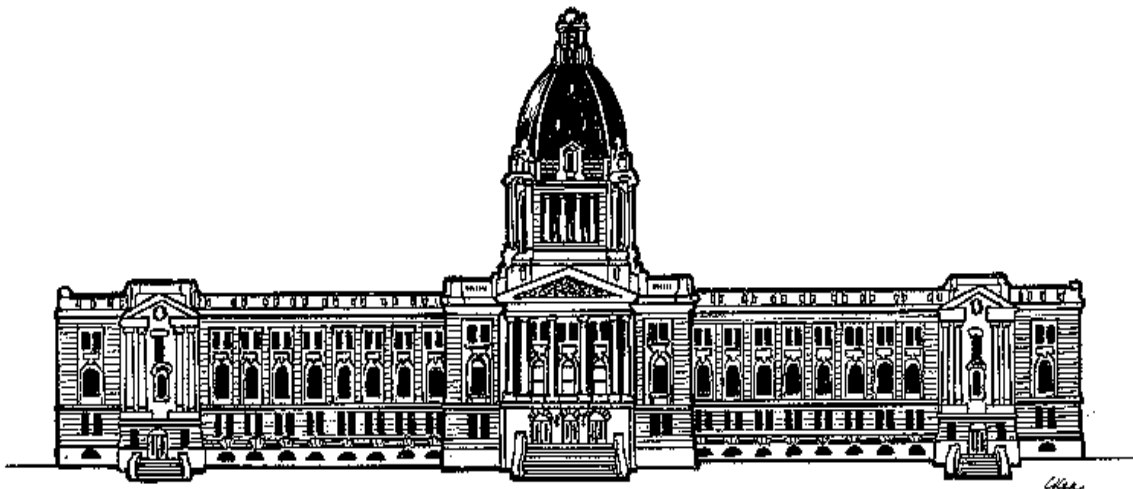




# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

## **Hansard Verbatim Report**

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## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

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Ms. Joceline Schriemer  
Saskatoon Sutherland

[The committee met at 19:00.]

**The Chair:** — Good evening ladies and gentlemen. We're here tonight, Human Services Committee, considering supplementary estimates. Our first estimates tonight will be Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, vote 37, with subvote (AE03), student support programs; subvote (AE02), post-secondary education; subvote (AE05), training programs; subvote (AE04), career and employment services.

Later on tonight we will be considering supplementary estimates for Social Services, vote 36, subvote (SS03).

Tonight we have one substitution. Ms. Danielle Chartier will be in attendance on the opposition side. Welcome Ms. Chartier. Other than that, all committee members are in attendance. So I invite the minister to open with some brief comments and introduce the people with him, and we'll commence.

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

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

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Thanks very much, Mr. Chair, and committee members, happy to be before the committee again. I would like to just take a minute, if I could, to make some introductions and then just to recap briefly with a few comments.

As many will know, this is Clare Isman, our deputy minister; Mike Carr, associate deputy minister, labour, employee and employer relations; Reg Urbanowski, right next to me, assistant deputy minister, advanced education and student services; Rupen Pandya, assistant deputy minister, immigration services. Karen Allen is here, executive director corporate services; Jan Morgan, career and employment services; Tammy Bloor Cavers, student financial assistance; Ted Amendt, program innovation; and Rhiannon Stromberg, executive assistance to the deputy minister.

And as I said, I wouldn't mind just taking a moment to provide some additional context for our discussion here this evening. As was mentioned last Monday, the change to the ministry's overall budget is a net increase of \$28.3 million. This is the result of a significant increase in federal stimulus funding, that increase being 65.3 million, as well as a further investment of provincial infrastructure funds of 5.3 million.

The ministry has also achieved savings in some programs and services. Once again these decisions were guided by the following objectives or principles.

Number one, put learners first. Number two, maximize federal stimulus dollars during the qualifying periods, and most specifically we can think about April 2009 to March 2011 as it relates to KIP, the knowledge infrastructure program. Number three, analyze programs for actual uptake, outcomes, and have a look at their expenditures. Number four, analyze capital programs, especially where funding is not required in the

current year or there have been savings that can be realized on behalf of the people of this province. And five, maintain strategic spending, that is, investments that matter to ensure that we're helping to meet the need for skilled labour now and into the future. That would be a rather instrumental approach. Really what we're looking at is helping to ensure that individuals are able to meet their potential, which is the intrinsic value of skills training, education, personal and professional development.

While the ministry has capped spending in some training programs, even after these caps, spending on training, employment programs, and student supports will be still up over \$17 million higher than in 2008-09 and up over \$23 million higher from the last NDP [New Democratic Party] budget. The number of training opportunities as a result has gone up significantly.

With respect to another important employment program, the JobStart/Future Skills, millions of dollars still remain embedded within this program. And tonight I'd be pleased to talk about this additional investment that the people of Saskatchewan hopefully will be getting. We're hoping that the opposition will actually vote in favour of these supplements, but that of course will be up to the official opposition.

I'd just like to add that this commitment of additional millions of dollars into Advanced Education, Employment and Labour as well as associated responsibilities demonstrates the high priority our government places on preparing Saskatchewan people for the current and future demands of Saskatchewan's growth.

Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity to be here again. And I look forward to the forthcoming deliberations.

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

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister and the many officials for being here this evening to look at these estimates.

With the minister's introductory comments, I too would like to make a few in order to provide anyone who's tuning in at home a bit of context with respect to where we are this evening. It's part two of some estimates, second night of estimates on these votes that we're looking at.

In the first few hours that we spent together we, as the minister referenced in his opening comments, we saw how there is about \$70.56 million of new funding coming into the province. And in that discussion last week, we learned that of that 70.56 million, about 5.25 I think was from the province, and the rest all flowed from the federal government. And then we also discussed that evening where restraint or cuts or deferrals had taken place — or freezes — and we've been talking about total restraint as it's listed in the government's mid-year financial update of 42.252 million. And so when we take the 42.252 million from the 70.567 million, we get the difference of 28.315 million that's listed in the supplementary estimates.

So on the first night, we were talking largely about where the \$42 million in savings was coming from, and a good portion of

the discussion we had last time was on the \$32 million from the health sciences, Academic Health Sciences building at the U of S [University of Saskatchewan]. That occupied much of the evening, and then we started to get into the additional \$10 million in cuts that we . . . in various programs, and that's where we left off in our discussion the last time we met on these estimates. That's where I'd like to carry on with the discussion for now.

In the minister's earlier comments, he referenced that there was \$5.6 million in savings, as it was termed, in employment and training programs. And we were looking some at the JobStart/Future Skills program. I was wondering if, could the minister please outline . . . There's a JobStart/Future Skills program, work-based, and then also the JobStart/Future Skills Quick Skills. Could the minister for the committee please provide what is the difference in these two programs, what are their aims, and how that programming is delivered in the province, please.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Thanks very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to highlight some of the key elements that are considered under the JobStart/Future Skills programs. And what I'll do is just provide a rough breakdown, and then we'll turn that over to one of our officials, Ted Amendt, to actually walk us through with some degree of detail.

So JobStart/Future Skills program components include Quick Skills and Saskatchewan skills extension program; second, work-based training; third, workplace essential skills; fourth, trades and skills centres. Fifth, then we have some administrative program delivery and program support.

**Mr. Amendt:** — Good evening. So just to give a bit of context around the work-based training for the unemployed, that program provides financial assistance to employers who provided recognized on-the-job training for unemployed Saskatchewan residents with the goal of becoming permanently employed in the workplace. Funding is provided to registered Saskatchewan businesses, particularly in the growth sectors.

Trainees must be new, full-time employees of the company and training must be led to an ongoing, sustainable job with the employer. Training must be recognized by a public training institution, industry, government, or must provide transferable skills and abilities. Small businesses with less than 10 employees may be eligible to train for permanent full-time or permanent part-time vacant positions. Training for full-time seasonal or permanent part-time positions may also be considered. And there's a goal of making sure that we are looking at equity groups as far as participation.

So that's for the work-based training for the unemployed. Also . . . [inaudible] . . . make a note that that is done through JobStart/Future Skills consultants who are employed by the regional colleges and SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology], and they are the ones that work with businesses to develop a training plan and submit that to the ministry for approval. So that is the work-based training.

The Quick Skills program also are run by colleges and SIAST. Programs run on the academic year from July 1 to June 30. The ministry determines funding level and allocates conditional

grants based on the following conditions: training needs are identified in the regional training needs assessment report that's conducted; submission of sector training needs information and the college's business plan by May 31st of each year; and then submission of a revised program plan by December 31st of each year.

So those are more done in terms of meeting the needs that are developed based on regional training needs assessments that are done within the regions. So that's the Quick Skills piece of it.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Sorry, Mr. Chair. As I highlighted, we have a number of categories and we've just simply touched on two of those. And what I'll do is — if it's all right, Mr. Chair — what we'll do is we'll just ensure that the committee members have a rundown or summary of the components, if that's appropriate.

**The Chair:** — Yes. That's fine, Mr. Minister.

**Mr. Amendt:** — A piece that's delivered under the JobStart/Future Skills program components is the trades and skills centres. And just to let folks know, they are delivered in core neighbourhoods of Saskatoon and Regina.

**Mr. LeClerc:** — I'm having trouble hearing you, sir. Could you speak up just a little bit higher?

**Mr. Amendt:** — The trades and skills centres is another component of JobStart/Future Skills, and they operate in Saskatoon and Regina. Their main target is to work with First Nations and Métis and vulnerable communities within Saskatoon and Regina core neighbourhoods. And so those are Quick Skills programs in nature. They're typically delivered by SIAST, SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies], or DTI [Dumont Technical Institute]. And there's also some industry-led programming, particularly here in Regina.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Next we'll highlight the workplace essential skills.

**Ms. Bloor Cavers:** — Good evening. Workplace essential skills is a number of pilot initiatives that are run through funding initiatives that are supported through the recent investment through the Labour Market Agreement. A number of the pilots are primarily initiatives that are run or employer-driven initiatives that work in partnership with post-secondary institutions, and we focus primarily on initiatives for improving foundational skills.

[19:15]

**Ms. Isman:** — Last but not least is an administrative component. These funds are through the LMA [Labour Market Agreement], LMDA [Labour Market Development Agreement]. And so what the federal government allows for is that we actually have dollars allocated from the federal funding back into the institutions in terms of the administration of these programs. So there is about \$350,000 that's actually used to fund positions out in the regional colleges and SIAST as the coordinators that are out doing the work and working with the

employers, as well as doing regional, needs-based assessment utilizing those federal funds. So that makes up the full pool of money allocated under the umbrella of JobStart/Future Skills.

**The Chair:** — Excuse me, Mr. Minister. Before any official speaks, if they could just introduce themselves the first time for the purposes of Hansard.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Certainly.

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

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you, Minister, and your officials for the overview. One of the programs that was just mentioned, the workplace essential skills, the Saskatchewan pilot, there was a news release on July 3rd about this funding. And I think in estimates last spring, 510,000 was announced to deliver the pilot. Was this pilot affected in any way by the restraint efforts or was it not touched?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — No. It remains as is.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. In the comments about the different streams under the JobStart/Future Skills program, there was reference made to JobStart consultants. How many consultants are currently out in Saskatchewan through the regional colleges and through SIAST?

