because that's ...

**Ms. Isman:** — Mr. Chair, I believe the longevity of the capital project is a multi-year project from beginning right until end. And so it's simply a matter of when the cash is needed to be expended. So it had been advanced and not needed at this point in time. So what is overall budget costs and the expense of the item versus when the cash is actually flowing as the project evolves and they actually need to make the payments.

**Mr. Nilson:** — So can I ask again whether you can provide us with a letter or something which describes how this project will work? And if you want to be broad on the numbers, that's fine. But at least you can tell us which parts are obviously costing a lot less than what was thought and which parts are going to cost more and when they're actually going to be done because it does directly affect what's being done in these supplementary estimates, which is what we're being asked to vote on.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Thanks very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to consult. Once again I just don't think it appropriate for us to get into construction plans at that level of detail. This is why we're here. We're addressing it. And the member is asking some pertinent questions, in my opinion.

Let's allow the projects to proceed. Certainly due diligence is under way, and we've made more progress in the last few months than the previous government did in any number of years. And on issues of accountability, you can just watch the project go. And certainly we've been entrusted with working to ensure that there is success.

That construction is under way. This project is going to be successful. And it's going to help train more doctors, more nurses. It's going to help ensure that we have better and more health care within the province of Saskatchewan. And the accountability for that, I think, is provided for in this forum, among others.

**Mr. Nilson:** — Thank you for your comments and thanks for trying to provide the information to me. I would say that, based on many years of experience, that the best projects include many years of planning and proper preparation. The actual construction goes forward quite simply if you've done the proper preparation. I think this is a good example of another project like that. I'll turn it back to my friend.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the member from Lakeview for his questions on this issue.

So this evening in our discussion over the last while, we've determined that there was a new revenue coming into the ministry, \$70.5 million, and that this was all from the federal government. And we've determined that, on the provincial front here in terms of provincial dollars, that there has been a total restraint, as it is put, of \$42.252 million, 32 million of which is savings from the Academic Health Sciences building, the discussion that we've been having for some time.

I'd like to now discuss briefly what the remaining of that amount of restraint is. From the 32 million from academic health sciences, that gets us the additional about \$10 million of money taken back. So we've discussed the capital project of the Academic Health Sciences building. Within the savings that have been identified by the ministry, are there any other instances where funding has been taken back from a capital project?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Thank you very much. No.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. So when we look at where the

other 10 million of savings or claw back occurred, if there's not any other project other than the Academic Health Sciences building, we can look for other savings within the ministry. So I have a few questions now geared from the human resources angle. In the budget constraints that have occurred within the ministry, how many full-time equivalent positions are unfilled as a result of the budget constraints?

**Ms. Isman:** — Mr. Chair, with regard to the FTE [full-time equivalent] savings, at the end of the year we're projecting right now approximately 6.8 FTEs underutilized. But the savings are actually in dollars as opposed to FTEs. So part of that is as a result of positions being held vacant for a period of time. When we go to fill a position, we may employ a new individual at a lesser salary than the previous individual or incumbent in the job. And so that way, the savings that we're projecting actually may not directly link back to an FTE saving because we may actually utilize the full-time equivalent of a position somewhere else. But the dollar value savings that we're projecting is \$1.25 million.

**Mr. Broten:** — So just so I understand this correctly in my head. The 6.8 FTEs, the way that you get to the 6.8 is not only through specific positions that might be phased out, but there's been instances where a long-time serving employee with a high salary leaves and then a more junior employee comes on with lower salary amounts. And then when you add up all of those savings, it equals what is on average 6.8 people?

**Ms. Isman:** — Correct. So we estimate that it should come out to about 6.8 at the end of the year. But our focus would be on more specifically the \$1.25 million in savings.

And the one other thing that I might add is sometimes those savings are as a result of an individual leaving and the length of time that it takes to staff the position. So you would actually have dollar savings from the position as a result of that.

**Mr. Broten:** — With the instances where a senior employee has left, are there instances where that departure has been encouraged or facilitated, or is it simply normal retirement patterns throughout the ministry?

**Ms. Isman:** — It's simply been normal attrition through.

**Mr. Broten:** — Okay. Is it in all instances, as you describe where a junior employee has replaced a more senior employee, or are there some instances where in fact a position has been eliminated for one reason or another?

**Ms. Isman:** — No. We haven't eliminated any positions.

**Mr. Broten:** — Okay. So are all the savings that are identified through simply hiring junior employees to replace senior employees?

**Ms. Isman:** — And it might not be just junior to replace senior. As I say, it could be a time lag in the staffing that's resulting if we hold the position vacant for three months, or if it takes three months to actually fill the position. Then you actually have realized those salary expenditures for that period of time that the position hasn't been filled.

**Mr. Broten:** — So how many positions at present would be sitting unfilled due to the restraints that are occurring?

**Ms. Isman:** — Mr. Chair, I'm sorry. I didn't bring the details with me in terms of the staff in the ministry. I would estimate it's about 15 to 20 vacancies that we've currently got in the ministry at this point in time.

[20:45]

**Mr. Broten:** — With those 15 to 20 vacancies, what would be the average length of time that they have been vacant?

**Ms. Isman:** — Mr. Chair, sorry for the delay. Part of it is just we didn't bring all of those details with us, but I mean on average it takes about three months to staff a position in the public service. Also sometimes just based on management decisions, if we're looking to see whether or not that's the right position that we want to fill, so we may be going back through just general management review.

So I think on estimate, if you said three to six months, positions have been held vacant. Not necessarily directly related to the objective of restraint savings, but more so just the general business of the ministry.

**Mr. Broten:** — So looking at the general business of the ministry, the 15 to 20 vacancies that currently exist, how would that number compare to the last two years in terms of an average amount of vacancies within the ministry at this time of the fiscal year?

**Ms. Isman:** — Mr. Chair, once again just checking with the officials that have been in the ministry longer than I. But I think on average, we would think that this is very comparable within the ministry.

**Mr. Broten:** — Of the 6.8 FTEs and the 1.25 million saved, if it's not an actual 6.8 people, is your estimate that it would be the 1.25 million savings is from the 15 to 20 vacancies or is it through other savings as well?

**Ms. Isman:** — If I'm understanding your question correctly, it would be through the savings overall.

**Mr. Broten:** — Are there instances where an individual, not the situation where someone's departed and you're choosing not to fill the position, but are there instances within the ministry where someone is being asked or encouraged to work less than they were before?

**Ms. Isman:** — No, there haven't been.

**Mr. Broten:** — In this process of having vacancies and not filling them, are there instances where severances have been offered to long-time employees in order to encourage them to exit the public service?

**Ms. Isman:** — No, there haven't been any.

**Mr. Broten:** — Are you able to state in what branches and departments the vacancies currently are found? Can that be provided to the committee?

**Ms. Isman:** — I don't have the list right now, but we can certainly provide a list of the vacancies currently in the ministry.

**Mr. Broten:** — Is it the minister's opinion that at present the vacancies in the civil service are not having a negative effect on the delivery of programs?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — The nature of the question, I'll turn around and say that I couldn't be more proud of the efforts and teamwork that is exhibited on a daily level by officials within this ministry. And I think it's reflective of a dedication that our public service in this province has had for years. And so I'll just simply comment, the officials have my full confidence and, as I say, on a daily level I'm impressed with performance and efforts.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. In the coming year, what is the projected number of retirements that will occur in the ministry over the course of the next year?

