



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. Greg Lawrence, Chair
Moose Jaw Wakamow

Mr. David Forbes, Deputy Chair
Saskatoon Centre

Mr. Russ Marchuk
Regina Douglas Park

Mr. Roger Parent
Saskatoon Meewasin

Mr. Corey Tochor
Saskatoon Eastview

Hon. Nadine Wilson
Saskatchewan Rivers

Ms. Colleen Young
Lloydminster

[The committee met at 15:20.]

The Chair: — Good afternoon everyone. I'm Greg Lawrence, and I'm the Chair of the Human Services Committee. We have Mr. Forbes, our Deputy Chair. We have Mr. Marchuk, Mr. Parent, Mr. Tochor, Ms. Wilson, and Ms. Young.

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

Subvote (LR01)

The Chair: — This afternoon we will be considering the estimates for the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, vote 20, central management and services, subvote (LR01). Minister Morgan is here with his officials. Minister, if you would please introduce your officials, and make your opening comments.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to appear before your committee to present the 2015-16 budget of the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety and to answer questions.

Joining me today is my chief of staff, Drew Dwernychuk, and I have several senior members from the ministry supporting me here as well. I have Mike Carr, deputy minister; Louise Usick, executive director of central services; Daniel Parrott, director, legal education affairs, employment standards; Tareq Al-Zabet, executive director, occupational health and safety; Ray Anthony, director of safety services with occupational health and safety. He is our resident history buff and knows everything about OH & S [occupational health and safety] going back to when the province came into being.

Pat Parenteau, director of policy; Denise Klotz, director of the office of the workers' advocate; Rikki Boté, executive director, communications; and Tara Acoose-Barreno, executive assistant to the deputy minister. Also joining us is Peter Federko, chief executive officer of the Workers' Compensation Board; and Fred Bayer, board registrar with the Labour Relations Board.

Over the last year, the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety has been working diligently to encourage healthy, safe, and fair workplaces. This year the ministry continues our strong support for workplace health and safety while ensuring that the budget is balanced and without raising taxes for Saskatchewan people. By balancing controlled spending with no new taxes, this budget continues to sustain a strong and prosperous Saskatchewan, one that builds opportunities for our people and improves the quality of life for all.

Today I want to speak in particular of labour relations and workplace safety and the leadership role the ministry takes in supporting workplace health and safety to help keep Saskatchewan strong.

The 2015-16 budget for the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety is 18.475 million, a decrease of 207,000 or 1.1 per cent from the 2014-15 budget. This budget provides

approval for an increase of one full-time equivalent for a total of 152.1 FTEs [full-time equivalent]. This new position will support and improve the Saskatchewan asbestos registry and workplace hygiene.

\$275,000 in one-time funding to support COR, or the committee of review for *The Workers' Compensation Act*; and \$163,000 to increase in-scope salaries — these are important investments in the safety and well-being of our workers. We have made progress, but the workplace injury rate in Saskatchewan is still unacceptably high, and this government is determined to continue to work towards better results.

Secondly, we want to talk briefly about safe and competitive workplaces. Mr. Chair, we are committed to supporting a competitive and productive employment environment by encouraging healthy, safe, and fair workplaces and by ensuring that our labour policies are up to date and competitive.

Over the last year, we have worked on several major initiatives to better protect workers, promote growth, and increase accountability, including firstly the introduction of the safety information management system, SIMS, which is now fully operational and allows employers across Saskatchewan the ability to connect in real time online with occupational health and safety. Employers can register their new company, view their safety records, and submit dangerous occurrences and progress reports for notices of contraventions and compliance undertaking. As well, the OHS division is able to communicate with employers through the system and send out hazard alerts and other safety information in real time.

The targeted intervention strategy, which focuses resources on employers who are driving Saskatchewan's injury rate, this approach is collaborative and focused and is complemented by random and other types of inspections. Early results of this strategy are encouraging. Priority employers with approved safety plans are on track to achieve an 18 per cent reduction in workplace injuries and the decommissioning of the OH & S hygiene and radiation lab, which is now completed.

This year's budget of the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety continues to support the above-mentioned activities in addition to several new initiatives to support all workers and employers in the achievement of Mission: Zero, zero injuries and zero fatalities resulting from work.

2015-16 the ministry will continue to make OHS a priority. They will continue to investigate employment standards complaints, educate employers and employees and youth on their rights and responsibilities under *The Saskatchewan Employment Act*. They will assist workers who have filed a workers' compensation claim and who may have to explore an appeal of the decision rendered on that claim and provide conciliation and mediation services to assist collective bargaining.

Lastly, the ministry is working on several legislative initiatives which include enacting new regulations which update the existing workplace hazardous materials information system to meet the requirements of the global harmonized system for chemical and hazardous product labelling recently adopted by

the Government of Canada.

It will also work towards completing *The Mines Regulations* review and enacting new regulations regarding mine safety to ensure that OHS standards in Saskatchewan's mining industry are relevant and up to date. As part of this review, OHS is currently conducting extensive consultations to ensure the viewpoints from all stakeholders are considered. The mechanisms for consultations include an online survey accessible through the Government of Saskatchewan website, three invitational multi-stakeholder meetings to be held in Regina and Saskatoon, and 15 one-on-one meetings with key industry stakeholders.

We also will be undertaking a review of *The Workers' Compensation Act, 2013*, the associated regulations, and policies. The Act requires that a review be conducted at least once every four years. The last committee was appointed in 2010 and, as a result, the next committee of review was appointed in February of this year, rolling out new initiatives related to asbestos and the mandatory asbestos registry which is the first of its kind in Canada.

We'll also be developing a response to the Supreme Court decision on essential services legislation in collaboration with organized labour and other stakeholders in the province. Mr. Chair, we continue to be committed to protecting essential public services like highway safety and health care in the event of a labour disruption. We believe that we can provide the right balance between protecting the public and ensuring that alternative methods to settle a labour dispute are available.

As we developed our budget, Mr. Chair, we worked diligently to promote the value of the services that Labour Relations and Workplace Safety provides and to describe how the work we do supports the economic growth that our province is experiencing.

As in past years, this budget is not without challenges. The increased demand for our services will continue to place constraints on our limited resources. Mr. Chair, this is a budget that is responsible, strategic, and supports keeping Saskatchewan strong. This is a budget that focuses on our workplaces, our youth, employers and employees, so all Saskatchewan people can come home safely each night and enjoy the best place in Canada to live, to work, to start a business, to get an education, to raise a family, and to build a life.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, committee members. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: — Mr. Forbes, you have the floor.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. Can you just tell me quickly, how much did the SIMS program cost? What was the overall cost, and then what do you anticipate to be the annual operating cost?

Ms. Usick: — The total cost for SIMS in capital was \$375,572, and the expense was 219,352, and that was for support and maintenance.

Mr. Forbes: — Do you anticipate that it will cost annually

about \$200,000 to operate this?

The Chair: — Mr. Minister, can you make sure your officials introduce themselves the first time they speak please? Thank you.

Ms. Usick: — The annual cost is 100,000.

Mr. Forbes: — Now about how many entries? How big of a computer system are we talking about here? Do you have 50 entries, 50 companies you're keeping track of? 100?

Ms. Usick: — So we currently have 2,700 employer locations that are registered on the system.

[15:30]

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Then I guess what I want to talk about and spend more time on today is occupational health and safety and the number of inspections. That was a major interest in some news that came out earlier this year in March and the whole discussion around inspections. The numbers have gone down, and you mentioned that there would be a plan in place. Can you talk a little bit about the plan? And you've talked that you were anticipating an 18 per cent cut in injury rate. Is that the cut overall and you will see the injury rate go down 18 per cent, or just of that select group?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm going to let one of the officials answer the question. It's actually the 18 per cent is focused on the specific group. Tareq will be able to provide some answers as to where we're going as we go forward.

I will probably ask if you have more questions as to sort of how we got here, what the pattern has been over the last 10 or 15 years, and sort of the history and the difference between random and unannounced inspections. That goes back to your time as minister. And I sort of thought the history might be relevant, and Ray Anthony will probably provide that background. Anyway I'll let Tareq . . .

Mr. Al-Zabet: — The 18 per cent is actually for the targeted intervention employers, and we were looking at 126 so far that represent 72,000 full-time equivalents. So those 126 represent 72,000 workers, and we brought the injury down by 18 per cent. As for the total provincial injury rate, it actually went down by 10 per cent as well.

Mr. Forbes: — Can you tell us what the provincial injury rate is right now?

Mr. Al-Zabet: — The current provincial injury rate is 6.99, dropped from I think seven five.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And so when you say 126, I'm not sure I caught what that was. You've got 72,000 full-time employees. What was the 126?

Mr. Al-Zabet: — They are the employers.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, so there's 126 employers that you have targeted, and that represents 72,000. And there are approximately how many employees? That would be about

400,000 employees that are covered by the injury rate or WCB [Workers' Compensation Board]. That's what we're using as the baseline, right?

Mr. Al-Zabet: — Basically we're talking around 16 per cent of the total workforce through this targeted system.

Mr. Forbes: — So when we talk about . . . Maybe we should start there for people who are listening or watching at home because the actual workforce of Saskatchewan is much larger than 400,000. What is the actual size of the workforce in Saskatchewan?

Mr. Al-Zabet: — The numbers we have, which is, again . . . We're looking at 575,000.

Mr. Forbes: — 575,000.

Mr. Al-Zabet: — We rely on some federal data too sometimes.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. And then when we come down to the 400,000, that is those that are covered by Workers' Comp. Now why the difference of 175,000 workers who are not covered by Workers' Comp?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — A number of workers that would not fall within that, they would be workers that would be federally regulated. Some would be farmers and that type of thing, workers that would be participated in where there's an employer group that had their own employment plan that would cover it, such as teachers.

Mr. Forbes: — It's a group that's about 175,000. So if there's a way, I mean, I don't need to get into groups that are smaller than 2 or 3,000, but . . . The teachers is a sizeable group; that's about 11, 12,000. So are there large groups of that 175,000 that we can identify right off the bat?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm joined now by Peter Federko, the CEO of the Workers' Compensation Board. So I'll let him give some better particulars on it, but teachers, First Nations, farmers, would all be part of that group.

Mr. Federko: — So those for sure would be the three largest industry groups that are excluded from mandatory coverage under *The Workers' Compensation Act*. So teachers would be a big one, so would farmers and First Nations operations as well. There are also several other specific occupations that would be excluded underneath the regulation, exclusion regulations, but they would not . . . They would all be relatively small compared to the teachers and farmers and First Nations operations.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you for that. That's something to always remember, and I know that when the review comes there's always a discussion about the groups that are excluded. Because you think that, we often think people in Saskatchewan are covered, and it's almost 1 in 3 are not covered. And so that's a significant thing.

But getting back to . . . Well maybe while we have Mr. Federko here, because I was using some stats from Workers' Comp, the growth of the workforce, how much . . . Have you got a percentage of the growth of the workforce, or I'll tell you my

numbers and if you tell me I'm wrong, if somebody over there's got a calculator and can do the math really quickly. But according to . . . I was just looking at your annual report of 2013, and in 2003 there were about 310,000 workers covered by Workers' Comp. In 2013, there were 398,000, almost 400,000. So almost a growth of 22 per cent, you know, from 300,000 to 400,000. I'm sure by now it's probably above 400,000. Would that be reasonable to say?