**Ms. Isman:** — There's 28 JobStart/Future Skills coordinators out in the regional colleges and on the SIAST campuses.

**Mr. Broten:** — What would be an average caseload that these consultants would have in terms of individuals coming and accessing the JobStart/Future Skills program?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — I'll just check on that.

**Mr. Amendt:** — Ted Amendt is my name. So just to give an indication, the program's run throughout the regional colleges and SIAST. SIAST has four full-time consultants that are employed that work on work-based training for the unemployed. The other consultants that are hired by regional colleges would work on this but would also have other duties. So as an example, in last contracts that were approved or agreements that were approved in this fiscal, SIAST Saskatoon, as an example, has 29 agreements in place. That would be one example.

**Mr. Broten:** — And with each agreement in the SIAST example, so that SIAST would have 29 agreements in place with an employer where there would be an individual in the program receiving the training and the work experience?

**Mr. Amendt:** — That's correct, yes.

**Mr. Broten:** — On each of those individuals receiving funding, what would an average amount of funding be that they would receive, or the average cost be associated with that individual in a training program?

**Mr. Amendt:** — Just a correction, I guess, or an amendment. It doesn't go to the individual. The maximum per work-based training for the unemployed is about 5,000 is the maximum, is

5,000 for training. That money as allocated goes to an employer. But from my colleagues here we would estimate that that's would be on average about 3,500, would be what a training opportunity would consist of in a training plan.

**Mr. Broten:** — So 5,000 to the employer?

**Mr. Amendt:** — There's a maximum . . .

**Mr. Broten:** — There's a maximum; on average, 3,500.

**Mr. Amendt:** — An average would be 3,500.

**Mr. Broten:** — Okay. And that, say on that average 3,500 amount, is that all in wages to the individual or does that include the administrative element for expenses? What's the breakdown of that 3,500?

**Mr. Amendt:** — So the money that's allocated, in addition to the dollars for the training, there's a 5 per cent administration fee that goes to the colleges or to SIAST who administer the program.

**Mr. Broten:** — So the 5 per cent administration fee, that is, the 5 per cent is only received if in fact the dollars roll out to an individual in a placement. My question: in order to secure the work of the consultants, either through the regional college or through SIAST, is it a flat rate that the ministry engages with the college or SIAST who have that individual as a consultant? Or is it basically, for lack of a better term, do the colleges simply get a cut of whatever goes out the door?

**Mr. Amendt:** — So the 5 per cent is the administration fee that would be given to the colleges and to SIAST for the delivery of the work-based training for the unemployed. So that's based on the approved training plan when that comes in, and it's approved by the ministry. And the 5 per cent is based on that.

**Mr. Broten:** — With the freezing of the program and no additional . . . well when the Job Start/Future Skills work-based, based on our earlier conversation last week, it was stated that 2.7 was being saved out of that program. Is that the correct amount?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Yes. That's right.

**Mr. Broten:** — So out of that 2.7 million, has there been any . . . If regional colleges and SIAST are receiving some of that funding for a service provided, if they're receiving revenue through delivering this program, has there been any concern stated by the regional colleges or by SIAST in terms of how that might affect the revenue that they have available to them?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Yes. We're in regular contact, not surprisingly, with SIAST as well as the regional colleges, and certainly that's part of our ongoing dialogue. We've heard from the institutions.

**The Chair:** — Mr. LeClerc.

**Mr. LeClerc:** — I'm having problems hearing through the conversations over there. I'd really like to hear the answers from the minister. So if you can have your backbench

conversations, maybe you could take them out in the hallway since you're not part of the committee.

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

**Mr. Broten:** — Individuals on both sides have been having conversations as we go along, and indeed perhaps both sides could agree to be a little quieter so that we could hear. But it is within every member's right, as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, to sit in on this committee. It's their right and a privilege, and it's a role that everyone takes seriously. So if members are here and want to participate, I certainly think they deserve the right to do so.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Broten. If I could just ask all members to respect the wishes of the members on the other side, and if I could ask the officials at the end of the table to maybe speak up or hold the mikes a bit closer.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Mr. Chair, happy to repeat. As part of our ongoing operations, not surprisingly, we are in regular contact with the post-secondary institutions across this province. That would include, in this instance as it pertains to the question, relating to SIAST and the regional colleges, and in fact this issue has come up during discussions and dialogue. And I think that helps to address — at least I assume that helps to address — the member's question.

**Mr. Broten:** — Yes, thank you. With the JobStart/Future Skills program, the 2.7 that is being saved, as it is put, through the work-based program. Before the freeze on this program, what was the projected number of individuals in this year that were going to benefit from the program, based on the ministry's projections?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — We'll just get . . . We'll get some statistics for the committee members.

[19:30]

**Ms. Isman:** — Mr. Chair, if I could. The work-based training that we've got allocated out in terms of . . . Overall there remains about \$18 million in JobStart/Future Skills at this point in time. And it's anticipated that approximately 4,750 training opportunities are based on that \$18 million. Of that, almost 3,800 are attributable to the work skills and the work-based training.

**Mr. Broten:** — And that was the . . . So that's what's left in it, right, the 18 . . . Like with the 18 million left in the program that has already been spoken for, earmarked, or out the door, on its way out the door, that is projected to provide 4,750 spots?

Okay. So before the freeze, before 2.7 million was taken from the program, how many individuals were projected to receive benefits through the program?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — I think what's important here, Mr. Chair, and just what we're sorting through is understand the nature of the question relating to individuals. These dollars don't go to individuals, they go to employers. And an employer may have more than one individual. And so there would be this year 222 initiatives working with 530 individuals. And we'll just get you

the comparative data from last year.

Last year there were 386 agreements with 263 employers involving about 1,300 individuals. But significantly not all those dollars were utilized, and so that certainly attracted our attention. There were surplus funds last year within this initiative. So it's the context. Part of this is demand driven. And last year, if I'm not mistaken, there was about \$450,000 — those dollars were not utilized.

So it's one of the reasons we're just going through this, trying to be as thorough as we can, it's to say that on a year-to-year basis, that baseline doesn't quite line up year over year because of the nature of the agreements and nature of employers. And again various employers may just work with one individual or more than one individual.

**Mr. Broten:** — So last year when 1,300 individuals received funding through this program through 263 employers and 386 agreements, what was the amount of the budget for the program that year, please?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — \$4.8 million. But again the nature of this, the individuals aren't receiving the direct benefit. It's going to the employers. And again that frame is important, certainly with the number of questions that we're asking about as on a go-forward basis, looking at funds flowing to employers. Certainly it raises some questions for us.

**Mr. Broten:** — An important distinction, so thank you. But certainly while the funds go to employers, it does assist individuals. So there's a link there, but it certainly affects individuals.

Would the minister agree that the level of unemployment in the province would affect the interest in this program by individuals and perhaps employers?

**Ms. Isman:** — I think when you look at the work-based training, a lot of this is driven by employers and their need to find labour for new jobs. So if they're creating new jobs and unable to find them with skilled labour in the immediate labour force, then they would look to this kind of a program in order to enable them to provide on-the-job training that they need. So very much it would be influx as to whether or not what the labour market in a given area is looking like at any given point in time.

**Mr. Broten:** — The Job Start/Future Skills program, the work-based stream where there's \$2.7 million being taken back, saved, that is the program where the average amount paid to a . . . the average amount an employee would receive through the program is 3,500?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Yes, that's the summation.

**Mr. Broten:** — So at \$3,500 per individual, and at \$2.7 million being taken out of the program, I believe that would be 771 individuals. And I realize there would be an administrative component there.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Yes. If I may, Mr. Chair, this is the significance of the funding model as I've tried to highlight.

There are 222 agreements in place, 530 individuals. The significance of the agreements and the employers, it really matters in this because the funding actually rolls differently depending on one employer may take more than one. And so that ratio, it's certainly one of the reasons that we're asking questions about this, is that the ratio isn't linear and so hence last year there were 263 employers. This year we have 222 agreements.

We can see that certainly we have capped this program, but it isn't linear. We can't just say, these are the number of individuals that have been affected. In addition to that, what we've highlighted is that there was nearly \$500,000 last year underutilized — that is, not drawn upon.

So again, my only caution here before drawing conclusions about the numbers of individuals, these funds don't go to individuals. They go to employers. And the number of agreements signed can affect more than just simply one individual.

**Mr. Broten:** — Well I certainly understand that it goes to employers, but I also understand that the employers are attaching to individuals. So that connection is there. And while the amount per agreement with each employer can be different, certainly we can . . . If it's not 700, we can ballpark that based on the types of agreements that are in place in previous years and in this year that it could be, say 500 or . . . That's just a possible example.

But so based on the types of agreements that are currently in place, were in place last year and are in place this year, based on the average amounts given to employers — which would later be given to employees — with the \$2.7 million, with that amount, does the minister have a ballpark, an educated guess as to how many . . . If you don't want to use employees we'll go with employers. How many employers that would affect if there was a full subscription to the program?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — One of the significant aspects of this is because the money goes to employers. And we certainly, we certainly know that it's a complex picture across Saskatchewan right now, on a relative scale. We know we're not immune from what's going on around us, on a relative scale, with the lowest unemployment in the country.

We know that there are thousands of jobs still available. This morning on the SaskJobs.ca website when I checked, well over 5,000. This is relevant as a little bit of context because the significance of the funding being directed to employers, the question is premised on an assumption that employers not having access to this program would then not hire employees. And in fact that isn't the case, not always. That's the complexity in this.

Some employers may very well say, oh well this was one instrument I was going to utilize in order to hire additional people. The program cap has been put in place doesn't in any way diminish the employees that I need, and just simply they would move forward on their own initiative. And again it speaks to helping to ensure that the efficacy of this program is actually being realized and maximized.

So it's one of the cautions, before I would throw out a hypothetical number, is to understand this is just one instrument

used by some employers to help meet their labour market demands while participating in training programs. And we know that companies and employers right across the province engage in any number of training and educational programs on their own. So my caution there and at this stage not able to accurately reflect what are the implications on the labour market for individuals or employers, it's because this is just one variable, one element of skills training and education. And I say, employers right across the province often just proceed on their own initiatives.

**Mr. Broten:** — That may or may not be the case. And that's fine, and so be it. My question though, with the 2.7 million that is being pulled away, surely when the ministry from the get-go put the funding into the program there were targets, there were guesses, there were ideas in terms of how many employers the ministry would engage, how many individuals would receive benefits from the program. So if those targets were presumably there from the get-go, they must still be there now.

So if 2.7 is being taken out of the program, what is the ministry's estimation — I realize it won't be an amount you can swear on — but what is the best guess based on uptake, based on patterns, that the 2.7 would bring?

[19:45]

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Certainly I think the numbers from last year are informative — 386 agreements, 263 employers involving 1,300 trainees. Again some of the challenges, to begin to extrapolate or hypothesize, and that is on this point: we know well and we've talked about an average. Well that number would be affected significantly. Some may go forward at \$1,000; some may go up at the \$5,000 rate.

Again looking at the average, I think last year certainly provides for us and provided for us some helpful suggestions. Here is a program. It was underutilized. The funds go to employers, certainly helping employees, those that are getting training. The goal here is long-term sustainable employment and the development of the skills to help foster and facilitate that employment.