**Ms. Isman:** — Mr. Chair, I don't have that information with me. In our human resource plans in this ministry as well as in all the other ministries, based on my experience before with the Public Service Commission, we do estimate potential retirements within the ministry based on the demographics of the ministry and the average age of projected retirement — I don't recall exactly what that is — and that gives us sort of an estimate of how many people may be eligible to retire. As you know, when people choose to retire is their own personal decision. And they can work until they're so ready. But we do for human resource planning purposes have a general estimate number. I just don't have it with me.

**Mr. Broten:** — Has there been thought and consideration, with the individuals retiring over the next year, if a hiring freeze is maintained in terms of filling vacancies, if it's the minister's opinion that now at 15 to 20 — through the commitment and good work of the ministry's civil servants — that the job is getting done, at what level of vacancies would it be determined that the ability of the ministry to provide the programs and do the work that it needs to do, at what point might that be hindered or hurt, and how will that monitoring occur?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Mr. Chair, I would say we're now fully getting engaged into a conversation of not just HR [human resources] questions but hypothetical HR questions. We've had a question about a notion of a hiring freeze. That hasn't come up in our deliberations. We're now having questions raised about competence and capacity within the ministry.

And the reason that some of these data sources are not with us tonight is, once again my assumption is, that we were going to be focusing on the document in hand.

What we've said is, we're happy to provide some additional information to committee members on some of these issues. But the last question I simply don't know how to answer because it was based on a hypothetical assumption, an assumption that in no way has been raised during our deliberations. We'll do our best to help answer questions, Mr. Chair, but the very assumption of that query just simply doesn't hold. Maybe it can be rephrased. Maybe I just didn't understand it properly. But

again, it wasn't based on information or empirical evidence provided by our presentation.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Your point is well taken, as reinforced by your officials. I would just ask the members to try and stick a little bit closer to the supplemental estimates and we will give a little bit of leniency and freedom, but just to stick a bit closer to the subject at hand.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. So I'm looking at the estimates on page 11, and it talks about ministry savings of 42.3 million. And we've covered the savings through, what are called savings here, the Academic Health Sciences building. So now we're talking about the other savings in the supplementary estimates. And one of the savings that the minister identified was not filling vacancies within the civil service, so that's what I've been asking about. And if that is the current state of hiring in the ministry, I heard no indication in the answer that there was going to be a filling of these positions in the near future so I assumed that that was the approach going forward and simply had a question about how many positions can be vacant within the ministry.

So I know . . .

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten, the point is well made but I think the minister and the official both did specify that, you know, you are kind of hinging on speculation.

**Mr. Broten:** — In terms of questions about human resources, I will pause right now but I know my colleague from Athabasca has a few questions for the minister.

**The Chair:** — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. In being a veteran of some of these committee meetings in the estimates, I know there is many, many occasions where we heard speeches and hypothetical questions and positions posed by the opposition on many occasions, but I won't go there.

I just wanted to talk about northern Saskatchewan in general. I think there was a reference made to some of the challenges of that specific area of the province. Federally and I think provincially it's recognized as an area that has very unique challenges. There is a high young Aboriginal population and there's limited employment in some of the communities and, you know, the list basically goes on.

In northern Saskatchewan we value some of the positions, especially around employment and particularly the Can-Sask centres.

Now is there any plans in northern Saskatchewan that you or your officials are aware of to shut down some of the Can-Sask centres or keep positions vacant, if in the event that they either have people that retire or people taking employment elsewhere? And the reason why I'm asking that, Mr. Minister, is the fact that we need every position in northern Saskatchewan for the creation of training or employment or seeking of that particular training or employment.

[21:00]

So I know in northern Saskatchewan there are a few positions that may become vacant as a result of retirement, I think, and one may be health related. I'm not certain of the detail, but that's what I'm hearing. What is your ministry's plan for an area of our province that needs specific attention when it comes to keeping these offices and the staff fully functional and of course fully staffed?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — While my officials focus on some of the specifics, I just want to say how much I appreciate that question. And I agree with you regarding initiatives for our northern communities and most especially the First Nations and Métis people right across our province.

And it's one of the reasons that we were absolutely delighted to partner with a number of stakeholders, and you'll know the initiative well. The northern career quest would be an example where officials from not just our Can-Sask offices but the ministry more broadly have helped. It's the largest Aboriginal skills training initiative in the country. It's \$33 million. It's helping to train over 1,000 people in the North.

Their project headquarters is, as the member will know well, it's in La Ronge. Federal government has come forward. The provincial government has come forward. Cameco has taken a lead role and a number of other private sector partners, as well as and probably most importantly, a number of First Nation and Métis partners as well.

That would be just one initiative where I hope the message has been loud and clear. We know there's certainly more to do but we're doing our utmost to try innovative and partnership-based initiatives in the North on skills training.

Regarding the specific question, I'll actually turn that over to our deputy as it relates to some of the functioning of the ministry. But certainly I've been in the North five or six times now, and the more I learn and the more I get to know the people, truly I see the promise and potential not just of the region but of everyone I meet. And it's a shared imperative, so I appreciate the question. Clare?

**Ms. Isman:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just did check and a vacancy that we had, we've just actually posted it for filling — the vacancy that was in one of the northern current employment service centres.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. And along the lines, I just wanted to share with the minister and his staff that I'm certain that you're aware that, given the number of trends — this came out a couple of years ago — the federal government done an evaluation of certain areas that were basically hard pressed economically. And there's one area in particular and that was northern Saskatchewan that had, quite frankly, the lowest ranking across the country. It wasn't Nova Scotia. It wasn't Nunavut. It wasn't any of the other areas that we typically would think. It was actually northern Saskatchewan.

So I think what's happened there is, what I worry about, when you talk about FTE reductions or program changes, alarm bells go off right away. Because in northern Saskatchewan we're actually quite rich if you look at the resource base — forestry, the land, mining, the list goes on. But all that stops things from

proceeding are thoughtful and meaningful programs and staffing and unique approaches to making sure you connect the resource opportunity with the people that have occupied that land for years.

And I reflect back a number of years ago. We had rural depopulation and people were quite worried about that. Now I look at that from northern Saskatchewan. And given the fact that rural depopulation, at least they had agriculture as their one mainstay of the economy for rural Saskatchewan. In northern Saskatchewan, they haven't got that. They haven't got zero as a mainstay of their economy because, basically, they're still struggling to participate in that economy.

So that's why some of the programs and the FTEs . . . And I can account and I can attest for some of your staff in northern Saskatchewan and the amount of work that they do, because people come in there for resumé's, for their first time application for social insurance numbers and they refer them and they work quite hard.

Now what happens is some of those Can-Sask offices in northern Saskatchewan are busier than the post offices, you know. And they get pretty busy, especially around election time. I'm talking about the post offices.

So the point being that there's people in and out and there's a lot of information being shared. And we cannot lose any of those positions. Why? Because we got the challenges of being in an economic dark, black hole, I guess you could say. But more so is that people are trying to find that full-time, meaningful employment. And that's why I implore you as a minister to look at the North very differently in terms of cutting programs or cutting staff. Don't do it. Because we don't have, as rural Saskatchewan had, a mainstay part of the economic opportunity as they had in agriculture to help us survive. We don't have that option.