Mr. Federko: — So based on the most up-to-date numbers, the numbers that you have, I believe, would be based on what the estimated payrolls would have been at that particular time. So current numbers to the end of 2013, now that all the actual payrolls have come in and we've recalculated the full-time equivalents based on average industrial wage, comes up to almost 399,000 full-time equivalents covered under the payrolls reported to us. And I'm sorry, what was the other reference here?

Mr. Forbes: — In 2003.

Mr. Federko: — In 2003 the full-time equivalents were around 310,000. So there would be an increase of roughly 90,000 full-time equivalents over that period of time.

Mr. Forbes: — So I'm thinking that the workforce has grown about 22 per cent that's covered under the WCB. Would that be correct? I don't know if any . . . No? So what would be the number then?

Mr. Federko: — Based on our full-time equivalent, it's almost a 30 per cent increase.

Mr. Forbes: — Thirty per cent? Okay, fair enough, I just want to make sure I get my math right here. I'm welcome to be corrected because I'm not going . . . I'm just going by my own math. But my point is that, so we've seen a significant growth in the workforce, and that is a good thing. And we're really excited about that because in terms of economic growth that's great, but has the number of inspectors and the size of occupational health and safety kept up with that? When we have a workforce that's grown by 30 per cent, has the number of inspectors or resources provided to labour kept up?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The number of FTEs the ministry has had has remained static or almost static since '07-08. There is 80 in '07-08, it has gone down in '11-12 to 79, to 81 in '12-13, and then 80 for the last two years. We are working with the ministry officials to develop efficiencies, and with the targeted interventions, we believe that the number that we're utilizing now is satisfactory. It would be an easy conclusion to say, bigger workforce, have more inspectors. But we think targeted inspections are working, and we're getting some of the best results now that we have ever had.

Mr. Forbes: — I know some of the concerns, and it was raised last year for example, keeping track of occupational health and safety minutes, we've had this discussion here. And you felt it was a better priority, a higher priority to have inspectors out in the field than keeping track of minutes. But you know, conversations I've had with different folks in labour, that they feel it's a slippery slope once you start to let go of some of the details that occupational . . . You know, you're sending a subtle

message that meetings are not important and that there may not be attention to the detail.

And so while I appreciate that it may be keeping costs down, that occupational health and safety, while the budget is always close to around 8.6 million, it hasn't really changed over the past several years. This is something that is not paid for by the General Revenue Fund or core funds, now that we refer to it, but it's something that comes from Workers' Comp. Have you explored this idea that the workforce has grown, therefore it deserves more attention, and particularly in a province where we have a high injury rate?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We don't think this has . . . is not something we look at as a money issue. We look at this as what's the best method for reducing injuries, and our officials have recommended a plan of targeted intervention. They're going to maintain some random inspections or unannounced inspections as well, and we feel that this is producing good results. So that's the plan we've chosen to follow.

The fact that we have the costs and, as you're aware, the costs of all of the OHS system is borne by Workers' Compensation, it is nonetheless a cost to the economy. And we think we want to be as fiscally appropriate as we can, regardless of whether it's borne directly by the GRF [General Revenue Fund], borne by employers through payroll remittances, or wherever else. And it's not a matter that we've said to the employers, oh we want to give you a break on this. It's a matter of saying, what is the right level to do this? And we think we have that level now because we are generating results.

You made reference as well to the OHS minutes that are no longer required to be filed. I've heard some of the same recommendations from people in the labour force. We're watching very carefully to see whether we have complaints about people not having the meetings, not maintaining the minutes.

What was happening before, as you are aware, is the minutes were being sent and we were merely filing them. They weren't being referenced. They weren't, you know, made accessible. It was a bookkeeping process and nothing more, and we felt was not the best use of one or two FTE's time to receive, make sure they'd received them all, go back and, you know, a catalogue list, whatever. We thought, we're not in the library business; we're in the business of ensuring workplace safety. So the point that they make is, is filing the minutes a necessary thing to try and promote to make sure that the meetings take place, the minutes are taken? And we're watching to see whether the complaints are going up, or whether in fact we're finding non-compliance. And we want to continue to watch that.

Mr. Forbes: — Have you or your officials done an analysis across Canada comparing the number of inspectors or people you have working in occupational health and safety compared to other ministries of Labour across Canada, and is the staff component similar?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We don't spend a lot of time out looking at other jurisdictions if we have the appropriate numbers and we're continuing to drive down our injury rate, which is what's taking place now.

[15:45]

Mr. Forbes: — I see. And you know, we've had news stories, I think it's often in February where WCB releases what its premiums will be, and I think it's always a good day when premiums go down. Nobody likes it, and you're right: somebody always has to pay. But when I think about this, I was thinking, you know, the workforce is growing and maybe we should be looking, and so maybe we should be looking at what other provinces do.

And I don't know — and I could find out from the annual report, I think, or maybe not — where we stack up in Canada with our premiums for WCB. But I think that we should be looking at other provinces for best practices and what they do. So I hope I'm not hearing the minister that you're not looking or you refuse to look at other provinces.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — If the officials continue to review it — and I'm going to let Mr. Carr give a very short answer on it because I know our time's limited — but the model that we have is somewhat different, so it's hard to do an apples-to-apples comparison. And we're focused on what's working. So the officials have not come forward to us and said, we'd like to have a whole bunch more inspectors. The officials are saying, this is how we're targeting the workers that we have. And anyway, I'll let Mr. Carr provide . . .

Mr. Carr: — Thank you, Minister. It certainly is our expectation that we should make the best use available of those resources we are given. From our perspective, what we're trying to do is we're trying to demonstrate the case that by doing our work differently we can impact the injury rate more strongly and drive down the injury rate in the province.

We may reach a point where we have to look at the resource in question and then come forward with a policy question for the minister and cabinet to answer but, from our perspective right now, we haven't answered the fundamental question: are we making the best use of available resources we have? Once we've answered that question, then I think we'll be in a position where we can pursue additional resources.

Mr. Forbes: — But have you looked at other provinces and best practices that they're doing and the resources they have when you've asked yourself the question that you've asked yourself?

Mr. Carr: — We certainly have. That's part of a good business practice.

Mr. Forbes: — So you don't see any significant difference in terms of resources available per worker.

Mr. Carr: — There's a range across the country and our perspective again is, what are the tools that we can put in the hands of our officers to improve the outcome of the work they do? We've done a number of things over the past six years that we think are meaning that they're doing the work differently, that they're having greater impact. We want to assess that and once we get to a point where we've reached a conclusion about that, then we'll go on to the question about are we resourced appropriately, or should we be asking for greater resources.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, because I think there has to be a balance. There has to be a balance between where do the premiums go. Workers' Comp has to be making sure they have the best interests of both the worker and the employer at heart. But when you've seen such significant growth in terms of the workforce, clearly I think it's worth the examination to say, so what will it take to provide more resources? Even if you have 80 inspectors now, and to add 10 or 20 would be a significant amount.

I mean if the question is you're doing a targeted approach, but there is always . . . You have to pay attention to detail and the other workplaces so other groups don't start to slide back. And that's always the danger. When you focus on one group, the rest of the workplaces feel that they're getting a mixed signal, that the random inspections aren't happening as much as they were happening at one time, or the unannounced inspections. So my question though is how many workplaces are there in Saskatchewan? Are there, is it about . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — 47,000.

Mr. Forbes: — That's significant. That's huge. So now in terms of inspections, now you were having in March, there was, when we had this discussion . . . [inaudible] . . . in the Chamber here, there was a discussion about a new plan, Has that plan been fully developed?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It's under way now and has been for the last year. So the plan was developed within the ministry. And actually there's some history with having targeted interventions rather than random inspections that go back to your time. And it's a matter of saying okay, where should an inspector go to, where is an inspector going to do it, so we've . . . Without direction from us they've shifted a focus towards the targeted ones, to the employers that they felt were the ones where there was the most likely benefit to be had. What we weren't doing at that time was what you would call random inspections that would be at a chosen whatever . . . The ones that aren't, that are truly random may not be particularly beneficial.

I'll give you an example. If you go to an auction mart on a day that there's no auction taking place, you're not going to find very much going on. So you need to target and focus on where's an injury likely to happen, where's the activity on a particular workplace. But we have given them the direction that just for maintaining public confidence and instilling into employers the possibility that there could be a genuine random inspection, not to think because they happen to have a good record that there will never be an inspection. So in the month of March we had done 102 random inspections, and going forward, I think the number you . . . We would tend to do approximately 500 per year.

Mr. Forbes: — Five hundred per year. So is that how many inspections happened in 2014?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No. As they're sort of shifting in, I think they . . . So we would, going forward the expectation would be, and these are the ministry officials' targets, is that they would have 1,600 targeted inspections and 500 random inspections. So there would be a total of approximately 2,100 inspections done over the year.

Now some of those would be a follow-up to . . . And it's hard to say whether an inspection is random or unannounced. An inspection's done because there was a problem or an issue. Then the worker comes back three weeks or six weeks later to determine how much progress has been made, whether they followed up on compliance undertakings, so that one, you wouldn't call it a random inspection but it would be an unannounced inspection.

Mr. Forbes: — So how many safety violations were issued then in 2014?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — In 2010-2011, there was 6,592 notices of contravention and there was 463 stop work orders. '11-12, 6,806 notices of contravention; stop work orders, 431. '12-13, 7,170, and in that year we started doing the compliance undertakings as well, so there was seven of those given; and then stop work orders, 615. '13-14, the numbers changed because we were targeting working with the specific employers, which meant more time because you had to develop a plan with each one of them. So the notice of contravention, 3,474; compliance undertakings, 156; stop work orders, 202. 2014-15, because it's a partial year, we have given 380 notices of contravention, 295 compliance undertakings, 55 stop work orders. And because we're just starting to do the summary offence ticketing and we're proceeding very slowly and carefully with it, we have done two.

We've also done a number of prosecutions under the Act and I think last year we'd indicated to you that we had developed an unacceptable backlog in prosecutions, which we are now working through. So I'll give you those numbers quickly. 2010-11, there was 81 files sent to Justice; 74 prosecutions; 52 prosecution convictions; 12 acquittals; total penalties, 201,000. '11-12, 73 files sent; 48 prosecutions initiated; 43 convictions; 11 acquittals; total penalties, 262,460. '12-13, 118 files, so this was our big year; 22 prosecutions initiated; 13 convictions; 5 acquittals; 518,920. '13-14, 48 files sent to Justice; 118 — because this is the carry-forward from the previous year — 118 prosecutions initiated; 85 convictions; 17 acquittals; total penalties, 647,200. '14-15 to date, 23 files sent over; 26 prosecutions initiated but some are still on the books from the previous year; 55 convictions; 8 acquittals; 568,855. So we're ramping up and if you're watching the notices that come out on virtually all of the ones where there's a conviction or a charge laid, we do a news release on it.

Mr. Forbes: — I've got a couple more questions on OH & S but in March though you said that there were going to be some changes, you know, and we were thinking that it was going to be like a new plan or revisions to the plan because of the concern that was expressed around lack of inspections. What were the changes?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Prior to that we had given no direction from the minister or from the minister's office as to what should take place. It was done solely by the workers. So the ministry had chosen to focus all on the targeted models so the random inspections or the true random would be close to zero. We said that we felt that was unacceptable, that that did not promote enough confidence in the system, and said to them, come back with a number and, by the way, start doing some right away. So that's why I'd indicated there was over 100 done in the month

of March. So the revised plan is the 400 random inspections and the 1,600 targeted. That was the number that the ministry officials came to us with and we think that's a reasonable blend, and I don't have an opinion on whether it should be higher or lower.