And so you're asking us to quantify. Simply saying we have capped this program, I think it's safe to say there will be employers affected. There will be individuals affected. But we are attempting to ensure . . . And certainly a series of questions have predated this cap, and those relate to the efficacy of this program.

**Mr. Broten:** — Okay, so when the Finance minister put out the call across all ministries that it's time to engage in restraint activities, I would assume that the minister and the ministry, when looking at places where there is available funding or funding that could be saved or clawed back or deferred or cut — however we want, whatever word we want to use — I would assume that each ministry would also have some sort of criteria in terms of well, yes, there's money in this bank account but if we take that money out of that bank account, how many people will be affected or could be affected.

So am I being told that when the decision was made to take 2.7 million from the JobStart/Future Skills work-based program,

that there was no consideration in terms of how many individuals this could affect? Was it simply there is money available there, so let's freeze it and use it somewhere else?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well your question has two components, the first of which is a hypothetical kind of analysis of what happens across ministries. And the response is this is focused on this ministry and this evening, and I'm not going to comment outside of that purview.

Regarding the analysis and deliberations that occur within a ministry regarding taxpayer savings, obviously there are a number of factors that are taken into consideration. One of the factors that was taken into consideration relates to that this fund was underutilized last year. That's very important.

The second, as I said, predating this call have been questions regarding the efficacy of this program. And so in fairness to the program we said, look, 530 individuals, 222 agreements are moving forward. And the decision was taken, let's cap this and continue with the analysis on the efficacy of the program. And certainly, as I've said, with awareness that some individuals and employers would be affected, but that decision is made based within a context of attempting to ensure that we're maximizing taxpayer dollars.

**Mr. Broten:** — Well in terms of access to the program last year, this isn't last year. So there is a billion dollar deficit in the province. There's a different financial climate in the province. There's many things that have changed which will affect the use and the subscription of the program.

And also the point about it being a hypothetical discussion, it's not hypothetical. I mean I'm looking here, and there's \$42 million in restraint however we want to call it, so it's not a hypothetical discussion. I assume that an actual discussion took place, just as we're having an actual discussion here about real dollars in a real program that affect real people. So I don't understand how it's a hypothetical question.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — If I can, Mr. Chair, the question related to activities that transcend this ministry across other ministries. What I simply referred to was, given the purview of these supplemental estimates and the fact that the member's asking questions particular to the operations of this ministry, I'm not going to comment on his first question because it seems a bit of a stretch. I was trying to be kind and use diplomatic language to say it was perhaps hypothetical.

It seems a bit of stretch that here we are within the deliberations and work of this committee as this ministry comes forward, then the member has asked about \$42 million in savings. Well 32 million came from savings through a very competitive bid process on the Academic Health Sciences building. So now we're down to narrowing our focus, still to a lot of money, but now we're working our way through some of the specifics.

So, happy to refocus and recalibrate the response if we're not quite getting to where the member wants. But at the same time just trying to contextualize, we're not commenting across government here, we're just focusing specifically on these estimates. And they're important for the people of the province.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. The JobStart/Future Skills program, the 2.7 that's being cut, it's my understanding this program is delivered, or these consultants are based throughout the province.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. This will offer a snapshot of the geographic distribution with the, I guess, aforementioned question as it pertained to the geographic distribution. Importantly here, there would be more than one at some of these institutions, and that would pertain to the individual campuses.

And so we can speak to the four SIAST campuses. Obviously we can think about the work under way in Prince Albert. We can think about the work under way in Saskatoon. We can think about the work under way in Moose Jaw and the work under way here in Regina.

We can talk about Great Plains. We can talk about Cumberland. We can talk about Southeast. We can talk about Parkland, North West, Northlands, and Carlton Trail.

And so again, it's a big part of our post-secondary system, that constellation that helps to ensure that the skills training, education, personal and professional development that individuals and communities draw upon — that geographic distribution is reflective of the consultants that are working in the field for us.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. I do understand. Thank you for that overview in terms of where the consultants are based, and you detailed throughout the province.

In terms of the dollars that go out the door through the JobStart/Future Skills program, your deputy said how many dollars are still in the program this year. Is it 18 in the work-based stream? Eighteen million, I believe.

**Ms. Isman:** — Yes.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — That 18-million-plus is across all the categories that we highlighted earlier on in our deliberations.

**Mr. Broten:** — So let's say out of that 18, what would be your estimate how that's broken down in terms of dollars out the door — broken down by Saskatoon-Regina, small urban, and rural — like, rough percentages. I realize there's coverage throughout the regional college system throughout the province, but in terms of dollars going out, is it mostly to the Saskatoon-Regina locations or is it mostly to the small cities or is it mostly to more rural locations?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Sure. I think if I could just get one element of clarification, and that is the geographic distribution of services versus the geographic . . . that is, services available versus the geographic distribution of a program uptake. It seems to me there would be a significant distinction to be made there.

**Mr. Broten:** — Well I would go with, I think it would be probably easiest to do it by locations, through the consultants in individual spots, assuming that they would have a region that they are servicing where individuals are accessing the program.



**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — So that is the services available. That is the supply side of what we're talking about. The second part would be the demand side.

**Mr. Broten:** — Yes, the demand side in terms of money going out the door. Out of those three areas, is it a third, third, third? Or is it 60 per cent in Saskatoon-Regina and 20, 20? Or what is the percentage breakdown?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Great. Thanks very much. And we'll get you that. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll start with the work-based training. This is through Carlton regional college. And I'll just attempt to provide a snapshot.

The communities that would be participating: Allan, Clavet, Colonsay, Davidson, Drake, Humboldt — there would be a number in Humboldt — Imperial, LeRoy, Nokomis, Simpson, St. Gregor, Watrous — again a number in Watrous — Watson, Wynyard. This would offer some . . . That would be a sum of \$240,000, again through Carlton Trail Regional College.

[20:00]

Regarding the Cumberland Regional College, there would be communities: Birch Hills, Melfort, Muskoday, Nipawin, St. Brieux. That would be just about \$98,000.

Through Great Plains: Consul, Frontier, Gravelbourg where there would be multiple. Kindersley, multiple. Lafleche, Maple Creek. Martensville, multiple. Outlook, multiple. Perdue, Rosetown, Saskatoon, Swift Current. Warman, a couple. That would be over 255,000.

Lakeland would have two, about \$10,000. Lakeland wasn't on my initial list. I should have added that for 10,000.

The North West Regional College: Hague, Meadow Lake, North Battleford, Parkside, Shellbrook — for 70,000.

Parkland Regional College: Ituna, Melville, Yorkton, multiple here. That would be 286,000, a little more than that.

SIAST Kelsey Campus, Saskatoon, that would be just over 305,000. SIAST Palliser Campus in Moose Jaw, again multiple, 281, almost 282,000. SIAST Wascana Campus here in Regina — again that would be multiple — 259,000, just under 259,000. SIAST Woodland Campus would be 401,000, a little better than 401,000.

And then Southeast Regional College, going through a number of communities, just over 57,000. Again all told this is just simply for work-based training over 2.2 million.

I think that provides a snapshot — I want to go into a little bit more detail — I think that provides a snapshot to demonstrate again community uptake and also, as the member has said, dollars going out the door. There is a broad distribution across the province as it pertains to work-based training. And I'm assuming that would be one of the priority areas because this is the program that in fact we've capped.

**Mr. Broten:** — I do find that list interesting in terms of knowing where the dollars are going. Would the minister be

willing to table that breakdown?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — If appropriate, Mr. Chair, what we propose is, is this actual document may have some information as it pertains to individual agreements that we'd be sensitive to, but if essentially in the period of time that would be reasonable, we could just simply take out some of these areas of sensitivity and provide the committee with the data as I've essentially offered it.

**Mr. Broten:** — That would be appreciated. Thank you. The breakdown that you listed there and the locations, what's the total expenditure on First Nations as a percentage of the total expenditure?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Appreciate the question. It's certainly one that is important to us. One of the methodological challenges on this relates to that ethnocultural data. So the data that is available, I would just simply offer the caveat that it may not be comprehensive. But based on the data that we have, and the reason we put that forward again because the dollars flow to employers and, as you've said, there are indirect benefits then to those participants. Based on the most up-to-date data that we have, First Nation and Métis participation is 11 per cent and other minority groups would be at 2 per cent. Certainly those indicators, again, not perfect but what I would call at least initial indicators, again allow us to continue our inquiry regarding the efficacy of some of the programs.

**Mr. Broten:** — The 11 per cent on First Nations, is that geographically centralized? Like for example, is it mostly on Muskoday? Or is it dispersed 11 per cent across the board?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — It's distributed right across the, it's distributed right across the range of program participants.

**Mr. Broten:** — The program consultants that you referenced earlier on in the evening, and you listed many of the communities where these program consultants are working in regional colleges or in SIAST, they are in many ways the eyes and ears for the ministry. They're the front-line individuals meeting with employers and I assume some individuals as well. Since the freeze of the 2.7 has occurred on the work-based stream, what feedback has the ministry received from these consultants?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well I think the work is important. Again there's a distinction between those working for the regional colleges. Those individuals would undertake this work as part of additional tasks and duties that they have. The four SIAST campuses that would be more concentrated as far as their duties and responsibilities, the actual connectivity is first and foremost to their respective institutions. And so it's through the institutions that that dialogue is undertaken. And as I've said, certainly with the respective institutions, both the regional colleges and the SIAST campuses, this has come up.

I'll just confer with my colleagues regarding the specific question, but again the organizational structure of where these individuals sit, they operate on behalf of their respective institutions. We'll just confirm what that dialogue is like.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. Well importantly — and this is

the work that's under way, 222 projects — much of that work is continuing day to day. And that's an important context. Certainly feedback has been received, and again mostly through the institutions as I've said, and a couple of other elements. And probably, Clare, what I'll do is just get you to elaborate on what that looks like.

**Ms. Isman:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Generally speaking in this program, interestingly enough, because it's continuous intake over the course of any given year, depending on when the applications are coming through, employers at any given point in time may have been made aware that the program funding was complete and was fully utilized. And according to some of the individuals that have been in the ministry a long time, often that did happen by the fall of the year, so that they would be working, and then the employers would potentially apply for the program and the funding would have been fully used up.

So I think the experience that we've got this year as a result of the cap on the program isn't unlike that, that the employers are actually fairly aware that when the funding has run out, then there is no more funding in this program because of the continuous intake. So generally what people are finding is that there isn't a lot of feedback coming from the employers as a result of the cap that's been put in place.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — I'll just elaborate, I'll just elaborate further. And that is, certainly one of the first elements that drew our attention related to the continuous intake. And certainly as we look at best practices, that's probably not the most efficient nor effective process with which to go forward. So, you know, as we've looked at some best practices probably . . . And again this program we inherited, and it's not to detract from it, but we think certainly one of the aspects of the program that needs attention relates to that continuous cycle. And certainly, on a go-forward basis, that has my attention.

**Mr. Broten:** — Okay. So I understand that these consultants, for most of them it's not their main gig, it might be 10 or 20 per cent of what they do. And I understand that it's a continual, it's an ongoing program, and people are accessing it at different times. So I understand all of that.

Out of the individuals that are trying to access the program, there are likely some employers who have tried to access the program and they've been told that funding is no longer available for the program. So out of those individuals who have contacted the program and learned that funding is not available from these regional consultants that are spread out throughout the province, what has the feedback been from those individuals? I don't care if the feedback's through the institution or if it's straight from the consultant or if it's in a memo, an email, a letter, but the feedback — is it happy, sad, or indifferent?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Certainly there have been a number of questions about the program and about the caps.