So these positions and these staffing and these programs not only should be protected, but they should be enhanced. Because out of all the regions in Saskatchewan, northern Saskatchewan is having the toughest economic times. And they've been having this for a number of years.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — I really appreciate the comment, your comment about the Can-Sask offices and the post office. I can remember visiting in Meadow Lake into one pretty significant government building and just seeing how busy the office was and the post office was. And there were some other offices there as well.

Now we're, you know, the work that's under way in the North — and certainly there's more to do — doesn't just come out of or from one ministry. And it's one of the reasons that on a pretty regular basis we do some collaborative work together and whether that's out of Ministry of First Nations and Métis Relations, whether that's out of the Ministry of Education, or any number of ministries where we collaborate.

But your points are well made and certainly find a very sympathetic ear to the points that you make. I think the ASEP [Aboriginal skills and employment partnership] initiative is one, the latest phase of the multi-party training program, recently



negotiated and signed. That was within the last six weeks where we were back in La Ronge. We signed that. That's profoundly important. And it relates to skills training. It builds on the record from the previous government. Certainly here's a case where there's continuity. This latest phase of the multi-party training program continues to build that emphasis on education and skills training, and without losing reference, of course we know one of the absolute linchpins and that relates to literacy. And we know there's a lot more work to do. So as I say, your comments are well founded, I know deeply held, and fall on a sympathetic ear.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the member from Athabasca for his questions. And I'm glad we're able to have this discussion about human resources and about the role of civil servants in carrying out the work of government and dealing with people. And I was pleased to hear of the minister's belief that ministry officials are doing a good job, because I believe that as well.

I was troubled though, Mr. Chair, when we were having this discussion a few moments ago. The member from Northwest suggested that the civil service was too large. I'm not quoting here, but certainly the opinion that there was fat to cut and that it was too many people working in the civil service for the job that needed to be done. And I know it's probably troubling for many of the civil servants in the room, as well as many of the civil servants that work throughout the province for the Saskatchewan government.

Just to be clear, because from the minister's earlier remarks I don't think he shares this opinion of the member from Northwest, but is it . . . Do you have a different view than the member from Northwest that there is a lot of fat to cut within the civil service and that there are too many people working in the civil service and that there certainly can be a lot of reductions and that vacancies really aren't an issue?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Mr. Chair, I'm troubled by the commentary that's being provided. And that is, I was asked some specific questions by my hon. friend. I'm not certain of what my hon. friend is making reference to. And to offer this in the context of the discussion that's under way, I will simply reiterate, and with all sincerity and intensity, I am absolutely proud of the work that is undertaken by officials right across the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

As you can see from the time tonight, they are tireless workers. And it is consistent with — and this has nothing to do with partisanship or party affiliation — the province of Saskatchewan has long been recognized as a source of remarkable, remarkable service when it comes to our public service.

And so I know not of which the context nor the contents of which my hon. friend has made reference and posed that question. I can just simply say it has had no bearing on the discussions that we have had, not only tonight, but in fact in more than two years that we've been in this position. And

again, I have no context for it other than to just simply say nothing further could be from the truth. It's an honour to serve with the individuals that I have the privilege of working with closely on a daily basis and it extends right across this ministry.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten.

**Mr. Broten:** — I thank the minister for his reply. And I was pleased to give him an opportunity to distance himself from those remarks because on this, he and I certainly agree that . . . the importance of the civil service.

It was interesting. During the minister's remarks, the member from Saskatoon Northwest didn't counter or didn't take on the issue that he said those statements. He simply said, I was commenting on the bureaucracy, not the civil service. So perhaps someone from the Public Service Commission can sit down with the member from Saskatoon Northwest and talk about the role of the public service.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — You know, the attribution which certainly is under way here is not grounded in anything that has been said on the record tonight. And from what I can see, as members on each side, I just simply do not know where these comments are coming from, Mr. Chair.

And I just raise once again a point of caution. We're here in utmost seriousness to deliberate and talk about the supplementary estimates. And I can't speak to what the member is referring to. And in fact as I say, the informal attribution that has gone on here, I have some serious questions about.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Broten, I just ask you to stick to what pertains to the supplemental estimates, and disregard any comments that may or may not be coming across the floor. Mr. Broten.

**Mr. Broten:** — May or may not — I liked that expression. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In terms of this discussion of human resources, has the process of vacancy management prompted any union grievances?

**Ms. Isman:** — Mr. Chair, to the best of my knowledge there aren't any grievances that have been filed such as you've referred to.

[21:15]

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. I believe I know the answer to this, but I do want to ask it. Are there any workers in your ministry that are members of unions currently bargaining with the government?

**The Chair:** — Ms. Schriemer.

**Ms. Schriemer:** — How does a grievance or negotiations apply to the supplementary estimates that we're here to be discussing?

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten, can you explain how that's relevant to the supplemental estimates?

**Mr. Broten:** — Oh absolutely. The issue that has been identified by the minister that has brought \$1.25 million worth of savings, that savings comes through vacancy management. It comes through the process of not filling positions, or filling positions with different people — a strategy of vacancy management — which has relevance on the strength and the well-being of the civil service, which certainly ties into workers and employment.

And I think if there are problems, one way to identify where problems could be arising is through whether grievances are filed and how that affects the bargaining processes as well. So that was the root of the question, and it's directly tied to the 1.25 million in savings through vacancy management.

**The Chair:** — Well, Mr. Broten, I understand where you're trying to come from, but I think when we start to getting to union negotiations in supplemental estimates, we're getting a bit off the topics. I'd ask you to get your comments back to the supplemental estimates.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. So we've talked tonight about how the 70 million, \$70.56 million of new revenue is all from the federal government. And we've talked about how, on the provincial end of things, how the total restraint, the savings, the cutbacks, the clawbacks has been an amount of 42.252 million — 32 million of that has been from the Academic Health Sciences building. And now we're talking about where this additional \$10 million of savings comes from.

So we've touched on, we've identified that there are no other capital projects that are being cut or deferred or anything like that. And we've had a discussion now about human resources. I'm providing this for context for those at home that may have just tuned in. So now in looking at where the other 10 million of the savings comes from as identified on page 11 of the supplementary estimates . . .

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten, if I could interrupt you for a moment. Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Thank you very much. And this won't be a long intervention. It's to say that, thanks to the good work of my deputy, the new dollars, 70 million identified . . . [inaudible] . . . stands and I think we're on the record as offering this refinement. That would include 5.25 million from the provincial government as well. And I just wanted to make sure that . . . mostly federal but some provincial dollars as well, just to ensure that those watching understand that context. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten.

**Mr. Broten:** — And thank you for that clarification. I do appreciate that, given that it was correcting earlier misinformation. So that's why I must have got mixed up in my head as I repeat it here.

So let's now look at some of the additional areas where savings are being realized. We've touched on some of the areas as I identified. Could the minister please identify what programs are being affected as a result of the — what is the term? — total restraint, please?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. On training programs, we have seen savings of just over \$3.4 million. And regarding employment programs, we have seen savings of just under \$2.2 million. That would give kind of the frame on employment and training programs.

