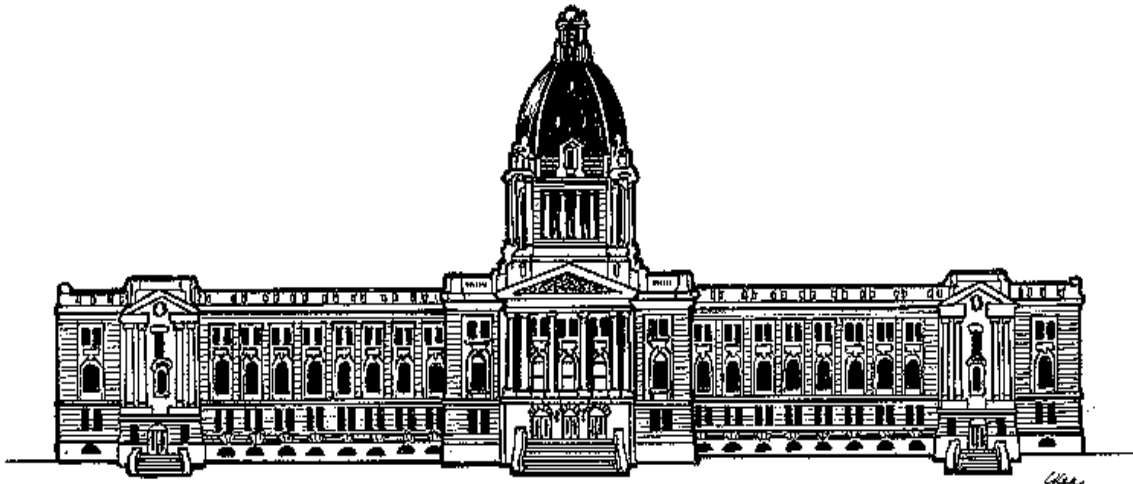




STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. Greg Ottenbreit, Chair
Yorkton

Mr. Cam Broten, Deputy Chair
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Estevan

Mr. Glen Hart
Last Mountain-Touchwood

Ms. Judy Junor
Saskatoon Eastview

Ms. Christine Tell
Regina Wascana Plains

Mr. Gordon Wyant
Saskatoon Northwest

[The committee met at 14:45.]

The Chair: — Good afternoon, everyone. It is now 2:45, the appointed hour for this committee to begin. I will call the committee to order. I would like to welcome everyone here and at home to the deliberations on the Standing Committee on Human Services this afternoon. On the agenda today, we will first be considering the estimates, supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Social Services and then moving to consideration of the estimates and supplementary estimates for the ministries of Health, the estimates for the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, and the estimates and supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Education.

I will now introduce the committee members. To my left is Mr. Cam Broten, and substituting for Ms. Judy Junor this afternoon is Mr. David Forbes. On my right is Mr. Glen Hart, Mr. Gord Wyant, Ms. Doreen Eagles, and Ms. Christine Tell.

Before we continue, I will table the following document: HUS 75/26 Ministry of Education responses to questions raised at the April 18th, 2011, meeting of the committee re: capital reserves of school divisions, capital projects expensed and not paid out, school division share of major capital projects, anticipated borrowing summary by school division, as well as documents containing information on home-based enrolments 2010-2011 school year, financing subcommittee and working group meetings, and the English as an additional language, or EAL, 2010-11 FTE [full-time equivalent] count, dated May 6, 2011.

**General Revenue Fund
Social Services
Vote 36**

Subvote (SS01)

The Chair: — As stated previously, committee members, we are now looking at estimates and supplementary estimates for Social Services. They are vote 36, central management and services, subvote (SS01), outlined on page 131 of the Estimates booklet and subvote (SS12) outlined on page 7 of the Supplementary Estimates booklet.

Ms. Minister, I would like you to introduce your officials. And when the officials do come to the mike for the first time, if you could just introduce yourselves for the purposes of Hansard. And I invite you to do that and make any opening comments.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much to the Chair and to the committee members this afternoon. I am pleased to be here today to discuss the housing portion of the Ministry of Social Services' budget for '11-12.

I'd like to introduce my officials. Marian Zerr is the deputy minister. Don Allen is the assistant deputy minister. Al Syhlonyk is the assistant deputy minister of corporate services. Eileen Badiuk is the executive director of housing program and service design. Tim Gross is executive director of housing development. Dianne Baird is the executive director of housing network. Miriam Myers is executive director of finance, administration, and corporate services. Jeff Redekop is assistant director of program and service design, income assistance and

disability services. And Doug Scott is the director of benefits policy, strategic policy branch.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to commend the board of directors of Sask Housing Corporation for their dedication and all the work in building a stronger housing program that they've undertaken in the last year and six months. These six individuals have played a central role in much of the progress we've seen, and continuing to do as we go forward.

These individuals are the chair, Keith Hanson. He's the president and CEO [chief executive officer] of Sun Ridge Group, a Saskatchewan-based company specializing in housing systems, energy and environmental efficiency, housing affordability, and quality assurance. And he's been involved in the housing industry for over 30 years. Bob Linner is the vice-chair. He has considerable experience in municipal government and served as city manager for the city of Regina until 2006. Bob Jeanneau has been dedicated to the housing industry since he first purchased housing, apartment buildings in 1967. He's played key roles in several community organizations including the Knights of Columbus.

Colleen Mah has been with the North Ridge Development Corporation since 1998 where her role includes the development of future projects. She chairs a women's council of the Saskatoon and Region Homebuilders Association. And Kevin Reese, in 2006, started Karina Developments Ltd., a land development project management company, and he's an active member of the Regina and Region Homebuilders Association. And Marian Zerr has been the deputy minister for Social Services since June of 2009. And prior to that, Marian was the associate deputy minister of Executive Council. She was employed by the Government of Canada from 1977 to 2007 in a variety of capacities including Health Canada, First Nations and Inuit health branch.

Mr. Chair, and to the committee, I'm very proud of the accomplishments our government has made over the past three and a half years in the area of housing. Since November of 2007 to May the 3rd of 2011, we've overseen the completion of 906 affordable rental housing units. We've helped close to 400 households achieve home ownership, and we've assisted 3,206 low- to moderate-income households improve the health, safety, and energy efficiency of their homes. We also have over 1,065 affordable rental housing units currently under development right across the province.

During this period, we've continued to support the 30,100 housing units that serve the needs of low- and moderate-income households in more than 300 Saskatchewan communities. This included making significant investments in upgrades to the stock to keep it safe and viable for current and future tenants.

The '11-12 budget, our government is committed to supporting a growing population, to ensuring housing is accessible to all, and to strengthening Saskatchewan's housing system. We've heard through our recent consultations with numerous housing sector stakeholders that to make housing accessible and affordable to all, we need to build a housing system that focuses on meeting the needs right across the entire continuum.

You'll see that our commitment to this approach has been reflected in the diversity of investments and initiatives in this year's budget, in particular our efforts to increase the supply of both rental and home ownership housing in communities across the province and our efforts to continue to maintain the existing housing stock to ensure that it's not lost from the marketplace.

We're starting to see some positive shifts in the marketplace. As an example, while our population has continued to grow, increasing to 1,052,040 people, we've seen some improvement in our vacancy rates. Vacancy rates have improved in seven out of nine of Saskatchewan's largest cities in the last year. The overall provincial vacancy rate has gone from 1.2 per cent in 2007 to 2.5 per cent in 2010. This shift is encouraging. It reaffirms our priorities, but it also means we know we can't sit back. There is a lot more to be done.

Now to the budget. The transfer to Sask Housing Corporation has increased to 4.1 million in 2011 and '12 from 2.4 million in '10 and '11. The transfer to Sask Housing Corporation is combined with other revenues from the federal government, from municipalities, clients, previously deferred provincial revenue, and other sources to fund the operation of Sask Housing Corporation which is the 25th largest corporation in the province of Saskatchewan in 2010. For the year ended December 31st, 2011, Sask Housing Corporation's budget expenditures are \$273 million which is \$32 million higher than the 2010 actual expenditures. The Ministry of Social Service's budget for housing in '10, '11, '12 totals \$12.7 million. This represents a 1.3 million or 8.8 per cent increase over last year.

In addition to these budget-related initiatives, the Saskatchewan advantage housing action plan will invest more than \$252 million over the next five years to fund the creation of more than 4,600 new homes. Components of this plan include . . . And there's four of them, five of them. Headstart on a Home is the first one. It will support the creation of a minimum of 1,000 new entry-level home ownership opportunities over the next five years through the creation of a new capital pool for construction project financing and initiatives to municipality-approved builders and developers. Almost \$200 million over five years, or \$40 million per year, will be available to make these low-interest loans.

The second one is the affordable home ownership program. \$200,000 will be invested this year to assist municipalities in stimulating entry-level home ownership opportunities right across our province. This funding is part of a 3 million, five-year plan to stimulate the development of 600 new homes. Our funding will be used to provide a matching grant to municipalities of the lesser of the education portion of property tax for five years or \$5,000 for each eligible new home that is constructed.

Under the rental construction initiative, we will invest \$1.5 million to assist municipalities to encourage and support the development of new, purpose-built rental housing. Similar to the affordable home ownership program, our funding will be used to provide a matching grant of up to \$5,000 for each eligible new rental unit constructed. Over the next five years, the planned investment of \$14.3 million will result in 2,900 new rental homes.

The Habitat for Humanity commitment is \$1.5 million this year to construct up to 30 homes in selected communities across the province, providing home ownership opportunities for lower income families.

And finally, the additional revenue in '10-11 allowed the investment of \$34 million to develop more affordable renting housing in communities with long-term housing needs and to continue efforts to rejuvenate government-funded housing right across Saskatchewan, rehabilitating homes and rental units, some of which would otherwise be lost without major work. These new initiatives will enable households to move along the housing continuum. They will increase opportunities and options in the rental market and provide affordable home ownership opportunities for tenants in both government-assisted and market rental units. Options which facilitate movement along the housing continuum contribute to our functioning housing system.

While we continue to make progress, there's certainly more to be done to build a strong housing environment and a strong housing sector — one that ensures housing is accessible for all, and one that supports our growing population. Our Saskatchewan advantage housing plan is an immediate step to alleviate the current housing pressure. These initiatives complement our other established housing programs and services such as the social housing program and the affordable housing program. They add to the tools that we already have in our housing tool kit.

[15:00]

And our recently held consultations with housing stakeholders across the province, along with the housing summit, will form the basis of a comprehensive longer term housing strategy that will be released this summer. Senior officials from the ministry are meeting with senior officials of key stakeholder groups to discuss the consultation findings, the strategy development, and the housing summit. One such meeting took place on May the 4th this year with senior officials from SUMA, the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association. The SUMA officials have stated that they are satisfied that the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation has understood and has heard and captured urban government's position when it comes to housing.

At the housing summit in April, I sensed a unanimous recognition that the government and other housing stakeholders had to work together to solve our current and future housing challenges, and I heard that one size does not fit all. The Summit Action Fund has been created to provide capacity to act on ideas and proposals brought forward as a result of the summit and to provide flexibility beyond existing programs. This \$6 million fund will create new ideas and prime the pump for innovation in the housing sector. I am truly excited about the additional opportunity for innovation and the new supply that this fund will support.

The budget demonstrates our government's continued commitment to strengthening Saskatchewan's housing system and to meeting the demands of continuing economic and population growth. Our approach will ensure the people of Saskatchewan have access to safe and affordable housing right

across the continuum, now and into the future.

I'm going to be pleased to answer questions, and I'd like to thank the critic for housing for attending this summit, and I know that he has a real interest in this area, and I'm looking forward to your questions.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. I think whenever we can get together and ask questions and learn more . . . it's a very complex, complex file. It's huge, actually, when you think about housing and all the needs, as you talk about the housing continuum along one level but also it's very three-dimensional in many ways. So in trying to keep track of all this, I appreciate and — before we start even — thank the board as you did and also the staff who do . . . This is a major, when you think of the three basic needs we have — food, clothing, and shelter — and this is huge.

But I just want to start off by asking some questions about the budget. And as always, it sometimes is an interesting thing to understand, page 134 in Social Services, the housing and what's actually happening there. Sometimes the money seems to be going down, but can be going up because of Sask Housing being an agency unto itself.

My first question would be, I notice that the salaries are going down. From 2010 there was 8.065 million. This year it would be 7.7 million. Is there a reduction in staff or why would that be?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much to the member, and when it comes to the actual FTEs, I'm going to ask Marian to answer the questions.

Ms. Zerr: — Thank you very much, Mr. Forbes. Marian Zerr, deputy minister. So there is a reduction in salary because there have been a decrease in the number of people in the housing division. That has primarily been due to some of the adjustments as we change the structure of the ministry, making sure that those that were involved in housing policy were involved more broadly in policy within the ministry. So their salaries are accorded to central management.

So when you look at previous years, you would have seen all of the policy folks held within the housing division. Now there are some in the strategic policy unit to make sure that we knit together policy across the ministry that concerns all our folks. So that's one change. But there have certainly been slightly fewer people in the ministry in the housing division. And that has been, as again, we've looked at what do we need to deliver the program effectively, and we've managed that.

Mr. Forbes: — So can you give me specifics? How many would have been within Sask Housing a year ago? This year it's now . . . What are your FTE projections?

Ms. Zerr: — It seems to me . . . and I'm sorry I don't have an exact number from last year at the top of my head, so we have a range for you. I was going to come up with 136. Don says it's 135 or 137 last year. And we would be probably looking at some 10 FTEs yet. We're still doing our internal allocations.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay and then as well is that goods and services has gone down, you know, in spite of inflation, so there must have been some cuts there to something.

Ms. Zerr: — I would ask Don Allen to pick up that question.

Mr. Allen: — Certainly, thank you. Don Allen, assistant deputy minister for housing and president of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation. The goods and services budget, particularly in an organization or division the size of Housing, can vary very little and yet it looks like a rather significant change. So as we make moves to rationalize our travel budget, to reduce the amount of external consulting that we do within the division instead do the work inside our own house, that goods and services budget will change, and in this particular case it changed marginally on a downward side even though there might well be inflation on some of those items.

Mr. Forbes: — So there's no major changes in a budget, just tightening up, is that what you're saying?

Mr. Allen: — Precisely.

Mr. Forbes: — And yet the transfer for public services went up by about 1.5 or 6 million, and that was significant because actually it's almost doubling the budget before. And I don't have previous year's, so I don't know what the trend line is, but it's gone up significantly from 2.3 million to 4.0. Can you explain the increase there?

Mr. Allen: — Yes. The increase is solely for the new programs that the minister mentioned in her opening remarks.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, is this the 1.7 million?

Mr. Allen: — The 1.7 million for the affordable home ownership program and the rental construction incentive.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay because the 34 million was from the previous year. Now was that because there was a deadline of March 31st, we had to get that in and the Canada builds deadline?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Part of it was the deadline for sure because we had the money that we wanted to be able to spend from last year's budget.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Then the other question, if we could just spend a couple of minutes on this, is understanding . . . I'm always trying to understand the housing trusts, and I see that the program delivery, this is the one that sort of floats up and down every year because whether or not . . . it depends what the projects are. This year, it's at 8.6 million. Can you give me some details about what that actually is and when you put that in, what are you hoping to achieve?

Mr. Allen: — Sorry, which page of Estimates are you referring to?

Mr. Forbes: — I'm looking at page 134 under allocations. Oh that is the salaries and good services added up together. Okay. There we go, okay.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — That's what we're talking about there, okay. So well I do have a question, though, about the housing trusts, and there are three or four housing trusts pools of money. Can you explain that whole concept? When I look through the annual report that just came out last Thursday, I think it was — the 2010 annual report came out — so what is a housing trust? How many do we have? What are the short-term and long-term goals of those programs?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, I'm sure that Mr. Allen will give us an overview of this. The annual report isn't part of the estimates, but we can give you a general overview of it. Then we can just go back to the estimates, if that's all right with the member.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, you know, the minister last year — now you weren't the minister last year — but the minister last year seemed to think that the annual report would come up at another time. Maybe I should ask at this time when that would be because I don't know when there's a . . . because it's not a Crown Treasury Board, like, or it's a Treasury Board Crown. So it's not the same as SaskPower or SaskTel, and we have different times when we can actually ask those officials, but I don't know when there is a time to actually ask about the annual report.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — And you know what? To the hon. member, I don't know the answer to that either, but I will find out. I know that we have an opportunity to get together again one more time and if I find out that there is . . . whenever the time is, I will let you know.

Mr. Forbes: — It is critical because we didn't have the time last time to talk about Sask Housing. The minister said you will get your time, and a year went by and I was anxiously awaiting for that, that moment. But if we can have just a short explanation of how the housing trusts work, what are their objectives, I'd sure appreciate it.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member opposite, yes, we will give you just an overview of it. And then for the next time we get together, I will find the answer out for you as to when you can go into the questions, the detailed questions because I'm sure there's lots of them, but we have a limited time today.

Mr. Allen: — So with respect to the question on the housing trusts, there are, strictly speaking, two housing trusts in Saskatchewan Housing Corporation. There's the Aboriginal housing trust which was funding provided to the province, and then from the province through to Saskatchewan Housing for housing for Aboriginal off-reserve, Aboriginal persons — First Nations and Métis.

And then there is the housing trust, the affordable housing trust which was again provided by the federal government through the province of Saskatchewan, and then from the province of Saskatchewan on to the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation.

Mr. Forbes: — And I understand that there are pools of money that the federal government has given for specific initiatives, i.e., affordable housing. And they become spent as those

projects get approved and they meet the federal requirements, and so they can shrink over time, and that's the whole initiative of that.

Mr. Allen: — That's correct. The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation has its own bank account. And as money is provided to the Housing Corporation, whether it's by a municipality or the federal government or the provincial government for a specific purpose — and there are conditions applied to the use of that funding — the money is deposited in the bank account and held until the conditions have been met and the housing has been built and the bills have been paid.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Well I want to also then shift gears a little bit, but it's still talking about . . . Minister, you had talked in your opening remarks about a report that will come out later this summer, the strategy. Now we'd heard that it was going to be . . . actually come out in June. And then at the summit people were sort of saying later, might be later, are we hearing now that it's going to be in July or August, or are your intentions still June that we would be hearing this?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. My intention is still the end of June, but we've had a number of discussions with people like SUMA and the home builders' and the importance of this, of our strategy can't be underestimated. I believe it's one of the important things, very important things that we're doing as government.

My goal is to make sure that the end product is what we really want. The process is important but so is the end product. So to nail down the date right now, I can't do, but I'm hoping it is right around the end of June. As I said, there will be, there has to be . . . it has to be looked at, the information not only from the summit but from the consultation meetings that we've had, have to be part of what we've heard as we develop the ongoing policy.

Mr. Forbes: — You know you've talked about a couple of programs that were announced and one was the Headstart for homes and still we're waiting for details on that. And the building season is unbelievable as it feels like it's still early April. It's hard to believe we're in almost mid-May, but time is moving on. And so when do you expect the details of that to be coming forward?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm expecting that there will be more details by the end of May on the Headstart on a Home.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And what will be, who will be overseeing that program? Is it Sask Housing or is it CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan]?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — CIC is actually the one that's going to be . . . The money is coming from the federal government through CIC. But they'll be working hand in hand with Sask Housing and municipalities. I think the important issues that we have to underline is that one of our partners is the municipalities, the local people. I'm hoping that we will see homes being built not just in the urban centres, but maybe in some of the rural centres as well. And the importance to developers to know that they will have an opportunity to work with partners, as well as the government, right across our province is important. So this

program — and I'm not sure if Don wants to add anything to this — the work is being undertaken at this time, and CIC is working with Sask Housing.

[15:15]

Mr. Forbes: — Will there be any work, as you said, outside the major urban communities? And clearly there's a need right across the province so that is good news. But will there be a bit of a gatekeeping role in this? I mean now when I look at the page on the website, you clearly say there'll be work to deter flipping, but it doesn't talk about really strategically placing them throughout the province. So if one big developer decided they were going to get an idea and build a lot in Saskatoon, it would be very hard . . . Is there a strategy to see it spread throughout the province?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm going to let Don answer this, but I want you to know that at the summit I was excited to hear from places like Humboldt who believe that they would have an opportunity to work under these projects. We've had inquiries to date from the city of Melfort, from the New North, from the south central enterprise region, from the town of Dalmeny, from the village of Englefeld and the town of Turtleford.

Mr. Forbes: — Do they have the capacity? And I know; I saw a housing conference actually in Yorkton, and it is a lot of work, but it's good work to get ready to do housing strategies. Do they have the capacity, or is there a way that these folks can get that capacity to do the housing plans to make this happen?

Mr. Allen: — Thank you. That was one of the conversations that's been had with SUMA, and we'll be having another one with SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] next week about how to provide capacity to those communities that traditionally have not had it. And thinking is quite a way down the road on that. SUMA has some wonderful ideas on how to cause that to happen, not just in certain communities, but in regions that are experiencing this. So yes, there is thinking about how to make that happen, and it's elegant in its simplicity.

Mr. Forbes: — It will be interesting to see that because — I mean, when I look at and I've asked about the FTEs — there's been a reduction in policy from Sask Housing. Maybe those folks have gone over to central management, but people are saying can they come out and actually help out, and so I'd be very curious. Will it be a public announcement about this elegant process that you speak of?

Mr. Allen: — There's more work to be done yet. The strategy will carry forward a lot of the thoughts on that, where we would hope that SUMA and SARM and the home builders and others would, in addition to releasing the strategy, release the actions that they intend to take over the course of the next short while, and then as years go by in the strategy, they would continue to evolve those. So I would trust and hope that there would be an announcement with that. With respect to, will this work be done by staff of Social Services? I would suggest not, that this is work that the communities need to do, and they need to find the resources. And we need to help them to do that without being those resources.

Mr. Forbes: — Well will some of those resources, could they come through the Summit Action Fund?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. And that could be where some of the money comes from. But I was very excited to hear, not just at the summit but in my meetings I've had in the North and in rural areas and places like the city of Moose Jaw, how they've come up with ideas and innovative ways to meet their needs. What will work in Moose Jaw will not work in Fort Qu'Appelle and will not work in La Loche. So there will be some I shouldn't say guidelines but some ideas of what the basics will be.

But I know that there is a tremendous amount of work being undertaken right now from people who say, I know what I need in my community. The mayors that have called me personally saying, you know what? You just have to give us an idea, a chance to work, partner with us in some of these ways. Places like SUMA and SARM are doing a tremendous amount of work, and that's why our programs are in conjunction with the municipalities. We need the people with their feet on the ground to talk about and to determine what the needs are in the local areas.

I'm not at all worried that people won't be able to do it because there is not only a need but there's a desire. I think that's the overwhelming feeling that I had when I left the summit, was that people no longer said, we need a house; we're looking to government. Because they are saying, what can we do? How can we partner? How can we be part of this growing province? And I know the member was there as well, and I know you must have heard some of the same kind of discussions when people said, okay, we're part of this; we're part of the opportunity we have in the province.

Mr. Forbes: — And I did hear real positive people. I mean, there was two things happening. One, they are, Saskatchewan people are problem solvers, and they really have to . . . That's the nature of who we are, and we get excited about that. But the other reality is we have to. We have to. You know, I know Saskatoon, and I'll be asking some questions more about the North because the situations are very grim in fact. You know, the situation is troubling, and so we do have to step up to the plate.

But I do have to ask, I'm hearing sort of two messages here. One, Minister, you're saying that mayors are calling you to say I have an idea; I just need to run with it. So it sounds like they have the capacity. They don't need any financial help. But I have heard that people are saying, we do have to have some capacity. More and more the province is asking municipalities to step up to the plate to do something that they haven't traditionally done. And so it's a capacity issue. They need the financial resources. They need planners. They need that kind of thing, especially the smaller communities that may not have necessarily a community plan. They all want to be there, but they just don't have the planners or the horses to do that. And so people were excited about the \$6 million that was announced, and I don't believe that \$6 million is in the budget here. It's actually from last year's budget if I understand. When I got the order in council, it's from last year.

But the question remains that, while it was from last year's

budget, there's no information available on the website, I don't believe, about the action, the summit fund.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. I think we should step back and look at the issue from a broader perspective. Traditionally Saskatchewan hasn't, especially small towns, haven't had to worry about or think about growth. How long has it been since there's been a new house built in rural Saskatchewan, especially in centres where there wasn't a hospital? It wasn't happening. And now all of a sudden, we have every small town . . . I should clarify that by saying at least I know of ones in my constituency and most of my colleagues tell me the same thing. You can't buy even an older house in a small town because they're filled up. So town councils and boards are being asked to think outside the box, and they can do it.