Mr. Forbes: — And just for the record, I will be thinking more about the growth of workforce. I may talk to you over the next while about that. I think that's a significant thing that I think we need to think more about in terms of, with more workers here they expect that they will have inspections like everyone else. And I don't think it's a . . . I think there are resources. I think there's a respect for making sure premiums reflect the costs of workers' comp, but I think that it's something that we need to pursue more.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I appreciate the comment, and I think we want to work with the ministry and with Workers' Compensation. I can tell you that in 2014, I have a statistic I want to give you. We had always used the term that we wanted to go with Mission: Zero that we felt that was the only acceptable number, was Mission: Zero. Last year 87 per cent of the workplaces in Saskatchewan were injury free, had met the Mission: Zero target. And I'm certainly not saying that we're finished, but I think we need to give credit to the workplaces and the employers and the employees where they have managed to operate for a year or more injury free. And sometimes you talk to employers that have gone literally decades that are injury free. So I think we want to give credit where credit's due, and target where we want to.

So the point I'm making is, necessarily ramping up and having a bigger presence isn't nearly as important as having a targeted, appropriate presence. So I think I'll be watching very closely over the next few months to make sure that we continue the downward trend, and that we'd like to see the rate of that increase. I'm pleased that the ministry officials have focused on that and I think are going in the right direction. But your point's well taken and I think it's something we want to watch going forward.

[16:00]

Mr. Forbes: — There was a concern that was expressed about a meeting that happened in the fall, and I don't think it was the Ministry of Labour that was involved or maybe it was, I don't know, but it was about the blending of the OH & S regulations among the three Western provinces. And that was something that was brought to my attention. I had not heard about it.

Can you give me an update? Are you aware of this meeting?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Neither Mike nor I were invited but . . . I don't know if you were or not. Yes, the Premiers regularly meet and sort of one of the standing things that are on the agenda are trying to standardize and streamline rules and regulations across the province. One of the things that we did early on was to change the regulations for multi-vehicle and trucks and like, so that there was a standardized period that trucks of this size can travel all the way across without having to stop and wait because, oh this one you can only go these hours, or this one you can only do on a divided highway. So they've standardized and streamlined those type of things.

So the direction that's there is, as we go through the consultative process, as we update the regulations, we should be looking at what's taking place in other practices, not necessarily with the idea of standardization although that's certainly an important factor, but also with identifying what is best practices all the way across.

The examples that came out of the Premiers' meetings were where and when first aid kits were required — and I can't say which jurisdictions were doing which — where hard hats were required, and where steel-toed boots were required. And I'll give you a little bit more specific example. In Alberta, a person working on road construction is not required to wear a hard hat because there's nothing above them. So they're required to wear the hard hat . . . Somebody says, oh well it's visibility. But they're also required to wear a visibility vest. So people working in Alberta that come to Saskatchewan have to wear a hard hat when they're here. And I'm not saying they should or shouldn't wear a hard hat.

One of the arguments was put forward, what are they trying to protect from? Passing meteorites? Well I don't know what best practices are, nor am I in a position to comment on it, but those are the type of things that they would be having a discussion on. But I think in each and every one of those cases, we would expect to look back at what our record has been, what the practices have been in our provinces, to make sure that it's not . . . And I think where you're going is that it's the lowest common denominator.

Mr. Forbes: — That is the concern that people have expressed about this, and that often is the case because you're looking for . . . yes, the lowest common denominator is not necessarily best practice, and you want to level the field. This is often the end result, trying to level the field, and if there are better practices, they tend to be shaved down.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — What I think is that, you know, we are one of the jurisdictions that has the most to improve, so we should be looking at better . . . at other jurisdictions and saying, is there something we can do to raise our standards or have our standards being made more effective? But I appreciate the point you're making.

Mr. Forbes: — I mean it's ironic that we're sort of flipping the tables here because I was just saying, have you been across Canada to see how many inspectors there are in different jurisdictions?

It's a little alarming, and I don't have this with me, but I think there was, when the Premier started down this road, there were assurances given that certain things would not be on the table. And one of them was around labour legislation. And I could be wrong on that, but I do think, if I recall, that when we started the New West discussion, and the previous form of that was TILMA [Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement], that labour regulations were going to not be part of this discussion.

And now we sort of see the creep, you know, whatever you want to call it, mission creep or whatever, where all of a sudden we say, what could hurt with that? But what could hurt is the fact that groups were not aware that this conversation were

going to happen or invited to be part of the pre-discussions and say, should we be part of this? They only found out after the fact that the discussion was taking place.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We're all Canadians. We want to have as much workforce mobility as we can. So I think it's appropriate for premiers and prime ministers to talk about what things take place, why things are different in one jurisdiction, and invite people to have the discussion as they go forward. I think to the extent that we can benefit from something else, we certainly want to learn from that and then also look at it in a critical perspective. Is there things that are taking place there that we would not want to adopt?

We want to do everything we can so that if a worker is trained on using a forklift in Calgary and then gets a job in Prince Albert, does that same piece of training apply? It's the same piece of equipment wherever it is. Or are we duplicating training courses? Is there things that we can do by way of certification, by way of the equipment that's used so that we make it both better for workers that are mobile and also for employers that are working in jurisdictions?

But I think the point you're making is a valid one, that we ought to make sure that none of those exercises diminish workplace safety. And I think it's valid that you raise it, and it's something that the ministry officials have to watch out for carefully.

Mr. Forbes: — And I do think that it's a change in policy. I should have brought the paper in with me, but at one point it was not on the list of items that can be discussed. And now I'm hearing the minister say labour regulations are certainly part of the discussion for New West Canada, and that's not going to be a surprise to you if any of the labour regulations come up for discussion. That's fair enough.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We're under way right now with a start of a review of our OHS regulations, so I think as part of that, it's worth our while to do some interjurisdictional comparison.

We've got the mines review under way right now, and I know before that went ahead, I pulled out the mine regulations for Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario to see what I felt where the significant differences were. If you're an insomniac, that's probably a good cure, you know. And it dealt with the size of cables down shafts, how shafts . . . all kinds of the engineering minutia that was there.

I was also surprised at how different they were between the jurisdictions. Not necessarily the standards but how things were framed or how things were there. So you could say, yes, you want to have a cable going down a shaft made of a certain material, whatever else. Why wouldn't it be section 13 in all of the regulations so that, you know, if you're going from jurisdiction to . . . Even if we haven't adopted a standard that's taking place, have the discussion whether you should, and then make it so that it's as easy to find. You know, we've taken all of our legislation and put it into one Act, but I think we can do a better job of having the regs sort of simplified so that people don't need to spend months learning.

Mr. Forbes: — Well in January I believe it was, the Ministry of Labour and the Government of Saskatchewan made an

exceptional contribution to federal law at the Supreme Court of Canada with a ruling on the right to strike and essential services. So that is one that became standardized right across Canada, that concept. Any lessons learned from that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We introduced Bills 5 and 6 when we first formed government, and I think the Premier has been quite open that those did not have the scrutiny that they might have received now that they wouldn't have gone through the same committee structure. So I think we've moved a long ways from that in terms of our internal process.

As you're likely aware, things were somewhat divided in the courts as we went through the courts. And I think we knew that with regard to the essential services legislation that we wanted to make changes in it, in any event. So to answer your question, did we learn things? Well we certainly wanted to do some things different with regard to consultation, and we felt that we wanted to make changes to the Act in any event.

You're aware that we have an advisory committee. Some of the labour people that were on the Act made some specific recommendations about how we would agree on an essential services contract or how we would deal with those things. So yes, we feel we've come a ways.

Mr. Forbes: — When was the last time your advisory committee met? How often has it been meeting?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We met more often during the process of the legislation. I think the goal, I don't think it should be taken as being the only method of consultation we would want to have. When I took the portfolio, I wanted to have an informal method of just sort of discussing and having . . . And I thought at that time, three or four people on it. Well we've got right around 20, and it's a little bit more structured. Ultimately I'd like to have it three to five times a year, and it was certainly more than that as we went through the employment Act.

Mr. Forbes: — Now one of the things that the former minister, when we talked about this, and of course one of the steps or things that happened along the way was a ruling from the International Labour Organization on the appropriateness of Bills 5 and 6. And that was not well received by this government. Has there been a change in opinion around the worthiness of the International Labour Organization? At that time it seemed to be really downplayed and discredited as an authority.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think we've always regarded the ILO [International Labour Organization] as something that was persuasive. It should be reviewed carefully and taken in the context of where we can do and what would be best practices. We hadn't regarded it as necessarily binding on our government, as is the practice in the other jurisdictions as well. However the Supreme Court accepted, and I guess it's now enshrined in law, some of the rulings of the ILO and some of the statements that they had made regarding essential services.

Certainly we accept the wisdom and benevolence of the court insofar as making that aspect of the ILO binding on us, and we want to work to see how that will fit or how it can fit. Having said that, we will continue to read ILO decisions and rulings as

they come forward and, in the same context, that we value and want to reflect on that.

Mr. Forbes: — Now at federal-provincial meetings, sometimes in the past it's been my experience that issues from the ILO would come up. Has it been your experience now that you've been minister for a few years? Have you talked about the different agreements or issues brought forward at the international level?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm told by one of the officials that it's a subcommittee of the ministers' meeting. The last one I went to was two years ago. The deputy minister went a year ago. So I think it's something that, for the ministers, ILO decisions are always there and are always something that should be considered.

Mr. Forbes: — I just think that, you know, and I know in our own government, our government, the NDP [New Democratic Party] government decided about the SaskPower in 1999 I think it was. And so I do take this seriously. I did have the benefit of attending ILO meetings, and I think that they really shine a light on issues that . . . you know, when we talk about people travelling from Alberta here to work, whether they wear a hard hat or not, and the wonderful thing that's happening in Saskatchewan where we have people coming from around the world to work here. And we should be, we are truly blessed with that, so I think that's important.

Now with the Supreme Court ruling, if I recollect rightly, not only was the right to strike enshrined in our law, constitution, but there was a penalty that was placed on the Government of Saskatchewan, the Ministry of Labour. Is that correct?

[16:15]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There was two things that came out of lower court rulings. The Court of Queen's Bench indicated that the government could be liable for damages. To have a claim and damages, they would have to prove what the damages were and make an application to the court and probably have another trial with regard to them. There is no proceeding that I am aware of with regard to damages, and I'm not certain that there . . . I can't speak for somebody else that would want to do it or their chances of success. They also received an order for costs at the Supreme Court.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. Okay. And you're a lawyer, so you would know this much better. That's a good explanation in terms of . . . There's a set of damages and then there are costs. These are two separate things? How do you anticipate the costs . . . [inaudible] . . . to play out?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The costs that were awarded by the Supreme Court are what's called party and party costs, and they're done according to a tariff. You might want to talk to your two people that sit behind you in the House, and they can walk you through it as to what the costs might be.

The process to have the costs determined would be what's called a taxation of the costs, and it would take out an appointment for the taxes or else negotiate and agree with them as to what the tax costs might be. I'm not going to comment on

or give the numbers on them because there's been no formal process taken to have the costs taxed or formally determined by the court, and I think there is some discussion going on between the parties as to whether they can be resolved outside of going through the formal taxing process.

Mr. Forbes: — So now who would be responsible for the government's side? Who would be leading that discussion?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well the Ministry of Labour will ultimately be responsible, or we expect we'll be responsible for the costs. The determination of the costs is made of course by a registrar at the Supreme Court, and we would have our legal counsel appear on that if we weren't able to agree on that.