We have seen a savings regarding the evolution of some of our immigration programming, and there's a federal-provincial component there. We're happy to talk about that. And then there are some additional initiatives that I'll have the deputy speak to, mostly administrative in nature.

**Ms. Isman:** — If I could just add to that. It's about point five million dollars. And it's related to some budget allocation that actually wasn't needed this year, so it's correcting some budget numbers that were in the documentation.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. Okay. So we know total restraint is 42.252 million. So 3.4 from training programs; 2.2 million from employment programs. Immigration — I know the minister earlier on in the evening said the figure, but I'm not sure if he just said it now — how much is the immigration amount? One point something?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — 1.5.

**Mr. Broten:** — 1.5?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Yes.

**Mr. Broten:** — And then budget allocation of 0.5?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — \$500,000 thereabouts.

**Mr. Broten:** — Okay. That's 9.6 million, if I'm doing my math quickly here, correctly.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — [Inaudible] . . . other than the efficiencies in the ministry.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. Just making sure, you know, where everything is being restrained. Could the minister please identify on the subject of training programs, the 3.4 million, could you please break that down a little further and list which programs are being affected please?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — On JobStart/Future Skills work-based training, 2.7 million; on JobStart/Future Skills quick skills, \$500,000. On northern skills training, there's \$300,000. On employment, we go to the Community Works program, \$400,000. The student employment experience, \$400,000; and the work force development, \$1.4 million.

**Mr. Broten:** — I'm sorry. I couldn't quite hear the one for (c), the student employment experience one.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — \$400,000, yes.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thanks. Could the minister please identify for the JobStart/Future Skills program, what communities that program was providing support to?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well I think, the question framed in the

past tense, Mr. Chair, I would offer there's pretty significant support still rolling forward. We have capped aspects of that program. The relevance of this . . . and I'll give you just a snapshot. Out of the Carlton Trail Regional College, there would be — 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 — 15 different communities benefitting from the work that's already under way, just to give you a sense. And that list would go on for multiple pages, so hence the frame.

What I will do is I will turn it over to the deputy to put it perhaps in a global perspective, and then we can continue on with any number of examples.

**Ms. Isman:** — Mr. Chair, I think the overall number right now with JobStart/Future Skills, overall that's been and remains invested in this area, is \$16.2 million in the program and approximately 3,500 training opportunities.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Ms. Schriemer.

**Ms. Schriemer:** — I'm just wondering if we could have a recess?

**The Chair:** — We'll be breaking at 9:30 for a few minutes, and then facilitating the next minister.

**Mr. Broten:** — Could the minister please describe for the committee how the JobStart/Future Skills program is delivered to communities please.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — As I introduced earlier tonight, Ted Amendt is with our ministry. He's responsible for program innovation. And Ted, why don't you provide us with a little bit more detail than we would have otherwise had.

**Mr. Amendt:** — The way the program is operated, there are a number of JobStart/Future Skills consultants that are employed by the colleges and SIAST. And it's their responsibility to work with employers in the region to look at particular applications that meet criteria of the program that would be submitted.

**Mr. Broten:** — Is it a fair and a true statement to say that the majority of the JobStart/Future Skills programs are delivered in non-urban centres?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — My sense is that there would be a broad distribution across any number of communities, again delivered by various regional colleges as well as respective SIAST campuses.

**The Chair:** — It being 9:30, we will take a short recess to facilitate changing of ministers and officials and a bit of a comfort break, and we will be back within a couple minutes.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you, Minister, and all of his officials for an evening spent together going over estimates. Thank you so much.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — I would like to echo that, and special appreciation for the opportunity to be here. But given the late hour, it is to reinforce just the high quality and high calibre of

our officials, not just here, but those that help run the legislature as well. They make our work possible. Thank you very much.

[21:30]

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And with that we will have a short recess to facilitate the change, and we will be back in a couple of minutes.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**General Revenue Fund  
Supplementary Estimates — November  
Social Services  
Vote 36**

**Subvote (SS03)**

**The Chair:** — I'd like to welcome everybody back to the second part of this evening's meetings. We have the same members in place, and I'll remind members again, we are going through supplemental estimates, to keep on track with those estimates.

The next segment of tonight's meetings is Social Services, vote 36, employment support and income assistance, subvote (SS03). I'd like to welcome the minister and her officials this evening. And I would just ask the minister to introduce her officials and open with any comments she might have.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Attending with me here tonight from the Ministry of Social Services: to my left I have Don Allen, the executive director of corporate services division, and to my right I have Gord Tweed, the associate executive director, program policy and services. And I have no opening remarks, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Forbes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Thank you very much. My question is . . . I have many questions tonight but I'll just start with one really straightforward. You're asking for \$13.388 million, an increase to the Saskatchewan assistance plan. And so when I look back at the original budget from the spring, that plan had asked for and got an allotment of \$215.848 million. I believe I've got those numbers right. Is that correct? And that would bring it up to 228 million. Is that what we're talking about?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes, it is. Well it's actually a combination of the Saskatchewan assistance plan for the 215 million, 848, as well as the transition employment allowance of 15.886 million, combined, because it is an increase in caseload in both of those programs.

**Mr. Forbes:** — In both of those programs?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. Is there a sound system issue here? I mean I'm having a hard time hearing the minister.

**An Hon. Member:** — I guess Mr. Yates shouldn't have been speaking over there.

**Mr. Forbes:** — No, I'm serious about this, though, because I missed the introduction of Gord. And now I'm getting a hard time . . . Could you say that again, please?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Do you want the introductions again?

**Mr. Forbes:** — No, no. I want to know what . . . [inaudible].

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Oh, just the answer to the question. Okay.

**Mr. Forbes:** — You said something about the . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The supplementary estimates allocation is for an increase in both the Saskatchewan assistance plan, which you pointed out, which is 215.848 million, as well as the transition employment allowance increasing caseload, which the original allocation was 15.886 million.

**Mr. Forbes:** — So the increase is in a caseload for both those programs.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — That is correct.

**Mr. Forbes:** — So how much is going to the Saskatchewan assistance plan? And how much will be allotted to the transitional employment allowance?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I don't have a specific dollar breakdown but what . . . The budget was prepared for 21,100 SAP [Saskatchewan assistance plan] cases and 1,950 TEA [transitional employment allowance] cases. And this allocation will be for the increase in caseload to 22,800 SAP cases and 2,800 TEA cases. So as you will notice, the biggest increase in caseload was actually in TEA.

**Mr. Forbes:** — In TEA. So when I look back, and correct me if I'm wrong here, did you tell . . . to say that this is now allocating on a go-forward plan for SAP of 22,800?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — That is correct.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And in September the caseload for SAP was 22,931.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — In December?

**Mr. Forbes:** — In September. I'm getting those stats from my written questions to you.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — In September of 2009 we had 22,931. Is that the amount? Yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — That's the number that I have. Yes.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — And we are now forecasting an overall year increase to 22,800 because, as you will notice, the allocation, as high as September's number of 22, 931, is not the highest that we were for the entire year.