We're looking at the programs. Every one of the programs that we announced this year is in partnership with municipalities, whether it's Headstart or the action, the fund for home ownership or the rental initiative, and even the Summit Action Fund. The details of that will be announced when we release the housing strategy. The opportunity is there for people who are saying, okay there might be some funding that's required.

The board is well aware that in their discussions across the province of what is needed, and I know that the municipalities, the small towns aren't going to be able to come up with lots of cash, but at the same time, they do know that there's opportunity where there's a home being built, there is a chance for a family to move in and that means something for their school and something for economic opportunities.

The board is excited about the Summit Action Fund, and they are talking now about some of the ideas that they are hearing when it comes to co-operatives and seniors places. I think the problem with government making these decisions is, sometimes we're caught inside of a box. Outside in the real world, they're thinking in ways that you and I haven't had the chance to think about.

Mr. Forbes: — So I am concerned though when I hear you saying that the details of the Summit Action Fund won't be announced until the strategy is announced, and we're hearing today that that strategy may not be announced until July and even further. I mean, you know, this is an issue, and we knew this with other reports that get delayed. We thought that June was a little late, and now we're hearing that it may be in the summer.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, I said the end of June. If it's a week later, I didn't want to have yourself or someone saying you're late. So I want to give myself a little bit of leeway. But we're not talking about August. We're not talking October. We're talking about within that time frame, somewhere in there. And when we release it, we want it to be something that can be added onto, you know, that people can see their voice. I could give you an exact date but then I think that's not the flexibility that the people who are making these decisions need to have.

Mr. Forbes: — There's some points I really do want to make sure and time is moving on, but it's hugely important so I

appreciate the answers. I'm curious to know about the affordable definition that Sask Housing and that you've been using. It used to be 30 per cent of income was what we would benchmark as an affordable housing cost. What is the definition that the minister is using?

Mr. Allen: — Personally, I try to never use the term affordable housing because it's a relative term that we all understand in our own selves, but we don't understand each other's meaning. Thirty per cent is a number that's generally used by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, though that is a pretty broad number. Thirty per cent for a family making \$1,000 a year in a particular jurisdiction seems, is an awful lot when all you have left is \$700 to cover the entire rest of the cost of living, as compared to a household making \$100,000 a year, having \$70,000. So 30 per cent is a rule of thumb though it is not a number that one should use rigorously because it should shift and move, depending upon incomes and household dynamics, and even communities.

Mr. Forbes: — So you're okay with that definition that CMHC [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation] uses? I got a sense that you'd rather use a different word.

Mr. Allen: — We try to use housing affordability if there's a desire. And putting the words in different order simply means that, you know, has a different meaning. I prefer appropriate or even accessible. Appropriate is housing that is appropriate to the needs of the house. So I mean yes, it may be affordable, but it may be far too small. So appropriate is appropriate size wise, condition wise, and price wise.

Mr. Forbes: — Now when I've talked to some of the folks about some of the housing issues . . . And the \$34 million is a very wise investment; I think it's important. Will it be an ongoing investment? Not necessarily \$34 million, but I know when we look in many of the core communities of cities, urban areas in the province, there's an old apartment building that's sitting empty and needed some work . . . you know, a community group would love to buy it, but it just needs some work. Some of the programs around revitalization of communities and the housing stock, will it be ongoing? Or what is the plan around the \$34 million? Is this a one-time-only funding?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think the member is aware the \$34 million is actually an addition to the 40 or \$50 million that we spend every year on rejuvenating or making sure that our stock, the 30,100 homes that we have, are looked after. So this money this year actually was on top of and it sent the message as early as possible that we recognize that housing is a huge issue. Also that there was some units, and I know the member's aware that there were some units that weren't even open in some of our major cities that needed some help just so we could actually open the door without building a whole unit.

So you're asking me if this is going to be additional money. I hope that we can do this. I guess a lot of it depends each year on the financial situation of government, where we're going to, and what the needs are. I know that the builders that I've been speaking to are aware that there is a huge need as well. So I can just tell you that housing is an important issue for our government and making sure that we can have people who are

living in rental units right now and perhaps have the opportunity to, through a program or to move from a rental unit into entry-level home ownership, would again free up space for somebody else into a rental unit.

The money that we spent for student housing, the 800 units in Saskatoon that will be opened up will, in the next year or so, will be an opportunity for people to move into other places as well. So yes, it is a priority. And if you can tell me exactly what some of the prices are going to be when it comes to potash and oil and gas in the next little while, I'll tell you.

[15:30]

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, that would be good to know, to be able to foretell that.

You talked about some apartment buildings that are . . . Were they owned by Sask Housing, that weren't operating. I'm not aware. Specific apartment buildings that were closed and people were not housed in?

Mr. Allen: — There were some apartment buildings in the Estevan area that were in significant disrepair. We took them back from a non-profit who was unable to repair them. And they were going to be lost to the market either, you know, by being placarded or sold. So Sask Housing took those back just recently. More to the point, there were some units in the city of Regina owned, directly owned, by the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation that have been vacant because they're uninhabitable.

Mr. Forbes: — So that's interesting. So the ones in Regina, why were they . . . Was it because of the building itself, or was it an infestation? Or what was the problem that made them that way?

Mr. Allen: — It's hard to say where it started. There were some structural issues with the foundation, whether that led to water infiltration or the reverse, the water infiltration led to structural issues. In any event, there were mould issues that developed. I know my staff prefer me to not use that word, but that's the truth. There was some air quality issues in the buildings. And the costs to rehabilitate the buildings was beyond the financial capacity of the Ministry of Social Services and Saskatchewan Housing Corporation until this funding came along.

Mr. Forbes: — I didn't realize the situation in Estevan. But that's what people have often talked about because we know in Saskatoon there are empty apartment blocks that are . . . It seems frustrating that they're just sitting, so if there can be more work done . . . What about RRAP [residential rehabilitation assistance program]? What's the future of RRAP?

Mr. Allen: — The repair program that you're referring to has historically been a federal-provincial cost-sharing program, where the 75 per cent of the funds came from the federal government and 25 per cent of the funds came from the provincial government. That program expired on March 31st, and we were in the process of negotiating a new agreement when the federal election was called. We are hoping any day now to renew negotiations and to conclude in very short order an extension to that agreement which we hope will make RRAP

that much more possible and flexible for the entire province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Forbes: — When you talk about flexibility, you know one of the concerns I often hear is when people come in and they want to renovate the house or do some upgrading, but then they get the estimator to come in and they look at the whole house — and I know this is a particular issue in the North — because then the whole house needs to be really basically redone, and it's just way out of the reach of the local people. Is that something where we could have this looked at, as opposed to the whole house has to be brought up? I understand, and I think everybody can agree, that you should be brought up to a certain standard, but it's unmanageable because, you know, they just don't have the cash to do the whole thing, or to do that extra part to make sure they qualify for the grant.

Mr. Allen: — In brief, the program requirements for RRAP are given to us, historically, by the federal government. So the rules are the federal rules. And the federal rules historically were, if there's a list of 12 deficiencies, you must fix all 12. Otherwise there's no money. That might mean that, you know, the 12th deficiency, the last one, puts the house over the possible funding under the RRAP program.

If we are successful in negotiating new flexibility with the federal government, we would be able to look at whether that should still be the situation. I'm not going to suggest that we would necessarily change that, but we would then have it within our own hands to decide that's what makes sense, as opposed to the federal government dictating it to us.

Mr. Forbes: — Well to use your example of 12 deficiencies, I don't think anybody wants to be off the hook for . . . Because you want to bring the house up to a standard, that's good. But if there's a way of making it more achievable and that flexibility would allow that, that would very good.

What is the status of the NHOP or the neighbourhood home ownership program?

Mr. Allen: — That program was more or less sunset or set aside several years ago when two things happened. The price structure of houses in the major centres, in fact across the entire province of Saskatchewan, made the neighbourhood home ownership program not viable any longer. In addition to which there were new home ownership programs that were rolled out, including the one in late in 2007, early 2008 which to assist households to buy homes.

Mr. Forbes: — So what year . . . Can you give us the last year the NHOP programs were actually happening?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, while we're looking at the numbers, I want to assure you that I agree with you when it comes to the RRAP program, that the federal government . . . We need their assistance, but at the same time I think they were making rules that made it impossible for us to fix some of the houses up to standards. So there was a lot of work done, not only by our officials here in Saskatchewan, but I think it was right across Canada where they encouraged the federal government to allow more flexibility when it comes to making sure that houses were safe and up to standards, but allow us to

actually make sure that there was as many homes as possible being fixed up. So it was a lot of work. It was something that happened right over the winter. And I'm waiting to hear that they are listening to us. Don't

Mr. Allen — It was around 2005-2006 that the Housing Corporation ceased to make commitments, new allocations of neighbourhood home ownership programs to communities. That said, there were households already in the program who were renting, who continue, some of them even today, to be working towards home ownership. So there were still a few. There were commitments that were being closed since 2005-2006, but it was in around that time frame.

Mr. Forbes — I wanted to ask, during the Premier's estimates, there was some questions around a report that you will be bringing forward in June. It's the page, in *Hansard*, page 7477. They were going on about the wait list for social housing and that in fact that there will be a report done and brought to cabinet. And I'll just say, I'll quote him:

... I think the minister responsible will be bringing forward a report to cabinet — I believe it's in June is the current objective ... to deal with this issue because we know there's potential spaces that we can free up for people who need it that may be taken up right now by those who wouldn't qualify with respect to income levels that they're now earning.

Can you tell us about that?

Hon. Ms. Draude — Yes, I can. Where we've had a chance to look at some of the policies that are in place or the programs that have been in place for a number of years, and I think the members opposite know that everybody is eligible to apply for social housing ... That isn't the first question. As long as you live here, you're eligible. Somebody's income and assets are used to determine the relative need compared to other applicants for the social housing. The applicant with the greatest need, that's with the highest priority, is offered the housing. And if Sask Housing is having difficulty filling units in a community where the demand is low, the application with the greatest need might not have a low income. And I'll give you an example. Maybe it's an oil rig worker that may have a high income, but because of that area — and they don't have a high need — but there's still, there's a house empty, so they would get it.

Once the applicant becomes a tenant, the income is used to calculate the rent, and assets are not considered in the rent calculation. So once they're a tenant, their income is used to calculate the rent. Once the tenant's rent reaches \$800 a month, it never increases any more. That's as high as it gets, even if you are a university professor or an RN [registered nurse] or whoever you might be. And the result is there's been tenants in our social housing program whose income has increased a lot since they became a tenant in Sask Housing, and they've had significant or even annual upgrades to their income, which would mean that they would have less need than somebody who is waiting. But we don't ask them to look at it again.

So I guess what we'd like to do is look at the units that we've got, the 30,000 units that we have, and say, are the people that

are in those housings the ones that should be in the housing? Is there people with needs? Is there a family with needs? And should we be asking people, on a more regular basis, what is your income? It happens in other areas.

Mr. Forbes — And when I look at, you know, the work that I've done around the waiting lists ... so you have three types of housing that Sask Housing manages. You have the social housing which is rental housing for people with low incomes or people who are victims of abuse. The rent is based on a tenant's income, which seems to be the group that you're talking about. Then you have affordable housing which is the rent ... That affordable housing rental program, rents are set at the low end of the private market rent. And then you have seniors housing, rental housing for seniors. And I've taken those definitions out of the Sask Housing annual report.

Now I know for example Bob Pringle actually asked in the last, in his report that actually the income for seniors be bumped up a bit so more seniors could apply, if I remember that correctly. That was one of his recommendations. I don't know if it really mattered because there were enough seniors on the waiting list that those with a higher level may not apply, but I don't know. So are you taking a look ... What is the scope of this? Is there a couple of people who are going to be hired to do this? How quickly will people be finding out that we're auditing people, or how are tenants going to find out about it because this is quite a, this is a pretty ... and I would assume right now, and I know even in my own riding ... and I have a lot of Sask Housing tenants in my riding, Saskatoon Centre. I think I have a couple thousand actually. And I know Saskatoon Housing Authority is very vigilant on people meeting the requirements of the lease because they come to me when there's a problem, and you can bet that I have people coming in almost every week about Saskatoon Housing.

And I've got to tell you, Saskatoon Housing does a great job. They do a great job, but they do come to me because of whatever issues. It could be a cleanliness issue. It could be a hoarding issue. It could be this was not the family who originally signed the agreement to be in there, you know, type of thing. So what is the scope of this because I know there could be a lot of anxiety over this.

Hon. Ms. Draude — Thank you to the member. I know that he's well aware of the housing issue that we have. And I think that the question I have been asking since I was minister was, when was the last time somebody actually looked at the whole housing policies? When did we actually decide that the program that is in place today is ... How long has it been in place? And it has been a number of years. In fact I can't remember what I was told, but if you can ...

Mr. Allen — Well it depends on the policy in question. The \$800 rent max was set in the early 2000s. Some other parts of the social and affordable housing program, in terms of its structure and eligibility requirements, some parts of them date back to the '50s. So there's some aspects of them that have been some time in their current form.

[15:45]

The question of where, the member asked about where the staff

were going to come from. The reorganization that the ministry underwent a year and a half ago, became more complete about a year ago, allowed us to create an area when the ministry within the division whose job it is to look at programs — whether it's the housing program or other programs — to look at the housing programs in this particular case, see which part of them needs some work, and then to work on those without having to be concerned with the day-to-day of, you know, of a lease complaint or what to do over here in this delivery issue.

Mr. Forbes: — And so you're talking about the social aspect, so maybe 800, and if it's an oil rig worker who's making a lot of money and I understand that scenario. But when you have the affordable housing concern and rents are set at the low end of the private market rent . . . and we see what's happened in, say for example, Regina over the last 10 years or 15 years where Boardwalk now owns a significant part of the private rental market, and I would believe it's close to 25 per cent if it's not a third, and Regina Housing Authority has a big chunk of that as well.

But here you have a corporation like Boardwalk and a few others, large corporations, setting the market rate for rent in Regina, thereby having to cause housing authorities like Saskatoon and Regina to increase their rents. And we've heard examples — I know of in Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, and Moose Jaw very clearly — where in the affordable housing, rents in Sask Housing, the last company you would think, would have to increase their rents fairly significant. Now it hasn't been 62 per cent, but it's been fairly significant, because they're having to because of the market rate in that locale. And that's happening right across the province.

So are you taking a look at that policy as well? Will you have some sort of form of caps because again the markets are very different than they were 20 or 30 years ago when that policy was developed.

Mr. Allen: — Our first area of investigation is in the social housing arena. Social housing is by far the largest part of our portfolio. Affordable is considerably smaller. So social housing is where we're focusing our attention first because that's . . . You know, you go where the volume is. And so social housing is what we're looking at. We're looking at income definition to determine at what point someone is making too much to perhaps even be put on the waiting list.

Mr. Forbes: — Sure, but I'm talking about the affordable housing.

Mr. Allen: — Affordable housing will be at a later date; at least that's in our current thinking. The minister could change that, but at this particular point in time, we're looking at social housing with affordable housing to follow.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, I know. I just have, well two questions, one comment. And I know my colleague here has some questions. One is I did see when I read your report that your rent incomes have increased by 4.1 per cent, and that's greater than the cost of living in Saskatchewan. So if the rents for Sask Housing were just even going at cost of living, it should have been half that.

But I do have a quick question. Is there a project, a building project that Sask Housing's doing that does not involve a partner right now?

Mr. Allen: — Thank you. The vast majority of our projects are being delivered with a third party. We do direct delivery when we cannot find a third party partner who is ready and able to move forward. We have one of those in the city of Regina which is basically expanding the number of units in one of our own buildings.

In the North, we do a fair amount of direct delivery. We try to work with the local builders and such to mentor them, but there are times when it's a challenge to find a non-profit or an organization to take on the entire project. So in that particular case, we act as the general contractor.

Mr. Forbes: — No, that's what I thought so thank you. Now my colleague has some questions.

The Chair: — Mr. Belanger.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much. First of all, welcome to the officials and Madam Minister. My questions are going to be just basically around seniors and the affordability issue. And I noticed earlier my colleague mentioned the scenario of having an effort to recognize the limited income that many of the seniors are suffering from. And I want to push my attention further north than Saskatoon of course and that perhaps there was some notion of trying to adjust the income so that many more seniors can take advantage of some of the housing programs.

And that may not be possible if you have the federal government that you have an agreement with, but I'll give you one scenario that might be possible, given the contractual obligations you might have with the federal government under the RRAP program, and that's the notion of the rule on payment on property taxes. I'm not sure when the rule was introduced, but if you're in arrears of property tax or arrears of a few other categories, you become ineligible for the RRAP and ERP [emergency repair program] program, the emergency program. Is that correct? Is that a rule there now?

Mr. Allen: — That is correct.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. And how do you base the premise of that particular rule? I just need to find out what's the logic behind that rule.

Mr. Allen: — The premise behind it, the foundation of it is that if we're repairing a home and making it in better condition, increasing its value, if it's in a market community, then it's to the homeowners' advantage to do so. If the homeowner is not paying property taxes, then the homeowner is being enriched unjustly. They haven't fulfilled their part of the bargain of being a homeowner by not fulfilling their responsibilities of homeowner, including property taxes. So from a social policy perspective, to give them something when they're not fulfilling the full responsibilities of the . . . [inaudible] . . . we thought was incorrect.

Mr. Belanger: — Now the reason why I'm saying that,

obviously I knew that that was the underlying theme behind this particular rule, that you must pay your property taxes in order for you to be eligible because you obviously want to be looking at people that are responsible and doing their part to maintain their homes. And of course maintaining your home obviously involves paying your property tax.

But my focus is on the seniors, in particular northern Saskatchewan. Many seniors are still very, very proud to have their own homes. Some of them do not want to go into a seniors home. Some of them don't want to go into a care home, any of that sort. They want to live their final days in their own home, the home in which they raised their kids. And many times they're raising grandkids, and it becomes a central kind of place for a lot of their families. So the seniors in northern Saskatchewan stubbornly cling on to their home.

And I made a reference last Friday to some of the seniors that I've visited in my constituency, where you see floors of the bathroom are very in poor shape, obviously providing a threat to the safety and comfort of the seniors that live in that home, mould on the walls and all that. And when we talk about the rule — whether the rule was in effect forever or whether just it's a recent rule, whatever the case may be — the rule is actually an impediment. And the reason being is that when you live on a fixed income, as northern and certainly as southern seniors do, I think the base amount you get for Old Age Security is \$550, and correct me if I'm wrong. That's a base salary, base income you get every month, not salary. And then if you're under a certain threshold of income each month, you're eligible for a further \$600 supplementary income. So many of these seniors live on \$1,150 each month, and it's very, very difficult to look at maintaining a home.

While there may be rent, there's other costs of heat, power, food, fuel, and so on and so forth. So many times these seniors, in their pride to have their own homes, don't have enough money to pay things like fire insurance and property tax.

Now is there a way that you could adjust the rule, or caress the rule if you like, to the advantage of many of the affordability issues that seniors face in the North, to say look, if you have property tax arrears, we will accept the fact that you have those property tax arrears, but that's a lien against your property in the event that you sell in the next 10 years, that that lien has to be paid whether your family assumes it or your estate, and thereby making many of these seniors eligible for some of their RRAP and ERP programs? Because the unfortunate thing is that in northern Saskatchewan, payment of property taxes is probably one of the least areas that many seniors can afford to pay and thereby won't pay. So it's not as if they have a choice.

So is that a possibility, as oppose increasing the threshold of what they're allowed to make, look at some of the rules that can actually benefit them to take advantage of the RRAP and ERP programs?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, I know he's lived in the North all his life, and we've been government for three and a half years. Is this something that you looked at when you were in government?

Mr. Belanger: — One of the things that we looked at when we

were in government is that the contractual obligations we had with the federal government prevented us from doing a lot of things you wanted to do. One of the examples would be writing off some of the 1974 houses that were built in 1974 where there's still arrears on the books.

But does that affect the financial integrity of the reporting mechanisms? Does that affect the relationship with the federal government? What cause and effect would we have to, as I would say, writeoff, take off the books all these old housing? There's a lot of cause and effect when you make a decision.

So yes, there's a lot of things looked at, and that's why it's important to figure out the date of this particular rule, when it came into effect, and the logic behind it. Now in recognizing the rule itself, my only argument is, can we change that rule? Because we can sit here and argue and debate the merits of what was done or what was not done, but that's not going to change the eligibility of seniors in taking advantage of the RRAP and ERP program. We're looking at the solution here.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — So I think the member just said that the important thing was the date, so I guess that means that you must have looked at the date, did you?

Mr. Belanger: — No, no. I don't know the date.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — So I know that the issue for housing in the North is huge. I mean I haven't lived there, but I've been in the North and I've talked to the mayors, and the northern roundtable talk about housing as a very important issue. I know that we've invested about \$22 million in the last three years for either 205 either new or rejuvenated units and another \$3 million to help low-income landowners, homeowners make necessary repairs. So I know that there is about one unit for every 12 people living in the North right now, but the exciting part is the more northerners that are working and having jobs in the North is changing some of those issues.

As far as whether we'd look at the date of these issues, I honestly will have to tell you that I didn't know about this. I can find out what this date is and where you are coming from. I don't think anybody wants to have a place with a whole lot of liens on it. But what we do need to have is make sure that our seniors are living in healthy, safe places. And that's the goal.

Mr. Belanger: — Right and that's why . . .

The Chair: — Mr. Belanger, could you make your last question fairly concise? We're running short of time, and I'd like to allow for closing comments.

Mr. Belanger: — All right. I guess the question being, very quickly . . . We want to make sure that if property tax is a deterrent for many young or many older people that own their own homes to take advantage of the RRAP and ERP program, can your ministry look at different ways — either a letter from the mayor saying they're beginning to address the property tax arrears, or you can put a lien on the property before they sell it or they dispose of it through their estate — that you'd look at options in which you would delete or eliminate non-payment of property taxes as an excuse not to have these seniors homes, at least for the seniors who live on fixed incomes, not to have their

homes become eligible for the RRAP and ERP programs. That's as simple as I can get it, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

[16:00]

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member, and I know that he cares about the people in the North. So that's an issue that . . . you know, property taxes for seniors goes beyond the North. I'm sure that your seatmates can both tell you that it is an issue.

So it's something that we are looking at, the amount of money that we've put in, in the last three years and the programs that we're initiating. And the input from the various stakeholders is important to us as we go forward. I can assure you that everybody, everybody in the province needs not just a house but a home, and it's something that we continue to look at, as government.

So I'd like to thank my officials here for all their work. I'd like to thank my staff back up in my office. I know Kelly's here right now, but Shelley and Sherry and Theo and Amanda and Kaitlin, they're working up there, and they worked very hard on this initiative, so thank you to all of them. And I appreciate your questions, to the member opposite, and we look forward to meeting again, I believe tomorrow.

The Chair: — Thank you, Madam Minister, and officials. Mr. Forbes, any closing comments?

Mr. Forbes: — I appreciate the cordial responses and we look forward . . . And I hope it's tomorrow. I'm not sure. That's good. It's got to be soon. So thank you all.

The Chair: — Thank you committee members. We will now recess for a brief few minutes to facilitate changing to the Ministry of Health, and we will return.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**General Revenue Fund
Health
Vote 32**

Subvote (HE01)

The Chair: — Welcome back to the Human Services Committee, legislative committee. We have facilitated the change to the Ministry of Health. Committee members, we are now looking at the estimates and supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Health, vote 32, central management and services, (HE01) outlined on page 87 of the Estimates booklet, on page 5 of the Supplementary Estimates booklet.

We will now move right into questions and answers. Minister of Health, do you have any opening comments?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Just I would like to welcome all my officials. Here on my left of course is my deputy minister, Dan Florizone. On my right is associate deputy minister, Max Hendricks; Lauren Donnelly, the assistant deputy minister; and Ted Warawa is also behind me, who is the executive director of financial services branch. I have more officials behind them. As

questions come, we may be calling them to the front to answer any of those, and they'll identify themselves at that time.

From the last time we were here — I guess it was about a week ago today — not a lot has changed, although I was able to be in Saskatoon on Thursday and sign the contract with the SMA [Saskatchewan Medical Association], which is certainly a positive move for Saskatchewan as we move forward. And it deals with a number of issues, I think, in particular a lot around rural recruitment and retention of physicians. So that's probably the major piece of news in the last week other than maybe the final results of the federal election. But we're not here to discuss that; we're here to discuss Health. So I'd be more than willing to answer any questions the opposition or government may have.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. McMorris, and welcome officials. Ms. Junor.