Mr. Forbes: — Now are you prepared? Have you set money aside, or will this be a contingency or something that we'll have to come back to in the winter months to set money aside for then?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We have not set aside money in our budget. Whether it's an amount that would be absorbed or whether supplementary funding would be required I guess would remain to be seen.

Mr. Forbes: — How much did this cost the . . . What were the costs to the Ministry of Labour over the past . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I understand the officials may have accrued some funds, but we wouldn't want to speculate on what the accrual might be any more than we would on a bidding process or the outcome of any negotiated process.

Mr. Forbes: — So what was the cost to the Ministry of Labour for this action over the past seven to eight years?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We don't know all of the expenses because all of the expenses have not yet come in, but I can give you some approximations.

The legal work was done by Graeme Mitchell with the Ministry of Justice, so it was done by a staff lawyer, and we don't think there was any incremental costs. He would have had some travel expenses and some out-of-pocket expenses. We also would pay an agent in Ottawa for filing the documents and appearing on our behalf to speak to adjournments and that type of thing.

We understand that the agent in Ottawa, and I'm not sure whether some of the costs of that is going to be split between this ministry and Justice or not, but the total from that law firm was just over \$50,000, I think 51,000. And then there was travel for . . . I think Pat Parenteau had gone down and those expenses would have been for travel in the range of 15,000, so an out-of-pocket guesstimate . . . 1,500 for travel. But there would have been some . . . There may have been Graeme's expenses as well. So I think between the two ministries, there was the 50,000 that was paid to the Ottawa firm and then some travel expenses in addition to that.

Mr. Forbes: — But I am anticipating that the costs over the seven or eight years on this project has been significantly more. And maybe it's been incremental, but I think that it would be

... I hope this hasn't been a side project or maybe it ... I mean clearly this was, you know, right off the bat of being Bills 5 and 6 of the new government and moving right away on this. It must have had some serious costs over the eight years.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think sometime later in the year, perhaps next time, we'll be able to give you a more precise figure of the travel of the officials and the Justice lawyers, and also the out-of-pocket expenses that we would have paid for the law firm in Ottawa for the Supreme Court application. So I think for those out-of-pocket expenses right now, and I could stand to be corrected, were 60 or \$70,000 maybe, in that range. Now what the taxable costs are I'm not going to speculate on until after we've gone through. I can tell you this with regard to the costs. The commitment we made was that we were going to have essential services legislation in this province. We still believe we have to have essential services and we are committed to having them. Once we got into the litigation, we continued. There was not a way to get off.

So there was two things that were challenged, Bill 5 and Bill 6. Bill 5 dealt with essential services. Bill 6 dealt with a secret ballot, communicating with employees. In each case as we went through the court system, Bill 6 was upheld at the Court of Queen's Bench, was upheld at the Court of Appeal, and was upheld at the Supreme Court. So with regard to that one, the province was successful in maintaining its position throughout. And that bill is now good law, and is part of the employment Act and I don't think poses a problem for anyone. So that bill, in and of itself ... People talk about Bill 5 and 6. Well 6 is something that worked out well. It was successful.

Bill 5 was *The Essential Services Act* and we were not successful at the Court of Queen's Bench. However the Court of Appeal upheld the legislation. So at that point it was very mixed. When we got to the Supreme Court, as you're likely aware, it was a mixed decision, deeply divided on the part of the Supreme Court. And I wouldn't be surprised if the Supreme Court chose to come back and revisit some aspects of the judgment that they've made. They also made reference in the decision that it was appropriate and proper and was something normal for a government to do, to try and protect and ensure essential services in the province. So they said that that was a laudable goal of any government in the country.

So to the extent that we wanted to have essential services protected in our province, we were doing the right thing. But we knew from practice, we knew from our discussions with organized labour that it was not as workable as we wanted it to be. So that's why during that time that the court process was under way, we didn't want that to be wasted or dead time. We started to do the work on Bill 128, which was the employment Act, and had a piece included in that that we anticipated what the changes might be to make the bill more workable, and also what we thought the Supreme Court might do.

Now the Supreme Court went somewhat further than we thought, so we may have to make some additional changes to Bill 128, or those sections in that Act, or do something else. And those things could include some further consultation which we'll want to do. It could include the use of the notwithstanding clause. We could say no, we think the Supreme Court has been too restrictive in what they said; we feel that we need to go

more, take a more aggressive stand and utilize the notwithstanding clause. You and I are both aware that the notwithstanding clause is not something, the use of it is not something that is taken lightly, but nonetheless it is something that we have not yet taken off the table. We are continuing to have discussions and will probably have more discussions as we go forward.

The Supreme Court has said that for a year we are entitled to keep Bill 5 in place, so we know that we are working now under the existing protection of Bill 5.

Mr. Forbes: — And I would say, you know, in this discussion I mean ... And I appreciate your comments, but I think in many ways many people saw that after Bill 5 was introduced, that it was really a pretty reckless bill, that in fact it was really ramming ahead where many people were saying we can work this out, we can work this out. Nobody was really opposing the idea of essential services and what can we do. But, and as you're right, that once you get on the merry-go-round of the different courts, who's going to back down? You know, you appealed it to the provincial level and won at the provincial level, so obviously it had to be appealed to the Supreme Court.

And to me, this is something that the people of the province will wonder. Was this a reasonable use of time and priorities, and was the choice of this government to pursue a course that in many ways was ideologically driven? And it wasn't about essential services because everybody was saying, we can do essential services. If this is a priority of the government then it would be fine to have that discussion with labour. And we're actually seeing now that there can be productive conversations with labour about how we can get effective legislation. But once you start to push a bill like that ... And I would say about Bill 6, you may call it a good law. I would call it, it is a law, and congratulations on winning. You are the government so you do have the right to make laws, and fair enough and that's that.

But I do think that there's a lot of questions, and it'll be interesting as the years go by, as when we look back at this period of eight years, eight years of legal wrangling over something that we call essential services, and the key part of essential services I think is the idea that you need to be quick. And here we are eight years later. Now you can use Bill 5 but the fact of the matter is you've seen a labour community that's willing to work, to work in a collegial way.

But for some reason, back eight years ago it was seen that we had to pick a fight with them. This government felt that and I just think that that was reckless and a very useless exercise to go to the Supreme Court. But many will congratulate this government on establishing the right to strike, and that that now is something that's part of the Canadian milieu and the Sask Party brought that to fruition. I don't know if that was the intent of the government to do that at the end of the day, but when you were out working to get essential services. So there were lessons learned and I hope that we can continue from that.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Okay. I'm not sure I necessarily agree with all of the points that you're making, but respect your opinion on them. I think the imperative for us is the safety and security of our citizens. We introduced the bill and then we didn't challenge it. It was challenged by SFL [Saskatchewan

Federation of Labour], by organized labour, which is certainly their right to do it. But once the process starts, once you have a decision, then you sort of have to go through with the process after that. It's one of the things it's difficult to get off of because whatever stage you get off, that becomes the status quo. That becomes the law that was there.

So when Justice Ball wrote the decision, it certainly wasn't something that we were particularly comfortable with or wanted because he was the one that established the constitutional right to strike in his decision, which came as a bit of a surprise, more than a bit of a surprise to everyone. But had organized labour chose to leave it after the Court of Appeal, that would have been the status quo and I think we both agree that they weren't prepared to do that. So that's how that merry-go-round continues.

The priority for government is of course safety and security of its citizens. But also when you look at the workers that work in a public sector environment, you look at those workers and if there is a labour disruption, they're not comfortable either striking or threatening to strike in a situation where they're providing what they know is an essential service.

If you look at a snowplow worker, the snowplow worker is frustrated because they haven't been able to arrive at a collective agreement. Then should you say to that worker, go out and strike, knowing full well that that worker's putting the lives of his neighbours and friends at risk? Is that what you want to say to that worker, or use that, even the threat of that? There has to be in place a better method to resolve issues so that you aren't saying to that worker, you have to choose your collective rights or you have to choose safety of your workers. There's got to be another method, and I think that's the process that we have to develop going forward.

Mr. Forbes: — So how are things going in terms of Bill 128? It was passed and . . .

[16:30]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — But not proclaimed.

Mr. Forbes: — Right.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — So 128 is there now. It would be open to us to proclaim 128 but we're not certain that it complies with the ruling. So what we're doing now is reviewing the ruling and reviewing 128 to determine what changes have to be made. We will want to undergo some consultation. We've had some discussions through the advisory committee and some informal discussions, but we probably have to do a greater level of consultation and a greater level of review.

I would really like to come out of it at the end of the day and say yes, we think we now have changes to the legislation that we think adequately protect the public and reflect what the Supreme Court has said and also, and equally as importantly, that organized labour within the province feels comfortable with and that we're not off down the road of another seven-year legal battle. That we can say yes, we think this is something that's working. So that's the goal that we have. Whether we can meet all of those or not, I don't know but I certainly want to.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you. Now in terms of the employment Act and the Labour Relations Board, we saw a cut I believe of \$53,000. Is that right? Was there a reduction in the Labour Relations Board funding?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The Labour Relations Board is a frugal group of people and I give them credit for that. What they've done is they have made some reductions in honoraria and retainers that reduced their salaries expense by \$13,000, and then included in operating the previous year was \$40,000 for video conference equipment, which has now been bought and paid for. So that money did not need to be left in the budget because it was already there. So there's been a minus 13 . . . minus 53,000 in total decrease.

I stand corrected. The video conference, they didn't go ahead with the project. The equipment wasn't bought, so they didn't need it.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. One of the concerns we had with the employment Act was the assignment of new tasks or duties to the Labour Relations Board, the fact of, in terms of adjudicators and that type of thing, that all of that kind of stuff would now be run out of that office as opposed to what would have formerly been through the ministry. What's been the impact of that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We believe that they're coping well with it. I meet periodically with the board Chair and the question that I put to him as we were going through the process was that this may add some administrative duties to you in assigning adjudicators and may increase a greater level of workload to you in making some of the determinations that you're required to under some portions of it.

They have indicated that they are coping adequately now, but will monitor it and ask us for more. And my offer to the board Chair was, make sure you let us know and give us as much lead time as you can because some of the people may need to get trained up or develop some expertise. But we are operating there with the complement that they've asked for.

Mr. Forbes: — And they feel good. This was raised to me by a couple of groups who felt that there were questions about whether or not they were adequately resourced.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I had a number, not a large number, a number of people come to me saying, you've imposed something else on them. Do they have the expertise? Do they have the background knowledge? Do they have sufficient resources? The board Chair indicates to me that he believes that at least for the time being they do.

Some of the additional work that's necessary revolves around Bill 128 on the essential services side, which of course is not in place yet. But they may at that point in time, determining who's essential, may require some additional resources. But right now they're meeting the targets. They're having a relatively quick turnaround time on the applications that they're hearing. So at the present time they have neither asked for or received any additional funding in spite of the fact that I offer periodically.

Mr. Forbes: — And you've given them more work. But that's good. I mean if they feel they can do it, that's great.

Another question I have is around the firefighters. They were here back in November, and you're probably well aware of the questions they asked. They lobbied both sides of the House. And so what is the status of . . . They came forward with four points. One was the removal of the 20,000 people population from the employment Act. Any further discussions on that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No. Because as you're aware, municipalities, if they wanted to avail themselves of the mandatory arbitration clause, they needed to be 20,000 population or more. So that was a change from what was there at 10, and that reflects sort of the current growth in our municipalities that sort of kept the same ones in or out. And this was done in consultation with the municipalities.

We knew that the firefighters would prefer to have had access to the binding arbitration and it was our view that, in consultation with the municipalities, that we weren't prepared to do that. So we raised it to 20 and left it there.