**Mr. Forbes:** — So that's an average number?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And it's averaged from January to December?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The average that we're asking for funding, for increase in the supplementary estimates, is an average of that caseload. The number that you gave for September is an actual number.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Right. But I guess I want to clarify, and I think I know the answer to that. If we're actually talking about . . . The average for the year is not the calendar year. You don't do your averages based on January to December. Probably April to March, I would think.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — That is correct.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. Okay. So that's what the average will be. And then for TEA, it was going to be 1,950. No, 2,800. I think I've . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — That is correct.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. And if I look at my numbers from this year, not one has been as low as 2,800. April was 2,861. May was 2,888. June was 2,875. July was 2,980. August was 3,004. September was 2,983.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We're still projecting a slight decline for the remaining months. These are what is deemed to be employable individuals. So we're still working diligently with Advanced Education in the skills training, making perhaps the clients more responsible to complete the programs. We're trying to strengthen that whole entire area of the skills training in partnership with Advanced Education.

[21:45]

**Mr. Forbes:** — You know, Mr. Chair, I want to read into the record from April 6, 2009, when the first cut, there was a cut in transitional employment allowance from \$23.863 million to \$15.886 million, significant cut. And this is the question. I'll just read this because this is very significant. I think this speaks . . . and my next questions after this will be, where do we go from here?

But on April 6, I said, and I quote:

Then under the employment support and income assistance, there's some numbers there that the Saskatchewan assistance plan relatively stays the same. There's a slight increase in that. But transitional employment allowance is significantly less — about . . . 8 million.

And the minister says, "We've had a significant reduction in clients." And I say:

Okay. Now that 8 million would almost represent a 30 per cent decrease. Has there been 30 per cent decrease in people on TEA?

She replies:

I believe our announcement in December, I think it was

December when we announced that year over year it was a 44 per cent decrease. But we're reflecting that the '08-09 budget would be 3,095 clients, and we're projecting that that will drop down to 1,950.

And I say, "1,050?" And the minister replies, "Which is a 31.1 per cent decrease." And I said:

Yes. That's huge. And so are you seeing the trending . . . I don't have my written questions with me here, but I did ask for the January, February numbers. We're not seeing that kind of decrease, are we?

And the minister replies:

January and February are not the numbers where you're going to see significant decreases. Winter months tend to be more level and you see major decreases usually within the spring and summer months. However, we have levelled somewhat. The major decreases was towards the end of last year . . .

And my point, Mr. Chair, I'm concerned about the 2,800. I can sort of understand the social assistance numbers, but 2,800 for TEA, when we haven't seen a 2,800 all year; we've not been near 2,800. And so your average will almost certainly be 2,900, unless you see something happening in the winter months which you've alluded to in April, saying that those numbers tend to stay fairly level. I'm curious to know what you're projecting this on.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We're basing this on the numbers from last year because that is basically what we have to go by. So in April of '08, we had 2,897; in May it was 2,940; in June, 2,752; July, 2,710; August, 2,483; September, 2,422; October, 2,304; November, 2,266; and then December, 2,489. So that we did see the decline that I spoke to in the spring.

**Mr. Forbes:** — You know, with the kind of errors we've seen in the global budget, particularly around potash, I do have to say — and I didn't come here argumentative — but I do have to say, I think if there's a time to be cautious about your numbers, clearly this is the time.

And I do have a copy of your news release. And it is amazing because you were correct that the November was a low month, 2,266, but it was the lowest, significantly. The trend was going down but then right after that, I think the ministry and the minister has to recognize the trend was going up. Almost as soon you issued that press release, it went from 2,266 to 2,489, then up to 2,700, then it stayed at 2,722. I mean other than June, where you see it going down by 13, it has been a steady increase, a steady increase.

So I would like to hear, how can you rationalize such optimism to be averaging 2,800 in the times that . . . I just, I guess, are you saying that this is the way the ministry has always operated, by looking backwards at trends and then forecasting based not on the economic, the unemployment numbers? I mean even though we have I think maybe the lowest in Canada, we still have unemployment increasing. As a matter of fact it's gone from 4 per cent — and my colleague can probably correct me; he's the expert on the unemployment numbers — from 4 to 4.9

per cent. The economic numbers are not suggesting that it's going to be easier to get off welfare than it was a year or two ago.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you. And when the member asked the written question, we did not have the October numbers. And my officials tell me now the TEA numbers for October is 2,758.

**Mr. Forbes:** — 2,758, okay.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Which is the downward trend that is usually seen in those months.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. Well there you go. And do you have the social assistance numbers for October?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The Saskatchewan assistance plan numbers for the month of October is 22,924.

**Mr. Forbes:** — So are you seeing any trends that are happening in social assistance in terms of the employables, families, and people living with disabilities? Some of those . . . I know the numbers around disabilities have been trending up this year. What are those looking like?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The trend that we are looking at the most seriously at this point in time because when you take the numbers that we have as percentage of population . . . And I know in the past we've been able to compare year over year because the population wasn't growing. That's not the case any more. So as percentage of population for 2006-07, the number of cases as a percentage of population was 4.7 per cent. In '07-08 it was 4.4 per cent. In '08-09 it was 4 per cent, and in '09-10 to date we're looking at 4.1 per cent. So although the caseloads have gone up, so has the population. So the percentage of population is only point one per cent increase.

The trend though to watch and to be mindful of and have the discussion within our ministry, and again in conjunction with Advanced Education, is that the largest increase is in what is deemed employable. So that is the number to be, I think, to be the most concerned with.

The SAP numbers, although they have increased, is not abnormal for an increase in population. And of course, it is not a big spike in increases of individuals with disabilities. They are a high percentage of the SAP caseload, and that percentage remains fairly steady.

So yes, we did experience an increase, I think, in the employable category. The encouragement in that is that they are . . . It is a transition allowance, so that they tend not to be on the assistance for long periods of time.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Would you get a sense of . . . Because of the population growing and because of the sense that the ministry has, that it's the employable numbers that are going up. So is it from out-of-province that we're seeing a lot of, more than usual numbers on SAP and TEA?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — My officials tell me that the in-migration does not seem to be changing these numbers, that

it is brought . . .

**Mr. Forbes:** — Across the board. Now you had the department organized around five regions, I believe. And now it's gone through a reorganization and I'm not very familiar with that. But I can only . . . So correct me here.

What I'm getting at is you had the five regions before: the southeast, southwest, the central, and northeast, north. And you could identify the areas where you could see some areas of the province that the economy or for whatever reason was hitting harder than other places? Or other places were doing better, frame it in a positive way. Is there a region or a couple of regions that you're concerned about in the province? Or again is this right across the board, there doesn't seem to be a specific trend?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I haven't noticed a specific region that stands out far and above the others. The statistics that we're getting still are on the existing five regions because we're in transition to the three regions. So I haven't seen one that speaks loud and clear to be more problematic than another.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. We all hope the numbers, and this is something I think is really significant because we think that this is an area where we all would hope for the reduction of numbers, but now when you . . . I am curious to pursue further about the trending. So you've looked at the past, but you've found that you've had to readjust, so you've come back for the supplementary votes here.

How long can you see into the future in terms of the trends? Like are you preparing for next year's budget, and how are you . . . I'm curious about how do you do this work. And maybe this is more a question for your officials: how do you project into the future? Do you use different stats from different, you know, StatsCan, or how do you get a sense of what the needs will be for Saskatchewan people?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I just want to tell the member that these are the same officials that have been in place for a number of years, and the same methodology, quite frankly, of designing budgets and coming up with the projections. So I will get my official, Don Allen, to explain how that process is done today, which is not a different process than the way it was done three, four, five, six years ago. So if Don could answer this, that would be helpful.