Ms. Junor: — I'd like to start off today's questions with some MS [multiple sclerosis] questions. There are people here with us tonight who would like to hear the minister talk about the MS trials. And on the website of the Research Foundation, they talk about the selection of the successful applicant for the research project to be announced the end of April. And I haven't seen that yet, and I'm wondering if the minister could tell us where that process is.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — So to the question. The issue that was on the website was the end of April date was the date for closure of people being able to submit proposals. It wasn't when the announcement would be made as to who the successful research group would be. It was the closure of proposals. And May would be, sometime around the end of May was when the announcement would be made as far as the successful research group.

Ms. Junor: — According to the website that I have from the SHRF [Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation] it says, SHRF expects to announce the outcome of the competition in April of 2011. Has that changed?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — On their website it says that full proposals are due by April 26th, 2011, not that the successful applicant would be announced. It says it would be, funding decisions will be announced late May of 2011, on their website.

Ms. Junor: — This is an older website obviously then. So people know that these are going to be . . . by what in May did you say?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — It says that the funding decision will be announced in late May of 2011. We're looking at their current website. I guess the only thing that we could do is check with SHRF to see if those timelines have been changed and when they changed those timelines. But we're going off of the SHRF, that's the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation website.

Ms. Junor: — Probably a more recent one than I obviously have. So the concern still among the community of people who have MS or their families that are with them is the trials are one thing, but there's going to be a limited number of those 3,500

people who have MS in the province that will have access to the clinical trials, to be the cohort. They're not going to take, I'm assuming, not going to take all 3,500 of them. And I did see in some — which I can't find — some announcement or comment made that these clinical trials will likely not see any results or any conclusions before 2014.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — So just a couple of . . . on really two different questions. The first one we've probably talked about before and discussed before as far as how many. There's, you know, well over 3,000 people in Saskatchewan of course. It wouldn't be a clinical trial really if all 3,000 were in the trial and, you know, at the \$5 million mark. We rely on the clinical researchers to make up the trial. That's not our expertise of course, it's the research community that would determine the size of the trial by the budget that's been made available. So they'll determine the size; in other words, how many and who those people will be selected. That isn't, again, the responsibility, nor should it be, of any ministry or government. That's the researchers.

As far as the completion, you asked about the completion of the proposal by 2014. I haven't seen that, but again I'd be surprised if anybody could put a number on it because that again is the purview of the research, successful research proposal that comes forward. As far as the timeline that they seek, the length of time that they feel that they need to prove whatever evidence that they come up with — be it positive, negative, or any piece of evidence — the timeline will be determined by the successful bidder or successful person that put in the successful proposal.

One thing I will say, that I would be very hesitant — and this is again not our responsibility — but to rush it. I mean this has to be scientifically proven. This has to be proven through research. And so again it wouldn't be prudent for us to say this has to be done within four months or eight months. Not being from the research community, we want the research community to take the time to validate any of its evidence, be it positive or negative, as it moves forward. And we would rely on them and their timeline to follow through with that.

[16:15]

Ms. Junor: — I think the question speaks to the concern of many people who have MS about the length of time or even the ability in their specific case that they may not be part of the trial and the trials may not benefit them in time. Because knowing some of the cases, some of them in my own family, where the symptoms progressed quite rapidly to a point where you really can't afford to wait, and I think that's the frustration that people that came to the legislature last week were expressing for sure, that they don't feel that the trials are going to be good, going to be a good thing for them. They won't be soon enough, and they really don't think that they're going to be inclusive enough.

So they did mention to me and quite clearly brought this up — and I know we've talked about this before — is that there should be some ability for people to get the diagnosis in Saskatchewan. Other provinces are doing the diagnosis. There's an ultrasound Doppler, I understand, and it's been used in BC [British Columbia] and Manitoba and Ontario. And as far as conversations I've had, we have that Doppler here, and we have the technicians that can read the results and do the procedure.

So I think from the community of people who have MS who come to the legislature to watch the process and the progress of this clinical trial announcement, they do ask, why couldn't they have at least the diagnosis done here in Saskatchewan, which should lend itself to moving the trials along as well. But many of them who are choosing to go out of province for their treatment, because they can't wait, have also got to pay for the diagnosis, and maybe they don't need the treatment or don't qualify for the treatment. And they think it would be beneficial if Saskatchewan at least invested immediately in the diagnosis, so have the Doppler ultrasound available like it is in at least three provinces that I know of to be done here and funded by the government.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I will answer the question, but I just want a point of clarification. You were talking about people in other provinces being able to access ultrasounds for this reason. But you also said that they were paying for those ultrasounds, did you, in other provinces?

Ms. Junor: — I don't know. I don't know if they are or not. I know, I know they're being done in Manitoba, BC, and Ontario. And I thought the announcement I saw for Ontario . . . I'm not sure. I can't remember if they are or not.

But I'm asking, and so are the MS people in Saskatchewan that . . . If we have money and we were the lead in announcing clinical trials, this would be a good step to spend money there as well. And since we have the equipment and we have the technicians, why not offer that to people who may not be able to wait for the clinical trials? Obviously some of them simply cannot, and have been out of province already. And that would take one piece of the expense off for them, for Saskatchewan residents.

So I don't know what other provinces are doing. Maybe someone else in your ministry does. But that's really not my question. I'm asking that you do.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I just was interested in your preface. I'm sure that you had said that they pay for this service in other provinces to have it checked. And what you're asking for us is to pay for it here and not have pay out of pocket even though if it's a non-insured procedure, that . . . I mean that is I guess a possibility.

But what I will say is that there's lots of . . . There's an awful lot of interest around the whole piece around clinical trials and around liberation treatment. And I understand many people's frustration. They want it to happen sooner; they want to get evidence and know perhaps a yes or a no much sooner than what the science is allowing us to. And I know there is frustration even here in Saskatchewan with some people out of the 3,000 that are saying, you know, there's a good chance I won't be part of it. And that is very frustrating.

What I can say, after talking to people from other jurisdictions and other provinces, people in other provinces are saying, we don't even have the option in our province. Manitoba has followed along. Now they, you know, MS patients in their province will be going through the same process as we are here, that they want to be part of the clinical trial; and the evidence, it'll never come quite, I shouldn't say never come quick

enough, but they would like it to be much quicker.

I can tell you that people in Alberta and British Columbia and Ontario and Quebec were wishing their governments moved ahead with clinical trials because zero out of however many in those provinces will be part of a clinical trial. I know that it, again it's frustrating for those that are having to wait here in Saskatchewan. But as the leader in this process it comes with some criticism and that's the criticism that we're taking, but we're not backing away from our commitment towards carrying this out.

As far as the ultrasound and using that as a, you know, a bit of a screening process, there is still some, there is still a bit of a, I guess you could say, the jury is out on how effective ultrasound is just on detecting venous blockage. It depends on a lot of variables — and I am certainly no expert in this area — but it depends on a lot of variables and some of the people that we've been talking to and the evidence that we've talking to will say that it isn't maybe always the most accurate way of judging whether there's venous vein blockage or not.

So with that we're moving forward with the clinical trials. We have some timelines set forward and we're looking forward to the successful research group being announced mid to end of May.

Ms. Junor: — And I don't think any of the questions that are coming from the MS community are suggesting that the clinical trials are wrong or aren't a major piece of dealing with MS and dealing with where we go with liberation treatment or anything else that it might show. But I think that people are quite frustrated with the reasons I gave you, that they will not likely see this benefit them, and the people that are here now in the province with MS don't see that this will be something that will help them.

They understand the research component of it and the necessity for research, but for them they're interested in the diagnosis, which you said is screening which I think is a really good way of saying it. And also they're very concerned about a database and having a database to track the people who have already been and who will have some experience to inform, if not the clinical trials, for sure how we move forward in MS, even research of any sort in MS because they will have gone and be the . . . They've already done this and they don't find it useful to not have some way to track what their experience is.

And even to, I know we've talked about the follow-up, but I know people have come back from the treatment and not have had access to the correct follow-up. And that is something, I think, I know you've said the doctor should all take, our own physicians and health community should step up and follow them through just as if they had a procedure here. But that's not actually happening in every case.

So I think that there is a frustration that has nothing to do with whether the clinical trials is a good idea. It has more to do with what is going to happen now in the next, say, three years for people who have extreme symptoms and need to have something done now. So the database is something people really would like. Because they are going. I mean there are lots of them going for the treatment.

And the diagnosis is another thing that people would really like to see, as well as I'm sure they're going to watch the clinical trials because there is some concern, with the announcement of the clinical trials, there's some concern about a bias in the research community, so there's a great deal of interest . . . And that is a bias, a negative bias towards the liberation treatment. And so the MS people have told me that they're quite anxious to see who is selected to do the research, if it includes people who really don't have, they do have a bias so will not necessarily have an open mind. And they do worry about that. I know you have no say in that or you have no answer to that for sure because it's not going to be in your hands, but I would just like to have it on record that that is one of their concerns.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I mean we could certainly go through who's on the panel to select the successful research proposal. It's a very, very well-rounded panel made up of experts from many different fields across Canada, not just here in Saskatchewan. I could certainly go through that if you want. I don't think that is, you know, whether that is useful for this committee right now or not.

I am interested, though. I think you could maybe use that argument with any research proposal that went forward that, you know, do the researchers have bias? And I think that's the whole point behind research, is evidence-based, not personal opinion. And I would hope that any research proposal that would go forward would be based on the evidence that they find through the research that they do, not because of personal opinions that they may have brought to the table for whatever reason. So you know, that's certainly our intent.

You know, there's certainly a group out there, a large group out there, that questions whether this is safe for MS. In fact, the MS Society of Canada and the neurosurgeons of Canada would say that there is some question as to whether this liberation treatment should be done anywhere, whether it's safe.

The other question is, if it's safe, then how effective is it, and the efficacy. And that's certainly what the research proposal is aiming to do, is to look to make sure that it is safe and effective treatment for MS patients to relieve symptoms. It's not necessarily, and I think most would realize that this is not being looked at as a cure for MS, but it's a symptom relief. But with symptom relief, we have to make sure that it is safe and that it is effective for, you know, the group that we are doing that will be part of the clinical trial. There's been a research paper put out from the United States saying that they didn't feel it was effective. I've had certainly questions asked of me: then why are we still proceeding when other jurisdictions have come out — and it's a small study out of Buffalo — that would question the efficacy of liberation treatment?

That hasn't, you know, wavered our thought that we need to continue along with the research done here in Saskatchewan, research done by, you know, professional researchers that I, you know, I would really be surprised if they would have a bias coming to the table. That's what they do, is they do research. They study it, and they come out with opinion based on research, based on evidence, based on science as opposed to personal opinion.

Ms. Junor: — I think we've seldom seen a research project that

has such high emotion attached to it. I mean everybody in the province knows somebody either in their own family or very close family who has MS, so this is an issue that really does touch a lot of Saskatchewan families.

So the frustration is I think . . . The clinical trials, like I said, is one aspect of this whole issue surrounding MS, but the other issues I think are what leads to the frustration. People know that the clinical trials aren't the be-all and end-all for most of them. They know the clinical trials will be the basis for where the research community and the MS community move forward. But for them, many of the things that are going to happen with that aren't going to benefit them. So that's why they really are very interested in the database and the diagnostic and screening. So they'll be, I'm sure, anxious to read the *Hansard* from tonight's or this afternoon's discussion.

If you have no further comments, I move on to another topic. There are several things that we touched on during this session that I would like to follow up just as we run through our last hour, people who came to the legislature who asked for certain things and the minister said their cases would be reviewed. And one of them was Charlene Sullivan, and another one was Ed Tchorzewski. Could you tell me the status of those two cases?

[16:30]

Ms. Tell: — Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Ms. Tell, you have a point of order?

Ms. Tell: — The points that are raised by the members opposite have to do with conversations, discussions that we've had during question period, has nothing to do with estimates.

The Chair: — Thank you for your point of order, Ms. Tell. Mr. Broten.

Mr. Broten: — In looking at Health estimates, it has to do with government spending, government spending through the Ministry of Health which delivers health care to Saskatchewan citizens. The incidents that were then asked by the Health critic specifically speak to expenditures of Health dollars and ties into, certainly, major issues about the provision of services and what protocols are in place. So I think the questions are completely in order.

The Chair: — Thank you for the member for the point of order, and thank you for the member for his response. There is a general wideness of latitude to the question and answer of estimates, so I find the point of order not well taken. However it is almost impossible for the Chair to know all the parameters of all the different parts of the estimates. Rule 19(3) anticipates a minister will provide a response even if it is to decline or take notice. So if the minister does not feel this is within his parameters in the estimates, he can verbally decline.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — What we'll do is, you know, we'll endeavour to answer the question as best we can without getting into details of any one case. I think the member opposite asked if we were going to review, and we can certainly talk about maybe the steps that have been taken as far as the review, but anything further than that, I think we'll just leave it at that. And

I'm going to allow Max Hendricks to talk about where we are as far as having another look at those two cases that the opposition critic cited.

The Chair: — Thank you for your response, Mr. Minister. Mr. Hendricks.

Mr. Hendricks: — Max Hendricks, associate deputy minister. So with the Ms. Sullivan case, information has been submitted both by her oral surgeon and by her general dentist. There has been some correspondence back from medical services branch asking for additional information to try and really nail down whether this is the only option for her. One of the things that I believe the minister raised last week or the week before was that, as we're in the process of getting this health services review committee going, that one of the things that we would do was actually try to consult with oral surgeons on these specific cases and get their input. It might be a different oral surgeon from a different community to make sure that we're making a fair and objective decision. So a decision on that should be forthcoming, I would expect, fairly soon.

With the Ed Tchorzewski case, I met with the family a couple of weeks ago. They explained their situation. And what I committed to the family to do was to review the case. And possibly this would be actually a good test for the health services review committee. You'll recall that this case went before the Ombudsman, and the Ombudsman declared that the ministry's decision was in keeping with policy and processes. So one of the things that, you know, just based on the situation here and some of the issues the family raised, I feel that it would be good to have a third-party review of this within the ministry once that committee is set up.

Now one of the things I do want to address is the complexity of setting up that committee, and you've raised this before, because one of the things that's different than we've done before is we usually have general family physicians, that sort of thing, review these cases. We actually want to bring in specialists in each area, specific to these cases, to allow that specialist input into the process, and sort of developing a list of all these specialists that we would use in these specific circumstances is somewhat complex. We have to get agreement and get their participation. So that's why it's probably taking a little bit longer than anticipated, but we're hoping to have that up and running fairly soon.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. Then could you also tell me what's the status of the kidney transplant program? How many people are waiting, and how many kidney transplants have been done since the beginning of the year?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you for the question regarding the kidney transplant program. Of course we've been working on it quite diligently for the last couple of years, and I would say that it's significant with this year's budget because about \$2 million was put into the base budget to deal with some of the concerns and pressures of the program through the Saskatoon Health Region. So the steering committee was struck back in July of 2010 and has been doing its work. The announcement in March of 2011 on the living organ donor reimbursement, expense reimbursement program, was launched, which certainly was very positive. Again the health region is still doing some

work with its physician leadership, and I think we'll have some announcements fairly quickly there.

But I think it's important to look at the 2010 calendar year, the calendar year. And a combination of between what was done here in Saskatchewan and what was sent out of province brings our numbers back up to the averages that we were seeing prior. Roughly around 34 Saskatchewan residents received a transplant.

I think it's also important to know that there has been really no one from Saskatchewan that has been eligible for a kidney transplant, that has an acceptable recipient or a kidney to receive, has been held back or delayed. It may not have been received in Saskatchewan, but any person that is eligible through, you know, the pre-screening and everything else and then matched with a kidney, be it a living donor or a cadaver, has been able to receive the work that they need to have done. And that's why, as I said, in 2010 our numbers were back to where they have been in the past.

And I think we went through a very good announcement a couple — boy, it was three or four — weeks ago when they were talking about organ donation. And I know I was at an announcement in Saskatoon that talked about that and trying to . . . The biggest issue I think around not necessarily only the kidney transplant program but so many of the transplant programs is to make sure that we have people in our province signed up to donate their organs if something tragic happened. And I think that is what's holding the program back and Saskatchewan residents back more than anything else, is the amount of kidneys that will be donated through various means, be it living donor or through cadaver. That is what tends to be what holds a program back more than anything else.

Ms. Junor: — So back to my questions, how many are on the waiting list, and how many transplants were done in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — And you know what, if there's another question, supplement question, perhaps I can give more information. But so far what we have on the waiting list is about 96 patients. And I would maybe not say that they are on the waiting list. They're being worked up to be able to receive a kidney, and also not only being worked up but waiting to receive an acceptable or a match be it through a living donor or cadaveric. So that's what would be holding those 96 people back, is the workup that needs to be done then as well as finding a match.

There have been, since the kidney program started up in Saskatchewan, six transplants done in the province. We're working to again, as I say, increase that as the resources come online, physicians or whatever. But you know when we get up to, you know, maybe a larger complement of physicians and the program up and running to the point that we want it, that isn't again necessarily the holdup. It's making sure that there is a match, be it cadaveric or living donor. That's what holds the program up. That's what holds the people back. There could be 96 people, as I say, waiting in Saskatchewan. And if there was 20 kidneys come available between Saskatchewan and other jurisdictions, those people would receive their transplant.

So I guess that's kind of where we're at now, and I don't know if there's any other questions on the kidney transplant program. I'll try and answer them if there are.

[16:45]

Ms. Junor: — No, we don't have, thank you very much. We don't have very much time left, so there are many other questions I want to ask, as well as Mr. Broten has a question too, but just one more of the one-off types.

I had correspondence with somebody in Regina and specifically from the Pasqua, that was complaining about the meals and linking them to the lean process because now apparently 1 in 20 patients get a menu for selection, for dietary selections. We used to get menus every day. You get to pick what you wanted, and now apparently it's 1 in 20 get the menu selection option and that rotates, and this person is as well saying that the food is coming from Ontario. Please comment on that?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I have to let my deputy minister talk a little bit about the food at the Pasqua Hospital and the lean process.

Mr. Florizone: — Thank you . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, I'll keep my remarks to a minimum. I can tell you that if someone is claiming that leaning out a process involves restricting choice or reducing variety, that it isn't lean. So I'll be intrigued to look into it further and to see what type of approach is taken.

In our view as a ministry, if an improvement isn't an improvement for a patient, then it shouldn't be considered an improvement. So we'd like to look into it further to see what has gone on. I'm unaware of the actual initiative that you're talking about. Doesn't sound too promising from what you describe.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, the person who complained is actually watching, so they'll be happy to know that you're going to look at this because . . .

Mr. Florizone: — Just one other . . . I'm sorry. Just one other comment on this notion of meals coming in from Ontario. Absolutely no substantiation to such meals being brought in. The only thing that would have anything to do with Ontario is perhaps some of the goods that are purchased from time to time. You know, it would never be a contract with an Ontario firm for meals — not in this province, not at this time.

Ms. Junor: — Now before we finish our estimates for this legislative session, I do want to talk about STARS [Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society]. I know that there's been a fair amount of interest and a fair amount of excitement. I did talk to SEMSA [Saskatchewan Emergency Medical Services Association] today. They're having their annual meeting and they're looking forward to hearing the STARS presentation because ground ambulance is quite concerned about the impact on their jobs and their business as well as many other questions. And some of the questions that have been sent to me, I do want to get on the record and have the minister at least give us some indication of what the answers might be.

And I'm not saying we need a talk on the value of STARS or the way STARS works, because I think people have followed that and watched it. But some of the questions that are coming, that I would like to have a comment on, is that Nova Scotia had STARS working there and they were asked to leave in 2001. Our calls to Nova Scotia have suggested that the reason STARS and the government parted ways was because it got to be too expensive and STARS was asking too much money. Would you comment on that?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I can't really comment on the situation in Nova Scotia. It wouldn't be prudent or relevant for me to comment on what has gone on in Nova Scotia. I'm not privy to it.

I do know though, having visited Alberta a couple of times, and I'm not, you know, we can probably get more information on the finances and everything else, but I know in Alberta it's been up and running for 25 years and has proven to be a very effective service and a cost-effective service because of certainly the private sector that has come to the plate and put so much into their program — three bases across Alberta.

We are expecting that to be hopefully our experience here in Saskatchewan. Again I don't know about Nova Scotia, but I'm hearing from people at STARS and also talking to the Premier of Manitoba and their Health minister that they're looking at moving to a program very similar — not very similar, to a program such as STARS.

They have used the STARS program, in fact are using it right now in the event of the flooding that's going on in Manitoba. So they've utilized the program before, found the effectiveness. They're utilizing it again through this spring flood and has been very effective for them. So obviously they've tried it once, have gone back to it, and from reports that I'm hearing may be announcing a program similar to what we're doing here in Saskatchewan.

In other words, the STARS program doesn't have just three bases in Alberta. It has five bases in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and hopefully another one or two in Manitoba into the future. So it is a fully integrated, across-border program to a certain extent. I mean it's . . . There are limitations there. I guess the point being that I'm trying to make is that, been very successful in Alberta. We're certainly thinking it will be just as successful here and I know after talking to the Premier of Manitoba at our joint cabinet meeting, very interested in realizing the benefits of, for lack of a better term, piggybacking on to a program that has 25 years of experience and has served the province of Alberta very well.

Ms. Junor: — I just wanted to mention Nova Scotia and suggest that in the province, doing the due diligence, that it would be good to find out what happened in Nova Scotia since they were not successful there.

My other question, one of my other questions is with the fundraising. When we see how STARS is funded, it is 75 per cent of the funding is coming from private donations, there was a huge gasp in the foundation community, other hospital foundations because they had not been consulted and did not know that this was coming. So they were not aware. They were

not talked or consulted with about the impact that this will have on their ability to fund raise in the private sector because it's all the same money that's out there for hospital foundations. So have you done any consultation with the hospital foundations about the impact that this will have on their ability to fund raise?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Again, you know . . . And I'll certainly answer the question as best I can. Me answering a question about fundraising and how the foundations operate during Health estimates is a little odd. I mean how a foundation is working or not working doesn't necessarily relate to Health estimates, but I'll take a shot at it anyway, in that the foundations certainly have been aware because this has been talked about for a very long time.

Did we sit down and consult directly with each foundation as to the impact that another provincial, doesn't matter what it is, but another provincial foundation — because that's what it is; it's a health foundation — would be operating in the province? No, we didn't because it would vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. There are some rural communities that would say it would probably help their foundations in the long run because people get used to giving towards health care, and this could be one aspect.

I do know after talking to the foundations, for example in Saskatoon, on different issues, you know, and the issue of being one hospital foundation in Regina and three for example in Saskatoon, whether they'd be better served with one foundation or three foundations, and each of the foundations will tell you, the more people that you have in the health philanthropy game asking for money — be it for St. Paul's, which is a Catholic-run facility, be it City Hospital which is serving, you know, you could say more of the inner city, or being the University Hospital, which caters to more of the academics — you know, people are able to give to a specific hospital foundation for example that meets their needs. They would argue that the more people they have, to me, that the, you know, the more people asking for the various needs — be it inner-city needs, be it for religious needs, the Catholic St. Paul's, or for the academic side of it — would increase the fundraising for all. And you know, we tend to think that overall for the STARS foundation. We only have one provincial foundation currently operating in the province. That's the children's hospital foundation, which is truly a provincial foundation. This will be the second provincial foundation that will be drawing across the province.

And you know, for some of the major corporate donors, they haven't had necessarily something that would cater to their interests that might be located in rural Saskatchewan. I mean just the two companies that I can think of — the PotashCorp and Mosaic — have been very generous. You know, the Mosaic cardiac care ward at the General Hospital services certainly all of, you know, southern Saskatchewan for sure. But I think a lot of those companies are looking at something that will actually have an impact perhaps in their communities where their employees are working, be it in Colonsay or wherever the potash mine may be situated.

And so I can see some concern by certain foundations that it may impact their overall funding. I don't know. I think that jury is still out. But what I would say is that I think what STARS has

done and what the children's hospital have done as provincial foundations have put more money into the philanthropic world than if they weren't here at all.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. The point of my question was the consultation, and I think that the minister at the beginning missed that point. But you did get to it, I think, that you did not consult with the in-place hospital foundations, and so they will probably have some comment about that and the impact on their ability to raise money.

But the ground ambulance also has quite a few comments and concerns which they are starting to spread around and send to me. But they will have, I think, a better indication of how they feel and what questions they need asked after they have their presentation at their convention. So they're looking forward to that, and I'm looking forward to hearing from them.