Mr. Forbes: — It is a dilemma though because the point made by the firefighters is significant because they are among the lowest paid in Canada and it's always an issue, you know, particularly in smaller communities. And the fact that you have people who are protecting property and lives . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The concern is an interesting one and I understand where they came from. The issue for the firefighters is the difference in pay scale between city of Saskatoon and say, city of Swift Current. There's a large difference in pay in the two municipalities. In the smaller municipalities the fire departments are often a blend of volunteer and professional firefighters, and they're very conscious of what the money costs are. And I understand and appreciate the very good work that they do because they protect the safety and security of all of us, but the cost differential to move those people from the type of salary they were receiving to give them parity or closer parity with Saskatoon and Regina was something that was not workable for those municipalities.

Mr. Forbes: — You know, I think they are comparing that but they're also comparing right across Canada. I mean we have the same pay scales whether you're a teacher in Saskatoon or a teacher in Swift Current, whether you're a government employee in Saskatoon or a government employee in Swift Current. I understand that there's a different employer but this may be a conversation because they did raise the issue about additional funding for the fire service.

And I want to ask about firefighters. They had raised some concerns about occupational diseases and expansion of that with Workers' Compensation. Have you considered that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — They brought some additional medical information. We've referred it to WCB and asked them to do a review and come back to us with some information and some recommendations. As you're aware, we made some amendments a couple of years ago and I think it was something that both sides of the House supported and moved it through very quickly. So at this point I think I want to give WCB their time to review the information that was provided. It was information not from Canada so it'll be a little bit harder or more complex for them to work their way through the

recommendations.

Mr. Forbes: — Well we'd certainly be willing to support that. And I know, and this is something that in fact when I was talking to the teachers today, people don't see us actually working well together. But I think, Mr. Minister, we have worked well in terms of the asbestos registry and Jimmy's law and I think in terms of the firefighters. If that made sense to do that we'd be very, very happy to be part of that. So I'll extend that olive branch.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I thank you for your past co-operation and put it on record that I won't be shy to ask for it again.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Well I know we finish in about 10 minutes I think, right? So I've got some short snappers here. Minimum wage, is it going to go up?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It has each and every year since we've been in government and will go up. The process will be under way now for this year. There'll be collecting and as you're aware, it's a six-month notice period so it goes up in late fall and will go up an average of what the consumer price index is and the average hourly wage. It's a halfway between those two.

Mr. Forbes: — That is good news because I think with the wage freezes . . . And there was some apprehension that in fact they may, people on minimum wage may also feel that, and I'm glad to hear that.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — As much as you and I are showing some restraint, for people that are at the bottom of the pay scale it's not going to happen.

Mr. Forbes: — Last year I asked some questions about Jimmy's law and the fact of the whole issue around post-traumatic stress or what happens with folks who experience violence in the workplace. Has there been any more work around that or has there been any more inspections around late-night retail workplaces? What is the latest with that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can give you in 2013-2014 we did 63 inspections, and there was a 70 per cent compliance rate. As you're aware, for the compliance it wasn't specific, saying you must do A, B, and C. It was a matter that you had to have a plan in place that included things such as a panic button, better illumination, a cash management system, unobscured windows, and that type of thing.

So in 2013-2014, 63, 70 per cent compliance; 2014-15, 33 inspections, 80 per cent compliance. So it's improving. We're working with, there's an industry association, the Western Convenience Store Association. Their members are actually very good at . . . They're usually the larger ones, the chains, and they've got some of the best practices in place. So we're working with them. They're providing their employees a website hazard assessment tool. It's a questionnaire that an employer can work through and try and develop a better method, not just of compliance but a better method of safety. So I think we've made relatively good progress but not as much as we want on the larger chain stores in the larger centres.

I still worry about the small centres in remote locations,

whether those ones are up to space as they would. You're likely aware, and I think we've talked about it here: Kyle, Saskatchewan, where two murders took place the same night in one all-night store. So that's the type of location where it's not on a major through highway, where it wouldn't be as extensively patrolled by RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] or a local police force. Those are the ones that I think we hope that the ministry officials will focus on because that's where the higher risk is.

Sadly our statistical tools don't work as well as they should because until you have a major occurrence that you've got something that's there, you know, you may have a non-compliant workplace that's there for a long time. Anyway, the officials talk about it, discuss it, and are working towards trying to improve compliance in there as well.

Mr. Forbes: — I've got a couple of questions about WCB, if your official could return to the table. A constituent came in in January, so I hope I still remember all of this, but I would imagine your official may remember this, as this is his line of work. This was dealing with New Brunswick workers. It's a news story from 2012:

New Brunswick's workers' compensation board is repaying close to \$4 million to 901 people as a result of a court ruling earlier this year . . . [about clawing back] injury benefit payments from Canada Pension Plan recipients.

[16:45]

Are you familiar with this situation, and how does it apply to Saskatchewan? And you probably get the question quite often about CPP [Canada Pension Plan] and how it works with workers' comp and whether it should be part of the calculation or not.

Mr. Federko: — I'm not 100 per cent familiar with all of the details of the New Brunswick court case, but included in our legislation are provisions such that we do offset, where there are CPP benefits being paid, we do offset 50 per cent of those CPP benefits in applying workers' compensation benefits. That particular section of the legislation was studied by not the last one but probably the committee of review two times ago, and there were no decisions made, no recommendations made with respect to changing the provisions of that particular piece of the legislation. So we've had that in place I think since the inception of the legislation in 1979.

Mr. Forbes: — So I could take a look back at that, and if I need to, I'll talk further and correspond with you about that.

The other one, and we've had this discussion about project zero, and I appreciate the minister's comments about it. And I want to say that I think in many ways it's a good thing, but as my role as the critic, I get critical. And so I just want to ask, and I was asked in the media about some of the media campaign. Has there or will there be an independent assessment of project zero and its effectiveness?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mission: Zero.

Mr. Forbes: — Mission: Zero, yes. What year are you in the campaign?

Mr. Federko: — So Mission: Zero is just the most recent branding, if you will, of a broad provincial prevention strategy that's been in effect since 2002. In 2002-2003 the Workers' Compensation Board signed an agreement with the ministry of the day creating a partnership called WorkSafe Saskatchewan, and WorkSafe Saskatchewan has been working with the ministry through all of those years to develop a broad provincial-based prevention strategy which has included things like education and training, targeting strategies both on the inspection side but as well as just from a workers' compensation . . . How can we help you build better programs, return-to-work programs? Those kinds of things.

We also have a significant partnership element, relationship element to our strategy whereby we reach out to organizations like the Federation of Labour, like the chambers of commerce who help us in becoming safety ambassadors to promote health and safety across this province.

The last element but the most visible, is our social marketing campaign: the television ads, the newspaper ads, the billboards, all of the stuff that we have been doing to create awareness and capture people's attention. But all of these other things continue to go in the background.

In 2008 my board of the day said, we don't believe that you're being aggressive enough in terms of pursuing reduction in the injury rate. What should the proper target for the acceptable number of injuries in this province be? After much discussion with many parties and many stakeholders, it was determined that there is no other number other than zero that would be an acceptable number, and for us as a province to strive for anything other than that would be unacceptable. So in 2008 we introduced the Mission: Zero objective and brand to all of the WorkSafe strategies which, you know, really now have been adopted by many, many other organizations in this province.

In terms of an independent review of its effectiveness, I guess the greatest testament to whether it is working or not, there are some of the statistics the minister has already mentioned, and that's the number of workplaces who have actually sought to achieve Mission: Zero. Through our partnership with Safe Saskatchewan, we also look at the number of business and community leaders who have committed and adopted Mission: Zero as their goal and as their objective in terms of injury reduction in their workplaces. We have almost 400 community and business leaders, including the Government of Saskatchewan, who have signed the health and safety leadership charter.

We look at the continued reductions in the injury rates and the more aggressive reduction in injury rates since the adoption of Mission: Zero. We continue to think that it is working, particularly when we talk to our stakeholders and there is huge acceptance and adoption of the notion that there is no other acceptable number other than zero in terms of our pursuit of health and safety. So we have nothing planned in terms of an independent evaluation. We look at the dollars that we're spending for the results that we're getting and we think it's really working quite effectively.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I think we're at that time, and so I want to thank you, Mr. Minister, for your answers, and to your officials. I really appreciate it. I've covered much of my ground. I'll leave some for next time. Thank you all.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you. Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the member opposite, the members that are here, plus the officials, including those that didn't get to participate. We'll save their incineration for another day. But I want to thank all of them for coming out. I know this is a time that they spend an enormous amount of work in preparation for, so I want to thank all of them for being here and the work that they're doing. That's all that I have, so thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you, members. The time being 4:51, we are in recess until 7 p.m.

[The committee recessed from 16:51 until 19:00.]

**General Revenue Fund
Social Services
Vote 36**

Subvote (SS01)

The Chair: — The time being 7 o'clock, this evening we will resume considerations of the estimates for the Ministry of Social Services, vote 36, central management and services, subvote (SS01). Minister Harpauer is here with her officials. Minister, if you would please introduce your officials and make your opening comments. And if we have new officials sit down, could they introduce themselves, please.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. With us tonight seated on my left-hand side is Ken Acton, the deputy minister of Social Services. In various places in the assembly we have Don Allen, the assistant deputy minister, housing programs and finance; Constance Hourie, the assistant deputy minister, income assistance programs and corporate planning; Tammy Kirkland, the assistant deputy minister of child and family programs; Bob Wihlidal, the assistant deputy minister of disability programs; Gord Tweed, the executive director, program and service design for income assistance programs and corporate planning; Bob Martinook, the executive director of community living service delivery, disability programs; Garry Prediger, the acting executive director, community services, child and family programs; Wayne Phaneuf, the executive director of strategic initiatives, income assistance programs and corporate planning; and Miriam Myers, the executive director of finance, housing programs and finance.

Thank you. And with that, Mr. Chair, we will entertain any questions.

The Chair: — Mr. Forbes, the floor is yours.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you so much, and thank you to the minister for this final wrap-up — I appreciate the opportunity to have questions — and to your officials here tonight. Of course we did have some questions in question period today, and of course the media has been really focusing a lot on the Bonneau inquest. I don't know if there is any general comments you want to put on the record before I have some specific ones,

some observations that you'd like to make.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — As I have said with the interview yesterday, our condolences go to both families because the Children's Advocate very aptly pointed out that there was two tragedies, not just one, and there was mistakes made and acknowledged. The officials have been very diligent in looking at the recommendations from the Children's Advocate, as well as an extensive internal investigation was done within the ministry to identify where services failed. So with that, I will turn the questions over to you.

Mr. Forbes: — I appreciate that. So I'm wondering if we could just take a moment, and now it appeared that in the *Leader-Post* this morning, the story that there was a thought that not all the recommendations from the jury that related to the province would be accepted or that some you are ruling out. Could you go through . . . I don't know if you have the list in front of you. If you want to go through some, if you want to make some comments, we have time enough to do that. And then in a few minutes, I'll be asking you to go through the Children's Advocate report so we can get an update on that just briefly as well.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Certainly. So as I had said, it'll be two, hopefully two, possibly three weeks before there is a formal response. But in first blush of course, we've looked at them and had some discussion already. The officials are looking at them more in depth, but we have discussed them. And there's a number, such as . . . So if you want to go through them one by one, we could do that.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. I wouldn't mind that.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The first one is:

With introduction of possible mental health barriers on part of parents or guardians, a qualified mental services worker is involved with ensuring the complete understanding of concerns on behalf of the Child Services Provider at the time of involvement. For example services offered and/or before documents are signed.