**Mr. Broten:** — And these comments, are individuals happy with the caps or are they unhappy with the caps?

[20:15]

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well I think what we've seen is, questions have come forward. Some of the individuals have expressed concern. Others have just simply expressed curiosity about the nature of the program.

**Mr. Broten:** — So when an individual — an employer in a town or city, small city, big city — is trying to access this program, they go to one of these consultants. They're told, sorry, I understand that maybe you were hoping to access this program, but it's no longer available. Some of those employers might just walk away and say, oh shoot. I missed my chance. I should have applied earlier. Some will say this is an outrage and will maybe take it to the next step in terms of looking into why this is frozen or when it might be available or . . .

So out of those individuals who have taken it from the level of . . . I'm at this consultant and I've just learned that this program is capped and no longer available, what level of activity has the minister's office seen in terms of these individuals contacting his office making inquiries about the program?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. We have had, now this is . . . I would offer distinction to the member and to the question. We have had responses into the ministry, as well as then I think the specific question related into my office. Just draw that distinction. Within the ministry there would be fewer . . . There would be 15 inquiries that have been made, some — as I've said — just simply aspects of curiosity, asking questions. And then we have had some of those more than expressing curiosity — expressing concern. To the office here I would say another handful to my MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] office. Through the mechanism or means of a form letter, probably an additional 25 all pertaining to one specific topic or subject.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. So our discussion over the last while has been focusing on the work-based stream of the JobStart/Future Skills program, the \$2.7 million being clawed back from the program. The quick skills portion is \$500,000 that the ministry has engaged in — what's the term? — in restraint of \$500,000. Just in a few sentences once again — I know you briefly mentioned this in your beginning comments — could you please just identify for the committee in a few sentences the difference between . . . or define the nature of the Quick Skills program please.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Mr. Amendt will be responding just to start.

**Mr. Amendt:** — Okay. The institutional quick response training is made up of two programs, the Quick Skills program and the Saskatchewan skills extension program. The quick skills component provides funding to public training institutions to provide short-term credit training to meet immediate industry needs for qualified employees. Training responding to an industry need for skilled workers may be provided at both the training institution and at the work site. This flexible training delivery model provides increased access to credit training for urban, rural, and northern residents.

Saskatchewan's skills extension program is a program designed to provide training for jobs in the labour market and to provide equitable access to credit training programs for the rural and

northern residents of Saskatchewan. The amount and types of training provided are identified through a process involving labour market partners of business, industry, government, and community known as the regional training needs assessment. Saskatchewan skills extension program, the programs must relate to the present and projected needs of the local and provincial labour market.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — If that's sufficient for initial overview.

**Mr. Broten:** — Yes. Thank you. In our earlier conversation, we learned that the \$2.7 million in cuts appears to be fairly, maybe not evenly, but certainly distributed across the province through the various locations because it is a freeze. So wherever the program was being offered, it is no longer being offered.

Could you please identify the distribution of the Quick Skills program? Is that in the same communities and through the same consultants as the work-based program or is it smaller in scope?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Sure. We'll get that information for you. Okay. Under the institutional quick response, and this is . . . What I'll do is provide an overview of the distribution of programming. I think that's an important context for the question.

For Carleton Trail Regional College it's over \$896,000; Cumberland Regional College, an investment of over \$833,000; for Great Plains College, an investment of just under 1.6 million; at Lakeland College, Lloydminster, that's just under \$900,000; North West Regional College, just over \$1.5 million; Northlands College, just over 1.7 million; Parkland Regional College, over 1.2 million; South East Regional College, just over one million. So the college total would be in excess of 9.7 million.

At SIAST, for the Kelsey institute, 533,000; here . . . sorry, just lost my place here. SIAST Palliser is 142-plus thousand; here at Wascana, 427,000, in excess of that; and Woodland in P.A. [Prince Albert], 224,000-plus; for a total of 1.3 million.

The Dumont Technical Institute, in excess of \$668,000. And then we have some additional dollars, \$25,000 going into Lakeland, and a cross-cutting theme, early childhood education, just shy of 280,000. Total on all of these over . . . in excess of 12 million.

Now the question is, out of that, where have the caps been implemented? And I'll be right back with that. Just gives you a sense of . . . As I say, that's the institutional quick response through both extension and the Quick Skills programs.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — The Quick Skills — the \$500,000 — this has been focused on SIAST. The rationale for this is that those dollars have not been expended in the past. So again, unexpended public finances — taxpayer dollars — that we've just simply said, because they haven't been utilized in the past, this is an opportunity to ensure that there can be a program cap, and taxpayers' dollars saved without significant effect on the program.

**Mr. Broten:** — So the \$500,000 being cut or restrained, which SIAST location is that?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — SIAST is an institution. And again those dollars have been underutilized in the past. So I think probably the most accurate, empirically accurate characterization of those funds would be taxpayer savings.

**Mr. Broten:** — Okay. The \$500,000 being restrained or cut or deferred or saved . . .

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Saved.

**Mr. Broten:** — You like saved? Out of that cut, what program was that to offer in, or what is the nature of the training that that was to provide?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well over the course of the last two years, each year there have been \$500,000 surpluses. And so once again we get into a bit of a hypothetical. In the past two years these \$500,000 have not been utilized and so hence, as part of our due diligence, the question goes out: can there be savings? The answer is, yes there can be savings. Here's a program that has been underutilized and those dollars have now been returned to the Saskatchewan taxpayers.

**Mr. Broten:** — But it's not a hypothetical. The funding clearly wasn't given as a hypothetical. It had to be for something. It's not for an idea or a hypothetical situation, a hypothetical program, a hypothetical student, a hypothetical individual. It had to be for someone. So what was the funding originally intended for? The same way that . . .

In other areas this evening we're talking about cuts. Clearly there had to be a discussion about what, how the cuts were going to affect real people. So in this instance here, if you want to deem it a surplus — which I would have questions about that terminology; I would see it more as a euphemism — but it had to have been earmarked for something originally in the budget. So what's the \$500,000 coming from?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Mr. Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to clarify this. We're talking about some skills training and educational funding, employment funding, that is under an umbrella called institutional quick response. Under that umbrella there are two components, essentially dollars pertaining to extension training and Quick Skills.

The member is right. We are focusing on the Quick Skills. Over the past two years, under Quick Skills in the respective years, there have been \$500,000 that have been underutilized. The trigger for this is again based on employers — employers submitting proposals. And so based on the last two years where there have been underutilized dollars, we've simply said, based on that, these dollars will be returned to the province. And so it's for a lack of proposal or proposals that these dollars have come back.

**Mr. Broten:** — So you're suggesting, if I understand you correctly, there's a pot of money, a pot of funds given to say SIAST for a few programs. One of those programs happens to be the Quick Skills, JobStart/Future Skills program where you're suggesting there's an underutilization of the funding.

So you're, if I understand what happened here correctly, you're looking for savings in the ministry. You get the request, the

order, however we want to frame it, from Ministry of Finance. Each minister . . . I know you don't like this train of thought but each minister, clearly each minister had to find savings, restraint, cuts, deferrals, whatever you want to call them, from somewhere. So you're going through areas where you can take a bit of funding here, a bit of funding there, a bit of funding there, to get up to the grand total that is \$42.252 million in restraint.

So if there's a pool of funds, a pot of money given to SIAST to fund a number of programs . . . As you just said, the quick start is one program coming out of this pool of funds. Is what happened, is this how it happened? Simply excess funds — not excess but funds were identified in a pot — that were needed to add up to the grand total, 42 million, and then out of that pot where there were funds, there were a variety of programs and you simply had an amount to take out of that pot, and then it was assigned whatever program seemed like it was the least popular in years past or whatever.

So while there's funding coming from what one could describe as an underutilized program perhaps — that's a whole other debate — but if you're taking money from that program, if it's from a larger pot that serves a variety of programs, would the ministry not then be taking funding from another program that could use that funding? Or do I have it all wrong?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well I think probably you've certainly scratched the surface on an analysis that's incomplete. One of the reasons I started off with a bit of an overview . . . It's not called quick start. It's called Quick Skills.

If I can reiterate, and I've already stated this for the record, the SIAST funding, and I won't go campus by campus, but it's over 1.3 million. And so as you've said, nothing hypothetical about it. Over the last two years there have been underutilized dollars to the tune of \$500,000 each year.

And so certainly the economic environment within which we find ourselves — but not just simply out of that, as part of any due diligence that's under way on a given operating basis — you begin to look at where taxpayer dollars are being utilized. Are they being maximized? Is program efficacy taken into consideration? What are the measurements? And so this certainly came up. As I've said, \$500,000 has been consistent regarding underutilization.

Your broader question about, if I understand it correctly, as it pertains to the effect this may have on other programs, once again this is the institutional quick response umbrella. There are a couple of components. This relates to the Quick Skills. The question pertains to the Quick Skills. It comes from SIAST.

So again I don't want to truncate the analysis, but it seems to me that it's pretty straightforward. It's been underutilized for the past two years. And certainly we felt that this was a prudent and practical approach to help save taxpayer dollars.

**Mr. Broten:** — So if we have this pot of funding that goes for a variety of programs, and it's the minister's opinion that this one program is underutilized — though it's puzzling why there would be a budget amount for the program if it is underutilized — within that pot of funding for the programs that it funds, are

there programs which are running at capacity and programs that, in the last year or currently, individuals have been turned away because the funding was exhausted?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Again I want to make sure I understand the scope and scale or parameters around the question. I'll assume that the member's making reference to the envelope of Quick Skills. And once again, based on our analysis of Quick Skills, the answer is no. Within Quick Skills there haven't been those wait-lists, hence the surplus over the last, over the course of the last couple of years.

**Mr. Broten:** — So the pool of funding that the minister referred to earlier in his comments, was that pool only for a variety of Quick Skills programs or was that for Quick Skills and other stuff?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well as I've said, as it pertains to this line of inquiry, there's an umbrella called institutional quick response. There are two components within this, one pertaining to extension training, one pertaining to Quick Skills. The total combined for institutional quick response is over \$12 million of investment.

The question as it pertains to SIAST and the \$500,000 that was, the rationale again, based on underutilization and the question as it has come forward: under Quick Skills, have there been wait times? No, there is surplus.

We'll go back and I'll just double-check on the extension training. Well it's to offer reassurance that the extension training piece, no funds have been withdrawn from that other component of the institutional quick response, and so it stands. As far as the wait times, we can check in and hear back from SIAST on that, and we're happy to report back to the committee.

**Mr. Broten:** — Sure. So the \$500,000 for the Quick Skills program, it's being used, it's being clawed back or restrained, in order to make up for the over billion dollars of red ink by the Finance minister. Does the minister think that the \$500,000 could have been used in a different spot to assist workers or students or individuals seeking training here in the province?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well I think our track record as it pertains to post-secondary education skills training and employment initiatives, we have I think demonstrated a very significant commitment on the advanced education side. Over the course of the last two years there has been in excess of \$1.1 billion invested. As it pertains to the training initiatives, and there's some overlap here, current numbers are up over \$90 million invested. And so that certainly we've also seen an increase since the mid-1990s of support for students, financial support for students.