One of my questions is that there's been two studies of EMS [emergency medical services] — one under our government and one under yours — and neither one of them recommended this, the helicopter services. Can you tell me why you moved to that against all advice?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The ground ambulance review was specifically that. It reviewed ground ambulance and the state of the ground ambulance. It didn't look at, you know, it didn't look at air ambulance or Lifeguard. It looked at the ground ambulance. So to say that there wasn't a recommendation from a ground ambulance review, I think would be pretty consistent. It was a ground ambulance review, not all the other options that are available, be it Lifeguard and how we operate that or any others. So we looked at it simply by saying, one of the few provinces that don't have a helicopter in its fleet of EMS, an integrated fleet of EMS. We looked at that.

We looked at what the services have been provided in Alberta, and although the population is maybe three times that of Saskatchewan — gap closing as quickly as we can make it, but gap closing — and an effective service, a geographic province similar to ours, that it has served people very, very well. I think all you had to do is be at one of the presentations that I was at where a physician from Saskatoon, former CMA, Canadian Medical Association, president and SMA president, Anne Doig, who spoke so eloquently about what the STARS program meant to her and her family as the result of a collision that their son was in, and how important it was to put into our overall fleet.

To say that it wasn't a recommendation of a ground ambulance review so we shouldn't put it into our EMS system, I think is not accurate because I can tell you that there are many that felt we are a long ways behind. Other provinces, have helicopters into their EMS mix. We are getting to that point. And I think all you have to do is look at some of the results that they've seen in Alberta and some of the positive feedback they've seen in Alberta and you would see that, with the support of the business community, does it make sense? Or if a government was to ask, for example, for a recommendation saying that we want to run a helicopter ambulance system within our own system, not expecting any money coming in — in other words, it has to be publicly owned and no philanthropic dollars coming in — it wouldn't make sense.

And I know from heckles from the other side, people have said, well did the ministry . . . I was the minister of Health and the ministry never recommended it. It depends on how you ask the question. And if you can have a service like this for the amount that we're putting in that . . . Here's the question: if you can have a service like Alberta's had over the last 25 years for 5 to \$10 million a year, would you not do it? The answer would be yes, you would. We're looking at it from that lens as well. If we can offer a service, this service, into Saskatchewan for a budget line of, you know, anywhere from 5 to \$10 million, and fundraising — and the foundation does an awful lot of it — I think most people would say that is a pretty darn good investment. But if you don't ask, if you ask the question to ignore any private donors, then the answer is no.

[17:00]

Ms. Junor: — I just want to clarify with the minister. The review that was done when we were in government did specifically state that helicopters were not effective in Saskatchewan. It was specifically mentioned there. And in some of the correspondence I have, which is pretty detailed about the type of helicopter, the radius, and the terrain and all that, there are again many, many questions being raised. And I think over the next few years before this gets up and running, especially to the cost, there's many comments about the cost is vastly underrated and under-reported and under . . . It's optimistic to think that you're going to be able to do this for that cost.

But in the interest of time, I think those are the questions that I will leave with STARS, and I'm sure we're going to have this conversation more as we move forward with it since I'm understanding that you will be doing that. And I'll turn it over to my colleague to finish this off today.

The Chair: — Mr. Broten.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ms. Junor, for the opportunity to ask a few questions.

I met with a group of individuals that belong to an ostomy support group or advocacy group. And I met with them, and they asked that I raise a few issues and ask a few questions to get some input on some of the concerns that they raised with me. When dealing with colostomies or ostomies of different types, it's not something that's often talked about, so it was a very informative meeting I had with them because it's a type of condition that people keep quiet for privacy reasons. But I was really struck by the number of people that this does affect in Saskatchewan throughout the province.

Also they raised with me that individuals, out of pocket, the monthly expenditures can range from 300 to \$1,200 was sort of the range that I was given, and they explained that a percentage of that is rebated back to or reimbursed to the individuals who have the costs.

Maybe I'll just identify some of their concerns and just ask a few questions and allow the minister to have the floor. One concern they raised with me was the issue of the absence of direct billing, how individuals can be out of pocket for a period of time before the reimbursement comes back, and when people

are on a fixed income and when it's a, you know, 500 or \$1,000, that's a considerable amount. They told me that they had heard there was a direct payment or a direct billing type solution coming or in the works. So I'm curious if that is in fact proceeding and when that might come into place.

Another issue they raised was the percentage of the coverage, wondering if it would be increased with the amount that is reimbursed, I believe it's 50 per cent, and they were wondering if there was the possibility of that being increased.

Another concern that was raised with me was the number of items that are covered for when an ET [enterostomal therapy] nurse comes and provides the treatment or the assistance. They expressed that often the types of bandages or materials selected, they're really chosen based on what's covered, not necessarily what is best for that individual person. Another concern was for those on social assistance, and possibilities that often . . . the statement was made that individuals on social assistance or the poorest that have this type of condition, often it's an additional burden to them and additional expenses are taken out of cost-of-living items.

And the last concern that I promised I would raise that they addressed was the number of ET nurses that help with this specific type of care, and some of the figures that they were stated with respect to how many ET nurses were operating in different health regions or different areas. It's a very high workload on these individuals, and it's not something that every nurse receives specialized training in or goes down that path.

So I realize I just opened up a number of items there, but I was wondering if on some of those concerns if the minister or officials had some comments that I could pass on to them please.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — There was a number of questions there, so what I'll do is I'll just kind of give you a brief comment at the start as far as the direct billing. And it's something that we are looking at through the summer here. We have to do some consultation with the clinics as far as how it would all work, but it's something that we want to move towards and we're looking at. There is a number of other specific questions, and pretty specific, that if you don't mind, we will get something back to you by the end of the week roughly, by the end of the week if that's soon enough, itemizing, you know, the answers to each one of those questions. I mean, we could go through it all here, but I think we can quite easily get it to you in the next few days.

Mr. Broten: — No, I appreciate that, and I'm sure the individuals that spoke to me would appreciate that as well. So thank you for endeavouring to do that. I appreciate it.

The Chair: — If that's all the questions from committee members, we will move right to the votes. Seeing no further questions, vote 32, Health, which is on page 87 of the budget. Central management and services, subvote (HE01) in the amount of 14,139,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Provincial health services, subvote

(HE04) in the amount of 195,994,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Regional health services, subvote (HE03) in the amount of \$3,071,337,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Early childhood development, subvote (HE10) in the amount of \$10,766,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Medical services and medical education programs, subvote (HE06) in the amount of \$785,136,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Drug plan and extended benefits, subvote (HE08) in the amount of 384,757,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Provincial infrastructure projects, subvote (HE05) in the amount of zero dollars. There is no amount to be voted. This is for information purposes only. The amortization of capital assets in the amount of \$1,690,000. This is for informational purposes as well. There is no vote needed for this.

Health, vote 32, for the amount of \$4,462,192,000. That's a lot of numbers: \$4,462,129,000. I'll now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Be it resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2012, the following sums for Health in the amount of \$4,462,129,000.

Mr. Hart. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

**General Revenue Fund
Supplementary Estimates — March
Health
Vote 32**

The Chair: — We'll now move to the subvotes, vote 32, Health, page 5 of the Supplementary Estimates. Provincial health services, subvote (HE04) in the amount of \$8,000,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Regional health services, subvote (HE03) in the amount of 134,496,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Medical services and medical education programs, (HE06) in the amount of 20,500,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Health, vote 32, in the amount of 162,996,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2012, the following sums for Health in the amount of \$162,996,000.

Mr. Wyant. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Thank you committee members, and thank you, Mr. Minister, and officials for today. Mr. Minister, do you have any final comments?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes. I would just, certainly on behalf of Premier Brad Wall and the government, thank all the officials that are seated beside me and behind me for all the work that they do year in and year out, but especially through the budgeting process, the lead up to the budget, and budget finalization. It's an incredible amount of work, and I know there's many more that are behind these people that are at the ministry that do a lot of the number crunching and get a lot of the information that we need to make the decisions that we need to make. So I want to thank them all on behalf of our government for the great work that they do.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister McMorris. Ms. Junor, closing comments?

Ms. Junor: — Yes, thank you. I'd also like to thank the minister and his officials on behalf of Dwain Lingenfelter, the Leader of the Official Opposition, myself and my colleague Mr. Broten, and all my colleagues in caucus who appreciate the answers to all their questions and the questions that constituents send in and citizens of Saskatchewan. And thank you to everyone who does all that work.

The Chair: — Thank you members of the committee and again, Mr. Minister, and all of the officials and the people of Hansard and the committee clerks. We will now recess until 7 p.m. when we will return for the estimates for the ministries of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, and Education. We stand recessed till 7 o'clock.

[The committee recessed from 17:11 until 19:00.]

**General Revenue Fund
Labour Relations and Workplace Safety
Vote 20**

Subvote (LR01)

The Chair: — Welcome back, committee members. It being 7 o'clock, we will now reopen our committee meeting, Human Services, this evening. We are looking at the estimates for Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, vote 20, central

management and services, subvote (LR01) outlined on page 113 of the Estimates booklet.

Tonight we have with us in committee Mr. Cam Broten, and substituting for Ms. Judy Junor is Mr. Andy Iwanchuk. And on the government side we have Mr. Glen Hart, Mr. Gord Wyant, Ms. Doreen Eagles, and Ms. Christine Tell.

Welcome, Minister Morgan. I would ask you to have some opening, any opening comments you would have, and introduce the people with you here tonight and just open with your comments.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And the fact that I've got a significant number of people, I hope that you don't read into it that that's a lack of competence on my own part or that I need a lot of help. But I'm joined tonight by Deputy Minister Mike Carr; Glennis Bihun, executive director, occupational health and safety; Laurier Donais, executive director, central services; Greg Tuer, executive director, labour standards; Daniel Parrot, director at legal education services; Denise Klotz, director, office of the worker's advocate; Pat Parenteau, director of policy; Kelly Murphy, acting executive assistant to the deputy minister; Peter Federko, CEO of the Workers' Compensation Board; and Fred Bayer, board registrar of the Labour Relations Board. When the various officials come and go, I'm going to ask each one of them to identify themselves when they come to the microphone.

Before I start, I just would like to thank the officials and the staff of this building for being here this evening. I know this is outside of our regular hours, and it's always appreciated when our staff make themselves available.

The Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety was created in June 2010 to emphasize our government's commitment to healthy, safe, and productive workplaces; to be more accountable to the needs of employees and employers; to ensure that the people of Saskatchewan benefit from our growing economy. To those ends, I would like to recognize a few notable achievements. Over the past couple of months, the ministry has hosted a series of webinars, seminars broadcast over the Internet that focused on labour standards issues in the workplace. These Internet sessions were so popular that we had to place a number of people on a waiting list.

Another immensely popular ministry program is the young workers readiness certificate course. Close to 5,000 certificates have been issued since the program was launched online about a year ago. It is doing a great job in educating young workers about their rights and their safety in the workplace.

In January we released the research by Fast Consulting on employee and employer engagement in identifying and addressing hazards in the workplace. This research also looked at what factors contribute most to eliminating injuries and illnesses in Saskatchewan workplaces. The research resulted in 12 recommendations. The occupational health and safety division is engaging stakeholders and agencies to develop and implement strategies to address these recommendations.

Last year through our WorkSafe partnership, we introduced the health and safety leadership charter. Nearly 200 CEOs have

now signed the charter, pledging to make workplace safety a higher priority.

I would also like to offer a further perspective about the ministry's commitment to workplace safety. Occupational health and safety has increased its number of inspections of workplace sites to 4,851 in 2010-11 from 4,785 the previous year, an increase of 66 inspections. OH & S [occupational health and safety] has zero tolerance for any failure to comply with fall protection and recommends prosecution whenever this is observed. The same zero tolerance approach has been taken with respect to trenching incidents which violate the Act.

The latest statistics for 2010-2011 show that there has been a total of 74 prosecutions initiated for violations of *The Occupational Health and Safety Act* and the regulations. This compares with 32 in 2009-10 and just 11 in 2007-2008. Also 2010-2011 has seen a total of 52 convictions compared to 11 in '09-10. It is fair to conclude that both strength in enforcement and public education measures are having a real impact. In 2010, Saskatchewan achieved its lowest total workplace injury rate in over 20 years. The total injury rate decreased from 9.32 per cent in '09 to 8.7 per cent in '10. Likewise the province's time loss injury rate was 3.12 per cent, a decrease of more than 9 per cent from 2009. This represents the eighth straight year of decreases.

These numbers are noteworthy because in 2010 we had more Saskatchewan people working and fewer people being injured. We are encouraged by these reductions but even one workplace injury is too many. We must all remain vigilant in our efforts to eliminate workplace injuries, illnesses, and fatalities. Moving forward, the government maintains zero tolerance for workplace injuries and deaths.

We will continue to make occupational health and safety inspections, investigations, and education a priority. We are therefore committing \$7.44 million to these activities in '11-12. The ministry will continue to investigate employment standards complaints and educate employers and employees on labour standards. We have allocated a \$2.46 million budget for this. The ministry has budgeted \$651,000 to assist workers who wish to appeal a Workers' Compensation Board decision. The ministry will continue to provide conciliation and mediation services to collective bargaining processes where required and has budgeted \$810,000 for these activities.

Specifically, I would like to mention a few items on which we will be concentrating during '11 and '12. The committee of review will report by the end of the calendar year on recommendations for changes to *The Workers' Compensation Act* and regulations. \$350,000 has been allocated to perform this review.

The government has received and released the report of the Minimum Wage Board, which recommends indexation of the minimum wage. We will use the report to ensure that working women and men can participate in the growth and prosperity of the new Saskatchewan.

I'm also in the process of putting together an advisory group to provide advice on future public policy issues impacting Saskatchewan workplaces. This advisory committee is to

provide a forum for discussion, debate, and recommendation on workplace issues in the province. The intent of the committee is to help our government address questions related to legislation, regulation, policy, and procedures but is not intended to replace the important contributions of existing groups such as the OH & S Council.

In closing, I want to thank Saskatchewan workers for the contributions they make every day to our province's success and prosperity. It is thanks to the skills and talent and hard work and dedication that Saskatchewan workers bring to the table that our economy continues to perform well. I would also like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that getting home safe is the most important part of everyone's workday. Our government is committed to enforcing occupational health and safety standards and regulations and to building greater public awareness of the rights and responsibilities of both employers and workers. I look forward to our discussions. We would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister Morgan. Mr. Iwanchuk.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the minister and all his staff for taking the time to deal with what are very important issues for our province, perhaps some of the most important when we talk about safety at work and how people are injured or suffer death at work, and then how they are dealt with by the system. I think those definitely have to be, if not the most important, then certainly very much on top of our minds. So thank you for making the time for this this evening.

And I would like to begin in terms of the ministers received letters from the Premier regarding what they might be looking at. And in looking at the letter from the Premier to the minister, I note on page 3, if I could just read this in:

An important initiative for our government will be the implementation of the workforce adjustment strategy to reduce the public service by 15 percent over four years. My expectation is that ministers will actively support and monitor this transformation of the public service. Targets will be established through the Office of the Deputy Minister to the Premier to guide your ministry's efforts in the following priority areas.

And then a number of areas are laid out. My question then, my first question would be then, what targets have been set by the deputy minister to the Premier?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We've looked at the various components of the ministry and will continue to manage employee numbers where they are. In this particular ministry, it will be difficult to meet the target that's set forward by the Premier. We want to maintain the number of investigations and prosecutions that are done. So we will look for efficiencies, we will apply the lean process and, wherever we can, reduce the footprint of government and try and make savings where possible. But at the present time, our reduction in workforce, although we've reduced by a total of three this year and we'll look and see how that manages next year, the priority right now is to maintain the level of inspections and prosecutions and to continue the reduction in workplace injuries. It seems that one

of the most effective ways in reducing workplace injuries and increasing safety is by frequent inspections and prosecutions. And hopefully with the passage of time, the mindset seems to be growing and it seems to become gradually reinforced, but there's obviously continuing work that needs to be done.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay. So you have three employees of . . . I'll get back to that. What still remains to be done, and when do you anticipate reaching your target?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We're going to take it on a year-by-year basis and then we'll . . . You know, we have a target we'd like to meet, but our goal is, our priority is to maintain safety within the workplace.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — How far are you away from your target?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well we've made the reduction of three for this fiscal year.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — What is left to be done to meet the 15 per cent?

[19:15]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well we'll look at it and see as we go along. You know, it's a target that's been set. We like to meet it where we can, and then it will depend on what happens within the workplace by way of reduction in injuries and by, you know, the necessity or possibly reducing the necessity of having as many inspections. But right now it's clear that we need to have the inspections, and we need to have the aggressive enforcement.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Where are the three employees from, and what were their positions?

Mr. Carr: — The positions that we're talking about, we've identified a requirement to reduce three full-time equivalents. We've done that at present by reducing one position within the Labour Relations Board. We've identified a situation where we will look for two additional reductions over the coming year across the ministry. Our focus, quite frankly, is on trying to ensure that we manage service delivery and don't see a curtailment or reduction in service as a result of those two reductions in FTEs.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay. Thank you very much. In Workers' Compensation, pursuant to section 162, the last committee of review took place in 2006. There were some 69 recommendations that were agreed on, if I recall, by the committee or the . . . reached consensus. And of course there was obviously equal representatives of employers and unionized workers. My question being that there are only 29 dealt with. What is the status of the rest of the recommendations?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm going to have Mr. Federko come forward and give you the specifics on that.

Mr. Federko: — There were a total of 69 recommendations made by that 2006 committee of review, 40 of which required either legislative or regulatory change in order to enact those

changes. None of those recommendations have been acted upon. The 29 that have been acted upon did not require any legislative or regulatory amendment and have been dealt with through policy or procedure.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Is there any thought by the department or ministry of moving on these? Because my question was, well first the status, and are you thinking of doing anything with the recommendations?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes. When the new committee of review came on board, we asked them to frame their review in the context of the work that was not completed from the previous one and determine which of those things were still required to do by way of legislation or whether some of the other changes had made some of those things redundant. But the direction that we gave the committee of review was to use that as the starting point.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay, thank you. Now also there was one particular one which I'm fairly interested in and what you might have to say on it. It's section 38.1, and that is the maximum wage rate for certain workers. And these levels have not been raised. We had in there in 2003, it was 48,000; the January of 2004 was 51,900; January 2005 was 53,000; and January '05 was 55,000. Again these have not been increased at all, and the recommendations were in there, recommended by the 2006 review. If I could just have your comments as to why something as straightforward as that, why there was no action on that.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We've asked the current committee to try and give us a recommendation on that. We've seen some significant growth in the economy and we, you know, we would want to look at what would be appropriate for, for implementing a recommendation to change those payments. So we've asked them to include that as sort of front and centre on this committee of review.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — How many workers are receiving this compensation?

Mr. Federko: — How many are . . .

Mr. Iwanchuk: — How many, how many workers are receiving the 55,000 or are on part of some compensation here?

Mr. Federko: — I can't give you an . . . I can give you an exact number, just I don't have with me tonight. But it's in the neighbourhood of around a couple thousand who would be trapped at that \$55,000 maximum. But I can get you the exact number.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — There's two numbers. Really everyone that falls under 38.1 and then yes, the further question as to how many people are actually, as you say, trapped in under the 55 — 55,000.

Mr. Federko: — So the maximum as established by the legislation is \$55,000, and there would be approximately 2,000, but I'll get you the exact number in just a few days.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Now and I would take it that that has been growing every year since 2005?

Mr. Federko: — Yes.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Any idea what it was in 2005?

Mr. Federko: — I can't tell you.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Would you know what the total cost of this particular section would be?

Mr. Federko: — To increase it, you mean?

Mr. Iwanchuk: — The overall compensation that's being paid out. I guess there's 2,000 that are trapped, so we can obviously use some multiplication there, but there are obviously a number of other people who are not at the ceiling, so the costs of the entire program, I guess maybe.

Mr. Federko: — The total compensation costs paid in 2010 — now this will include health care paid on behalf of injured workers, vocational rehabilitation, short-term and long-term wage loss — so the total amount paid for all of those categories was \$228 million.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay, thank you. Just say a question. A worker who has claimed for compensation and has exhausted the rights to a reconsideration or a review of the decision of Workers' Compensation Board may in writing request the board to provide for a medical review panel to examine the medical information. Now again there were recommendations made around the medical review process and more specifically amendments to section 60 of the Act to define the phrase "bona fide medical question" for the guidance of obviously physicians, chiropractors, and all those comments. Now again, this was another very important consideration that has sat there. There are many concerns. It seems to be an issue that comes up quite regularly. And I was just also wondering some of your thoughts on this, on the bona fide medical question because there seems to be a great deal of uncertainty and definitely unhappiness around that and this whole issue of the medical review.

Mr. Federko: — So there were two parts to that recommendation that the committee of review made. One was specifically to have the legislation changed, as you have indicated, to expand upon the issue of what bona fide medical means. My understanding is the minister's pointed out is that recommendation is included in the recommendations outstanding from the previous committee of review for consideration by the current committee of review. The other issues with respect to better communication to the worker in terms of the process by which they can proceed through the medical review panel has been undertaken simply procedurally by our board services area. So those matters administratively have been dealt with. But of course the issue of the legislation remains before this committee of review.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — I guess if I could just pursue this a bit more. Obviously the frustration is that this has been there much like similarly as you call it, trapped under the ceiling of the \$55,000. Many people are looking at that much like they would look at minimum wage or anything else where the economy is moving along. And so we have you answering tonight and saying, well we will use the new committee to look at these things again. I

mean the last committee review was in 2006. Some very substantial areas which could have had some work done on them has been left, I would take it, sitting on the shelf. So I would ask again if, are you simply saying that no work at all was done on this issue?

Mr. Federko: — On the legislative side I can't speak directly to, but I can tell you the issues that could be resolved in terms of more clear communications from our board services area has been undertaken administratively.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay. Have there been any complaints by injured workers to the minister's office regarding lack of qualified medical practitioners who are willing to participate or put their names forward to participate in the medical review panel?

Mr. Federko: — Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — So this issue has not surfaced at all in the ministry?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can check with the ministry staff and find out whether there's been issues that have come up, but it hasn't been brought to my attention at all.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Now Roslyn . . . Is it Kunin? Is that the proper, right . . . is the Chair of the new review. Now what remuneration in terms of wages, expenses, and other benefits will she receive?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — My officials will have a hurried look at that right now and give you an answer in a minute or two. She's former Chair of the British Columbia WCB, so I'm not sure what the arrangement was made for compensation for her. If you have another one you want to ask in the meantime, the only thing it'll do is disrupt them from looking.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — The total cost and the extent, what you expect, how long her tenure will be or how long she'll be in that position.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'll just ask them to have a look and find out what her compensation is and what we expect the cost for the whole process to be. The budget for it is 350,000, but we'll find out in a minute or two what the breakdown is. We appear not to have the information and the compensation with it, but we'll provide it.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Now you've indicated some terms of her assignment by speaking as to the previous review. But could you sort of outline what the terms of reference and mandate of the committee will be.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It's specified in the Act. I met with Ms. Kunin at the time of her appointment, and I knew there was some outstanding issues from the '06 review that were not dealt with by the current government or the previous government. So I said, use that as the starting point and then had provided some additional information as to, you know, things that people had heard about in the, through the constituency offices and I suspect probably the same things you are about length of time, etc., for a process to be dealt with . . . [inaudible] . . . You

know, we'd welcome her comments on all aspects of the operation.

Yes, the deputy minister just advised me that her reference letter is exactly as outlined in section 162 of the Act.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Is there an end date to the process? Do you . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — She indicates that, anticipates completion early in '12.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Early in '12. That would be the hearing portion, or is she going to continue hearings until . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That would include times for the hearing and time for her to complete the report. The OC [order in council] was for a one-year period, and I'm advised will expire in January.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay. So at this point in time we don't have a date by which time if people are asked to get submissions in or when meetings will end as to . . .