**Mr. Allen:** — Certainly. Don Allen. The process is fairly simple and fairly complex at the same time. We do look backward to see the impact of specific programs on caseloads, so that when we look forward and we look at what programmatic changes we might make, we adjust for that. So when the minister refers to us taking particular actions with Advanced Education, Employment and Labour to make better attachments to the workforce for TEA caseloads, we factor that into the future forecast as well as into future budgets.

So with respect to budget development, we look at historical unemployment rates and its impact with respect to, or relativity, with respect to SAP and TEA. We get projections of unemployment rates from the Ministry of Finance, and we build caseload forecasts based upon those.

There's certain elements of that — the disabled population, for example, we tend not to look at unemployment. We simply look at intake versus historical outflow, knowing that we have a certain number of cases that enter the caseload in a particular month or year, of disabled persons. And they tend not to leave. They do leave eventually. I mean, most people leave at some particular point in time, but over the short term, no.

So we look at historical relationships and we apply those to the future, but also impact those caseloads with decisions that we intend to make or actions that we intend to make in the upcoming budget cycle.

[22:00]

**Mr. Forbes:** — And I want to say to the minister, I agree. I don't have any, I didn't have . . . It's one of the things in opposition, you get to ask some questions that you wished you had asked when you were in government. But we're all very busy. And so this is a real learning opportunity for us. And so we get to understand the basics of what do we do — how do we do this, which is so, so important?

So it must be an interesting . . . Do you work with other departments across Canada to see the trends that are happening? I mean I think it's interesting that you have, when you talk about the population growing and you know that part of the issue when you track people, is you want to have the highly skilled people come. But of course when we know as families that some, within even our own families, are more skilled than others.

And so there's challenges because you want to bring family units along and sometimes there's challenges, such as you're talking about the disabilities issues would be one that would be a challenge. Because you do want to have . . . And it's important that we do have an open policy in terms of promoting our province and getting as many people to come as possible. But there must be a sense of when we do that, that there's people come with different challenges.

And so, I guess my question is, do you work with trends that are happening across Canada? Do you work with and how big, how many people is in the policy unit around this that's working to really refine this? Because it is a significant amount of money that the province spends in terms of income support.

It's a huge budget. You know social services — it's over 700 million now. Very important work, but it's really important it's done well. And so my question is: how many people are working on this and how do, you know, do you work with your counterparts across Canada in developing some of these numbers?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Without question. I mean we are all aware, the officials within the ministry, as well as myself as a minister, and yourself as the critic in the opposition. I'm sure you are watching what other provinces are doing — reading reports from other provinces, seeing what works, what doesn't work. I think every one of us are doing that.

It is interesting times in the economy across our nation. The encouraging thing that I can say, in looking at the other Western

provinces for example from May of '08 to date, Saskatchewan has seen an increase of 2.5 per cent to our welfare caseload. Manitoba, on the other hand, has seen a 6.7 per cent increase in that same time period. British Columbia has seen a 17.4 per cent increase in that same time period, and Alberta has seen an 18.4 per cent increase.

So although we don't want to see an increase, as I pointed out, it really isn't an increase as percentage of population. But I don't believe the other provinces are experiencing the population growth we are experiencing here in Saskatchewan, and yet Alberta is experiencing as high as an 18.4 per cent increase to their caseload.

Do we watch what other provinces are doing? Absolutely, and if there's different areas, we have that discussion. Okay, so we're seeing, you know, what is this increase? This increase is employable. To be very, very blunt, quite frankly the social assistance clients are usually the last to be hired and the first to be fired when there is a layoff. And so that's brought a number of people back into assistance that had a job, and hopefully we can transition them back into a job situation.

So my officials tell me that, just as late as last Friday, the income assistance staff participated in a conference call with the other provinces on social assistance forecasting models. That communication is ongoing, as it should be.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Good. I think it's really important to keep up with this because the more effective we can be, the more better benefits. And we've seen that in the last year or two, some good benefits. Those things can happen.

You've talked about the employable but the families too, from the numbers I've been able to get through my written questions, have increased. I don't have the percentage of what it would be, but I know in March the number was 5,846 and the last one was September, 6,259. So that would have been an increase of 400 families. I don't have how many new families, but the growth has been up this year. Can you comment on the family aspect of this?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Because child poverty is the first and foremost concern in the programming that we decide and changes that we decide to make. And that's why as a government we made very, very quick decisions to increase the rental supplement which is available to families, to the Saskatchewan employment supplement, again only available to families. We have implemented the prescription drug plan to include children 14 years and under. We introduced the active families benefit.

So yes, we are concerned when it does involve families. Now 400 is not a huge number, but one to be very mindful of if it all of a sudden becomes a trend to going upward.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Yes. The trend seems to be there. And so will you be then . . . And you've talked about some of the initiatives you've taken. I think of one though — I could be corrected — but the active family benefit, has it been frozen because of the restraints? Or is it still active?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — It's still active.

**Mr. Forbes:** — It's still active?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — It's still active.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. It's not one that was . . . I haven't been following because it's not in this department; it's in somebody else's.

Okay. But it is a trend that's going up. And so have you been thinking about this? Like at what point do you start to think about, what does this mean? There are more and more families going on. And it may be small now. It may be only a 400 growth since March. But are there things that your ministry's thinking about that you've done in the past? Okay, you've done that. What can you be doing into the future as next steps to curtail the number of families, or supporting families before they need to go onto social assistance?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — As I mentioned, we've strengthened enough . . . or a number of programs just that are targeted for families. We are always watching the effects and the numbers as we move forward. Are we always mindful of it? Yes. Do we think that an increase of 400 over the course of just about a year is alarming enough to automatically put through some changes? Not quite yet at this time.

I think the most important change that we made for families, quite frankly, was increasing and indexing the shelter allowance and the rental supplements. That was extremely stressful and challenging for families to find housing in the rates that was in place prior. And so many of the centres have seen three increases now, because we indexed that and we revisit it every six months.

So are we in the position to make another dramatic change quite yet? The answer would be no. But will we take things into consideration if those numbers continue to go up? Yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — The rental supplement, do you need to be on social assistance or TEA? Is that the only qualifier? Or can you be on the employment supplement and also receive the rental supplement?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — You can be on employment supplement and also receive the rental supplement if you have a family.

**Mr. Forbes:** — If you have a family.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And this would be the groups that we're talking about right now?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Exactly.

**Mr. Forbes:** — We're talking about the families. So, and of course, I mean, this is the challenge. You've done the income tax cuts that apparently affected 80,000 individuals.

Now I have actually asked about that because I wanted to know, how did you get the 80,000? But I asked the Minister of Labour. He wasn't able to tell me. So I asked the Minister of

Finance and they weren't able to tell me because of the lags in income tax. But you've done these things and yet we still see an increase in families and employables finding out they just don't have enough.

Now the employables, I suppose if they're out of work, that's the issue. Or if they've run out of their employment benefits, this is the time that they're turning to this. And I guess that would be another question: is this what's happening? Are people running out of their unemployment benefits and we're seeing them now turn to welfare?