So certainly one of the key elements of due diligence relates to the efficacies, efficacy associated with any given program. And as I say, that's part of good governance. It's part of due process and due deliberation.

[20:30]

And so, is there more to do? Certainly this is an active and

dynamic area of endeavour. Not just more, but ways to maximize investments, especially public investments, given specific outcomes.

But I think our track record as far as taking 80,000 people off the tax rolls, those least able to pay taxes, contributed significantly to students. Increases in student financial assistance, first time since the mid-1990s. Again, over \$1.1 billion in the last two years in post-secondary education. More to do, but I think our record stands favourably, not just when comparing to previous administrations in the province of Saskatchewan, but in fact by a broader comparative context reaching across the country.

[20:45]

**Mr. Broten:** — Not the universe, though, just the country. Sorry — bad reference to the Throne Speech. So we've been talking about JobStart/Future Skills program now for a little bit, and we may come back to it, but let's move on to another area of cuts.

The northern skills training, in your earlier comments last week, you mentioned that \$300,000 was being cut from the northern skills training. Could you please outline what this training is and where the \$300,000 of cuts will be felt, please.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Yes. Again, I think the conceptual frame as far as savings is important here. Certainly we know there is much work to be done in northern Saskatchewan. And this related to a federal-provincial shared Northern Development Agreement. This program quite simply has been complete. The program has been completed and there were funds remaining from this initiative, and so once again there were taxpayer dollars to be saved.

I think importantly it needs to be put into the broader context of the multi-party training program that we've just signed in La Ronge worth millions of dollars — phase 4. Many of the members on the opposition benches have seen the evolution of that program and that continues to be very important.

We've also seen the signing of the Northern Career Quest. That is an ASEP [Aboriginal skills and employment partnership] initiative. It's a federal-provincial-private sector and First Nation-Métis initiative. It's \$33 million. The largest, largest of its kind that we've signed, as it pertains to and focuses on northern Saskatchewan, helping to train over 1,000 individuals. We've just had another one signed in Saskatoon.

Importantly in the North, we have come forward with the completion of housing at the SIAST campuses in Prince Albert. Again we know how significant social housing is.

And so it's within this broader frame, and there are a number of other initiatives. Happy to have that discussion and deliberation, but in this specific initiative, the program had been completed. There were just under \$300,000 left from this program. And again to taxpayers' savings, we felt it was prudent especially in light of the additional work that's under way. Always more to do in the North, and we're certainly cognizant of that.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. Well we've just started to scratch

the surface here of the \$42 million of cuts, and I have days of questions here. But I know my colleague from Saskatoon Centre has a couple questions he wants to ask on an issue. So, Mr. Chair, perhaps I'll give him the floor. And if there's time remaining before the 9 o'clock, before the clock hits 9, I'll ask some more questions.

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

**Mr. Forbes:** — Thank you very much. When we were doing the Social Services estimates, Advanced Ed came up an awful lot actually because of TEA [transitional employment allowance]. And we're seeing huge numbers in TEA increasing, and we were talking about FTEs [full-time equivalent]. And the minister in fact said, and I quote, "Most of the casework for the TEA program is actually handled through Advanced Education."

So how many FTEs will be increasing to look after the increased caseload, and what are your plans to make sure that's done as efficiently as possible?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Great. Thank you for the question. Thanks very much for the question. There is an MOU [memorandum of understanding] between Social Services and the ministry I have the honour of serving as it pertains to the work undertaken in this area from our ministry. We're mostly focused on areas of employability skills, and currently there are a couple of sessions held per week. Where demand warrants, that increases to three times. And certainly, given the work that's under way, we're confident that we have the capacity within the ministry to address this.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Now I'm curious. So I'm hearing you say that in spite of the caseload almost increasing by a thousand — it's actually 850 a month — that this can be absorbed by your staff. That's amazing. That's really amazing.

I am curious. I'm curious because time is short, but I'm curious. The next question: who plays the role through your MOU or whatever in terms of forecasting? The TEA numbers have been a bit of a yo-yo in the last 18 months. It's been cut by 30 per cent in the last budget, then it's come back up some 44 per cent from nineteen fifty to 2,800. Do you play a role? Does your ministry play a role in forecasting the projections around TEA?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Before I address the substance of the question, I'll just simply say that I think what the member meant was a supreme compliment to the officials within the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour. And I agree with that compliment. So we'll be right back with your . . .

**Mr. Forbes:** — Can I clarify that? I'd like to speak for myself, and I know the minister would not want to put words in my mouth.

And I am not saying that it's a compliment. When I see an increase of some 40 per cent, either you're telling me that . . . As with the question earlier, we had this pool of money that we didn't know what was happening. And now you're having . . . I mean, I'm shocked actually, to tell you the truth.

When you have people who are facing this kind of situation, welfare caseloads are going up, these people are right against the wall. And if you're not increasing the FTEs to help these people, I am shocked and disappointed. So those are my words. That's what you need to hear.

But now I want to know is who does the forecasting here?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — I certainly appreciate your words.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And I think I'm entitled to them.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Well of course you are. Here's what contemporary management and leadership practices would look at, and that is the effectiveness and efficiency within the systems.

And I'll just say, quite frankly many of the systems that we inherited from the previous government certainly could have been paid more attention to in this area.

Mr. Chair, thanks very much for the opportunity. The question was as it pertained to role and responsibilities pertaining forecasting, and in this there are shared responsibilities.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. Let's go back to the cuts in the northern skills training program, the \$300,000. You said it was for a completed program. In what communities was this program being offered?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — The program, again it was a federal-provincial initiative based on the Northern Development Agreement, based mostly out of La Ronge but spread across the North. And so these funds remained at the end of this initiative.

**Mr. Broten:** — Sorry. I couldn't hear the last sentence. These funds . . .

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — As I said, these were part of the federal-provincial program called the Northern Development Agreement. As that program was completed, these funds remained. And so it was just simply a matter, once again on behalf of taxpayers in the province, just simply saying, okay that initiative is complete. There are a number of initiatives that we continue to roll forward with right across the North. But in this instance, on behalf of taxpayers, those dollars can be saved.

**Mr. Broten:** — Yes, I heard that the first time you said it. The question was, in what communities was the program being offered?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — As I stated, those . . .

**The Chair:** — Ms. Schriemer.

**Ms. Schriemer:** — Just to comment. Do we need to be snippy?

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten, continue.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. So in what communities was that program being offered?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — That program was focused mostly on La Ronge, but it was distributed across the North, various communities. And we can get a thorough list for the committee members.

**Mr. Broten:** — What was the total amount of the program, the amount of the funding?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — I just want to be clear, Mr. Chair. Is that the total amount that was invested throughout the program or that which remained?

**Mr. Broten:** — In the northern skills training, the 300,000 being saved. I'm curious, what was the total amount for the northern skills training?

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — Okay.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — For the entire initiative. Okay.

Mr. Chair, just attentive to the time. Again, we're happy to get that. That was over multiple years and they were multiple ministries. We're happy to get that information to the committee members.

**Mr. Broten:** — Yes, if that was tabled in the near future that would be nice. Thank you. Mr. Chair, given that I see it's 9. I do have plenty of questions to cover the cuts, but given that it's 9, I'll say thank you to the minister and his officials for the time spent together this evening.

**The Chair:** — Seeing as your comments, you have more questions, Mr. Broten. I'm assuming you're not voting off tonight.

**Mr. Broten:** — That is correct.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Minister, you have some closing comments.

**Hon. Mr. Norris:** — I do, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much for the opportunity. And I appreciated the opportunity to be here over the course of a couple of nights, to accommodate the official opposition on very short notice with even additional time built into tonight. And I'll just say for the record how deeply disappointed I am that these aren't being voted off tonight.

The additional funds are affecting post-secondary educational institutions. They're affecting those that are most vulnerable within our communities. They're affecting skills training initiatives.

[21:00]

I can think of only one analogy that comes to mind. And that is the Republican Party, during the reign of Newt Gingrich, didn't pass the budget. And so based on the model of the Gingrich Republicans, what can I say? Deeply disappointed.

We're working on behalf of post-secondary institutions, learners, and educators across this province and, Mr. Chair, we

have worked diligently. We've allocated additional times, and this is something that certainly we're going to help make sure that the people of this province are fully aware of.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Being 9:01, we will adjourn for a few minutes to facilitate the exchange of ministers and officials, and we'll reconvene in about 10 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 the Minister of Social Services tonight and her officials. We have no substituting members for this committee meeting. We are here to consider supplementary estimates for Social Services, vote 36, employment support and income assistance of subvote (SS03). I would invite the minister if she has any opening comments and to introduce her officials.

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

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

**Mr. Forbes:** — Just to clarify, I just noticed . . . Well first of all, the deputy minister won't be joining us tonight?

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

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. Now I have Don Allen as acting assistant deputy minister, corporate services. Is that correct?

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

**Mr. Forbes:** — Oh there you go. Okay. And then I have Gord Tweed as associate executive director, income assistance. Is that correct?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — For these purposes, yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. And those purposes would be?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The problem, the difficulty is we are going through a reorganization . . .

**Mr. Forbes:** — Oh okay. There you go.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — So it's getting a little confusing right now while we're in the midst of a reorg.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Yes. Absolutely, I understand. So what I want to do tonight is clarify some of the information. We had a good discussion last time, but I do want to clarify some of this

because as these numbers and the caseloads go up, clearly this is a concern, and we want to be accurate in the information we have.

And so I want to start off by saying that when I asked the question last time, I said that the increase was for \$13 million — \$13.388 million — and that would be an increase bringing it up to 228 million. Is that correct for what now the allotment would be for employment support, income assistance when you look at the budget?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The supplementary estimate request is for that amount, yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Right. And so what kind of percentage increase are we seeing in that line when you think about it overall? I'm looking for . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The '09-10 budget was 313.73 million. And so that is a 4.15 per cent increase.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Pardon me? Could you repeat that?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The '09-10 budget was 313.73 million for that subvote. And so that would be a 4.15 per cent increase.

**Mr. Forbes:** — 4.15. So when you're adding all of that together . . . But when I look back on that budget, the Saskatchewan assistance plan was 215.848 million. So are you saying that some of the increase, some of the 13 million is actually going . . . Some is going to the transitional employment allowance — we know that. That is for sure. But are some of it going to some of the other allocations under that line?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — No.

**Mr. Forbes:** — No. So between the assistance plan and the employment allowance . . . so it would actually probably be more than 4.15 increase for those two lines. Right?

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

**Mr. Forbes:** — Right. Do we have the number of that right now?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The number would be 5.8 per cent for those two programs.

**Mr. Forbes:** — 5.8 per cent. Okay. Good. Thank you. Now you also said that the caseloads would be going, the average caseloads would be going up from 21,100 caseloads average per month to 22,800 per month. Is that correct? Did I get that right?

[21:15]

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — For SAP [Saskatchewan assistance plan], what I said last time we were together was that the budget was prepared for 21,100 for SAP cases and 1,950 for TEA cases. And we now predict for the remainder of the year that we will be looking at 22,800 for SAP cases and 2,800 for TEA cases, which was the answer I gave at the last estimates.

**Mr. Forbes:** — So what percentage increase would that be?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Approximately 11 per cent.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Now how did you arrive at 11 per cent?