[19:30]

Mr. Carr: — There in fact have been a number of advertisements running that have a specified time for submission. I believe it is the end of May. There's also a series of public meetings that are being held by the committee of review across the province. Those started a few weeks ago. They happen to be in Regina this week.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay. Now my understanding is that there were a number of organizations that were consulted by the Chair without the full committee present. Is that in fact correct?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm not aware of that.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — So if that . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I know I met with her myself without the rest of the committee being there, but that may have been part of the start-up process. And what she's done for eliciting opinion or met with people informally, that'd be a question you'd have to put to her.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Did you give her any particular instructions from the ministry when you met with her?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No, none at all. I'm assuming that she is competent and capable, and she neither asked for nor did I volunteer any directions as to procedure.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — It was just that we were contacted on a number of meetings that were held without all the stakeholders or without the full committee present and that there were meetings with individual stakeholders. And that if that was any thoughts, any of your thoughts whether that was going to continue into the future or whether the full committee would always be there when these meetings were held.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — This is the first I've heard of it is right

now.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — And again just to maybe ask this question in a different way so we get it. So if I put the question to you this way: under whose authority and under what legislative provisions did the Chair engage in meetings with stakeholders in the absence of the full committee?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well they determine their process and whether she regards . . . You know, the Act specifies the process, and I've not had anybody make any complaints or raise any issues to me about what's been dealt with. If somebody wants to raise a concern, they should probably write a letter to her.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Yes, I was going to mention that whether the letter should go to you or to her in terms of the process because it has sort of set off some alarm bells for people who realize that the committee's now running but . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — If there's an issue, I'd encourage you to write to her directly and please feel free to cc [carbon copy] a copy of it to me.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Now was there any instruction to her regarding the recommendations, that they would come forward and that nothing would happen until after the provincial election? Was there any discussions regarding that because I know you've just mentioned that she's here until 2012.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No. I asked what she thought for her . . . what her time frame was and then indicated that that was acceptable to have it complete early in '12.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — So that the provincial election, having her report come out before or after, was simply not an issue?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — You know, to be candid I don't think I would want it to come out during a writ period or something where it would become something to be focused on during that period of time. If it came out before, I would expect or hope that it would come out far enough ahead that it could get a meaningful discussion or review without it becoming a political issue. The goal on it would be to have as much productive benefit from the report that's coming out, so either after or before but not, you know . . . In the few days immediately proceeding I think could have the effect of politicizing it that I don't think either side of the House would benefit from.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — So neither you or anybody else in the ministry indicated to her that the report should not come out till after the provincial election?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No. She indicated that that was the timeline she wanted, was that she intended to do some preliminary work, have hearings during the fall and whatever timeline it took to right after that. She indicated as well there was a possibility that she may have to look for a short extension at whatever other matters that she had going on. It may . . . [inaudible] . . . longer, and I indicated that if that was the case, we would consider that at the time.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Some people have also suggested that the

committee of review could've perhaps started earlier. I don't know if you have any comments to that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No, I don't. It came up by the statute, and it would've taken some time for the ministry officials to have found somebody to undertake the process. So I don't think it could've been significantly sped up without possibly compromising the process.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Now I would think that probably we all agree that the Worker's Advocate provides an important role and plays a pivotal role in injured workers, and again legislated pursuant to a section in *The Workers' Compensation Act*. How many advocates presently work at the office?

Ms. Klotz: — Hi. Denise Klotz, director of the Worker's Advocate. Presently we have five advocates, a senior advocate, and one early resolution advocate.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Could you just briefly explain what the roles are of each?

Ms. Klotz: — Sure. The early resolution advocate was formerly known as our intake officer, and they deal specifically with . . . We try to resolve issues early on in the process, going back to the case managers when we can. And to do first level appeals, the quicker turnaround appeals provide advice to individuals who may want to appeal on their own or perhaps to other representatives who want assistance to help a worker. The advocates do the appeals to the board level, the more complex files that require a lot of development and research. And our senior advocate does some of the complicated cases, has a small caseload, as well as mentoring and coaching the advocates to provide consistent and standardized representation.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — So how many cases would be before the advocates at present?

Ms. Klotz: — At present we have 240 files are assigned to the various advocates. And we have 39 files in our backlog. And our backlog is we're presently at four weeks to assignment.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — I'm sorry. That four weeks to . . .

Ms. Klotz: — To assignment of an advocate. They receive initial advice and guidance from the early resolution advocate, so they do receive immediate attention. But for the files that have to go to the advocates for further development, there's approximately a four-week wait.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — So the four week you would count from when somebody contacts the office.

Ms. Klotz: — Yes.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — The number of files, because you've outlined a sort of hierarchy of advocate, how long of a process might it be to . . . And I know that it's a difficult question because of course obviously each file has got its own complexity. But how are we doing on this backlog of the number? You know, four weeks does sound like a bit of time to wait but . . .

Ms. Klotz: — Yes, the four weeks . . . I mean ultimately we'd like to get it under three weeks. But four weeks, within that four weeks we've provided them some general guidance and to reassure them that we're going to work on their files. Once the advocates work on the file, it really depends on how much development and research is required. It depends if we need to contact physicians and get opinions, so the duration once it's with an advocate can extend. And you're right. I can't really . . . I don't even have a number for that. Once we do submit the files for appeal, then we're within the waiting periods at the WCB [Workers' Compensation Board].

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Now are there plans to increase funding to the worker's advocates?

Ms. Klotz: — Not at present.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Maybe, and I know you might have touched a bit on this, but what role does the worker's advocate play during a medical review panel?

Ms. Klotz: — We will provide guidance. We'll provide the information to the injured worker regarding the MRP [medical review panel] process. From there, if a physician is wanting assistance with the bona fide question and the particulars, we can provide that advice and guidance to the physicians as well. We have not usually . . . The medical review panel is an independent process, so we don't represent or present at that process, but we will, you know, give guidance and counselling to the injured worker while they're waiting or before they go before that panel.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Maybe just some comments because again this came out of the last review, but sort of a specific why recommendation, and that was: why was the recommendation from the last committee of review for the board to adopt the practice of referring workers to the office of the worker's advocate for advice and assistance before rejecting the certificate from a physician or a chiropractor or a company or a request from the medical review panel under section 60? Some of these things seem sort of things that perhaps that should have gone forward.

Ms. Klotz: — The board actually does refer to us. They have actually participated in doing that, and they will refer some back to us. We will also defer to the medical, the chief medical officer at WCB as well if the physicians want direct advice from the medical practitioner. Our office gains a unique perspective from reviewing the files and dealing with the clients, so we have quite a thorough knowledge of the WCB cases. So that's why my advocates are able to respond so well and assist the physicians. So we do help whenever we can, and they feel that we're a trusted source to deal with on behalf of the injured workers.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — I guess that was somewhat my question, and thank you very much for that, but it was . . . Now when a claim has been denied, what is the present waiting time for an appeal to be heard at the first and second levels there?

Ms. Klotz: — Well the appeals department, the first level of appeal is presently . . . We have submissions in that are approximately five months. And at the board level, it's

approximately nine months. And of course each process has to run its course before the next can proceed. And then possibly for our office, depending what happens after the first level, if they're dealing with our advocates, we may want to do further development, depending on what the outcome was, if there's some further information we feel needs to be gained before we go to the next level.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — It's five months plus nine or is it five months and nine is the . . .

Ms. Klotz: — [Inaudible] . . . appeals department. So the first level is five months from date of submission. And then once you appeal to the appeals department, it's nine months.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Another . . . Yes, so it's 14. Okay.

Now I don't know if you have it. Do you have any knowledge about how many claims are at the first level at present?

Ms. Klotz: — My office?

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Yes.

Ms. Klotz: — No, I don't have the number from my office that are sitting in there, no.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Do we have that for the entire . . . And I guess I'd be asking for the second level too, same question.

Mr. Federko: — So if I could offer clarification to the first question that you asked about, the length of time for decisions, not all decisions or not all appeals that are received at either the first or second level would be supported by the advocate's office. Less than 50 per cent actually would be supported by the advocate's office at the first level of appeal.

So during 2010, the average number of days to render a decision across all claim files — and there were 1,100 appeals received at the first level of appeal in 2010 — was roughly 55 days. For the first four months of 2011, that has spiked up to roughly 100 days on average, so it may be longer for some of the files that the advocate's office is dealing with. We start counting the length of time from the date that the appeal is actually recorded as an appealable issue.

Of those 1,100 files, roughly 240 would make their way to the next level of appeal. So if denied at the first level of appeal, they would then move up to the next level, which would be the final board level. The average time for all decisions of the board in 2010 was roughly 250 days. For the first four months of 2011, that too has spiked up to about 280 days.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Just something that you've said there. The number of appeals after the first level going to the second level, does that mean there's a good number of those being resolved?

[19:45]

Mr. Federko: — These won't necessarily be exactly the same claims that we're talking about. But just for sake of illustration, if there are 1,100 decisions taken at the first level of appeal, only 250 of those are subsequently appealed to the second level.

The remainder have been resolved at that first level of appeal or decision made not to pursue to the second level of appeal.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — I would . . . because my follow-up question was going to be that it appears in just quickly looking at those that at least 50 per cent are resolved. But I think it sounds like it's much higher . . . [inaudible] . . . resolved. And so I'm just wondering, why are we going to the first level of appeal if we're then immediately resolving such a high amount of cases?

Mr. Federko: — Well the first level of appeal is made up of a group of eight appeal officers who would hear the first and largest sum of appealable issues. The final level of appeal is made up of three board members and their support staff. So because of the high resolution rate at the first level of appeal, it's much more expedient from a customer service perspective to have the majority of appeals dealt with at the first level. So instead of all 1,100 being pushed up to a final level of appeal . . . And I think, I mean I'm not a lawyer and I don't know much about judicious practice, but I believe the process by which you offer an individual multiple levels of reconsideration is considered due process.

So the individual firstly has the opportunity to have a discussion with the case manager, the individual responsible for the file, to see if that matter can in fact be resolved. If not, they have the opportunity to go to the first level of appeal, which is resolving, you know, over 75 per cent of those issues, leaving only 25 per cent then to go to the final level of appeal where far more work and consideration, I guess, is done.

The first level of appeal is bound by policy. The board, being the creator of the policy, is not bound by its own policy and can consider the broader merits and justice of the individual cases. If all 1,100 were given that consideration, the waiting times would be considerably longer than they currently are.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — My question wasn't about the second step. My question was, why are 1,100 proceeding to the first step if 75 per cent are being resolved at that step? I mean why are these claims not being allowed? It does seem, I mean there is due process, and no doubt people . . . But if there is such a high level, we're talking almost, I was thinking 50 per cent, but I think it's higher — just quick math — why are we getting to that? Why is there not simply these claims being accepted? Because I'm not certain.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Some of them could be resolved the other way. Some of them could be resolved by the claimant withdrawing the appeal. As they prepare for it or go into the process, they may realize the lack of merit or the issues that they have with it, and then they're the ones that don't. It's not appropriate to assume that in all cases the thing was resolved in favour of the worker. A lot of times the worker just realizes the issues that they had with their own.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — So perhaps I could just go back to that and say that I think we should check. But if 50 per cent is the correct and 25 per cent are removing themselves and 25 per cent are going forward, but if we have that high rate of — which I imagine to the workers is positive — but if we have that many going to the first step of appeal, I would be wondering why they're going there.

Mr. Federko: — So to clarify and support what the minister is saying, only about a third of the appeal issues that go to the first level of appeal are resolved in favour of the appellant. So if it's a claim denial, then a reversal of the initial decision, only about a third of those initial case management or employer decisions are actually overturned by the first level of appeal. So it's not a 25 per cent denial rate and 75 per cent acceptance rate. It's that 75 per cent or more of the appellants at the first level of appeal after receiving their decision, positive or negative, decide not to pursue the second level of appeal. Only about 240 of those 1,100 who may have had their decision denied would then proceed to the second level. Included in that 75 per cent will be a good number of appellants whose decision was not, initial decision was not overturned, who simply decided to abandon the issue.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — I think even at those numbers, the perception, and a good many people mention this, that they are somewhat puzzled by that and of course make claims that in fact that there is sort of, the Workers' Compensation Board is simply having everybody go to the first level of appeal. And I guess that's where my question is coming from. That is the perception.

Mr. Federko: — If I might put this into perspective, we receive annually 38,000 claims a year. Approximately 6 per cent of those, between 6 and 7 per cent, are denied on the basis of non-work-relatedness. So that translates into about 10,000 claims. Of those, if you will, 10,000 negative decisions, only 1,000 of them, about one-tenth of them, decide to challenge that initial decision by going to the first level of appeal. And one-third of those, so roughly 300 of them, have their decisions overturned. So we consider those 300 decisions overturned against the total population of 40,000 claims, it's a very, very small percentage of the total claims volume that would be resolved at the first level of appeal or take their opportunity to move to the second level of appeal. So it's a very small percentage.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Does the minister have any plans to combine occupational health and safety branch with the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We don't have a recommendation to do that and there wasn't one from COR [committee of review], so it's not under discussion or consideration at this time.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Has the WCB targeted industries with high workplace injuries with prevention initiatives? And if you have, what is happening with those initiatives and are there any reports or evaluations of the effectiveness of what is happening?

Mr. Federko: — So we don't target specifically industries. Although through our WorkSafe partnership, just by way of example, a few years ago issues were identified within the construction industry, and the occupational health and safety branch brought forward the resources necessary in order to increase the inspections within that industry.

In turn, through our WorkSafe partnership, we identify what we call the priority 50 employers, and those are the 50 employers who could use our help the most from an injury prevention and safety perspective. We would jointly visit those employers and

help them establish a good health and safety system. We do monitor the results from an injury rate perspective of those priority 50 employers. And again, I can't give you the exact number, but we've seen significant reductions in the injury rates of those priority 50 employers subsequent to being targeted and visited and assisted in the development of health and safety systems.

Mr. Carr: — Perhaps I can add to that simply by providing some numbers based on our WorkSafe Saskatchewan numbers, that is the partnership between WCB and our ministry. In terms of looking at that targeted group, the priority 50 employers, we use the time-loss injury claim count as an indication of performance. We looked at the priority 50 employers in 2009, and they had received a total time-loss claim count of 3,528 injury claims for '09. In 2010 for that calendar year, they experienced 3,192 time-loss claims. So our view is that we did have a significant impact in those workplaces.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — In terms of return to work assessments, what thinking has been done in terms of having the return to work mimic the actual workplace as opposed to just simply receiving a report from a rehab clinic or a sports rehab clinic?

Mr. Federko: — The role that the clinics or multiple disciplinary teams that we have assist us in assessing workers is to determine their functional capability as opposed to a specific job. So the model that we use in terms of determining readiness for work is a functional rehabilitation as opposed to a vocational rehabilitation model.

So by far the most successful Return to Work programs are with the pre-injury employer in the same job. In order to facilitate that return to work, introducing the worker back into the workplace in modified or light duties that are consistent with the functional capabilities of that worker prove to be very, very successful. So a knowledge of the workplace, a knowledge of the job, a knowledge of existing and available modified or light duties all become part of the information that's provided to the multi-disciplinary assessment team, to the primary caregiver, to the worker and to the employer, to establish the most suitable employment that would fit within the functional and medical restrictions provided by the caregivers.

Where necessary, vocational rehabilitation will be provided. So if a worker cannot return to pre-injury employment and their skills need to be upgraded, of course the Workers' Compensation Board would support through those vocational rehabilitation programs.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — It is just that on any number of occasions people that . . . One of the criticisms is is that it's just not a realistic, if I may, approach because it doesn't really mimic the actual workplace situation. And I guess, as much as you might say that a good job is being done, people are somewhat critical of the Return to Work. But I was just wondering the role that the case managers might play in this, and are you looking at involving them more, or where is this at?

Mr. Federko: — For the very large employers that have dedicated staff to Return to Work who have the opportunity for multiple modified or light duties are case managers. And we have account managers who are assigned to these very large

employers, will visit that job site so that they have a better understanding of the opportunities that will exist within that program. I do want to say that generally speaking the Return to Work has proven to be very, very successful. We see 95-per-cent-plus return to work rate, and a recurrence rate of less than 2 per cent. So the Return to Works are successful and they're durable in that we don't see them coming back onto the system because they weren't ready to begin their modified light or permanent functions following recovery from the injury.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Because that was my follow-up question in terms of the repeats, and that might not be within a month but might be further down the road. Are there any statistics other than ones that you mentioned where there are repeat WCB claims?

Mr. Federko: — I've shared those with you already. Our most seriously injured workers that have to go into what we call tertiary treatment or assessment centres, their recurrence rate is actually less than 1 per cent once the Return to Work has been put in place.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Do you have any figures on the number of employers who did not report injuries within five days?

Mr. Federko: — I don't off the top of my head. We do have an initiative under way where we do monitor and target those employers who are not reporting within the legislative requirements. And if you will provide them an opportunity to modify their processes to bring them in line with the legislation . . . And barring that or failing that, we do send them for prosecution. I've had a number of employers who have been fined in the courts for not complying with our legislation.

[20:00]

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Do you know the numbers of employers that have not complied, and do you have the numbers that have been actually fined?

Mr. Federko: — It would not be a significant number. I don't know those off the top of my head, but I could provide you with that detail.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — The other question in terms of WCB taking recommendations from physiotherapists over a practitioner, and I was just wondering if you have any thoughts on that.

Mr. Federko: — Oftentimes where the confusion comes is the differing recommendations that come from the physio caregiver as opposed to the medical caregiver. What the physio caregiver is providing us is with the functional abilities of the individuals, not necessarily the medical recovery times. So if I could use perhaps an oversimplified example: if someone has broken their arm and is in a cast for six weeks, the medical provider will tell us that arm will not heal for a six-week period. What the physio helps us assess however, are the capabilities of that individual even with that existing impairment because certainly there ought to be some productive work that could be done during that six-week period while the arm is healing.

So there isn't, in our minds, necessarily a conflict between information that we're receiving from the physio care provider

as opposed to the primary caregiver. And of course the primary caregiver always has veto power, being the person who is directing the care of that injured worker. So they kind of do have final say, but when they understand that the functional abilities that are being identified by the physiotherapist are in fact within the medical capabilities of the individual, we often do not see a conflict.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay. So the perception that the, in fact, the recommendations of physio overriding the general practitioner, you would see as incorrect?

Mr. Federko: — Yes. I mean there would be instances where there would be disagreements where our medical department needs to then involve itself, and either our physio consultant or our medical officers mediate, if you will, the differences of opinion.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — In terms of again — and thank you very much for that — where the claimants are having difficulties with their workers and in terms of being reassigned, oftentimes that's the sort of issue that comes forward as people are making their way through the appeals process. Do you have any policy around that? Or how do you actually handle those types of situations?

Mr. Federko: — We don't have a written policy, but procedurally we would not entertain a change in the assigned case manager unless the relationship has totally broken down. We would leave that to the team leaders to decide when an injured worker and their case manager have reached that particular point in time and then make an appropriate reassignment where necessary, but I would say that happens very, very infrequently.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — A question actually that I was asked was talking about wait-lists for medical examinations or treatments and the use of private clinics. Have you looked at that, what the additional costs might be to you for using private clinics?

Mr. Federko: — The Workers' Compensation Board has actually made use of private clinics for a number of years, having an exemption under the *Canada Health Act*. So we have, you know, availed ourselves not only of private clinics, but expedited services with the health regions in Saskatchewan as well. We do have agreements with private surgical clinics both in Regina and Saskatoon, who do basically day surgery, orthopedic procedures on our injured workers. The overall costs of those procedures relative to the costs of the claim is very, very positive. In other words, lessening the length of time that someone is waiting for a procedure increases the probability that they will return to work without loss of function, and so the costs associated with those type of arrangements have proven to be very effective for us.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Now the early intervention program, could you sort of briefly outline what that is?

Mr. Federko: — The early intervention program is intended to identify workers who are at greatest risk of not returning to work, and so the first criteria would be the severity of the injury. Where those injuries have been identified and psychosocial issues perhaps attached to those, then at periods of

four, eight, twelve, and sixteen weeks, injured workers will be referred into the intervention program to clinics to have assessments and treatment plans developed that are consistent with a speedy and safe return to work. So it's providing the right functional rehabilitation at the right time in order to expedite a quick and safe return to work.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Now several years ago there was an evaluation done of the program. Have there been any additional evaluations done?

Mr. Federko: — We have a stakeholder committee that oversees the intervention program, called the health care advisory committee. They have yet to request a follow-up evaluation since that one was done, but certainly when they are ready, we would entertain that opportunity.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Now one of the most common reasons I think WCB perhaps, perhaps . . . [inaudible] . . . is based on the degenerative disease claims. And then the people are coming forward saying that they usually get denied. If you get denied anywhere, it's that. And the feeling is that the workers are not given the benefit of the doubt, and I'm just wondering if you could comment on that.

Mr. Federko: — I'm assuming you're referring to section 50 of our Act which speaks to pre-existing conditions, and section 50 requires that we neither deny nor terminate a claim on the basis of pre-existing condition. So the fact that there is a pre-existing condition would not be a cause for us alone to deny an injury claim, providing that that condition has been worsened or accelerated by a work incident.

But particularly when you're dealing with back injuries, for example, you know the aging process itself has the effect of degenerating the back, and often the diagnosis with respect to cause and effect becomes very difficult when there isn't a specific workplace incident to which you can attribute the worsening of that condition. Those type of claims, I would suggest, are probably the ones that go through the reconsideration processes most frequently because they are not as cut and dried. Our role at the primary adjudication level is to collect whatever evidence we can in support or otherwise of that claim to make a decision.

And according to our legislation, where the evidence to support or refute the particular claim is balanced, the benefit of the doubt does fall to the injured worker. But I can't give you any specific numbers about, you know, how many that would be relative to the overall claim population.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Is there any further work being done there to try and deal with those specific issues? Any discussions ongoing as to how they're treated, you know, because of the number of, because of it being . . . I think, and we agree, that if anywhere there's a contentious issue, that's definitely one of the areas. What has been the thinking over the years on that?

Mr. Federko: — Our process again has been to rely on the diagnoses provided from the various specialists and medical processes that are available to us so that we can make a balanced decision on the acceptability or deniability of a particular claim, and then rely on the reconsideration processes

to ensure that it is fair.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — At the same time that you're discussing employer premiums and being reduced, do you discuss whether there could be increases to prevention and increase in staff?

Mr. Federko: — Absolutely. Our premiums are based on the total cost of the system, including the cost to administer the program, which would include all expenditures for injury, prevention, and health and safety. So those numbers are factored into the overall budget through, again, the partnership that we have with the ministry. A joint plan for WorkSafe Saskatchewan is developed. The budgetary implications of that then flow into our respective organizations. And the resources necessary out of the Workers' Compensation budget to fund occupational health and safety or work that we would undertake directly are included in the premiums that we would be charging our employers.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Just in the 2010 report on claim durations that has come out and the 2009 report on claim durations, and what struck me when I was looking at the two is that if you look at 2009, if we were to look at . . . This was on page 20 of the 2009 report. If we would look at operation of oil wells, and we would look at the injury rates and claim durations, we would see under . . . Between the years 2005 to 2009, in 2005 there was, the number is 14.2 and in 2009 the number is 35.7. Now when we look at this year's report and we look under operation of oil wells, we see in 2006 there's a number of 51.19 and in 2010 a number of 31.74.

Now none of the numbers are the same as the numbers in 2009. Between 2005 and 2006 we would again, looking at this, look like it's an incredible increase. Yet in when we look at the numbers in 2010, we see the numbers in fact going the opposite direction and there is an incredible decrease. Am I misreading something here? Maybe if you could help me out with these figures.

Mr. Federko: — I'm sorry. Were you referring to the . . .

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Well I'm referring to the 2010 report.

Mr. Federko: — Yes.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — And I'm referring . . . And it's claim durations, claim durations in 2009 and claim durations in 2010. I'm looking at operation of oil wells. And in the 2009 report I've got a number for 2005, whatever that number might mean, at 14.2. I have in 2009 the number of 35.7. Looks like average number of days has gone up from 14.2 to 35.7. I look at the 2010 report under operation of oil wells, claim durations. I have a number of 51.19 in 2006 and a number of 31.74 in 2010. Even the number in 2009 is going the opposite way — dropping. I guess I'm just sort of asking for an explanation of what is occurring here.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We'll have a look at the statistics and find out whether there's some missing numbers or whether there was a change in whatever there . . . why there would be a discrepancy on the previous years. We'll have a look at it and get back to you. I don't think we've got an answer right now as to what it would be.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — But I think it's significant if you are talking about something as basic as the length or duration of claims. That means people are off for time. You have put out press releases, you have put forward that this is your second lowest, or the historic . . . We've hit a high in Saskatchewan. Surely something so basic as this, between one year and the next where we have such dramatic changes in numbers, is something that you would have looked at, I would think.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — You know, it may be that the numbers that were given probably would have been across . . . [inaudible] . . . across all the claims. So it could be things are categorized differently. I'll have the officials look at it and we'll give you an answer.