But with families, I'm not sure if that's necessarily the same situation. Because when you set up all these things here, what would cause 400 more families . . . And actually the percentage — and I could be wrong, if there's anybody with a calculator — I think it's a 6.5 per cent increase in the number of families. What could possibly be . . . What is the ministry thinking about in terms of what can we do to turn this around? We don't want to have those numbers like you've raised with Manitoba — even though actually the families are very close to what the Manitoba numbers are — BC [British Columbia], or Alberta. We definitely don't want to see those kind of numbers here.

So one, is this because of unemployment running out? And two, are there things that we could do more for families so they don't find themselves in this circumstance?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — As I said, I'm not sure what I can add to this. We're watching the numbers. We've introduced a number of services completely targeted at families. Another one that we introduced was the employment service for parents, again in partnership with Advanced Education. We will continue that.

The increase overall, year over year, is less than point one per cent of the population. You know, it's 400 families. Every family is important; I understand that. And we're putting together or putting forward a number of initiatives and changes to help strengthen — specific to families but for all individuals — to transition from dependence to independence.

Is 400 families, in a population now that's significantly over 1 million people, alarm bells for major changes? Or do we stay on course and just be mindful that this number continues to rise over more than just a one- or two-month period? And I'm going to suggest to you right now we're just watching the numbers carefully and the programs that we have put into place.

We introduced the low-income tax credit which is a considerable increase to the sales tax credit from before. Again that will help the families. And have they had one full year of that income increase, and will it make a difference? The income tax cuts that we've made are very targeted to families because it increases the personal tax exemption, not only per individual, but per child. So let that have one year of significance in leaving money in people's pockets per se.

So the best thing I still say that we can do is to ensure that we have a strong economy and have opportunity. We're increasing child care spaces because that is a barrier to families sometimes gaining employment. We're increasing the programs of support, targeting many towards families. We will be watching the

numbers closely.

And I guess we could deliberate all night whether 400 is significant enough to make major changes. I am saying at this point in time we have literally made millions of dollars of changes to our existing programs, and I'm not proposing any further at this time.

**Mr. Forbes:** — You know, it's one way to look at it as it's just 400. And I appreciate that you're being sensitive. I sense that. But what the other alarm bell is, that it's not going down. Because of all the things you've done, that this government has done, including the income tax, including the rental supplements — all of these programs you think would be helping people to not have to apply for social assistance as the final support.

[22:15]

And I am aware of, and you've been in the media actually talking about your three-point plan for an anti-poverty strategy. And I think if there's an opportunity here, this is a time where you could say, to reach out to community groups and say, listen, we find that something's happening here and we want to be collaborative. And I've seen the ministry be like this with the disabilities folks around SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability] and around the intellectual disabilities.

Is it time now to really take a look and say to some of the community groups that have been advocating, to say, can we work together on a poverty reduction or a poverty elimination strategy, a multi-year plan?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I would like to say to the member, having statistics now brought forward to me from my officials, the rental housing supplement which is families, September '09, the caseload was 4,078. In September '08 it was 2,884.

**Mr. Forbes:** — So how many was that again in '08?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — In '08 it was 2,884. So are we supporting more families? The answer is yes.

The Saskatchewan employment supplement is seeing again more families. We increased the amount but we also increased the income threshold of who qualifies, which is significant. So in September '08 we had a caseload of 5,761, and in '09 that caseload increased to 6,186. So we are targeting families. We are supporting more families in a number of our programs.

Now you see an increase of 400 in one program but, overall, we are giving the supports that families are looking for.

**Mr. Forbes:** — I think — and I think everybody appreciates all of those things, definitely appreciates all of those programs — but I think it's not right to equate the social assistance program with, say, a rental supplement program. When you're on social assistance, things have gone, I think, terribly wrong. And I think we have to say that. I mean, like, you're really saying you have no other resources. When you're talking about rental supplement, at least you've got a house, a place to rent. And the employment supplement you've got a job and you've got a family.



All these things . . . I mean, it's not a great circumstance you find yourself in. But when you're on social assistance, to me, it is the safety net, the final safety net when you have nothing else.

And so not only are you seeing an increase of 400, it would be better to see a decrease of 400. This should have been trending down. It should have been trending down, but it's not. It's trending up. And no matter what the number, if it was 200 it would still be . . . The fact is it's not going down. It's going up.

And we can look at a stat and say well, you know, it's part of population and population is growing in Saskatchewan, you know. And we've had this debate many years over, when we say is the population a million, you know, when it's under by 4,000 people? But people would say you can't say it's a million because it's 999,000 and it's not quite a million. So it's 16,000 over a million now.

We may be splitting hair but my question was — and I had two questions out there — one was do you see a result of employables going, the increase in employables because of people running out of employment benefits and now they're turning to social assistance as the final safety net? And the other question I had, is it time for you and the ministry to take a look and think about a poverty reduction strategy and engage the community in that discussion?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you. In answer to your first question, the answer is no. We're actually seeing the increase of clients that did get a job and now they are returned as our clients. They didn't work long enough to qualify for unemployment insurance.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Are you talking about TEA?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay I'm talking about, so what about the employables on social assistance?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We just have employables.

**Mr. Forbes:** — You don't know what happened to them in terms of, did they run out of employment benefits.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — They didn't work long enough to get employment benefits.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. And the second question then?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Second question I have answered many, many, many times in the House in discussions. We have a strategy. I have gone over it in length and I would be more than happy to put it on record yet again. We believe that maintaining a strong and growing economy is the number one important thing to reducing poverty, is to create jobs and opportunity for the citizens within our province. We have done a number of things to ensure that our economy in the times that are stressful, quite frankly, globally, we have taken a number of measurements in this government to keep the economy strong.

There are a lot of indicators that have said that our efforts have

been successful. We believe in putting money, more money back in the pockets of the people of Saskatchewan and we have done that through lowering income tax and taking 80,000 people off the tax roll. We have done that through introducing the low-income tax credit. We have done that by increasing the Saskatchewan employment supplement. We have done that by increasing minimum wage. We have done that by increasing the seniors' income plan. We have done that by decreasing the property taxes.

And the third is to have support programs in place to help people transition. We do that by supporting the bus pass program that's offered in a number of cities. We do that through having the prescription drug plan that includes children, for all of our families. We do that with the active families benefit. We do that through the increase in skills training that we're doing. Looking at the different property strategies across the country, it's interesting because that's exactly what they're doing. All of those things is on education, on putting more money into people's pockets; it's what we're doing.

So I could go to the effort and the expense of a glossy document and put that all in, although it's been on record time and time and time again, or we could stay on course.

**Mr. Forbes:** — I would say that many of the things that you are talking about are key elements of a good anti-poverty strategy. But one of the key parts that you're missing, I think, are the benchmarks, the agreement first. There's a couple of parts. One, agreements on what it means to be in poverty, and that would be a good discussion to have another time. But the other one is around some benchmarks, so everybody could agree on how is our society, how is our province doing in terms of addressing the issues of poverty?

We can use the social assistance caseload as one indicator. Some people would argue that's not a good indicator. But I will continue to raise this because I do think there's a lot of merit in this discussion and I think that's important.

But I do have a couple of quick questions that I wanted to ask before . . . I hope . . . I don't know if we get an extension tonight, do we? We do? As long as I want? Okay. Midnight, there you go. In terms of the increased caseload, are you hiring more staff to deal with the caseload? What's the anticipation around that?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We haven't done that to date.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Is the feeling, the thinking, that you'll be able to absorb the increased caseload just through your regular staff?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We have so far.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And there's been no issues?