**The Chair:** — Mr. Furber, if you've got comments, you want to take the floor and make the comments, if you're going to be that loud. Otherwise keep your voice down, please. Mr. Forbes, continue.

**Mr. Forbes:** — My question was, how did you arrive at 11 per cent? If you could work me through the math there.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I would ask Mr. Tweed to answer that question because he quickly did the math for me here.

**Mr. Tweed:** — Gord Tweed. The budget, the combined caseload for SAP and TEA for '09-10, the budgeted amounts that were expressed last week were 23,050 cases. The new combined caseload for SAP and TEA or the forecast would be 25,600. My math says that's a variance of 2,550. You take the 2,550 cases as a percentage of the 23,050, and that would amount to approximately 11 per cent, Mr. Forbes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — What I'm interested in, I would prefer to split the two. I'm interested in what is the percentage of the SAP increase, and then I'll be asking you later about the increase, the percentage increase for TEA.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The SAP increase would be 8 per cent. The TEA increase would be 44 per cent.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. Those are the numbers that I have as well. What has been the average caseload for six months of this year, this year that you use, for SAP?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Would you like that response from the first month starting with March, which is the fiscal year, or with January?

**Mr. Forbes:** — March.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — March? Okay. As the . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . April? And again you're asking about the SAP program?

**Mr. Forbes:** — Yes.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Okay. As the answer was for a written question that you have asked before, and so you would have that answer, in April of 2009 it was 22,308. In May of 2009, it was . . .

**Mr. Forbes:** — What I'm trying to get at is that . . . because I do have those answers.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes, you do.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And so I don't want to repeat it. But what I'm looking for is, do you have an average for the first six months rolled in together? And then what I'm going to ask you for is, what are your projections for the last six months of the fiscal year?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The average to September 30 is 22,576. The average to October 31st is 22,626.

**Mr. Forbes:** — 22,626?

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

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. And so that's what it's going to take us for the last six months — 22,626. And yet you're anticipating that it would be 22,800? That's what the new estimates are based on — 22,800?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We are going to experience within that time period another review of the shelter allowance.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — So we have to give some sort of allowance within what we're asking for to allow for the possibility of changes in the rates because within the fiscal year of the government there are two reviews of the shelter allowance and so we are projecting where that may go.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And I understand that the rental supplement even though is it not . . . It's a different line item on the budget. It's not part of SAP, even though . . . Well it's not part of SAP.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — That is correct, the rental supplement is not part of SAP but the shelter allowance is.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The shelter allowance was also increased substantially, and indexed. And the shelter allowance within SAP and TEA is also visited every six months and adjusted according to the changes within the market for the community in which the client lives. So no, it is not the rental supplement; but yes, it is the shelter allowance.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And so when are the anniversaries for figuring out the shelter?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — February, I believe is the next time it will be reviewed. October '09 was our last adjustment.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Was it done October and every six months?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Six months.

**Mr. Forbes:** — So you have just done one and then the next one will be just prior to the budget start? And so you're putting aside some money anticipating that there'll be an increase in March?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We want to be prepared for that possibility. Yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. So you've seen something done. Were there increases in October?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes there were, not for all of the tiers. There's a number of tiers which communities fall within. The most substantial increase the last time was in our major cities,



as well as Estevan was bumped up to tier A because the rental costs in Estevan had increased substantially. So Estevan was brought to the same shelter allowance rates as say Saskatoon and Regina.

**Mr. Forbes:** — So you've gone through that and but — I am trying to get a handle on this — that while you have the two sets of averages, and not the first one or the second one comes close to the 22,800, but yet the answer is that you're saving some money aside for the rental or the shelter allowance. This is an odd way of calculating it, isn't it? Thinking that you're going to have more people on social assistance, but that's really not what you're thinking. Have I got that right?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We're forecasting for the last six months that there will be 23,040 cases, is what we're forecasting, which is up 414 is what we're forecasting. I know it would be nice if the numbers were consistent throughout the entire year. When you go down the route of indexing such as we have, it is better for the clients absolutely, but it does make the numbers more volatile and more difficult to predict.

So you can't necessarily do the absolute math of number of clients to the average to absolutely this is what your number is going to be. Depends where the clients live; those rates are different. Depends on how the shelter rates changes. That changes those numbers as well. Or the amount of money that you're going to have to allocate.

So we are now saying that for the past, last five months, we're going to forecast 23,040 cases.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Now that's cases. How many individuals would make up or beneficiaries be part of those cases? When you look at 23,040, how many people are we actually talking about here?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The best I can do is just give you examples of where we've been at. For example in October, there was 22,924 cases that involved 37,586 people. In the month of September, there was 22,931 cases which involved 37,860 people. In October, there was 21,637 cases which involved 35,743 people.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Now I'm wondering on SAP . . . Or what is the forecasting in terms of cases or beneficiaries? Are they staying longer on SAP? Are you finding that people are exiting sooner? What has been the trend over the last year, 18 months? Going forward, are you anticipating people will be staying on?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — You have to realize that we're going to see quite a change in SAP. SAP is designed for those that are longer termed and more stable. And the numbers show that it has indeed been far more stable.

What is going to change significantly in the Ministry of Social Services is going to the design and the moving of individuals with disabilities off of SAP into the SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability] program. And so that is going to dramatically alter the SAP numbers. SAP is designed to be longer term, it does include those with long-term disabilities, and as such, is fairly stable in the numbers.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Well I'd like to talk more about SAID. So I

will ask you a quick few questions, then we'll come back to some of the things I have on my list here.

So you had anticipated that SAID, you'd be seeing about 3,000 cases move over to SAID in October, November, somewhere in that ballpark. Are you seeing that? How are the numbers in SAID now?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — That is not included in the supplementary estimates. The SAID program is not included in the supplementary estimates. The supplementary estimates only cover the SAP and TEA programs.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Mr. Chair, I would think . . .

**The Chair:** — Mr. Forbes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — The minister brought up SAID, which is a future component over the next four or five months. And she's not answering the question. So I mean either I would ask you to rule her out of order on some of these things if I can't ask further questions on that. And I think this relates very much to the, particularly this program, SAID, because it's such a key component of SAP. And I agree with the minister, in that, when we talk about SAP and how long do people stay on it, it's hard to talk about it without talking about SAID.

**The Chair:** — Thank you for your comments, Mr. Forbes. Although reviewing Social Services, vote 36, in my estimation, it is talking about the social assistance plan. It's specified there. So I would suggest that we stick to the social assistance plan.

**Mr. Forbes:** — So for clarification on your . . . Will you be ruling her out if she wanders off the topic?

**The Chair:** — The SAID program isn't listed in the supplemental estimates . . .

**Mr. Forbes:** — Yes, but I am asking . . .

**The Chair:** — The SAID program. So no, I won't. I would suggest you just stay with the Saskatchewan assistance plan.

**Mr. Forbes:** — I'm willing to stay there. But I'm asking you as Chair, will you be focusing the minister on her comments when she brings up other topics like SAID and so on? Because if she brings them up, I'm happy to hear it, but I will think that I should be able to question her on some of those parts. So I'm asking direction from the Chair.

**The Chair:** — I'll ask the minister to stick with the social assistance plan.

[21:30]

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay, thank you. So what I wanted to know . . . So the question originally was, before we got off topic, was the anticipated stay on SAP. Is it longer or shorter? So without talking about what some of the programs that may be coming up, are people staying longer or shorter on SAP?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Longer.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Longer. How much longer?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — So median time on SAP in months, the single deemed employable: in April 2009 the average was five months; in May 2009, six; in June 2009, six; in July 2009, six; in August 2009, six; in September 2009, six; October 2009, six.

The single not employable: in April 2009 the average was 52 months; in May 2009, 52; in June 2009, 51; in July 2009, 51; in August 2009, 51; in September 2009, 50; in October of 2009, 49 months.

For a childless couple the average was: in April of 2009, 28; in May 2009, 27; in June 2009, 27; in July 2009, 28; in August 2009, 30; in September of 2009, 30; in October 2009, 28.

The single parent: in April 2009 the average stay was 18 months; in May 2009, average was 18; June 2009, 17; July 2009, 16; August 2009, 16; September 2009, 16; October 2009, 16.

The two-parent family: in April 2009, average was 17 months; in May 2009, 18 months; June 2009, 18 months; July 2009, 17 months; August 2009, 17 months; September 2009, 17 months; October 2009, 18 months.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Thank you very much. There's a lot of content there so I'm glad we have *Hansard*. That's very good. But I am curious about the number, the actual number. When you say that you see an increase going from 21,100 to 22,800, what are the actual numbers that you'll see of the employable cases or beneficiaries? What will the average increase be? So if you have the six months of the first half the fiscal year, compared to the second six months. And I'm picking that because of course the first six months was part of the budget and now we're into the second, the supplementary estimates.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — My officials tell me that we don't have that detailed of information here and so we'll have to give you that answer at a later time. I do want to put on record though and remind the member what I have said before. As percentage of population our numbers are still down. As a percentage of population from 2006-07, percentage of population, the number of clients we had in Social Services was 4.7 per cent. In '09-10 we are now at 4.1 per cent as a percentage of population.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And I actually wanted to follow up on that because I wanted some clarification around . . . When you had raised that in the last session, I asked about whether there was some pressures that the program was feeling from in-province migration. Because if the population was increasing, and this was another way of looking at it, if I'm right, you had felt actually that — and correct me if I'm wrong — that that did not have an impact, the in-province or out-of-province migration to Saskatchewan.

So is that what we're seeing? Is that really the increases, are people who have been born and raised here in Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I don't think we could go so far as to say they're born and raised in Saskatchewan because that would be following a lot of history and documenting it. To say that they have been here for some time, the answer would be yes,

they have been here for some time. We are not experiencing people coming here to go on welfare.

**Mr. Forbes:** — You know I was looking at this *Child and Family Poverty Saskatchewan Report, November 2009* and it's put out by Campaign 2000 and I'll ask more questions about this. But one that, seeing we're on the topic right now, it does say that, "More than one in three immigrant children are poor" and that they experience a high poverty rate. In fact:

Although the child poverty rates for immigrants to Saskatchewan (38.1% for those immigrating since 2001 and 31.3% for all immigrant children) are lower than for immigrants to Canada, they are well above the provincial child poverty rate.

So, but they're not as high as the Aboriginal children in the province which is at 45.1 per cent. So according to this, it seems to be an issue for Saskatchewan. Not necessarily as bad as Canada, but it's significant when you compare it to the provincial child poverty rate.

So, comments. On one hand you're saying, that I'm hearing you say that it's no, you're not seeing that, that experience with immigrants. But here we're reading in other credible sources that in fact it is an issue. Is this correct? Is this correct what they're reporting?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — That's not what we're finding in the ministry. Without veering too far off of what supplementary estimates are about, and I fear I may be doing that in discussing Campaign 2000 and the results that they have, because you're going to get into the sort of hypothetical discussion on how we measure poverty. And we've had that discussion in the past in estimates, mainly on the main budget. A lot of the numbers in Campaign 2000 is using LICO [low-income cut-off] before tax. And that's disputed amongst stakeholders and governments of all the provinces and different advocacy groups of whether or not that's an accurate measure to use.