Mr. Carr: — Just for clarification, we're looking then at the operation of oil wells and so that's rate code D50, pardon me, D32?

[20:15]

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Well we don't have to stop at oil wells. We can look at residential construction in 2009 getting worse. We can look at commercial, industrial construction in 2009 getting worse. We can look at wholesale chain stores getting worse. We can look at lumberyard building stores getting worse. All the three operation of oil wells: oil well servicing, service rigs, water well, and drilling — dramatic increases in there. Open pit mining, underground soft rock mining, underground hard rock mining, elementary and secondary school education, health authorities, hospital, care homes, bakeries, food prep and packaging, meat foundries and mills, agricultural equipment, iron and steel fabrication, road construction and earthwork. They've even got legal offices and financing getting worse. Restaurants, catering, dry cleaning, caretaking, park authorities, commercial air transportation, all of those in 2009 show an increase.

You have turned this around in one year. But also, adding in that the turnaround is not only in the end year, the turnaround is in all the other years. I think we could have an answer on that. I mean, this is dramatics. You know, we should be able to explain this. Either it's a new accounting system, but the underlying factor is, is the perception is in 2009 this is going one way; in 2010 we have dramatic increases. I mean there's nothing even close to that. So either we're talking about some other outcomes that is based on that, we could . . . And again, if that's what the minister is talking about.

But I have to say that from the public perspective and my perspective that when you see this and then you have the ministry talking about figures and talking about how good they're doing, when you have . . . And I mention I guess the operation of oil wells because that's dramatic. And either there are problems there . . . Because this is at the base of what you are trying to do in trying to solve these issues. Because we have asked questions about initiatives in areas that are difficult, and this is serious stuff. People are getting injured. People are getting killed, and at these places. And so when we have to ask questions, we base that on what you're providing us. And to simply say, well we'll get back to you on that, you know this is . . . I mean, I guess have to accept that.

But I have to tell you that if this was one place that this had happened and maybe there was something . . . But this is a good portion of where our workforce is. We are expanding in the oil sector. We are expanding in the soft rock mining and underground hard rock. These are important for people to know. To then dismiss it, that we would have to check on this, is perhaps stretching it a bit to say that we're not aware of this.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It's important for us to give you an accurate answer, so I want to give the officials the chance to look at it. We have pointed out that the claims rate has dropped, but we haven't included in any of the press releases the duration of the claims. So we want to give you an accurate answer as to whether there's a statistical variation or something different in the method of computation.

But regardless of whether the claims rate has gone down, the duration has gone up or down, our figures are unacceptably high in our province. We're not taking credit for having good numbers or saying that they're satisfactory. I think for the last decade, the numbers in our province have been unacceptably high, and I think both the previous administration and the current administration have made efforts to reduce them. But they continue to be too high, and I think it's an indication that more work must continue to be done.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — But you see, this is the problem because we are being told that we are heading in the right direction. We've got the Mission: Zero out, and of course we all . . . No one wants to, in an area like this, to inflame the issue or to try and not take this seriously. But you have to wonder, when you downplay the deaths — because there are 45 — and saying things like, well this was, you know, directly . . . some of these are sort of . . . Here's the actual deaths in the workplace. Some of these are people who are suffering from asbestosis and things like that or cancer-causing agents. And then sort of say at the same time, take credit that we are somehow reducing this . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — But I don't think anybody is taking credit for anything in this area at all. And whether somebody dies from a motor vehicle accident, mesothelioma, a death is a death, and a death is unacceptable. I think the bottom line is that as long as people are being injured and as long as people are dying, we have work left to do.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — But in that press release she talked about, well, nobody under 25 has died. And I think in some way, in some sense when people are reading that, and myself included in that, I think you do it an injustice. I actually think that when you try and use figures in the way that those figures were used, I think it does a disservice — and I just want to get that on the record — a disservice in this area because I think we all have to work at this together. We recognize the difficulties because this is not, as you mentioned, this was not simply a new problem that you inherited. This is a problem that is there.

The issue for us, the issue for us is that, you know, we're in the midst of the Stanley Cup playoffs. And everybody wants to win the Stanley Cup when they start out at the beginning of the year, but by the time we get to the end, people do not have good records, and continual bad records results in some changes. Now we keep hearing that there will be changes and each day . . . because this is an area we must have passion about. We

have to have passion in this area, and you have to live and breath this in order for this to work. I have to say, it is disturbing for me when we can't answer what the new figures are in these areas where there is this . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think Mr. Federko has looked at the numbers and may have at least a partial answer for you now.

Mr. Federko: — I believe there has been a change in the definition of what we're reporting in terms of average days. If you look at the 2009 report, the little cross at the bottom says that this is average days on compensation based on current year time loss claims registered. Whereas if you look at the 2010 report, it says, average durations and days equals total days lost divided by claims with time loss. So it's a matter of the difference between whether you're measuring duration on only current year claims or whether you're measuring total days paid on all claims in the year, on all claims paid in the year regardless of when the injury occurred.

If I can refer you to page 18 of the annual report, the very next facing page, you will see a balanced scorecard indicator that is total time loss claim durations. It's the last chart over on the right-hand side, and you'll see the durations as 34.67 days. One of the issues that we had in the 2009 annual report is . . .

Mr. Iwanchuk: — I'm sorry. Which . . .

Mr. Federko: — Page 18. There's a chart on the extreme right-hand side that says, time loss claim duration.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — This says 32. You said 34.

Mr. Federko: — 34.67 days.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Oh up and . . . Okay, yes. I see where you're . . .

Mr. Federko: — The target is 32.35 . . .

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Right, right. Sorry, yes.

Mr. Federko: — But the blue bar there is 34.67 days. So that's the average number of days paid on all claims in 2010 regardless of when the injury occurred. In 2009 I believe we were reporting durations only on claims that occurred in 2009, and that didn't jive with our overall balanced scorecard measure. So I believe there's been, and I'll confirm this with our statisticians for you, but I believe that there's been a change in the definition so that we're measuring the total durations of claims regardless of the year of injury so that it ties into our balanced scorecard. That definition in that scorecard, just for your reassurance, has not changed. It has always been total days paid in a 12-month rolling period on all claims paid in that 12-month rolling period.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Is that listed somewhere here at the bottom, what you just said, or take some time and I can write it . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well there's an asterisk at the bottom of each of the two annual reports, the one that indicates that it's on the claims made within that year and the other one indicating that it's on claims on all years. So if you include the claims

across all of the years that are still pending, it's obviously going to be somewhat higher. So that's the change in the methodology. And to be fair, I think the higher number is the better one to use because those are claims that are still outstanding. So I'm not, you know, I don't have a reason for the change in the methodology, but I'd rather see it show all of the outstanding claims than merely the ones that were made in that year.

Mr. Federko: — So the definition of what I just said is just below that chart. So you see there's a title there that says claims. It says, indicates the average number of days paid for time loss claims represented by all time loss claims paid within that 12-month period regardless of when the injury occurred. So that's what that scorecard indicator represents, and I believe the facing page is consistent now with that definition.

So that duration number is the number that we've reported upon annually, that balanced scorecard number, that average duration number, and reflects what we would have said at our technical briefings — a reduction in overall total days paid. We are under 500,000 days paid now, which is the lowest number that we've achieved in the last 15 years. So that combined with the reduction in the number of claims, a constant duration with the reduction in the number of claims, results in us over the entire claims population in paying fewer total compensation days.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Then maybe . . .

Mr. Federko: — But I will confirm that change in definition.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — But in 2009 then, in 2009, so that you can just help me out now because now . . . I guess that's why I asked the initial question. If you could just go over so that we could all understand . . . Well particularly I would like to understand this.

So in 2009, in terms of the asterisk that's on the bottom of 2009, the measurement is . . . If you could just go over that for me again.

Mr. Federko: — So it says average days on compensation based on current year time loss claims registered. So only the current year's injuries. The days paid on current year's injuries would be included in 2009. 2010, as I read the definition, is the average duration of total days divided by claims. So it's all claims, all days, as opposed to just claim days associated with current year injuries.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — So all claims going back to when?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Whenever anybody's still got an outstanding claim . . . injury for . . . if somebody's off work. It could have been somebody that's been off work for five or ten years.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — But it goes back to 2006. I mean, it's one thing to do it for a year, but what have you done by . . . you're just going back and . . .

Mr. Federko: — We adjusted the definition for every one of those years and restated all of those numbers, but I will confirm that for you.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — So to make this comparative.

Mr. Federko: — Using the current definition, we would have restated all of those prior years.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — So which definition would give you . . . If, for the layperson, if you were explaining to anybody in the province and say, well, you know, what is the duration of claims in 2009, which is the measure of how we're doing?

Mr. Federko: — If you're looking at the system in total, how it's operating for all claims, then the balanced scorecard definition for all days on all claims is the better evaluation of the individual . . . or of the overall compensation system. If you're looking at how are certain industries performing year over year with respect to only that year's claims, then the other definition is more useful. But for purposes of presenting our annual report, we felt that the overall measure of the effectiveness of the system was a better measure, as the minister pointed out.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — So is this something new in 2010 that has never been used prior?

Mr. Federko: — We've always used that measure. We're reporting it on an industry-by-industry basis, on a different basis than we were for the overall corporate scorecard, and the decision obviously, made in 2010, to bring those two pieces together.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — A dramatic change.

Mr. Federko: — Well as the minister said, if we're paying, if we're including a claim that has 360 days of duration into the average, it's obviously going to bring that average up.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — You mentioned also something very important. If we're attempting . . . which is where I wanted to find out, because I think that's where people are concerned, if there are industries that are showing spikes. So under the 2010, we've got operation of oil wells going down but . . . So then the issue is, is there a problem in that sector? Should we be addressing it? Are we addressing it? I would look at this and say, we're headed in the right direction. And in fact what are we doing?

Mr. Carr: — I think if I can perhaps shed some light on this conversation, the duration is the number of days of benefit being paid for wage loss. When you look at the injury rate, that is a measure of the number of incidents that have resulted in a claim. So if you look at the injury rates, those are a clearer indication of what the frequency of injury is in a particular rate code. So if you look at, in the cases that you have shed light on, D32, the operation of oil wells, in '09 their injury rate for lost time injuries was point . . . just a minute here. My bifocals are getting in the way here. Here we go.

[20:30]

So the operation of oil wells in '09 was point nine seven, an injury rate which meant the percentage of workers injured with a time loss claim were point nine seven. So under one worker per 100. In '10 the injury rate was point seven six. Now when

you look at that as a number, as an indicator of the number of injuries in an industry, that is a significant indicator.

When you look at the number of workers in the industry who are injured, that's also another interesting and important indicator. And so if you look at it from that perspective, in '09, 4.22 per cent of those employed in the industry were injured or had a compensable claim, and in '10 it was 3.81 per cent. Both of those numbers are far greater than zero, far greater than we would like to see them be. And our focus continues to be on individual employers who experience a high incidence of injury in their operations. So our focus, rather than on a specific industry — the exception that Mr. Federko spoke of earlier, where we focused on construction — was a very specific response to a very specific set of issues around high injury rate and fall protection. In terms of our focus under WorkSafe Saskatchewan, the partnership is focusing on the top 50 employers, and our focus there is in trying to improve individual workplaces.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Yes, and if we do go look at the construction and commercial under the 2009 figures, they have always been high. The issue here to deal with this is we've got deaths in the workplace, and if in fact if we're looking at that the injuries are serious, even though the numbers are going down on a percentage basis . . . Now again here because perhaps we should look at actual numbers because if you have a dramatic increase in the workforce, you know I mean I think that's not a figure that we shouldn't look at as a percentage. But what instructs us better? Is it the actual numbers give us some instruction so that we would move on this? Because it seems to me one of the other ways that you can read the 2009 figures is that there are actually more serious injuries happening out there, and that is something that should instruct us as to how we would approach this. And I mean, I think it's all, any steps that we're taking are commendable. I mean I don't see this as an easy or place to simply make suggestions. But I think we need good data to instruct us of what we should be doing, and I think if we have more serious injuries but less injuries, that would be a concern as well.

Mr. Carr: — I couldn't agree more. I think that there are significant challenges when you have, from a safety perspective, addressed all of the easy, simple fixes within a workplace. Where you see a continuing incidence of injury, and you see the duration of claim going up for those injuries, that tells you that they're more serious, that the severity of those injuries need the attention of the workplace partners in that workplace to ensure that they're eliminating those incidents that are giving rise to those severe injuries.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — And of course obviously it takes a few to drive up the cost and at the end of the day, everybody if they are concerned about premiums, then you obviously should be concerned about that. But I also think more so what needs to be and what we need to look at is to then it goes back to our programs as to what programs we should institute in there. So are we . . . And again, if we are having, you know, figures just for press releases — and I would hope that that's not what's happening here — but I think that what we are here all to do is to decrease that. So we need the best figures that we can. We need all the figures, I mean, so we can look at it and analyze it from a number of perspectives. But what is worrisome is if we

can't get a handle on it, there are serious injuries and there's a particular kind of injury that we need a particular kind of program. And you know, I don't think I'm seeing anything . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We can't do anything now about somebody that contracted mesothelioma 20 years ago. We can only ensure that they get good treatment and that they're properly compensated for it. But what we can do is focus on fall type of injuries because those are preventable injuries and by having, ensuring that workers tie themselves off, that they use appropriate fall protection . . . And those are the type of things that we're targeting the education on; those are the things that we're targeting the prosecutions on; and we'll continue to make the emphasis on the areas where we can be of some benefit to the workers that are being hurt.

We can't do anything about the worker that contracted an illness a long time ago other than to continue . . . And we can actually, our figures will probably look worse in the next year or so on illnesses because if we, later this week, plan to pass the Bill dealing with the esophageal cancer, make the changes to testicular cancer, that will have the effect of increasing some of the numbers that are there, and that's the statistical thing that's doing that. Those injuries were there whether we amend the legislation or not.

And I don't think that we should ever be afraid of amending the legislation. We want the numbers to be as accurate. We don't want to back away from having things and the numbers even if they make our system look worse. What we want to do is ensure that workers are appropriately compensated and secondly, that we use statistics to try and direct our resources wherever we possibly can to reduce or minimize injuries as they're taking place, now whether that's falls or exposure to toxins in the workplace.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — We can't even in the . . . Whether there are falls, whether they are falls from ladders or falls, they're falls, and we have to talk about that. And we shouldn't not step away from and politicize — and I'm not saying that that's happening here — to politicize the situation and be afraid of that. Because what we're talking about, if we really mean it, we're talking about somebody not going home to their family, not being there, and that is a traumatic . . . There aren't words that can describe that. So we should never feel that if something is happening because the economy is growing and we are perhaps falling behind that we should not say, here's what is happening. Because only when we do that, it's to everyone's credit and that we could accept responsibility and move on that. I don't think anybody's accusing anybody that they would not be wanting to do something about this area. We all talk about that.

But the problem is is if we . . . We have to be upfront and open and deal with this. And perhaps what we should be doing is reporting numbers. We should be reporting numbers; we should be listing the types. And maybe the percentages serve a purpose, but to just simply tell us how we're doing in that way in small increments, I don't think serves a purpose here. So I mean I could go over this but I think I would . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Best advice I could give you if you want to get into the technical numbers is ensure that you attend the technical briefing. I'm not sure whether you did this year or not.

But the technical briefing provides you with the statistical background. We talk in terms of the number of claims that are there. We're the second worst in the country. It's not acceptable. But we focus on the statistical information we have as to how we target our resources.

But if you look in the report, it talks about the type of injuries that take place, whether it's back, fingers, eyes, shoulder, knees. It talks about the different age ranges that are there, the gender of the worker. I mean there's a large amount of statistical information that's there. And Ms. Bihun is here if you'd like to ask her some questions about the type of things that they do by way of enforcement, prosecution, or inspections to try and ensure that they minimize things through OH & S.

I mean it's not a matter of . . . I take strong exception with the idea that we're using numbers to somehow minimize it or take credit for something that's there. There are nothing in these numbers that anybody deserved to take credit for. The numbers are going down, and that's fine. But as long as the numbers are there at all, they are not acceptable.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Again I could probably pursue that another time. I just wanted to get on another topic here and that was the . . . My understanding is the minister is proposing some changes to *The Occupational Health and Safety Act*. And we have heard that some people are not exactly enamoured with the process, that it is in fact happening at a fairly rapid pace. And I was just wondering if you had any comments on that process.

And my understanding is that by May 20th, people are to reply . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — On the 18th of last month, a news release was made; questionnaires were sent out. The process is mandated under the Act. So we would like to be able to generate the information in a relatively quick time period so that we can act on it and provide the benefits that the changes in legislation might make.

Having said that, if there is somebody from SFL [Saskatchewan Federation of Labour] or CEP [Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada] — and we're aware of the two letters — if somebody needs a short extension, we'd certainly be prepared to have that discussion with them as to what additional time they might want to have. Now we have every intention of wanting to move ahead with the process, but if somebody needs another few days or a week or two to do it, we're quite prepared to accommodate them. I mean it's important to us to have the input from everybody that works in the workplace.

But as far as this being a criticism of the process, it's not there. I mean it's mandated. It's routine. It takes place. You know, there was a news release; there was questionnaires. I mean everybody knows it's taking place, but if for whatever reason somebody does need a small amount of extra time, we'll accommodate.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — In terms of that, is your intention of implementing these changes within the next few months, or what does this process entail?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well we're gathering information now for completion in the fall session. The fall session of course, as you're aware, doesn't begin until after the next election. So if you assume a change in government, I would look to you to give that answer. If there's no change in government, we would look at those things as soon after as possible.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay. Another issue that is sitting out there is the issue around Bills 5 and 6 and the International Labour Organization declaration or instructions to the province to meet with workers to deal with these issues. And so my question would then be, what has the Premier done to follow up on the instructions from the United Nations body, the ILO [International Labour Organization]?

Mr. Carr: — We received the recommendations of the ILO some time ago. We reviewed those recommendations. We considered them carefully, and we responded to the ILO through the Government of Canada in reply to them.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Now will you be starting consultations with groups of workers as was indicated?

Mr. Carr: — Our view respectfully is that appropriate consultations took place, that the consultations that were undertaken in regards to Bills 5 and 6 were sufficient and appropriate, and that the government acted within its mandate to pass the legislation.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay. Just back to, we were talking about asbestosis, the mesothelioma. The International Agency for Research on Cancer, the World Health Organization declared all forms of asbestosis — without exception — cancer, causing cancer. I know the minister spoke briefly before, saying the best we are doing is attempting to give these people the care, those now suffering from this. What has the department been doing in moving forward to try and prevent future committees such as this, and so they would look back and say to us, what was done in 2010 or since 2007 on this issue?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes. As you're aware, asbestos exists in a number of locations in the province where it's regarded as encapsulated. It's not regarded as a health risk, but the issue is whether people that have to deal with it either by way of removing or otherwise handling it, whether there's appropriate things that are . . . So I'll let Ms. Bihun answer that.

Ms. Bihun: — Good evening. In addition to ongoing enforcement that we would do regarding the requirements of asbestos as laid out in the regulations, you know, for example such matters as notifications when high-risk processes related to asbestos removal are going on, in recent times, last year what we did was we implemented a inspection process of some small construction companies that were doing home renovations so that we could take a look at their practices, take a look at whether we'd been notified appropriately. So an example of a targeted inspection effort related to the issue of asbestos.

In addition to promoting guidelines that have been developed by other organizations like the brochure by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, we are also working on developing guidelines for distribution to certain groups and targeting specifically those that would have responsibilities for managing

asbestos in buildings. So looking specifically at those requirements related to labelling, that kind of thing.

[20:45]

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Just following up on the labelling. Have you ever considered a registry? Probably you've heard about, you know, so that there was . . . whether that be fire fighters entering and the building's burning, or creating a registry so people would know when they are coming there whether there was asbestos there or not. And that's not asking for anything to be done necessarily, but just so that even, sort of, that the knowledge is shared with people that there is an asbestos risk on this site.

Ms. Bihun: — There are certainly some records that do exist from the work that has been done. The extent to the inclusivity of those records, I can't speak to specifically, but it's certainly a question I can ask and inform you of.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay. So there's been no discussion within the department about establishing a registry or . . .

Ms. Bihun: — There are pockets of information, but the extent of compiling all of that information into a single registry, I'm not certain what the efforts are in that regard.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think what's taking place in the workplace now is the labelling and the knowledge of how to treat it and identifying it is the key focus. I don't know whether a registry would necessarily be a good use of resources. I think the better focus is on the workers that have to come in contact with it to ensure that they're properly trained in the process for removal.

Having said that, you know, it's not something you'd ever rule out completely, but I think the better use of resources is to ensure that the people that are using it are taking the proper safeguards either by way of breathing or coming into physical contact.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Is there any discussions about early detection, I mean, in terms of the medical community in how we might be looking at this or anything we could be doing in this area?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Not that I'm aware of. I'm looking at the officials. I don't think there's any indications that's there. I suppose, you know, if you're a worker that you felt had come into contact with it, it's probably worthwhile to have the discussion with your health care provider that you had been exposed at some point in the past or potentially been exposed so that you might have earlier diagnosis and a better chance at a successful outcome with the treatment.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — And I guess that's why, whether that's labelling or registry or whatever in terms of that, I guess that was really my question. Because obviously if you don't know that there's asbestos on site, whether that's through labelling or a registry or whatever, then you can't go to your caregiver and talk about that you've been exposed. I guess that was really

where I was coming from. So I was wondering, you know, all these areas, has there been any discussion in the department as to how to enhance the situation? It doesn't strike me that these are very costly things to do. Perhaps I'm wrong though, I mean.

Ms. Bihun: — There are regulations in place which speak to the requirements for medical examinations. I can get my regulations and make specific reference to those sections. As well there are also requirements for employers to do the appropriate labelling and for workers to have that information available. So our focus is on, largely on targeting certain sectors and making sure that the knowledge and compliance with the control plans for asbestos are put into place and workers receive the education related to that.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — And not, again, not to point fingers, but it's at the same time that when we send out press releases or whatever and we say, well a good number of these people who are dying this year are from the past. But we are the past now. And so the question is, is if you are short on the labelling and you feel that it's better to enforce enforcement on a work site because somebody could die immediately, if you are not enforcing at the same level on the asbestosis, then we'll be talking about this in any number of years in the future, saying the same thing — well you know, this wasn't really our responsibility. It is always our responsibility. So I guess that's why I asked that question, to kind of get an understanding because I think it's all important. And I think we need to address these areas.

Mr. Carr: — I think you hit on something. It is important, and it's equally important that workplace partners have a knowledge and an awareness of those hazards in that workplace.

It's particularly relevant to point out in the context of having approached now 5,500 occupational health and safety committees in the province where there's an opportunity for that information exchange and for that good transfer of knowledge in terms of how things should be handled, how they should be labelled, what the rules are with respect to the regulations. And the expectation we have around compliance when any one of our officers is in a workplace is that where they see those types of issues and they're brought to their attention, that they're dealt with and that they're dealt with appropriately to ensure the protection of workers, moving forward.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Just change to maybe the minister's favourite topic, the minimum wage and indexation. And where are we at now in your deliberations or thinking on this whole issue?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The Minimum Wage Board report was completed at the end of February. We've had some cabinet deliberations. We're doing some comparison with some other jurisdictions. We want to do something with it at some point later this year.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Any dates or any indications where you might be going?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well even if we didn't follow the indexation, it's probably appropriate to do an annual, an

adjustment in any event. So we're looking at what, at doing something this year. We know that at one time we were one of the highest provinces in the country, and we've certainly fallen somewhat behind. We're well down so it's appropriate to have an adjustment.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — I think it was the sixth. We're sixth highest now I think, something like that. Would this be . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think we were at one time the second highest, and I think we've fallen down to where we're in the lower portion right now — sixth or seventh.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Now would you be thinking of doing this sometime in September then? I only say that because the committee was also talking about that.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The committee's report was to make the announcement in April for a September adjustment. And that's, you know, I think having a good lead time is worthwhile, for it gives some sense of consistency and makes it easier for people to get used to it both on the employer and employee side.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay. The experience with the miscellaneous statutes and labour mobility amendment proclaimed on May 20th, now I see Saskatchewan's approved seven exemptions within that. And I guess, what has been our experience and have there been any other indications to date that we would have to be moving on any other exemptions?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It's a different ministry. I don't, I'm not able to comment on that.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — In just questions in your department, have you the number of employees in the ministry that will be designated as essential services under the new legislation?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Within this ministry?

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Yes.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We're having a very quick discussion right now. The deputy minister is trying to come to grips whether he himself is essential.