Now in terms of, I do find it interesting that this is a single line from Social Services around the support and income assistance. Does this mean that everything else pretty much is on track, that you couldn't find any savings anywhere else in your budget of over 700 million that you could redirect into this? Are you that close in terms of what's happening within Social Services?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We'll be going through, definitely, an efficiencies exercise as we prepare our next budget. We're already in our next budget preparations. So yes we're looking for, you know, where our caseloads will be, as well as whether or not there will be efficiencies that can be found. We are in the midst, as we talked about before, of restructuring. However that is not relative to this subvote in this supplementary estimate.

**Mr. Forbes:** — But there's no other savings within that could have been redirected at this point to offset the 13 million that you needed?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We have looked at efficiencies within the ministry and always do.

**Mr. Forbes:** — So I'm taking that as there wasn't the money to be found anywhere else.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — There was to absorb some of the caseload increase, yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Yes. So is the 13 million — let me get the number right here — 13.388 million now. So that will be going all to the caseloads. That will be going to the clients then, is it? That's what I'm hearing, that none of this will be going to the supports, new staff, increased staff?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — That is correct.

**Mr. Forbes:** — That is correct. Okay. What is the average per caseload? What are the average costs? How much does it cost per average for an employable person or for a family or for someone on disabilities?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Okay. Being mindful that the average cost is not necessarily representative because the shelter allowances alone are significantly different from community to community, so the average cost for SAP is \$851.82. The average cost for TEA is \$688.85.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And that's per month, is it?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Per month. Okay. All right. And what is the average caseload, number of cases that a social worker, and I don't know if I can use the word social worker, can I? The social workers don't deal with this, do they?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The income assistance workers.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. And the average caseload is?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — One hundred fifty clients.

**Mr. Forbes:** — One hundred and fifty clients. Okay. And is that the same right across the province, in the North, and all through the five regions?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I just want to remind the member that we'll be looking at readjusting this as the SAID program comes in. So that would be the time to address any changes we may or may not look at as far as staff per client. That all will have to be

reviewed as we introduce the new income program for individuals with disabilities.

The official's telling me that right now, on average, the provincial average is the rural caseload will, probably would be a little lower than the urban caseload.

[22:30]

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay.

**The Chair:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Fairview.

**Mr. Iwanchuk:** — Mr. Chair, seeing it's 10:30 and I will probably need another evening or more hours on this, so I would consider that we would work towards that.

**The Chair:** — The member from Saskatoon Fairview has inquired to the time. Seeing as we started later, it was my intent to go to at least 10:38 to allow the full hour scheduled. I'm willing to disregard the clock, if the committee members are, to continue on tonight. So . . .

**Mr. Iwanchuk:** — Yes if you want to give the eight minutes, but I think in order to better deal with the issue, we'd probably be better off setting some more time for this minister.

**The Chair:** — Well I'm willing to entertain a motion to adjourn if it's the wishes of the committee.

**Mr. Iwanchuk:** — Yes, I mean we're prepared to go to 10:38. I just wanted to make that clear, but I mean, I think in order to do the full hour then I think 10:38 is sufficient. And we probably should not be debating it and allow the few minutes left to . . .

**The Chair:** — We can go as long as the members wish.

**Mr. Iwanchuk:** — Yes. We would like to go till 10:38 and then set some new time.

**The Chair:** — Okay, carry on with your questioning. Mr. Forbes. Ms. Junor.

**Ms. Junor:** — Rather than feed them to my colleague, I'll ask them myself. I'm interested in the caseloads because I'm thinking that with 400 extra cases and no new FTEs, I am assuming, from the calls I get to my office for people that deal with social assistance and the various other programs, there is not a real high level of satisfaction with the timeliness and the attention they get.

So what I gather is that the caseloads are going to increase per worker. And you said there's 150 clients per worker now. Does that include the new 400? Are they . . . [inaudible] . . . through that already?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Most of the casework for the TEA program is actually handled through Advanced Education. So the increased caseload for the workers within SAP would be the increase that the workers would experience today. And again we need to revisit the ratios — that have been in place since prior to my being the minister, quite frankly — once the SAID

program is fully introduced and we have restructured the ministry into the new regions, and all of these things will be reviewed at that time.

**Ms. Junor:** — So can you just maybe give me an idea that the 150 clients per worker, what is the trend of that? What was, say, last year's ratio of client-to-worker? Is this a significant increase or is that kind of steady? Has that been steady at 150 per worker for a while?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — It's fairly steady. It has been for . . . Sort of just doing the math quick beside me — an increase of 400 cases would mean that each worker would have two or three additional cases on average.

**Ms. Junor:** — Okay, you were talking about the review in the department and the new program, the SAID program. Can you tell me what, is that an acronym?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes, it is.

**Ms. Junor:** — Can you tell me what it means?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Saskatchewan assured income for disabilities.

**Ms. Junor:** — And then can you tell me the target for that program to come on stream?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Actually that's not included in this subvote at all.

**Ms. Junor:** — So you keep mentioning it, though, that it's part of your planning. And so . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — When we discuss FTEs, yes. But it's not part of this subvote.

**Ms. Junor:** — So it's something that you're still working on. We don't have a target date that's public.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — It's been publicly announced. There's been a press release as well as an event done here at the legislature that your colleague was there.

**Ms. Junor:** — But the target date, was that mentioned?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — December 1st.

**Ms. Junor:** — Okay. That's all I was asking.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Just to follow up. I mean it's rung . . .

**The Chair:** — Mr. Forbes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Made me think of, but SAID as an integral part of the social assistance program today. And it will be interesting as they separate out, because some of the new cases that are coming on are people living with disabilities. And so I think it's an interesting dilemma because of course one of the issues they're going to be . . . folks who've been involved with that design of that program have talked about adequacy. And that's going to be a challenge to talk about it in the time ahead.

So as you pull these things out, I mean, this is a very complex . . . somebody said, complex yet simple. Because you're going through a major reorganization, and we're not here to talk about the reorg, but you have five regions. How will you be tracking afterwards? You're going to be going down into . . . Now I've heard three regions, but I'm not sure if that's correct either. Then you have SAID, a brand new initiative, very good initiative. And how are you going to pull that out? There's going to be, it's going to be very complex in terms of how you do this.

So I think that . . . While I've been brought up very familiar with this, my colleague from Saskatoon I think has some questions about it. And I think, you know, it's going to be interesting as you're talking about increased caseloads. And some of those, how's that going to play out in terms of caseloads because, as you said, the caseloads for the SAID program may be not 150. I'm not sure whether it's going to be smaller or increased actually because the way of interaction's going to be different. So are they going to be smaller or different, or smaller or larger?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Again I would like to say that we're not there yet. And this is not relevant to this particular subvote in supplementary estimates. It definitely will be relevant to future estimates, but it is not included in these estimates.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Seeing the hour of clock, that it is 10:38, and we've had one hour of estimates for Social Services, and seeing that members on this side have additional questions, we would like to do that on another day. And I would move that we end the evening at this time. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten moves that we do adjourn this committee, and it being 10:38, being an hour of these estimates, we will adjourn until the next time we meet.

[The committee adjourned at 22:38.]