Our province uses the MBM [market basket measure], the market basket measurement, for measuring poverty. We feel it's more reflective of the region in which you live in, and most provinces use that measure. So I guess we could go through a lengthy discussion on the measurement of poverty, the measurement used by Campaign 2000. If you do the Campaign 2000 measurement after tax for Saskatchewan, it brings us from the 16.7 per cent before tax down to 8.9 per cent which is significant difference. The before tax and after tax, of course, takes away the incentive of governments to do anything on the tax side. It would eliminate the low-income tax credit being accounted for whatsoever that our government initiated.

So I guess we can debate that at length of how we measure poverty. And it is debated in a lot of forums, but I don't believe that is sticking to what is supplementary estimates for tonight.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Well I think it is important to be talking about this, and I'm glad that you've raised this issue. Because clearly when people see this and they get alarmed because we're talking about the increased caseloads and what does it really mean, and I think there would be some benefit if there was some agreement about how do you measure poverty. Do you

measure around caseloads? Do you measure a percentage? Which would you prefer if you could work with community groups to say, let's agree on how we measure this? What do you think is the most effective way?

**The Chair:** — Mr. Forbes, I think we are drifting a little bit off the topic of the Saskatchewan assistance plan when we start debating how to measure poverty and those numbers. I think we're talking specifically about the number of those people that are on the Saskatchewan assistance plan.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. Then my question is, what are the actual number of new families in the first six months . . . or the actual number of families with children who are on SAP in the first six months of the fiscal year this year?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Again this was an answer that was given to you already, and . . .

**Mr. Forbes:** — I'm looking at the average of the six months similar to that. I have the six numbers.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes. You do have the six months numbers, so what you do is you add them together and divide by six. But I will get my officials to do that for us tonight.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Thank you. I appreciate that.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The calculation comes to 6,078 as an average in the first six months of the government fiscal year, of caseloads with children.

**Mr. Forbes:** — The next question would be, what do you anticipate the average for the final six months? But I understand that you may be actually anticipating that it may actually be higher in the last four or five months.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Again, we'll supply you with that answer. The officials don't have that kind of detailed data here.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And then what are the actual numbers of those living with disabilities in the first six months of this fiscal year?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Again, I want to make note that you had that answer to questions in written question answers. But we will do the math for you here tonight.

[21:45]

**Mr. Forbes:** — And I would say that I do have those, but I just want to make sure that we have the same numbers here.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — It's the written questions I'm using.

**Mr. Forbes:** — You're using. Oh, well very good.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I'm absolutely using the questions that were given to you for the officials to do the math quickly with the calculators.

**Mr. Forbes:** — I'm glad I could be of help.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Absolutely. The answer to your

question of the SAP cases involved people living with disabilities, for the first six months would be 13,742.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And I will be asking about the last six months, but I anticipate the answer may be that you don't have the information here with you.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Your anticipation would be absolutely correct.

**Mr. Forbes:** — So then how do you come up with the number 22,800?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Again, I believe this answer was asked the last time we were together for estimates. And I had Mr. Don Allen explain how we make the projections as we go forward, what we use to forecast the numbers. We also have the added element, of course, of the changes that may happen to the shelter allowance.

So although, you know, they're forecasting a number, they did not bring with them all the details of the breakdown of those forecasts on that number. However, if you review *Hansard* from the last estimates when we were together a week ago, it was described to you at that time of what indicators we use to forecast numbers.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Yes. And I do have it in front of me. And I actually found it insufficient in terms of the answer. And so that's why I'm re-asking, is because the benefit of being able to come back is to look back and say, you know, when I asked those questions, there were points that were not answered. And that while some of it was worthwhile, I would like to explore a little further.

Because clearly, when you see some of these numbers, like a 44 per cent increase in TEA . . . And we talked about that last time, the decrease on some of those numbers. And I just have a lot of questions about that because I think people have concerns about when they see increases happening.

And I would just ask the simple question, when have you seen this kind of increase? Because you have referred to, we're using the same process we've used for several years. But to you or to your officials, have you ever seen the number of this size of increase in the last several years?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — What the member has to remember is there also was a substantial and unforeseen decrease. So this is basically bringing us back to the levels it was before. And so it was a substantial decrease at one point in time in . . . And I didn't bring the press release with me, but I know it was announced at the time and it was quite substantial. And now it has, it's returning back to levels closer to what it was before.

So I suppose you could make a big deal about this being a substantial increase. There also was a substantial decrease. So it is an interesting time in the economy right now. We are following those numbers very closely. We have the supports. Is it a huge increase over and above levels that we've seen in the past? The answer would be no.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Well I think this is a big deal. I think this is,

considering the quality of some of the work that went into the previous budget. And we saw the questions around forecasting potash. And we saw and I read into the record from April 6 — and I don't mean to read into the record again — but even in April, on April 6 when we met, I raised the question about how is that sustainable? And you were looking probably at the same written questions that I have, that we weren't seeing the kind of decreases in TEA. There were a few months that were quite low. But clearly there wasn't a significant trend, where a program should be cut the way it was in preparation for the '09-10 budget.

And so I do have some serious questions about how this is put together, and I think people want answers about this. And so I do have some questions about this. And I guess when we talk about how this budget is made, one of the questions is that I had last time: how many people worked on this particular issue around forecasting or crunching the numbers to understand how many people will be on SAP?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I just want to remind the minister that the officials that we have today are officials that your government had when you were in government. I have extreme faith in their ability to do the work that needs to be done. They're predicting a lot of programs that fall under Social Services and all of them are client-based. So we're working with numbers and projections on clients.

So there is, yes, there is SAP and TEA, but there also is rental supplement. There's Saskatchewan employment supplement. There is child care subsidies. We're working with numbers in a lot of areas, so the projections on these particular programs were underestimated.

Now we can review again what Mr. Allen explained was how . . . the indicators they used to make that forecast. I guess my question to you is this. What specifically do you want more detail on, on the answer to the question that was given a week ago? Because we could give the same answer, but that isn't the answer you want to hear. I know it isn't. What specifically do you need more details on?

**Mr. Forbes:** — Well I had a series of questions here, and they didn't come with the answers. And I do want to say to the officials that we have a lot of confidence. I mean we really, truly do. But I need to know more because in order to have confidence in these numbers . . . how is it that you get to those kind of numbers? How is it that you project such a decrease in the past budget and then it bounces back up some . . . And the number you gave was, I believe, was it a 44 per cent increase in TEA? How does that happen? That's amazing.

So we're trying to get through this. And I'm trying to get a sense, is there an office? How many people work in this area of predicting this? That would be the third time I've asked that question. How many policy analysts work on this area? And I'll stop there.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Seven people work on it.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Seven people work on it.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — And I want to remind the member also

that when you're working with relatively — and we're talking relativity — small numbers, when you have the client base that is in the Ministry of Social Services, relatively small numbers make a dramatic percentage difference.

So TEA numbers are around that 2,000-person mark, so it doesn't take much to make a significant increase in percentage. TEA is a very flexible program in changing of numbers because they are employable. It is considered to be a short-term program, so that changes very rapidly.

SAP has been far more consistent. And it is by far larger numbers, so you don't see the percentage change. I would like to point out to the member opposite that unemployed persons in the province is up by 39 per cent, whereas on SAP and TEA the unemployable number is only up 15 per cent. I mean, we can play percentages, but you have to look at the sample size as well because if the sample size is small, your percentage becomes very, very large with only a small change.

**Mr. Forbes:** — I haven't asked for percentage. I mean I've asked for a percentage there, but I'm more interested in the actual numbers, and I haven't been able to get those to see an increase. I know last time, for example, we were talking about the number of families, increase in the number of families, and actually I was the one who came up with the number 400.

I'm curious what your number is, because we haven't heard that number. That's what's recorded in *Hansard* because I was using the answers from my written questions. But do you have a number of how many more families are you anticipating to be on SAP when we hit 23,000?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — As I said to you before, I will say yet again, that the detailed breakdown is not here. We don't have those details here. We will be more than happy to supply that number as I already told you tonight.

**Mr. Forbes:** — We're just two days away from this session. I know that we don't have time for written questions, and so unless you're giving me an assurance that you'll have that sometime before Christmas, I don't think that's satisfactory. But are you willing to give me the answer before Christmas?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Mr. Forbes, any time I have promised you an answer from committee in estimates, you have always received that answer. So I'm not sure where you're going with this.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Well you know, I mean you're saying two things there. I'm asking before Christmas, because we know that I could put in a written question and I don't get it for 180 days. So are you making a commitment that if I put that in writing in the next couple of days I'll see an answer in the next . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — You can absolutely have the answer before Christmas and you . . .

**Mr. Forbes:** — Somewhere around there, that would be great.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — It's already on record. I have assured you that answer before Christmas. You don't even have to

worry about a written question. When I commit to an answer in committee, you will get that answer.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

So my question then becomes, when you do see 1,700 though, that is a significant increase. Now I have to . . . You know, when you've talked about some of these programs, we were talking about whether or not . . . You referred to several other programs, and you referred to social assistance as one of those programs. But clearly when you have families and people who are employable or living with disabilities, when you're one of the 1,700 that you'll see the increase of, this is significant. So I'm curious. Is there a number where you find that something that you've told your officials that this is a bottom line; we cannot go past this number? Is it 24,000? Is it 25,000?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We will supply assistance to whatever the number is. So is there a bottom line where we say no, there can't be anybody else who gets assistance? No. So that is indeed the case. Is there someone that we're going to say sorry, like that's the bottom line; no more people are allowed to have this program. The answer is no. I have not given my officials that cut off.

**Mr. Forbes:** — That's not what I was asking. If you misunderstood or if I wasn't clear, let me say it a different way. Whereas the last time when we met and you said you'd be carefully watching these numbers but you didn't give an indication of when a number got too high that you would say to your officials, clearly we have a problem here. We need to be doing something. You went through a series of other programs that you thought would be helping. But I'm curious. Is there a number where you say, this is something we have to do something about.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We don't significantly have numbers that are escalating above where they were prior to my being the minister, so that we're not in the situation even when you mention the Campaign 2000. Those numbers were from the previous administration, which was one where you yourself sat at a cabinet table. Those numbers are from 2007, so I haven't been in the position where I've seen a dramatic decrease. I've seen us come back to the levels we were before or very close to the levels we were before.

So have I been in a situation where I have to say like wow, this is way out of control; we need to address a situation? No. Have we strengthened a number of programs to help assist people? Absolutely we have. One of the most significant was within SAP and TEA, with the shelter allowance and indexing it and visiting it every six months. So do I feel I'm in the situation where I have to arbitrarily pick a number that is, it cannot go beyond? No, I'm not in that situation yet.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Did you see when you came in as a minister, were the social assistance rates, caseloads, how were they going? Were they going down? Have they been going down over the past few years? Or were they going up when you took office?

[22:00]

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — If I'm not mistaken — and I don't have those stats here because of course it again is not the supplementary estimates we're talking about today — there has been a steady trend downward with kind of a levelling over the last probably five years.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Fair enough. I want to get back to this policy analyst's unit. So there's been seven in this group. Has there been any change in the last couple of years of people within the policy analyst unit, or have they been consistently the same people over the last several years?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Again this is outside the parameters of the supplementary estimate. But my officials assure me, who have been there, there's been a couple of changes, nothing significant.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Thank you very much. I think my colleague from Regina has a few questions here so.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Yates.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I have a number of questions that my colleagues from various parts of the province have asked me to ask this evening. But I want to start by asking a few questions. And I'm sorry, Madam Minister, if you may have answered these previously and I wasn't here.