Mr. Donais has come up with the information on Ms. Kunin's compensation.

Mr. Donais: — Laurier Donais, executive director, central services. Yes, I apologize for not having the answer earlier, but we do have it now. Roslyn Kunin, who is the Chair of the committee of review, her compensation is \$200 an hour. And so out of that whole total 350,000, her cost would probably be 100,000, both remuneration and travel. And then other expenses, staff and support, would probably be around another 100,000 is what we've estimated. And then we have the remainder of 150,000 would be for costs such as, like, the remuneration for the other members on the committee. And they are remunerated at \$155 a day plus their travel, and then any other committee meeting expenses like room rentals, those kinds of things as well as, you know, advertising or for publication of notices of the public meetings and that. So that's in a nutshell what the total \$350,000 is allocated to.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Could you supply who does your advertising, which company, what the contract is, what the cost has been for all advertising done by the ministry?

Mr. Donais: — Yes, that would be our agency of record. And I don't have the name of that off the top of my head, but I can certainly provide that.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Could you give a cost of what advertising's been done and how much that has cost?

Mr. Donais: — And for the most part it's been just the notices of publicizing the notices of the public meetings.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Just generally, I'm sorry, just switching to the ministry as a whole, advertisements are done around Mission: Zero, the entire budget for . . .

Mr. Donais: — Sure. Yes, we can certainly provide that. Yes.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Now would you have done any polling or focus groups or anything like that in terms of that?

Mr. Donais: — No.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Essential services piece here, I understand they have an answer ready.

Mr. Carr: — For the ministry, in the event of a labour dispute, we would have five positions presently designated as essential.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Can you give me the staffing in the harassment unit, how many people?

Mr. Carr: — Presently the harassment unit is staffed with four officers.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — That would be — now there's a chief — the entire unit? That's it, just four? But what other people involved in that department would be dealing with this?

Mr. Carr: — We have four individual officers who are dealing with harassment issues.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — And no thoughts that one of these people would be cut to achieve the . . .

Mr. Carr: — That is actually an increase of one person in the past year in the harassment unit, and we haven't reached any conclusions yet on that issue.

[21:00]

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Now in terms of caseload, what is the present caseload?

Ms. Bihun: — So we track our caseload in the harassment unit by two key areas, and one of those areas are inquiries, if you will. And I can provide those numbers on a breakdown of matters related to personal harassment, as well as those matters related to prohibitive grounds, as well as a total number. So the

total number of harassment inquiries in 2010-11 was 1,241. Broken down, the personal harassment matters were 1,149; the prohibited grounds were 92.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — I'm sorry. That last ground was what?

Ms. Bihun: — Prohibited grounds were 92. Taking a look at those matters that resulted in an investigation or officer-assisted resolution, and that's a situation where a complainant filled out a harassment-related questionnaire and we conducted an investigation and rendered a decision. Those numbers for total harassment-related investigations for 2010-11 were 240: personal, 232; prohibited grounds, 8.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — So successful resolution . . . And I would think that that might mean anything that was cases resolved.

Ms. Bihun: — The one indicator that I can provide you from these statistics would be the matter of the number of appeals sent to a special adjudicator. And in the legislation for harassment, the appeals system that's legislated is for when an officer's decision is appealed, those matters are appealed directly to a special adjudicator. So if we were to look at, of the 240 investigations — total number in '10-11 — we received seven appeals to be forwarded to the special adjudicator.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Well I could open up something new, but I think just thank you for your answers and for taking the time to do this. And that would be it for me.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Iwanchuk. Any other questions? Seeing none, we'll go to the vote on vote 20, Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, central management and services, subvote (LR01) in the amount of \$4,602,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Occupational health and safety, subvote (LR02) in the amount of \$7,441,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Labour standards, subvote (LR03) in the amount of \$2,460,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Labour Relations Board, subvote (LR04) in the amount of \$994,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Labour relations and mediation, (LR05) in the amount of \$810,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Worker's advocate, subvote (LR06) in the amount of \$651,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Amortization of capital assets in the

amount of \$14,000. This is for information only; no vote needed.

Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, vote 20, \$16,958,000. I will now ask a member to move:

Be it resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2012, the following sums for Labour Relations and Workplace Safety in the amount of \$16,958,000.

Ms Eagles. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Thank you, committee members. That ends our . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Chair, before you adjourn, I'd just like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of both sides and also all of the staff from House services and also from the ministry that have come out in the evening. I realize it's not always the nicest thing to do in the evening, but we appreciate it nonetheless.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and those with him tonight. Any comments from the opposition?

Mr. Iwanchuk: — I'll just also thank the minister again and his staff and all those here. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you. That is it for this part of our meeting tonight. We'll now recess for a few moments to facilitate changing to the Ministry of Education.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**General Revenue Fund
Education
Vote 5**

Subvote (ED01)

The Chair: — Once again, ladies and gentlemen and committee members and Minister and her officials, recess is now over. And committee members, we are now looking at estimates for the supplementary estimates and estimates for Education, vote 5, central management and services (ED01) outlined on page 46 of the Estimates booklet, and for supplementary estimates, subvote (ED03) and (04) outlined on page 3 of the Supplementary Estimates booklet.

And we have two substitutions for this portion of the meeting. Substituting in for Mr. Glen Hart is Mr. Greg Brkich, and substituting for Ms. Judy Junor is Ms. Pat Atkinson. Ms. Minister, would you like to introduce your officials and make an opening statement.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good evening to you. I'm pleased to be here again tonight to continue our discussion for the Ministry of Education's 2011-12 budget. So tonight with me I have to my right, Audrey Roadhouse, the deputy minister. To my left is Darren McKee, the assistant

deputy minister; and Cheryl Senecal, the assistant deputy minister. Behind me I have Dawn Court, the director of finance and corporate services; Lois Zelmer, the executive director of early learning; Michael Back, the director of infrastructure and education funding; Clint Repski, the director of infrastructure and education funding; Daryl Richter, the manager of capital projects, infrastructure and educational funding; Simone Gareau, the executive director of student achievement and support; Elaine Caswell, the associate executive director of student achievement, support; Rosanne Glass, the executive director of strategic policy; Joylene Campbell, the executive director of information management and support; Doug Volk, the executive director of the Teachers' Superannuation Commission; Brett Waytuck, the Provincial Librarian, Provincial Library and literacy; and Sonya Leib, the senior financial manager of corporate services. With that, Mr. Chair, I will entertain any questions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Madam Minister. And I'll just ask officials the first time to the mike if you could just introduce yourselves for the purposes of Hansard. Thank you. We'll open up the questions. Mr. Broten.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Ms. Minister, for being here this evening and to all of the officials, hello once again. My question to the minister: when a professional association decides to take job action of some form, how is that decision arrived at? What is the process of arriving at that decision?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — You would have to ask the association.

[21:15]

Mr. Broten: — According to the minister's knowledge and understanding having worked with, in her capacity as minister, with different unions and/or professional associations, based on the minister's experience in those environments, when those organizations have decided to take job action, how is that decision arrived at?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It is arrived at through a vote of the members of the association.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. Today in question period when we talked about . . . I brought up the issue of a letter that was obtained. Is the minister aware of that letter?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, you had distributed the letter to the media, and I obtained a copy from the media.

Mr. Broten: — Who wrote the letter?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Considering that the letter is unsigned and there's no letterhead, perhaps you would know as much as I would.

Mr. Broten: — So can the minister confirm that the letter was written by someone in her office?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, I cannot.

Mr. Broten: — She cannot confirm or she states that the letter was not written by someone in her office?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Both. To my knowledge it wasn't written out of my office, but I can't confirm that this letter wasn't written out of my office.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. Does the minister know if the letter was written out of the Sask Party caucus office?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I do not know where the letter was written.

Ms. Tell: — Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Ms. Tell, state your point of order.

Ms. Tell: — We are here for supplementary estimates, and what the members opposite are asking has nothing to do with supplementary estimates.

The Chair: — Mr. Broten, your reply.

Mr. Broten: — What we're discussing here is an issue to do with the education system in the province, something that has great relevance to students, to teachers, to parents. And I think the line of questioning in this issue is important to the education system, and in estimates it's typically a time where we discuss questions relevant to the ministry that we're dealing with. As such, I think this line of questioning is completely in order, and nothing out of the ordinary.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Broten. I have heard both sides of the argument, and although the estimates do allow for a lot of latitude, I don't find that this is really pertaining directly to any part of the estimates, so I find the point of order well taken.

Continued questions?

Mr. Broten: — Yes. When a professional association decides to take job action of some sort, the minister confirmed in an earlier response that that decision is decided by the membership of the professional association. Would the minister state that it would not be a proper characterization or a proper statement to say that the organization directs the members to do something, but in fact it is the other way around?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It's a vote, and so therefore it is a democratic process.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. My question to the minister: earlier on in the day, there was a government-trustee bargaining committee news release that was issued, and it speaks to the fact that with negotiations under way between the government-trustee bargaining committee and the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, that bargaining will be resuming. In earlier comments the minister made, in earlier comments in the media when talking about the breakdown of discussions, I recall hearing comments made by the minister stating that the position of the government-trustee bargaining committee was not a final position but a firm position. Could the minister please elaborate on the definitions of those as it relates to the bargaining position of the government-trustee bargaining committee?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Absolutely. And if the member opposite had listened to the interview as he is implying, he would have heard the explanation there. A final position is one that will go to vote, and a firm position means that we feel that our position is fair and competitive. However we will listen to compelling reasons of why the other side does not believe that to be true, and those will be examined. As well as there may perhaps be other areas that can be explored as either side will see fit.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. And would the, since bargaining is resuming, is it the position of the government-trustee bargaining committee that the firm position is, in fact, there is now some room for movement, that government is bringing additional or willing to talk about new resources being brought to the table and brought to the discussions?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Both sides are coming to the table with any, without any preconceived additional resources at this point in time. And the discussions on what can be explored will take place at that table.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. Would the minister characterize the approach of the government-trustee bargaining committee in returning to discussions with the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation] as returning with a desire and approach of bargaining in good faith?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I believe both sides have bargained in good faith.

Mr. Broten: — And does good faith bargaining properly characterize the approach that discussions will be resuming with?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. Both sides will be bargaining in good faith.

Mr. Broten: — In the news release that was issued today by the government-trustee bargaining committee, it makes the announcement that bargaining will resume. There was also a fair amount of discussion in the news release about different statistics and different figures and some of the details of a potential agreement or details of the position of the government, and details of the reality as the government-trustee bargaining committee sees it. In engaging in that type of discussion at this time in the news release, does the minister believe that that is a constructive approach to the bargaining process?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It is a decision by the bargaining committee that the public is entitled to facts and there is statistics that is given in the press release that is an awareness of facts.

Mr. Broten: — I see on the news release the Government of Saskatchewan logo or emblem. Was this news release approved by someone within the ministry?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I seen the news release before it was released, yes.

Mr. Broten: — And having seen the news release, you approved the news release and therefore it went out. Is that how

the course of events occurred?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No. The bargaining committee approved it.

Mr. Broten: — At what stage was the news release shared with you?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Just before I went in the House.

Mr. Broten: — And had the news release already gone out at that time or was that . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — To be perfectly honest with you, you probably know better than I when it was released. I'm told that the news release went out 11 o'clock this morning.

Mr. Broten: — You don't need to, please, no need to provide the individual's name but what level or what position within your ministry would approve a news release like that going out?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It would be approved by both the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association] and a ministry official.

Mr. Broten: — And on the ministry side it would be an individual, it would be an official who would know the official stance of the ministry and of the minister?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It would be representatives from both the government and the SSBA.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. The actual drafting of the news release, does that occur by an official or an employee with the SSBA or with the ministry?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It would be both.

Mr. Broten: — A joint endeavour?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. But it's fair to say, if it is my understanding, that the minister supports the positioning and all of the language and everything that is entailed within this news release?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. Thank you. Does the minister think it is appropriate for Saskatchewan families to ask the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation for a reimbursement of child care expenses if expenses were . . .

Ms. Tell: — Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Ms. Tell, state your point of order.

Ms. Tell: — Again, the minister is not about to be bargaining in the House and is not going to bargain in this committee with respect to collective bargaining. So my point of order is, again, this is not about . . . The questions are not about supplementary estimates. They are about issues to do with collective

bargaining.

The Chair: — Mr. Broten.

Mr. Broten: — The line of questioning is the most relevant and important thing facing the Saskatchewan education system right now. For the minister not to have a desire to engage in this conversation and provide answers for people who are watching, for the public I think that would be a troubling thing. As has been stated before, there is an appropriate amount of latitude provided in these types of estimates for important matters, and I certainly could not see why this line of questioning would not proceed.

The Chair: — I've heard both sides of the argument and although there is a lot of, again there's a lot of levity to the questioning here, it's almost impossible for the Chair to know exactly what is in the purview of the minister. So according to rule 19(3), if the minister, it is not in her purview, she is able to decline but she will have to decline on the mike.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do want to point out that any additional funding that the collective bargaining committee arrives at is not included in these budget estimates.

And I have said in the House, again and again, that I am not going to enter into, either in the floor of the Assembly or in committee, in negotiating with members of the official opposition. The negotiations for teachers appropriately needs to be done at the collective bargaining table. That is the correct way for the process and respectful to both parties who are at the table. So I am not sure where exactly the NDP [New Democratic Party] member wants to go with this line of questioning, but I am not going to entertain bargaining here in committee and nor do I feel that he is the representative of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation bargaining committee.

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

Ms. Atkinson: — I have some questions.

The Chair: — Ms. Atkinson.

Ms. Atkinson: — Good evening, Minister, and welcome to all the officials that are here tonight. And I think the minister is entirely correct to say that this is not the forum for the thrust and parry of collective bargaining between the Teachers' Federation and the government-trustee bargaining committee. But it is a forum where it is quite appropriate to talk about process and to talk about the public positioning of the provincial government along with the government-trustee bargaining committee.

And I have a question to the minister: Minister, do you consider and does your government consider the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation to be a union?

[21:30]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The federation has two roles. And I've met with them, had those roles explained to me. They're both obviously the body that does collective bargaining, as well as

the association that is the supportive body for teachers in the province. So they have a unique role which is unique to Saskatchewan unlike, from my understanding, all of or most if not all of the other provinces.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation came together. They have a piece of legislation. As you know, the superannuation commission has a piece of legislation. Each year in the minister's estimates, there is a budget line for benefits that would come. We have before the legislature at the moment, a piece of legislation that puts in place the last collective agreement that occurred in 2007.

So I want to bring this message to the minister. In this press release that your government-trustee bargaining committee issued today, there is a reference to the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation as being a union. They are not a union. They are a professional organization that, as you say, has two roles. They regulate teachers, the profession, and they also bargain. They are unlike any other organization in the province of Saskatchewan. We could call the Saskatchewan Medical Association a union because they only bargain fees on behalf of physicians. But I think it's fair to say . . . well you can call SUN [Saskatchewan Union of Nurses] a union.

Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation come under the education relations Act. They do not come under the Saskatchewan trade union Act. So I would just say that language — and this is something I know a little bit about — language is important to teachers. And when there is a reference to the Teachers' Federation being called a union, that is not something that teachers view themselves as. They view themselves as being professionals.

And I guess I'd like the minister to respond because, Minister, the language that is used in this press release which obviously your ministry saw . . . I also know how this works. There would be discussions about what kind of a release would go out. You would have seen it and you've said you saw it. You may have seen it after it went out, but nevertheless you saw it. You have officials that are stickhandling this on your behalf. So I guess I would say to you: is it appropriate for the Saskatchewan government-trustee bargaining committee . . . and I see that there is a phone number. It's a 787-1069 number, which is a government number, on this press release. Is it appropriate? And why didn't someone notice this, that this is not a union and they shouldn't be referred to as a union?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I guess my comment would be: duly noted. And the officials are all here and have heard what you've had to say and your concerns, and we'll take it in advisement.

Ms. Atkinson: — Right. Well several of the officials are teachers or have a teaching background. So I just wanted to put that on the record.

The other thing I wanted to ask the minister, and this has to do with recruitment. When you look at a first-year teacher in the province of Saskatchewan, I believe their beginning salary is \$46,419. These are people that are coming to the profession with a degree. Beginning nurses, so a first-year nurse, their beginning salary is \$71,000 a year with their latest — and I will call it collective agreement, because SUN does come under the

Saskatchewan trade union Act — their beginning salary is \$71,000 a year. You compare.

The point I'm trying to make, minister, is I know there are school divisions across the province that are having a difficult time recruiting teachers, and particularly in certain parts of rural Saskatchewan. We have teachers that have retired and they've come back into the profession in order to support, I guess, school divisions. They are what we would call double-dippers. They are getting their pension plus they're getting a salary. And I'm wondering, Minister, and this is not to bargain on the floor of the Assembly or in committee, but I just want to bring to your attention that in terms of recruitment, this is an issue, and in terms of people going into the profession, this is an issue when you're coming out with students loans and so on and so forth.

So I would say I want to put this on the public record: I am very worried, when you look at the teaching profession, the beginning salary, given what's happening in other parts of the country, given what's happening in other professions in the province, I am very worried that we're not being fair when it comes to new people going into the profession, starting out with all of this debt. And many of them do have debt. And when you compare them to other beginning teachers in the West, they are lagging behind. So I wanted to make that comment on behalf of lots of young, beginning teachers who are having a bit of a struggle when it comes to first-year pay. And you don't need to respond, because I'm not sure it would be appropriate, but I wanted to put that on the record.

The Chair: — Mr. Broten.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. Last Thursday when the STF assembled outside on the steps of the legislature, it was a fairly large rally, very large — thousands, the media has reported — but very respectful, very professional, and very well organized. I understand the STF invited a presence from government and opposition. My question to the minister: why did she choose not to attend the rally last Thursday?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — And I agree with you. It was very respectful, and the teachers have been very respectful through the entire process. And I had just met with a large delegation in Saskatoon 12 days prior — the media were all present — in an open session and spoke with them then, and there was interaction there. I had basically nothing further to add.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. I heard either through a scrum tape or through the media that you watched it from your window. Was that an accurate description of how you took in the events on Thursday?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, you didn't hear that. I'm sorry, but you might have thought you heard that. I know for a fact you did not hear that in a scrum or otherwise.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. I think Ms. Atkinson has a question now.

Ms. Atkinson: — I do. Thanks.

The Chair: — Ms. Atkinson.

Ms. Atkinson: — I want to move on to early learning and care. And I'm sure you'll be quite happy to move on to that subject, but you may not be happy when we're finished.

Minister, last year in your budget there was an indication that during the fiscal year 2010-2011 that it was the intention of the government to have approximately 11,650 child care spaces operational by the end of the 2010-11 fiscal year. Minister, can you tell me how many spaces were in operation at the end of March of this year?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The number of licensed child care spaces in operation as of March 31st, 2011 was 11,761.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. Minister, can you tell me how many spaces were in operation on March 31st of 2010?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That would have been 10,848.

Ms. Atkinson: — And can you tell . . . When you look at the 2010-11, I guess we'll call it the budget summary, there was an indication that there were going to be 235 additional child care spaces. Can you explain how the ministry got from 10,848 at the end of March 2010 to 11,761 spaces at the end of 2011 when the ministry allocated an additional 235 spaces?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The explanation comes in — and I know that I had to explain this confusion when I was the Housing minister — of operating and when an announcement's first made of an expansion of spaces. So those spaces, when you ask the question of . . . It needs to be specific to operating because some may not . . . They'll be in development. And so that's where the numbers get quite confusing because there may be an allocation of funds, but by year-end some of those spaces may not be operating yet. They may still be in development.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Minister. So the last year of the NDP government, there were 1,000 additional spaces. So I'm talking about March 31st, 2008 because the budget announcement would have been in the spring of 2007. There was an announcement of 500 additional spaces, and then there were an additional 500 spaces that were announced in the late summer, early fall, so there were 1,000 spaces that were announced in the budget year 2007-2008. Can your officials tell me when those 1,000 additional spaces were fully operationalized coming out of the 2007-08 budget?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'll get the officials to add the details, but I want the public to know that the additional 500 spaces was not funded by the province or the NDP, it was federal money. And we need that to be clearly understood as well. So yes, the federal money was announced by the NDP, allocated after the election, and we'll get the details on the allocation of the spaces.

[21:45]

Ms. Atkinson: — I think that we knew for some time that there was federal money that came to the province for child daycare. That came about as a result of the 2005 agreement. And then I think in 2007, that money was gone so it had to be expended. I think that was referred to in the 2007-2008 budget summary. But, you know, federal money does go to the province and the

province allocates the money, not unlike the Canada health transfers or whatever. So can we just, you know, you've made your point. But can I know when the 1,000 spaces that were announced in the 2007-08 budget and then in the summer of 2007, when were all of those spaces fully operationalized?

Ms. Zelmer: — Lois Zelmer. The spaces were actually allocated through the federal child care spaces initiative. In January we had the confirmation of the allocation. There are a few of those spaces, for one reason or another, that haven't opened, but we have been able to use that funding to open other spaces, for example, Nipawin. We had allocated spaces to Nipawin. There was a change in the board. There were some concerns, and the spaces were allocated but undeveloped until very recently when a new board group and a new community group has taken over. So we do have all of the details of every allocation which we can provide to you if you like.

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Chair, if I could. So of the 1,000 spaces that were announced by the NDP government in 2007-2008, 500 of those spaces were "provincial" money; 500 were federal money. When the minister talks about over 2,700 spaces being created by her government, is she including the 1,000 spaces that were announced by the former government, or is she only including the 500 spaces that were announced by the former government?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It includes the 500 spaces from the federal funding that came after the election.

Ms. Atkinson: — Just if your officials could refresh my memory, when were those 500 spaces that came . . . They were announced during our administration. When was that announcement?

Ms. Zelmer: — The federal child care spaces initiative money came to Saskatchewan in June of '07. We were looking at options for ways of spending money. We did some delayed maintenance grants. We did do a list of proposals for new spaces that were not announced with the election call. And then following that, those particular allocations were confirmed in January.

Ms. Atkinson: — Good. Because this has caused some confusion. Was there not an item that went to treasury before the 2007 election call that then announced the 500 spaces? Am I correct?

Ms. Zelmer: — There was a hesitation about moving forward with that. The actual amount was 7.5 million that came to Saskatchewan. But there was that problem with the changes in the CST [Canada Social Transfer], and the net decline in the floor payments meant that Saskatchewan actually wasn't seeing a gain. So it wasn't until later on that it was confirmed that we could in fact spend all of that 7.5 ongoing.

We began with a commitment to spend the 2.5 ongoing, and that was spent on . . . proposed for 500 new child care spaces, a 4 per cent wage lift for licensed child care facilities. We did announce the 19 new pre-K [pre-kindergarten] programs prior to the election. There had been, I think, 15 in the '07-08 budget, but we did roll another 19 pre-K programs out off that 2.5. We also began doing the EDI [early development instrument], and

we gave some additional subsidy money to Social Services.

Ms. Atkinson: — So just so I'm clear, the 500 spaces, additional spaces, were announced before the election?

Ms. Zelmer: — We had plans for them but it wasn't confirmed that we could . . . We got caught with the election call, so they were confirmed in January.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. I just want to put it on the public record that there were 500 spaces that were announced in 2007 in the spring budget, 2007-2008 budget, and that a further 500 spaces went to Treasury Board. It went from the Ministry of Education to Treasury Board, and it was confirmed by Treasury Board, I believe, in August, September — I'm going from memory — for those 500 additional spaces.

So, Minister, getting back to you, so when you talk about 2,700, I think it's called, you say 2,700 additional spaces, that includes the 500 spaces that would be the federal money. Am I correct?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, that would be the initial year, right after the election, would include the 500 spaces that was federal money, and since that time it has all been provincial money. And with this budget we will now, including the 500 spaces that was federal money in the year immediately following the election, we will have allocated funding for the development of 3,435 child care spaces. So that is provincially we will have dedicated funding to just about 3,000 additional spaces, which is a far cry from the 8,850 that we inherited.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well I think it was a bit higher than that, but they all hadn't been developed. I think your ministry would acknowledge that. Because as I see it in your plan for 2011-12, there were 9,153 child care spaces at the end of March 2008. I assume that given . . . I would assume that those were spaces that were in play prior to or shortly after you came to government, but basically we'll just say the former government spaces. But in this budget, you indicate that there are going to be 500 new child care spaces. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That's correct.