That will take some consideration because yes, there has in this case identified where there was mental health services that were needed to be provided to at least one, if not both, young boys. The consideration has to be around . . .

Mr. Forbes: — And the mother as well.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — And the mother. Correct. Now there was services put in the home for the mother, numerous services with varying results. That's another discussion, but we have to implement this in such a way that it doesn't delay the case plan. Like we can't delay decision while waiting for a mental health worker or a mental health intervention. So a lot of thought I think has to go on into how this actually can be implemented so there will be a more formal result.

No. 2 is, "Parental Services Agreements should have follow up, upon completion." And we agree, and we need to do better.

And no. 3 is, "Stronger recruitment and retention incentives for

foster parents in rural areas.” That’s a struggle. In my interview with the media I said, absolutely, that would be great. The Foster Families Association along with the ministry has undertaken a number of initiatives to try to recruit more foster families. It is a challenge for a few reasons: one of them, society changed, societal changes. We no longer are a society that wants bigger families. We also have the two-parent working families that may not necessarily want to take on more children. And so there’s a number of reasons why it’s difficult to recruit foster parents, and it’s not unique to Saskatchewan. That is something that we’re facing in America and I think in other countries as well.

No. 4 is, “Increase of monetary compensation and services provided for foster parents under Ministry of Social Services and Yorkton Tribal Council Child and Family Services.” We have increased them significantly, and I’m not sure that increases is going to get the result that I think the jury was hoping for, which is more families. What we’re finding more effective in helping to retain our families is putting supports in their home to help them, which we have increased considerably. So I think that’s something that we need to continue to do and identify those families that need the extra supports in a more timely fashion.

No. 5 is, “Policy with regards to completion and forwarding caregiver information form to be followed,” and we agree.

No. 6, “Concerns with regards to the child’s behaviour and/or specific needs be brought to the immediate attention of the prospective Foster Parent before placement.” We agree, keeping in mind that sometimes it’s an emergency placement. You apprehend the children in the night. You don’t want to necessarily house them in a hotel or some cold . . . you know, an environment that perhaps isn’t appropriate. So you have those that will take them on an emergency, and there may not be the . . . Then the follow-up needs to happen with the relevant information.

No. 7 is, “Re-evaluation of protocols with respect to training and qualification of Foster Parents; more specifically re-assessment of child care skills and the introduction of a mandatory refresher course for Foster Parents on an appropriately decided basis.” This might be one that you referred to that I said I wasn’t sure if the jury perhaps understood that we had a very rigorous training for foster parents, and that explanation will go to the jury in our response, our formal response. But I know the last time we met in committee that I had gone through all of the qualifications that we require of our foster parents and in the PRIDE [Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education] training in particular, which I think you’re familiar with, other provinces are copying the training that we do.

No. 8 is, “Communication and file sharing between all pertinent parties with regards to child welfare be shared in a timely manner.” We agree, and we have to do better.

No. 9, “FASD, ADHD and other mental health issues should be addressed as soon as an issue is identified. Depending on results, a full-time therapist may be warranted.” We will in our response of course identify what supports are there, keeping in mind that we would . . . Most services are for more symptoms

than diagnosis because the symptoms vary very much from one child or even an adult that has FASD [fetal alcohol spectrum disorder], and the severity.

We also think that we will be working with Health very closely. And I know the recommendation was for Ministry of Social Services and the Yorkton Tribal Council, but I think Health will be partners with us on this because there will be a response to the mental health and addictions action plan, and some of those services that’ll be offered from the response to that will indeed be helping people that have FASD.

So no. 10 is, “Efforts to increase funding for positions for child welfare workers on Reserve should be made. A social worker and a mental health therapist are recommended on a priority basis with the necessity for a direct line of services . . .”

Mr. Forbes: — These are the ones that aren’t related to . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That’s true. That’s for the Yorkton Tribal Council. So you want me to skip over those?

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. I do, yes.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Okay. So there’s a number specific to the Yorkton Tribal Council, and that one that I was just reading is actually federal funding.

Going to 13, “Funding efforts be made for a facility for children with complex needs under the age of 12.” We have services already, and so I’m not sure — and you’re well aware of all of the capital pressures that we have in government — whether we’ll be building a stand-alone facility. But we have service providers. We will definitely take a look at whether or not we have enough, is more the area we’ll look at there, rather than an actual separate facility.

No. 14, “Ministry of Social Services and YTC pursue implementation of prevention awareness for mothers with respect to FASD through various resources.” Further efforts have been made in that, but we’ll explore where else we could perhaps do so beyond where that’s already made available.

No. 15 is, “Criminal Investigation on a child through the RCMP not be a hindrance to ongoing investigation by YTC,” and we absolutely agree.

No. 16 is YTC [Yorkton Tribal Council].

No. 17 is, “Protocols for Alcohol and Drug Assessment for parents/guardians be enforced.” And I have to say, on first blush, we’re not sure what they were looking for there. And so some thought will go into what exactly is being asked for there.

No. 18, “An Assessment and Case Plan be completed by 120 days after Intake Report, regardless of the introduction of the new Intake Report. References to subsequent Intake Reports and Assessment and Case Plans should be made if applicable,” and we agree.

And No. 19 is, “The size of service centres for rural offices be re-evaluated in relation to available staffing and service concerns.” Again that will be challenging because there is rural

areas and, in particular, the remote North where we struggle to get workers.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Thank you for that overview. That's helpful, and I appreciate that. For example, 17, are there protocols around alcohol and drug assessment right now? Do you have a protocol for that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I will get Tammy Kirkland to answer that question.

Ms. Kirkland: — Tammy Kirkland, ADM [assistant deputy minister], child and family programs. So as part of our case management and assessing risk and need with families, if there is an identified concern around addictions, we would refer families or parents to the appropriate resource and support them in getting those services. We also have families who sometimes have involvement with the justice system and may have that as a requirement, and so we would again try to support that work.

Mr. Forbes: — But it isn't a general requirement for everyone? Drug testing isn't a requirement right off the bat for everyone?

Ms. Kirkland: — It's not.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And I guess the couple that I would really want to comment and highlight that I'm interested in seeing progress is really around the mental health one in no. 9 . . . well no. 9 and I guess the other which is the FASD and ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder], no. 1. And so you had been talking that there will be a response to the mental health action plan that may address some of these concerns.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'll just comment at first, and then Tammy Kirkland will talk about it as well. There will be. I can't speak for Health though, as to where that's at. Right now Health, in their budget this year, have \$1.8 million that's dedicated to FASD diagnosis and services, and then through the Ministry of Social Services there's funding available for services in the cognitive disabilities strategy. But I will get Tammy to add more to this.

[19:15]

Ms. Kirkland: — Just in regard to the FASD, in addition to what Health does and the \$1.8 million that the minister had mentioned, we have a contract with the fetal alcohol spectrum disorder society of Saskatchewan. And they assist us with training for foster parents on how to work with children and youth who have FASD challenges, so we have that in place.

We also in the past year implemented a behaviour specialist program within Social Services, both in child and family and CLSD [community living service delivery], where we have folks in our ministry who go in and provide intensive support to families with complex needs, and FASD would qualify as one of those areas we would look at.

Mr. Forbes: — I just think that it's a critical, critical piece, and one that's so, so, so important. Now somewhere along the line, whether it was yesterday, I understand you wrote a letter to the federal government regarding this situation. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I don't have it with me, but it was in essence just saying that, in light of the recommendations that had come forward from the coroner's inquest, that we hope that there is consideration in their budget for funding that would be equivalent to what is provided by the province.

Mr. Forbes: — Now do you find it interesting — I mean this comment was made to me — that the two parties that were really named in all of this was the Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services and the Yorkton Tribal Council? Really the third party would have been the federal government who should have been at the inquest, who should have been named. The RCMP even intervened and asked for a special allowance to be part of the inquest process. But some people have said, really who should have been there as well was the federal government and the appropriate department because there's a lot of responsibility when it comes to funding and making sure that it's appropriate. So I don't know if you have any comments you'd like to make about that.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The federal government is the sole funder of the First Nations agencies, so it is very important that that funding is adequate. And definitely this particular situation did involve a First Nations agency.

As I said in question period, it would have been helpful had they had an electronic system for example because it was identified in the coroner's inquest that the paper trail wasn't passed from one office to another, so the one worker in particular that was involved with the one child didn't know some of the past history of the child because the paper trail hadn't followed to her office. They have now put in an electronic system, and so that will help some of the gap in the communication, but of course that costs a lot of money, as you identified. So yes, it's quite important that the federal government is funding our agencies adequately.

Mr. Forbes: — So what could be done I mean to really bring this to the attention of the federal government that this is clearly a crisis. And while I can hold you accountable for your part of it, clearly the big part, the elephant in the room here in many ways is the federal government, and we need to have some way to get their attention on this.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We do, as government officials, we meet with our federal counterparts as much as possible, and I know the Premier has brought this issue up with the Prime Minister on more than one occasion. There was an injection from the federal government — I believe it was two budgets ago; it could have been three — partially because of the conversation I think our Premier had with the Prime Minister. But it will be ongoing. It's ongoing, those conversations, with the hope that funding will flow and there'll be an understanding. Our First Nations also lobby the federal government on a continual basis for funding.

Mr. Forbes: — I think it's important to . . . And I appreciate your comments about ongoing because they are ongoing partners in this responsibility. But the more we can do whatever we can . . . And I appreciate your efforts at the federal-provincial table and the Premier's efforts. I know he's spoken about education for example, but social services is a huge part. And of course I raised this last time about Jordan's

Principle and, you know, when the federal government came on board with that. But there's such a narrow definition, and here's an example where, you know, we have a tragic circumstance because of that.

In terms of a relationship with First Nations, have you ever thought about a First Nations child advocate? Or is there any kind of recognition of . . . Well obviously they have their own sovereignty, and that's important to respect. But how can it be that we can do more to recognize and respect each other's sovereignty but also respect responsibility and understand the role of the province and the role of the federal government?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — After I answer that, I'm going to get Wayne Phaneuf to talk about a tribunal with involvement with interaction with the federal government. But in answer to that, I think we've come a long way in our relationship with our First Nations agencies. There is from time to time where an agency and the ministry, there'll be mistrust from time to time, but I think that has improved greatly. I think having a special consultant for First Nations and Métis people was quite helpful because that individual is trusted by the First Nations, and so that's helped with the communication.

Having a separate, apart . . . And I know that the First Nations, there are some that have asked for that. They haven't recently. It has been brought to my attention once. Unfortunately the majority of our children in care are First Nations, so then you would go, what, do we need two, or is our Children's Advocate in essence mostly First Nations already? So I'm not sure that we would merit two. But going back to your previous question, Wayne has a few comments.

Mr. Phaneuf: — Good evening. I just wanted to introduce myself. Sorry. Wayne Phaneuf, executive director of strategic initiatives. I just wanted to make sure that we got on record with the issue that the caring society of Canada has initiated a human rights complaint against the federal government in regard to the disparity in funding experienced by First Nation child and family service agencies. That tribunal has been ongoing for two years. They have concluded their hearings but have reserved decision until the end of the current year to 2015, so we do expect to hear what that is. So there is adjudication in the works.

Mr. Forbes: — So when you say end of the year, do you mean December?

Mr. Phaneuf: — December of 2015, yes.

Mr. Forbes: — That's when we anticipate hearing, okay. Thank you. I appreciate that. And we do look forward . . . I've been somewhat familiar with that, but I appreciate the new information.