Is there any one factor or any identifiable factors as to why we're seeing the increase in both SAP and TEA rates at this time?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — SAP is again, and in the conversation that I had with your colleague earlier, is not a huge increase. The increase that's concerning is the TEA which is employable.

There's a couple of things we're seeing. Unemployment is an issue right now. Change in the province somewhat. We're also seeing that some of, far too many of our clients are taking the jobs first but not sticking with their job.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much. When you're saying many clients are taking their jobs and not sticking with it, is there any identifiable reasons for that? Is it in a change of job market? Is it a lack of skill, or is it an uncertainty or is there any reason that it's going now different than it may have in the past?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Nothing that we've been able to identify and really say this is absolutely the problem.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much. Are the increases identifiable to major layoffs in particular areas of the province or particular industries where, in a particular area, anything that would tell us this may be short term in nature? Or is it broadly across the province, the distribution of new cases on TEA?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — It is mostly large urban centres. It's not broadly across the province.

**Mr. Yates:** — Okay. Would that in any way be able to be say identified? We've had significant layoffs in the potash and

some of the manufacturing areas in Saskatoon. What I'm trying to get from this is, is this a short-term problem? Or is this a change in utilization of the program, perhaps more long term? And what . . .

**The Chair:** — Mr. Yates. I think you're asking the minister to speculate on employment numbers, and I don't know if she can really do that or if that really pertains to the supplemental estimates on the Saskatchewan assistance plan.

**Mr. Yates:** — Well, Mr. Chair, what I was asking the minister was if these, the locations of the increases were relative to major layoffs in sectors of the economy which may be short term in nature, and does that have an impact? And then can we anticipate or change as a result of, you know, those types of industries going back to work?

I think it's actually quite relative if it's — say — isolated to 70 per cent to a community that's seen a disproportionate amount of layoffs, as an example.

**The Chair:** — That's understandable, Mr. Yates, but I did hear the minister say it was mainly urban in nature. Okay, go ahead, Minister.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. What I can say to this — and it was asked previously — this is not a reflection of unemployment insurance running out.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. That's where I was getting at. Is there . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — No, we're not seeing that at all.

**Mr. Yates:** — Is there another hole the system that we're picking up as a result of . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — What we're seeing more so — which is concerning — is more barriers. We have, and it's well known, we have, you know, we're gradually seeing more increase in addictions. We're seeing an increase in mental illness. We're seeing increase in my clientele in barriers that is not just an unemployment problem.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much, Madam Minister. Is there any indicators why those increases would be coming today and why we're seeing these in the system? Obviously addictions, mental illness, and other illnesses are often . . . They're consistent I guess across a population. Why are we seeing more today utilizing our services, if you have any indication as to why?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — And again we could speculate. What we're seeing is sort of levelling back to the levels they were before. We've seen a dramatic increase and a very rapid, dramatic decrease in the number of clients. Perhaps it gave us a false security that the numbers were going to stay down and remain down. And they're now returning to levels where they have been before.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much. So the return to, you know, what would have been normal averages previously occurred rather rapidly in intake interviews. And looking at . . .

As you put the clients in the system, were there any identifiable factors at all that we could learn from to try to prevent this type of increase in the future?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I believe that the best way to prevent this in the future is to set an environment within the province to maintain and sustain a strong economy. It is absolutely the best way to address this particular issue of employable people.

And perhaps the member wasn't here. I know that there's quite an alarm raised by your colleague. But in actual fact, if we look in comparison of Saskatchewan to other provinces, they have all increased or they have all seen increases. Alberta has had an increase in caseload of 18.4; BC [British Columbia], 17.4; Manitoba, 6.2. Our increase overall is 2.5.

So are we faring well when we look at social assistance caseloads in the Western provinces? We are faring very well in the economic climate of today.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much. Looking at these, the changes across the province, a number of my colleagues have asked me to examine the impacts on their communities. What would the caseload increase on SAP be in the community of Moose Jaw?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — What particular months would you like the increase to be over?

**Mr. Yates:** — Over the last nine months, or this fiscal year.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Okay. In October of '08 the caseload in Moose Jaw was 998 which was about the time where we see the most dramatic decrease. We're now March of '09 . . . No. In October of '09, there would be 1,040, so we're looking at 42 — a difference of 42 people.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much. What would the increase in TEA be over the same period of time in Moose Jaw?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — 18 clients.

**Mr. Yates:** — 18 new clients?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes.

**Mr. Yates:** — Okay. Thanks. Would the increased workloads in . . . or increased clients in the Moose Jaw area, will that result in any increased staff capacity or assistance to those clients?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We did not decrease the staff when we had the dramatic decreases. And we have not increased staff to address levels going back to where they were.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you. Prior to the increases in the Moose Jaw office, what would have the average time from intake to acceptance be, and what would it be today? Would it have changed at all?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Are you talking SAP clients or TEA clients?

**Mr. Yates:** — SAP clients first, then TEA clients.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — TEA clients go through the call centre.

**Mr. Yates:** — Right.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — SAP clients, it varies very much with the barriers that they have. I don't know whether they even calculate average time for the SAP clients.

My official said that there is no difference to the amount of time that you would contact someone in Social Services should amount to the time where you would qualify.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much. What I'm looking for is if it's created any additional problems for clients in getting into the service.

I now have the question for La Loche. What are the . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The SAP client numbers from October '08 to '09 went up 35.

**Mr. Yates:** — Okay. And TEA?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Two. Oh down two, I'm sorry. It went down two.

**Mr. Yates:** — Down two?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes.

**Mr. Yates:** — All right. Thank you very much. Saskatoon, what would we see for a change in numbers?

[22:15]

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — In Saskatoon the SAP numbers are up 424, October '08 to October '09. And the TEA numbers are up to 105.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much. Regina numbers?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — In Regina the SAP numbers are up from October of '08 to October '09 of 326. The TEA numbers are up 70 — seven zero.

**Mr. Yates:** — And Prince Albert?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — In Prince Albert from October '08 to October '09, SAP caseload is up 116 and TEA is up 28.

**Mr. Yates:** — And for comparison purposes, what would Swift Current be up?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — From October '08 to October '09 in Swift Current, the numbers for SAP is up 43 and for TEA is 15. Humboldt.

**Mr. Yates:** — Do you want Humboldt next?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Absolutely.

**Mr. Yates:** — Humboldt, then North Battleford. Okay.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Oh, we don't have Humboldt with us. So we'll do North Battleford. Is that okay?

**Mr. Yates:** — Okay.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Absolutely. For North Battleford, from October '08 to October '09, SAP is up 116, TEA is up 6.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you very much. Lloydminster?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — In Lloydminster, SAP is up 42. TEA is up 7.

**Mr. Yates:** — And a last one, just for comparison reasons, is La Ronge.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — For SAP in La Ronge, from October '08 to October '09, and the number is up 16. And for TEA it's up 11.

**Mr. Yates:** — And that takes in the Creighton area as well, or is Creighton a separate office? I don't need to know the answers necessarily. I just want to know if it's separate.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Creighton reports separately.

**Mr. Yates:** — They report separately. Thank you very much, Madam Minister. Those are my questions. I think my colleague has a couple more questions.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Forbes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Yes. A couple of clarifications. One, and the minister raised this, and it was from our last meeting where you talked about, and I'll quote you, "The encouraging thing . . ." And the quote is:

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 . . . [BC] has seen a 17.4 per cent increase in that same time period, and Alberta has seen an 18.4 . . . increase.

Now I didn't raise this, but that's why I was asking about earlier about the percentage increases. Because on one hand, I hope that . . . Are you going to be characterizing this as a 2.5 per cent increase where we did the math earlier, and we know the SAP caseload has actually gone up?

What you're asking for in increase is actually 8 per cent. And we know that the TEA caseload, that the actual increase in terms of the numbers that you're projecting your future needs on is 44 per cent. So is it 2.5 per cent or is it 8 per cent?

And in the other one, number that came out tonight was 11 per cent, that when you combine both the SAP and the TEA. Which will be the number that the minister will be using when talking about the increase?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The difficulty becomes of course in what months you're taking into consideration because it does

change. So I'm not sure where I'm going to be talking about it. But I mean, this is simply a request for funding so that we can ensure that those that are experiencing some difficulty and need social assistance will have funds.

And so I don't think I've talked about the percentages, other than being questioned by yourself, at all. But many times we talk about a six month. We've talked about 12 months. The chart that I was referring to is over just about 18 months. That all changes numbers. It truly does.

**Mr. Forbes:** — No, I think to be consistent with what the request is here, when you answered a question to my colleague, you threw out the number 2.5 per cent. I don't recall him asking about the numbers of May to the current time. That wasn't the time frame he was talking about here in supplementary estimates. And so I think there needs to be a consistent answer. And I would say that when you're talking about SAP, it's an 8 per cent increase, and when it's TEA, it's 44 per cent increase. And if you combine the two, it's 11 per cent.

Now the other interesting thing, and I quote, is that you talk about the Alberta numbers and the BC numbers. And I do have to point this out, that those are the other two provinces that don't have a poverty elimination strategy. How is that? The two provinces that have higher numbers than Saskatchewan — you can talk about Manitoba, but actually the Manitoba numbers are lower than Saskatchewan — those are the other two provinces in Canada that don't have a poverty elimination strategy. Go figure.

So my question is, do we want to be in that club of Alberta and BC that does not have a strategy, or do we want to be with the other provinces who do have a strategy and seem to be having better success rates with poverty?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you for the question. Again I'm not sure how that is in direct reference to the supplementary estimates. I have on record and publicly said that we have a three-point strategy within Saskatchewan. I haven't waived from that position whatsoever.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Well my point is that clearly, when you're using Alberta and BC, they have issues about poverty rates. And I think there's a good reason why they have issues of poverty with their caseloads.

The other question I have is dealing with those living with disabilities. And as we approve, as we go forward into the next few months, will the increased funds that are going to social assistance be staying with those who are on social assistance, or would they be following them to any other program that they might be on?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I don't understand your question.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Well the Chair has been ruling me out of order, and I can't use the . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I don't understand at all what your question is.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay, well the question is this, the question is

this. Will they be going, when they transfer over to SAID, will the money that you're seeing . . . Will any of this new money that you're getting, be going to SAID?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — It will be.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — How much of it will be going?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We don't have the SAID numbers yet because it's just in . . . The SAID numbers already exist within the existing numbers. These are not new clients; these are existing long-term clients. So this isn't bringing on a new clientele. Those are consistent numbers.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. It's now closing in on 10:30. Is it the will of the committee to vote this off tonight, or is there going to be more questions?

**Mr. Broten:** — We certainly have more questions on this, and given that the time has elapsed, I would move that we conclude this evening. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — With that we will adjourn the supplementary estimates. Can I ask the minister for closing comments?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I would just like to thank my officials that are here with me tonight as well as the committee members for their commitment to the good work of the committee.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Forbes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — I would like to join in and also thank the officials and the minister for being here and such diligent work around these numbers. Thank you.

**Mr. Broten:** — Motion to adjourn.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten has made a motion to adjourn. This committee stands adjourned until we meet again.

[The committee adjourned at 22:30.]