Ms. Atkinson: — So this year it's the intention of the province to create an additional 500 spaces.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That's correct.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. So can you tell me, we know that as of March 31st, 2011, there is 11,761 spaces, and there's 500 that are going to be put in place in this fiscal year. That gets us to 12,261 spaces. Can you explain the difference between 12,700 and 12,261?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Okay. To give you some indication, in 2008-09, there was 500 spaces announced as you had pointed out, and then there was 200 in mid-year, in January. And then in 2009-10, the 1,000 spaces that you've referenced. But mid-year, there was an additional 500 spaces added to that. Then '10-11, 235 and '11-12, 500.

The difference in the numbers that you were questioning is what is completed and operating and what is in development.

Ms. Atkinson: — So, Minister, what you're saying is in essence there are 500 . . . No. There are 1,000 spaces at the moment that are in development.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So there would be 400-and-some — I don't know the exact number — that's in development. The 500 are brand new, a brand new announcement with this budget.

Ms. Atkinson: — I would call them . . . They're brand new but they're in development. You have to get them operationalized. Am I correct?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — They're not operating. This is a new announcement. So they haven't even been allocated to specific facilities at this point in time.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. So in this year, we have 400 spaces that are in development. They've been allocated I presume?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Ms. Atkinson: — And we have 500 additional spaces that are not allocated, but they will be developed before the end of this fiscal year, getting us to 2012?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That's correct.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. Minister, have you had any feedback from people across the province about the difficulty recruiting child daycare personnel that have the proper qualifications to be providing child care in our various facilities across Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That actually is an issue for child care facilities. It's also an issue that was brought to my attention by community-based organizations previously. Now we have increased the wages substantially for child care centres, but it is an issue with recruiting.

Ms. Atkinson: — Have you gotten any feedback? There has been a significant growth in child daycare facilities in rural Saskatchewan. Have you gotten any concerns expressed to you about the ability to recruit people with the proper experience and credentials into various communities?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I haven't had any rural Saskatchewan daycare contact me with that concern.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. That's surprising because I have. There are some people that are concerned that because there was such a massive number of centres put in various parts of the province, that the developmental work wasn't as adequate as it should have been. Because I agree that this has been a significant ramping up of child daycare. And so I'm wondering, is your ministry working with SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology], the community colleges in order to have the personnel necessary for child daycare that is being developed in the province? And when these child daycare spaces are being developed, what kind of oversight is there to ensure that the quality is there?

[22:00]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We have legislative requirements of the quality and the expected services in child care, as well as we have a number of initiatives to support the education side.

From 2007-08 to 2009-10, we had an education support grant which assisted early childhood educators and licensed child care centres and family care homes to upgrade their formal early childhood education qualifications. There was a tuition reimbursement grant. We have the professional development grant which assists child care directors, early childhood educators, and child care home providers to attend the approved professional learning events.

In 2010-11, the licensed facilities are eligible to receive a maximum of, for centres that have 30 or fewer spaces, of up to 1,500; 31 to 60 spaces, 2,500; centres with 61 to 90 spaces, 3,500; homes, 300; and group homes, 400.

In 2008 there was 2 million was allocated to child care centres and homes to purchase materials and resources to enhance the learning environment for the children. There's a nutrition grant. There is a physical activity grant, yes.

Ms. Atkinson: — Some of these things were in place before, but I guess the question is, Minister, do we have any personnel in our child daycare spaces that do not have the minimum qualifications that are required, that are required to be a child daycare worker?

Ms. Zelmer: — We do have an exemption process. There are legislated requirements for certain ratios of staff within each centre to have certain levels of training. If a centre is unable to find staff with those levels of skill and training already, they can apply for what's called an exemption. And they need to demonstrate that they are, have a plan under way to take the required training, and then the education support or tuition reimbursement or in some cases the PD [professional development] grant can support them in moving forward with that training. So it's a time limited, but yes, there are staff on exemptions.

Ms. Atkinson: — Can you tell me, tell me how many centres at present would be exempt, would have some exemptions, would've applied for some exemptions?

Ms. Zelmer: — We can send you that data. We are just collecting it. We have, trying to develop a HR [human resources] database looking at levels of training and ensuring that within each centre we have a range of training, but I didn't bring that data.

Ms. Atkinson: — So say in the last, you know, we've had a significant ramping up of spaces. Say in the last few years, have there been exemptions approved of?

Ms. Zelmer: — There have always been exemptions.

Ms. Atkinson: — But does this tend to be more than usual?

Ms. Zelmer: — I can't say with great specificity. We know there are ongoing exemptions and we know that a lot of staff are doing the courses online, which gets them through more quickly.

Ms. Atkinson: — I'm just curious to know, have there have any new child . . . There's several new child care centres, particularly in rural Saskatchewan. I'd be interested in knowing, of the new child care centres that have been developed, how many exemptions have been applied for? Because there have been several new centres developed.

Now one of the things that was important prior to the government change was a curriculum for early learning and care, and I'm wondering where that is at in terms of design and implementation.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It was completed and it's implemented. It's the play and learn program, yes.

Ms. Atkinson: — The play-based program? So when was it implemented?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The initial was implemented in 2008, and there has been two additional booklets done since then, one on leadership and just recently infants and toddlers has been added.

Ms. Atkinson: — I know it was piloted in 2006-07, if I'm correct, and it was implemented in 2007-08. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It was 2008.

Ms. Atkinson: — But it was to be fully implemented. According to my documents, it was piloted in the fiscal year 2006-07, and then it was to be fully implemented in 2007-08. Was it? Or was it delayed to the next fiscal year?

Ms. Zelmer: — The big print job was done early in that next fiscal year.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, thanks. Now in 2008-09, there was a requirement for a common curriculum for early learning and care for the professions. Is that in place or not? That was part of the plan.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm being advised that it's widely available and widely used, but it's not mandatory.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. So it's not a requirement that there be a common curriculum for early learning and child care professionals. So that's not yet in place. Okay. So while we have a common curriculum for pre-Ks, I presume we have a common curriculum for kindergarten to grade 12, we don't yet have a common curriculum for child daycare.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Play and learn guide is for three- and four-year-olds, whether they're in daycare or pre-K.

Ms. Atkinson: — So in terms of the . . . And I'm not sure if the official was here in 2004-05 when we were dealing with this. I'm just trying to determine where things are at. Now have we done any initiation on, you know, there is some work to be done on data analysis and accountability framework. Has any of that work made progress?

Ms. Zelmer: — We have done a number of initiatives around fiscal accountability. To start with, we did request that every

centre submit a common financial template in 2009 to begin to frame out where the cost drivers were, what were the differences across centres. We've done some work as well on the question of utilization, both numbers of children and hours of service relative to funding. And we're in the process, as we mentioned, of building an HR template looking at wages relative to training, looking at numbers of exemptions in a given centre, looking at how we support particularly the director cohort within child cares with additional training that they may require.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. Thank you. Now there was some work done to deal with child daycare subsidies, and the idea was to improve them. Has there been any recent improvement to child daycare subsidies?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The child daycare subsidies falls under the portfolio of Social Services.

Ms. Atkinson: — I understand that. But I also know that your early learning and care people are familiar with this, and so I'm just wondering if there's been any recent improvements.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That is not in our budget. The child daycare subsidies falls under the budget of Social Services.

Ms. Atkinson: — So you're going to be stovepiping tonight, Minister.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, I am. Thank you.

Ms. Atkinson: — You are going to be the stovepipe . . . You're going to stay in your stovepipe?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The exact numbers on what has been done . . .

Ms. Atkinson: — No, no, I'm not asking for the exact numbers. I am simply asking, has there been any recent improvement to child daycare subsidies? Just a quick question.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm being advised that it's a work-in-progress.

Ms. Atkinson: — I won't say that's a good answer, but it's as best as you can do, I guess, at the moment. Now I just want to, and I realize this probably isn't under your purview as well, but as part of the overall early learning and care strategy that appears to still be in place, there was some significant work done to increase the number of training spaces at SIAST and/or through the regional colleges in order to support early learning and child care workers. And I wonder if that part of the strategy is still in place and are we seeing, given the extensive increase in spaces, are we seeing new training spaces each year?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm being advised that the interest seems to be more towards online. I don't have the exact numbers of the increase to the online training and the number of seats. That would all be in the information of the Advanced Education minister.

Ms. Atkinson: — So then I presume that online training is for existing workers who are trying to get the qualifications in

order to meet the requirements in child daycare centres. So in terms of new people getting the education that would get them into the child daycare space with the right credentials, you can't tell me if there've been increases in the number of spaces as was part of the original strategic plan?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm being advised that if we are anticipating expanding in a certain area, that that information is given to the Ministry of Advanced Education, and they will then do the work on community colleges, delivering the necessary classes. But again, I don't have the numbers of seats or when or where those programs would be.

[22:15]

Ms. Atkinson: — So, Minister, would your officials have that information, given that, you know once again, this takes a more integrated approach to the strategy in terms of post-secondary . . . Social Services in terms of the subsidies and then of course the announcement of the expansion? So I'm wondering, is that something your officials could provide later? Perfect.

I think that about does it, except I have one final question with regard to your capital process. And I note, Minister, that you were invited to go to the Soviet Union or Russia because Saskatchewan is one of the few provinces in the country where we have an early learning and care unit, and we have child daycare in the Ministry of Education. And I'm wondering, now that early learning and care is within the Ministry of Education, which some of us worked very hard to have it moved . . . Not everyone was, particularly within the bureaucracy, was interested in this move but some . . . It did occur. Is your ministry now, as part of the capital process for new schools, putting early learning and care centres in those new schools?

A number of announcements have been made by your government for new elementary schools, I believe. And I'm just wondering, as part of the planning process, is it the policy of the government that early learning and care centres, which includes not only pre-Ks but infants too — you know, toddlers to three- and four-year-olds — that those folks will be co-located in the new school?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — They're always given the option. In some situations where they're located, there is an established child care centre, we're not going to take that away. But as you've watched announcements, I know more and more are being announced to existing schools where they are now integrating the child care and the pre-K, and it becomes a learning centre per se. And so yes, it isn't absolute, but they're encouraged and they're given the option. And we are seeing more school divisions definitely leaning and wanting that option. We're not forcing it.

Ms. Atkinson: — I'm not suggesting that you force it, but for instance there will be a new school, there are two new schools announced, elementary schools in the city of Saskatoon. Will the schools that are announced in the city of Saskatoon, will they have early learning and care in those schools? Because to me it makes some sense that when you're dropping your children off, you know, whether they're infants or toddlers or the pre-K kids, you don't have to run them around.

And so as part of the policy, while you say it's not, you know, it's not a compulsory, but as part of the policy, is it the government's intention that brand new schools in brand new neighbourhoods will have early learning and care centres? I'm thinking of Hampton Village. No doubt there'll be an announcement there soon. These are young families. Saskatchewan has the highest labour force attachment of women with children five years of age and younger in the country. And we've got some work to do. So I'm just wondering, I mean, is it . . . You're not forcing people, but is it highly suggested, strongly suggested that you put an early learning and care centre in the school where young people are?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. And I mean, it doesn't even need a large push from the government. School divisions are seeing the value of this. And so it is definitely the direction that we're going in partnership with the school divisions. And that is why we're seeing more and more of the integrated learning centres.

The Chair: — Ms. Morin.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you very much. Madam Minister, I'd like to ask some questions with respect to the funding formula that's still a work-in-progress in Saskatchewan. The information that I have that's been provided to me is that for 2009-2010 Regina Catholic schools in comparison with Regina public schools received \$275 less per pupil funding for that fiscal year. I'm wondering if the minister could tell me what the difference was with respect to the 2010-2011 fiscal year, please.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — In 2010-11, the Regina Public School Division received \$181,678,581. The Regina Catholic, for the 2010-11 budget, received \$85,195,670.

Ms. Morin: — So when one breaks that down in terms of the amount of pupils that it works out in terms of per capita funding, could the minister provide those numbers please?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The enrolment for Regina Public is 19,525. The enrolment in Regina Catholic, I have 20,062. Let me confirm that number. The enrolment for Regina Catholic is 9,427.

Ms. Morin: — Could the minister repeat what the enrolment is for Regina Public please?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — 19,525.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you. My understanding is also for 2009-2010 that the funding inequity between the Prince Albert Catholic school division versus the Prince Albert public school division was closer to the effective 800 . . . over \$800 in terms of less per pupil funding. I'm wondering if the minister could also provide me the same numbers in terms of the funding for 2010-2011 for the Prince Albert Catholic school division and public school division and also the enrolment numbers.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — But I do want to clarify, while the officials are looking up those numbers, because you're trying to build a case that is in fact misleading information. Mr. Chair, in Saskatchewan we don't provide funding for school divisions based on a per student. There are quite a number of factors that are taken into consideration.

So if you want to do a per student breakdown, you need to look at the instructional dollars alone and not include plant operation, transportation, and maintenance of facilities. Because the age of facilities in the different school divisions is different, therefore their funding is different. The number of facilities in each school division is different and that funding is therefore different. And the transportation requirements for each school division is different, so that funding is different. So what the member is doing, not understanding how the funding works, is she is trying to take the entire budget, divide it by the number of students and say, therefore that is the per-student funding.

If you want to do that, you need to just carve out instruction because that is directly the programming and funding that goes towards the education piece of the students. The support staff salaries, the teacher salaries, etc., all would fall under instructional of the students, and then it is far more fair then to divide that number. So if we want to return to the Regina Public and the Regina Catholic, the instructional funding within the budget per student is actually less for the Regina Public than it is for the Regina Catholic if you just take the instructional dollars alone.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Madam Minister. This member is by no means confused about what she's asking, and quite frankly I'm not interested in the spin that the minister wants to put on the answers that she wants to give tonight. I want to get down to the numbers that were given to me by the organizations that are directly impacted by the funding inequity that currently exists between the Catholic school divisions in the province of Saskatchewan and the public school divisions in the province of Saskatchewan.

It is by no means the fault of these school divisions, either one of them, that the funding formula that the government has decided upon, so far, created an inequity in terms of funding for the public school division versus the Catholic school division. It is unfair however that the Catholic school divisions in the province of Saskatchewan are now dealing with a funding shortfall which is now causing them to have to cut programs which parents are already finding about with respect to what's going to happen in the fall of 2011, Madam Minister.

So what this member is interested in is getting down to the numbers that count. And if the minister isn't willing to provide those to me, I'm sure that I can get them from other sources because they're more than willing to provide that information for me. I however thought that coming to this committee this evening, I would be able to get some honest and clear answers and not the spin that is typically put on answers by the minister when she's answering these questions in the Chamber.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The funding formula did not create the inequity. What created the inequity was an inequity of wealth from one school division to another due to the differences in the assessment. The inequity existed for many decades of which the NDP Party was the government. The inequity was there. School divisions asked for it to be addressed. A former NDP minister underwent the amalgamations of school divisions and said, we've solved the inequity. But it didn't. The inequity still existed. It has not been resolved. That is the point of the new funding formula.

You can do your rant on spin. I was trying to explain what was included in the budgets. And it isn't just instructional that's included in budgets. It's not spin; it's numbers. And I'm sure you must understand the school divisions have a different number of facilities to maintain, and so therefore that is a different piece within the budgets. And so you can do your rant on spin.

I also have a letter from a Donna Ziegler, the board Chair of the Regina Catholic School Division, which was dated March 8th of this year, which said, "We believe that the funding gap has recently been compressed as a result of the ministry's decision to fund our LINC agreement." So the LINC [local implementation and negotiation committee] agreement was obviously causing them some concern.

But unless you understand what's contained in a budget — and I'm sorry that you think that's spin — the fact is there are different factors contained in a budget. If you want to just do a division by students, you need to understand the flaws in that math because the budget isn't based on per student funding in Saskatchewan. It wasn't in the past. It won't be under the new formula. So therefore I know you want to just do the blunt math. Do you want just the instructional dollars or not?

Ms. Morin: — Well, Madam Minister, you can talk about me giving a rant on spin, but here's what I know as well. There was no concern raised prior to the Sask Party changing the funding formula with respect to a funding inequity between the public schools and the Catholic schools in the province of Saskatchewan. That concern only came forward last year in the spring.

As a matter of fact, we saw groups come to the legislature to complain about the funding inequity that existed under the Sask Party, that was created under the Sask Party between the Regina Catholic school divisions. And the letter from Ms. Ziegler with respect to . . . that you just quoted from, talks about compressing the inequity. It doesn't talk about solving it by any stretch of the imagination. So perhaps the minister can explain to me why it is that the government-appointed committee that's been mandated to deal with finding a long-term funding formula, why it doesn't have a representation on that committee from the Catholic school division in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — SSBA had representatives on that committee. There was not a distinct, you are public and you are Catholic. I would like to point out the small focus group that is now doing the financial analysis of the formula, with three CFOs [chief financial officer]; one of them happens to be from a Catholic school division. But there wasn't, okay, you will be a Catholic school division representative, you will be a public school division representative. It was the SSBA who put forward representatives to be on that committee.

And again I want to . . . the Sask Party funding formula was taking the, if you want, the NDP FOG [foundation operating grant] formula and adding to it. So if there was inequities, explain the math to me because I am mystified how the existing funding plus additional adjustments for enrolment increases, etc., how all of a sudden that made it unequal when it wasn't before. Of course it was. Of course it was. We didn't redo the numbers. We took the existing FOG base budget, based on the

FOG formula, and each year added funding increases or, unless there was a dramatic enrolment decrease, that would be decreases. And that is the funding that they received. So it would be historic funding inequities that existed. We didn't redo the formula. We used the existing base formula up to date.

[22:30]

Ms. Morin: — Does Madam Minister then have a reason for why the . . . If Madam Minister feels that this formula, I mean that this existed for a significant period of time, why is it that it only came to light then, in terms of the concerns and complaints being brought forward in the spring of 2010 under the Sask Party government having been in government already for three years?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The school divisions are very anxious to have a new formula that will address inequities, and they are also, there is some that are disappointed that they can't directly tax or go to the tax base for additional funding. But to say that we redid the formula, all we did was took the existing base budget which was based on the FOG formula, and we've made adjustments for LINC agreements, for enrolment in the case of, you know, the larger centres was enrolment increases, and the increases that have been in each and every budget. We didn't redo the formula in the last three years. So if there is a flaw, it existed, and we've added to that existing flaw additional funding.

Ms. Morin: — So if there's a flaw that existed, that would have existed — and what the minister is saying, prior to the Sask Party being elected in November of 2007 — how is it that we're sitting here in May of 2011 and the minister has allowed that flaw to continue to exist? How is it that's the case?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It's an extremely complicated undertaking. It was one that we felt it was very, very important for all of the stakeholders to be engaged in. It has been a long process. I mean, your party, the NDP, were perfectly comfortable with this existing for the 16 entire years that they were government. They allowed it to exist. So to sit there and say, how could we possibly allow it to exist, it existed for the entire 16 years the NDP were in power. And when your minister, Andrew Thomson, tried to address it through amalgamations of school divisions and said, there it's all fixed — it wasn't fixed. The amalgamation did not fix the inequities.

The Chair: — Ms. Morin, it's getting late and people are getting a little bit tired, so I just ask all further questions and answers to go through the Chair. And it's just to keep things civil.

Ms. Morin: — No problem, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Madam Minister, then my question is this: Madam Minister feels that this inequity has existed for many years. Madam Minister feels that this is a good excuse for her to use in terms of the differences in the funding that is currently seen as a deficit shortfall, or funding shortfall I should say, between the Catholic school divisions and public school divisions in the province of Saskatchewan.

So, Madam Minister, given that there was great concern raised for the first time last year with respect to the funding difference

that exists between the Catholic and public school division, why is it that that has not been addressed, given that my information is — from representatives — that they were assured that this would be addressed within the school year, from last spring to this spring, and were quite disappointed when they found out prior to the budget announcement being made that it wasn't going to be fixed for this school year going forward. So how does Madam Minister square that circle?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I want to read a quote, “We have fixed the equity in the system so we no longer have an education system that the rich being able to provide a system 25 times better than those in the poor ridings.” That's Andrew Thomson on May 11 of 2006.

And so what happened was that the inequity existed. It was complained about. Supposedly the NDP had the magic solution; however it didn't fix the problem. School divisions were going back to the tax base. And what did we have in our province? We had a massive tax revolt in our province. And then the answer to fix that was the NDP then turned around and had an ad hoc rebate program to try to get the property owners just to pay their education property tax because we were in a revolt in our province. So the whole system was in mayhem.

So that's where the inequities came from. We took the existing base budgets as they were, as flawed as they were, and we've added increases. We have not changed. We have not had an interim change in the formula. We froze the existing base budgets that were based on the previous flawed formula, and we have added increases each and every year to address student enrolment changes, to address LINC agreement changes, to address any extreme issues as well as just the overall increase to the budget that we gave each and every year.

Now the school divisions had inequities. They cannot go back to the tax base. They want to see the new funding formula because they feel that then it should finally be addressed. But it's not new. We didn't create it. It existed.

Ms. Morin: — So what Madam Minister is in effect saying is that these elected trustees of for instance the Regina Catholic School Board and elsewhere simply didn't understand something that they've been dealing with for many, many, many years. In some cases, I know many of the trustees on the Regina Catholic School Division for instance have been trustees of that board for many years, and so they simply didn't understand what they were talking about when they came to the legislature last year to air their concerns about the fact that there was a funding inequity between the Regina Catholic schools and the Regina public schools. Is that what the minister is saying?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, Mr. Chair. I'm clearly saying that they probably understand full and well. I'm saying the member opposite doesn't understand any of it.

Ms. Morin: — So, Madam Minister, what you're saying then is that they have no reason to come to the legislature. They should have just come here and been grateful and thankful that the Sask Party government is doing absolutely everything that they would like to see done, and their specific complaint . . .

The Chair: — Ms. Morin, through the Chair please.

Ms. Morin: — I am saying Madam Minister. That is through the Chair.

The Chair: — No, it isn't.

Ms. Morin: — Pardon me?

The Chair: — No, it isn't, Ms. Morin.

Ms. Morin: — I am directing my questions to Madam Minister, which is through the Chair. Thank you. I'm not saying you. I'm saying Madam Minister.

So as I said, Madam Minister, when one looks at the trustees' complaint about the funding inequity in Regina Catholic schools versus Regina public schools amounting . . . And I understand the funding formula isn't dealt with on a per capita basis. But when the Regina Catholic school trustees are saying that the funding inequity was amounting to \$275 per student when one looked at the global picture of funding versus students, they had no idea what they were talking about and were basically speaking out of the top of their heads because that was not factual. Is that what the minister is saying?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I've already answered this question. I have clearly said no. I believe the school division is quite knowledgeable on budgets and budgeting and how the system works. I have clearly said that I have said that the member for the NDP does not understand any of it.

I will publicly declare here tonight, should the school division want to meet, they merely have to phone my office. I have not denied a sit-down meeting with any school division, and I would be more than happy to hear their concerns one-on-one. And any school division that has asked for a meeting, I have granted that meeting.

So as long as the member wants to sit here for the rest of the night — and I know we're over time — and try time and time again to put words in my mouth, it is not going to help. I have not said the school division does not know what they're talking about. They understand their budget. They understand it well. I am saying that the member opposite does not understand the budgets nor does she understand the formula.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you for that lesson, Madam Minister. It's always, you know, I'm always grateful for the Sask Party members telling us what we do and do not know. That's very helpful.

So I'll ask question this way: why does Madam Minister feel that the school trustees came to legislature last spring? What reason does Madam Minister think that they had for coming to the legislature last spring?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I will offer that I will meet with them. I wasn't the minister at the time. I'll be more than happy to meet with them any time. If they want to put that request to my office, we will find a time. At the time when that the member opposite is referring to, I was not the minister at the time.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you for that answer, Madam Minister. Perhaps Madam Minister could ask one of her many officials that she's brought with her this evening as to what did occur at that time, given that some of the officials would have been part of the Madam Minister's ministry at that time and would have that information as to why those trustees from the Regina Catholic school board came to the legislature last spring.

The Chair: — Ms. Morin, as we are past the time, this will be the last question.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — None of my officials were at the legislature on that day, I don't imagine. They are not usually in the building when I am in the Assembly. So no, I don't believe my officials should speculate as to why someone might have come to the legislature.

The Chair: — Thank you, Madam Minister, and thank you committee members for this evening's meeting. Madam Minister, you have any final comments?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I just want to thank the members opposite for their questions and thank the officials for coming here tonight for their support.

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

Mr. Broten: — I too thank the minister for her responses and the officials and everyone else in the building that makes this all happen. Have a good night.

The Chair: — Yes, thank you, Madam Minister, officials, and the people of Hansard and the Committee Clerks and all else helping us out these late evenings. This meeting stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 22:39.]