So getting back to when you say you have a First Nations consultant, is that the title, consultant?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — But they are a full-time employee, so they're a consultant who's not really a consultant because usually when you think of a consultant, it's arm's-length and you're hiring

them.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We have more than one actually, and each one covers two or three First Nations agencies. So it's building relationships, as you will know, and that's what they helped do is build those relationships.

Mr. Forbes: — Now today we did have a discussion about the communications, the computer system. You have 16, 17 agreements. How many of the 17 would have, would you say, a good active computer or communications system?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Ten.

Mr. Forbes: — Ten do?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Ten do.

Mr. Forbes: — Ten do, and so seven don't.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Ten have a formal case management system, and the other seven would have kind of a mix of paper and a computer system of some sort. But 10 would be considered to be a good case management system.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. And are they using the Linkin system, or do some of them have access to parts of it but they have their own system then?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — They have their own system. Lac La Ronge uses Linkin off-reserve.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. Okay. So who are the seven that are in . . . Now is it a situation . . . Do you feel comfortable . . . And I'd like to know the seven, but are some at high risk in terms of, this may be causing problems like risk we saw with the Lee Bonneau circumstance?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — While the officials are looking for the detailed information that you've asked for, we are auditing the First Nations agencies once a year now instead of once every three years, which is part of the response to this particular issue. Is it a concern? You know, I have to say yes because I stated when I was minister last time, which I was given that responsibility in 2007 and had it for a few years, I found it very concerning that the province didn't. So I still find it concerning that we have areas of children that we can't track, and the information, as adequately or as seamlessly as we should be able to. That is definitely something that I hope they all see the merit and the importance of this. We're not sure we have the detailed information, but we can provide that for you after if you like.

Mr. Forbes: — That would be great. Thanks.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Okay.

Mr. Forbes: — And the other questions, a couple of questions I wanted to ask around is the PSIs [person of sufficient interest], persons of significant interest, as opposed to PSAs [parental service agreement], which is a parent something agreement. So PSIs, now are they at the same standard of foster parents? Is there any concern about . . . You know that we want to keep the

same good standards as we do with the foster parents, foster homes. How do you manage that with PSIs?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So Garry Prediger has joined us and will help with that answer of what qualifications are required of a PSI. Some of the PSIs are relatives, which we feel is better for the children if possible because of the family connections. But we'll get a better answer, a more detailed answer in just one moment.

Mr. Prediger: — Hi. Garry Prediger, acting executive director of community services. So I think the question was how are PSIs different than . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Okay. So the PSI, or persons of sufficient interest, parents would be home studied by a ministry worker. They would undergo a complete home assessment. That assessment would be based on their suitability of providing care for a child. Also in PSI situations, the children are identified already for that home, so the worker's really doing an assessment of the parenting capacities of that caregiver and the needs of those particular children or child. That information is then presented in a report to the court, to the family court, and the family court judge would make that decision about making a PSI order.

[19:30]

Mr. Forbes: — What are the costs involved? Do the family members, whether they be grandparents or aunts or uncles, do they get the same supports that a foster family would get in terms of financial supports, that type of thing?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes they do. And I would like to also add that many . . . Quite often, the PSI is identified by the parent. So the parent will say, you know, you're going to apprehend my children, and I would prefer that they be placed with, as you pointed out, the aunt, the uncle, the grandparent. So many of our PSIs are identified by the parent as their preference.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Now this afternoon I'd like to ask a question about deaths in 2014, to have those numbers.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The reports that we provide cover children in care or if they were receiving services, so they may not be in care. In the 2014 calendar year, there were 25 incidents that triggered reviews within our province and, of those, five were in care.

Mr. Forbes: — So when you say 25, and you call them critical incidents, does that mean deaths?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Four were critical injuries, and 21 were deaths.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Was there a breakdown of the kind of deaths that they were?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Five were of natural causes, three were suicides, one was an accidental death, and three are undetermined or SIDS [sudden infant death syndrome] or sudden unexplained death. The remaining nine deaths are still waiting confirmation on the cause of death from the office of the chief coroner.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. And again with the suicides, as with any young people, that's always tragic, and it's important. Again the mental health aspect of it just underlines it. But I also appreciate the medical, fragile as many of them unfortunately are in that circumstance.

So at this point I wouldn't mind going through the advocate's recommendations, so if you can give me a quick update on the *Two Tragedies* report. There were 18 recommendations in that one. If you can give a quick overview of each one of those, that would be great.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So in two or three weeks, we'll have our quarter and final report, which will be public, on the Children's Advocate recommendations. As I said in question period, there were 18 recommendations by the Children's Advocate. We have implemented 12 already. And again, these are shared recommendations. Some were for Social Services; some were for the Yorkton Tribal Council First Nations agency. There are five in development and one under consideration. So I'm going to cover the ones that are under development, and then you'll know the others have already been implemented.

So the first recommendation, which is, "That the Government of Saskatchewan develop and implement well-resourced early childhood development and poverty reduction strategies to advance the goals of its Child and Family Agenda," as you well know, we are undergoing that. We have appointed a panel to review gaps within our services as well as look at other provinces' best practices and do consultation to develop a poverty reduction strategy. So that of course is under development.

The other recommendation is recommendation number three which is:

That the Ministry of Social Services contract with the Children's Research Centre to complete an SDM [which stands for structured decision making] workload estimation study that determines standards for caseload size in Saskatchewan. Once the study is completed, implement the recommended standards.

I've spoken to you. You and I have discussed this before, that to use the average caseload isn't . . . It's helpful but not entirely showing the picture because we have to look at workload not just caseload. If some of the clients for the worker is in a very stable environment, she may only have to visit them once a month, but there's some that of course are very complex. So we're doing work with the Children's Research Center to do that study and review, and that would be ongoing for a while yet before we have any results.

So the other recommendation is no. 11, which is:

That the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Health and their related agencies conduct joint critical incident reviews for children and youth served by both the Ministry of Social Services and the Mental Health and Addictions system within the preceding twelve months.

And the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Health conduct joint critical incident reviews for children and youth

served by both the Ministry of Social Services and the Mental Health and Addictions system, and we're improving on that.

The other is no. 12, which is:

That the Ministry of Social Services and Yorkton Tribal Council Child and Family Services Inc. develop the protocols identified in their Agreement but not yet in place. Of these, the following protocols should receive immediate priority:

- Staff training, development and support;
- Child abuse investigations; and
- Integrating health, education and family services

And we are doing that. We're working with the Yorkton Tribal Council. I had mentioned to you before, we're helping them with training staff. It isn't completed yet, so that's in progress.

The final one in progress is no. 16 which is, "That the Ministry of Social Services and Yorkton Tribal Council First Nations Child and Family Services Inc. provide written progress reports to the Advocate on the applicable recommendations . . ." which is what we've done. We've made them public. And it's quarterly reporting, so we've reported three times now. We'll be reporting our progress one more time in a couple of weeks.

Mr. Forbes: — Now is that a public report? Is that on your website? I could go to it.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. The one that's under consideration is no. 17, and it'll take, in my understanding, a little more work, which is:

That the Ministry of Social Services, Ministry of Health, and Regional Health Authorities jointly develop mental health and addictions services to ensure immediate access to mental health and addiction services for high risk families with child protection involvement.

And again, that goes back to the work that's undergone with all of the consultation with the mental health and addictions action plan, and there will be a response for that.

Mr. Forbes: — In no. 3, when it talks about contract with the Children's Research Center, is that the group in Minnesota?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, it is.

Mr. Forbes: — Can you tell me a little bit about that group? I've read about it a little bit, but clearly you've been using their resources.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We'll get Tammy Kirkland to answer that question.

Ms. Kirkland: — I'll tell you what I know. We'll just look up for you their actual official name. The Children's Research Center is a subsidiary of the larger company, which I think you asked us about last time because we had a budget item under that name.

Mr. Forbes: — I was wondering. I didn't see their name in that.

Ms. Kirkland: — Yes, which meant nothing to me at the time. So the Children's Research Center — sorry, that's the subsidiary — has developed the structured decision-making tools which we have implemented and which have been implemented in a number of jurisdictions. Why that was of interest to us is it looks at each case. It's an assessment tool that looks at each case and identifies the level of risk and the areas of risk, so it allows us to provide the least intrusive but most appropriate services to each family. So it provides a real structure and context for a caseworker in deciding what they need to provide to each of those families.

Mr. Forbes: — They're obviously well known, respected across North America.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Further comment to the recommendations, I'll get the deputy minister to comment further on no. 17, which is the one that I said was in consideration and that, to me, is going to take a lot of work, but it's worthwhile work. So with that, I'll get Ken Acton to speak more to what's been going on.

Mr. Acton: — Yes. So I just wanted to flag that, you know, when you look at the two tragedies and what happened there, I just see so much of it as inability to get the communication or work together as a team. So not long after that, the Children's Advocate, myself, the deputy minister of Health, and others got together to talk about that. And we recently completed an event where we got players from all the different agencies together for close to a week to map out and identify where there was gaps, develop protocols to ensure that communication was shared at an appropriate level, and that there was . . . We developed a protocol, and we'll finalize that in the coming month to make sure that any one of the players can call a case conference if they see a child that is starting to fall through the cracks.

In this particular case, we had the Ministry of Education there, the Ministry of Health. We had the health authority that was involved, the local school board. We had the vice-principal of the school there, Yorkton Tribal Council, ourselves, the RCMP. So it was a really helpful process. We'll fine-tune it for Regina-Yorkton area, and then we'll use those learnings to take it to other areas of the province as well, just to make sure that if there's a child that's struggling, we make sure that the dots are connected and we respond. As good officials, we can always argue about who pays later.

Mr. Forbes: — That's a very good thing. I mean essentially that's the Jordan's Principle, and that's why I think that's a great thing and why, you know, I appreciate hearing about that because at that point it's not as expensive. It's when it gets to be a real . . . houses really burning down that it gets to be a real problem, and so good to hear on that. I think the more that we can approach it that way, that's a good thing. Did you get the name of that children's . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It is called the National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

Mr. Forbes: — That's the one I was asking about. I thought it was a Canadian national, but it's obviously an American. Okay. Fair enough. In the price, you know, for the work, I mean I wasn't struck necessarily by the size of the bill. It seemed to be fairly reasonable.

I want to shift gears and I appreciate being able to talk about this child and family services. It's a very important issue so thank you very much for that. What I want to talk about now is . . . I'm not sure who will answer this. Maybe the income assistance people. But it's about the Northwoods motel in Saskatoon. And some of you may know that just this past weekend there was a death at the motel and it really got the neighbourhood quite excited. I live fairly close to that area and Facebook was just lighting up. And of course and I know that there are some social services recipients in the past who've lived there because they called our office for help. And that's the, you know, we asked for their address and that's what they've given us so we know that there's a bit of a connection. And I did make a commitment to some of the local people that I would raise this.

They are concerned about what's happening at the motel and how it spills out over into the community. And so I don't know if you can tell me a little bit about what the ministry uses or how it utilizes the motel. And what, if there's any plans or have you been talking about it?

[19:45]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Okay. I will say what I know and probably the officials will have more to add. So income assistance does not use the Northwoods Inn and Suites as a resource for emergency shelter, and hasn't for eight years. However some of our clients may choose, which is their choice, to stay at that hotel. There was, however, one family residing at the hotel for which I don't believe and nor did the deputy minister believe was appropriate. So the officials in Saskatoon were asked to find better housing and to try very much not to do that again. So we don't place them there for emergency shelter. It hasn't been used, as I said, for eight years, but a client may choose to stay there and that would be their choice.

Mr. Acton: — If I could just add, I think the last time we had a child and family client there, a mother and some children, I think that ended in January or February. And we have no intention of using that facility again for on that side. I mean we'll find other locations that hopefully are more appropriate, and generally we can access housing.

But there has been times over the last years I guess when the suites there have been used. But I'm like you and the minister. I have concerns about the appropriateness of that. So I think, in terms of our social assistance clients, we may have some that choose to live there, and that's their choice.

Mr. Forbes: — And so I'm getting the sense from you folks that you're not in favour, you don't refer people, and in fact you actually will work to refer them to other places. Is that right, that you've found it to be a problem place as well?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That's correct. It's not appropriate for families, and a hotel isn't, for any long term . . . If it's an

emergency over a weekend, sure, but long term . . . And again, clients, if they ask, we will give them ideas of where they can find appropriate places to stay. We probably wouldn't name the hotel.

Mr. Forbes: — This is actually, I think, there were families . . . It was interesting. Before I came in here — and that may be the one family I mean — I just did a little check on, you know, I have a database of all the people come into my office, so I know where their addresses are, and a bunch came up from Northwoods, so it wasn't unusual. But I would say that it seemed like there was only one family. It seemed to be more single people and the issues they have because they're still dealing with violence and they're still dealing with inappropriate behaviour. And they're right beside a neighbourhood.

And I don't know what happened on this past Friday night, Saturday morning, but it really got the neighbourhood upset. And I think that they may be calling or there may be a meeting of the community association to talk with Social Services. So you may want to be prepared for that in Saskatoon. But I said I'd raise it here first, so whatever you say tonight might help in terms of further down the road because this is an issue.

So when people do get referred, especially single males or females without children, really they don't have . . . I mean it is such an expensive place to stay as well. You know, this is the challenge that single folks have. Where are they referred? What's the protocols when somebody says, I'm homeless? For whatever reason, they don't have a place to stay. What are the protocols in Saskatoon that you use?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Okay. So just to clarify, we don't refer them to this hotel. That is not a practice that we've done for eight years, utilized this hotel. And we've doubled the amount of emergency shelters. So we would be . . . If they were absolutely homeless, and there was no options in Saskatoon, there's Lighthouse and Salvation Army, is the two emergency service providers that we have for emergency spaces. So again we do not refer them to this hotel, and we haven't for eight years. I don't know this answer and probably we should check with the Justice minister. I don't think the hotel can ask someone coming whether or not they're a social services recipient and turn them away. I don't think that can be done.

Mr. Forbes: — That's against human rights, that's for sure.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. So if they have or they're receiving assistance and they're not asking for emergency shelter, we don't even, necessarily wouldn't be following them to see if they're taking a hotel room.

Mr. Forbes: — But you would know if folks are receiving social assistance because they have to give an address. So does that cause any problems if somebody says, a single guy says, I'm staying at 689 Idylwyld North? And everybody knows what address that is. So do you then say, does the caseworker say this, and we need to talk. Are there places where you say you should not be staying?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We're fairly, I think fairly mindful of them making their own decisions. I don't think we would do

that, but I'm looking to my officials to tell me I'm wrong.

Mr. Tweed: — Gord Tweed. So the choice, in terms of where individuals elect to live, Mr. Forbes, is at their discretion. Our workers do work with individuals on a case-specific basis, obviously. We've talked about case planning in this forum before, and they would certainly be apprising individuals of rental opportunities that would fit within their means. Stays at hotels or emergency shelters are obviously short term in nature and the workers would counsel individuals on the amount of budget funding available to them to allow them to make informed choices.

Mr. Forbes: — The community is concerned, and they hear these stories that it's Social Services over there. And I think it would be in the best interests of everyone to make sure first we know the facts, and (b) that if we can move people out of there and as . . . You're right. People have the right to stay where they want, but as Social Services, you have the ability to influence people into making better choices. And I think . . . So do you keep track? Or would you know? Like if a community did come to you and say, listen, we think there's 15 people over there on social service, on SAP [Saskatchewan assistance plan] tonight, would you be able to tell them that? Or say yes or no, that's not true.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We probably wouldn't tell them that because of privacy. We probably wouldn't tell the community how many people are staying there that are income assistance recipients. It's a challenge. You living in Saskatoon and you're well aware of Saskatoon issues, there's some that don't want Lighthouse either. There are . . . in the area it is and, you know, there's other areas and other difficulties.

Mr. Forbes: — And I think that's fair. You couldn't tell them really, is probably more appropriate because that's . . . So if they have, the gossip machine is working . . . But what could you tell a community to reassure them that (a) Social Services is not to blame — maybe, I don't know — and that you're going to be doing everything you can as a good neighbour, you know? Because I mean not only are we concerned about motels, but you know how group homes get a bad rap and all of that. And you want people to be in their communities as much as possible, and so it's important to be a good neighbour.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Agreed, and I guess our message would be, yes, we do not refer people to this hotel. If there is a number of income assistance clients staying there, it is by their choice; it is not a referral from the ministry. And I guess the other comment would be that most income assistance clients are other criminals either. It's a bit of a stigma that I think that's being placed on them.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, that's fair enough too, and it's one that . . . But I'm hoping that in some way that I hope by raising it tonight you might go back and take a look and to say, so internally take a look and see if this is the case and do what you can from the inside to, you know, take another look. I mean it's great that you stopped. And I asked Justice this yesterday as well, and they're not referring anyone and they're pretty, pretty straight about that. And I think that's fair enough, you know.

I mean the interesting thing and many years ago when we had a

bunch of old hotels, they would be the place where single people would stay, but we don't have those places anymore. And I don't think, you know, in Saskatoon we've lost the Pat, which would be one, and the Barry and different places; the old Lighthouse prior to what it was. You know, so it's a changing world and so for single people it's a little difficult for them to make ends meet.

But I wanted to raise that tonight and make you aware of that. I said I would, to the community, and it's an important one. And I think you are right in terms of, you know, poor bashing is not the way to go with this. It's important that everybody needs a good place to stay overnight, but sometimes that hotel really lights up at night. So anyways, I'll leave that right now for that and if I have any more information I may share that with you.

I'd like to just go back to housing for a few minutes and some of the questions, some clarifications and some discussions. Last week we were talking about the projects that were initiatives were 2015. And I just want to clarify when Mr. Allen was talking about 280 projects or units or doors. You used the number 280 and I want to make sure I understand what the 280 things were.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So since Mr. Allen made the comment, I'll get him to clarify it.

Mr. Allen: — That would be either homes or units.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, right. I heard at one point, projects and I thought, well that's a lot of projects. But that's when I reflected on that, that would be doors or homes. And can you describe a little bit about what those 280, is it four or five projects? Are they spread throughout the province? Or is it just right now you had talked about expressions of interest, I think. So has it been scoped out any further than just a total number?

[20:00]

Mr. Allen: — At the risk of scooping myself, so I'll try to control myself, we haven't notified the successful proponents of their success. But we are looking at 8 or 10 projects receiving basically unconditional approval in the very near future: different communities across the province, different groups, hard-to-house seniors, hard-to-house singles, you know, persons with mental health challenges, in communities ranging from the South to the North.

Mr. Forbes: — We'll stay tuned. So I'm curious about . . . Now we were in committee last night and we were talking about residential tenancies Acts. We were talking about social housing, and they were talking about definitions. And so what is the working definition now that Sask Housing, and I assume the ministry by extension, would be using, the definition of what is social housing?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm going to give you what I'm looking for and then, I'm sure, the officials will have an actual definition. But what the social housing program is, is that the amount that you would pay would be one-third of your income, so with a floor and a ceiling, and the floor and the ceiling would be dependent upon the community size and the average rents within that community. With that I'll get the officials to give a

better explanation if they have one.

Mr. Allen: — Thank you. The challenge with social housing . . . And there was a couple of reasons why it was removed from *The Residential Tenancies Act*. One is it has a variety of meanings and it means different things to different groups. It means different things to us. It means different things to us, depending upon which program we're talking about.

So the definition of social housing has shifted over time. And that's the same right across the nation, perhaps even the world. I was looking at some literature from Vancouver today, and two different groups described social housing completely differently. But the working definition that we go by is basically what the minister described. And if I may, I'll just read you an excerpt from the Social Housing coalition in Vancouver who defines social housing this way: "It's available to people with very low incomes who pay either 30 per cent of their income or the welfare shelter amount for rent." So that's basically our working definition for social housing.

Mr. Forbes: — See to me, I thought, and where I got the definition I was going from was from Sask Housing annual reports up to just a few years ago where we would talk about families in distress or women fleeing abuse. But all of those social descriptors are no longer applicable.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — They're applicable on being eligible for a social housing unit. I think that all of those issues are still applicable. But the program, the calculation for the program and what you would pay, is the one-third of your income with a floor and a ceiling. So you're correct, as is the explanation that Mr. Allen gave. It's quite broad of who's eligible for social housing and covers a number of sectors in our society from seniors to single moms to, you know, to those who are maybe fleeing an unsafe situation. And the list goes on of who's actually eligible for social housing.

Mr. Forbes: — So what is the goal? What is the goal of social housing?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The goal of social housing is to assist those who are the most in need of house. And a lot of it is based on income and the inability to meet the market costs either in home ownership or rent. However there are those times where you go back to, are they in an unsafe situation? And maybe their income is high enough, but they need something very quickly to get out of their situation before they can get their finances in order per se. So it is largely income based, but not totally income based.

Mr. Forbes: — So you have that as a goal, and then you have the descriptors. But really from a programming point of view, the definition is how the rent is arrived at.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The rent amount, correct. There's a calculation for rent amount, but the eligibility is a weighted system on a number of factors. And another factor to take into consideration — and I'm going to go for a family this time — if a family applies, something that would be under consideration when you think of whether or not they should be higher in the wait-list or not, you know, is where they're living now appropriate for the family size? And so that's taken into

consideration. The safety of their situation is taken into consideration. Their income is taken into consideration. But the income itself is what's used for the calculation for the rent amount.

Mr. Forbes: — So when someone applies, what does the application form look like in terms of, do you ask about are you fleeing abuse?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm going to get my officials to answer that.

Mr. Allen: — We ask a number of questions. And the minister described them in three dimensions, and they are described in three dimensions. We ask a number of questions on income and assets. That's about one third of the weighting, the points that an applicant could get.

Another one is on adequacy. Are they living in a place where the heat is off more than it's on? Are they living in a place where there's no running water? Are they living in a place that's rodent infested? So that's adequacy. Or are they living in quite a nice place, but they're just struggling with the affordability?

And then the third dimension is suitability. Do we have a family of five living in a two-bedroom apartment? Do we have a family of nine living in a two-bedroom apartment or perhaps living in a car?

So each of those is assessed independently. And one of the other questions that's asked with respect to adequacy is, are you fleeing domestic abuse or violence?

Mr. Forbes: — And that was on second?

Mr. Allen: — And that's on that second dimension. And if they are, they vault everything else and go immediately to the front of the list, irrespective of income, irrespective of suitability.

Mr. Forbes: — So each of those, you have points for that. And then you're placed on the list, on the waiting list, and some may get you to the top right away in terms of fleeing abuse, that type of thing.

And so once you're on the list though . . . And this is a concern that I had and I expressed in January because I felt like there's almost two lists working there because there's people who may not have issues around abuse or adequacy, but it's more of an affordable issue. I don't know. So they're at the bottom half. People may be leapfrogging them all the time. Or do they get on the list and that's their fixed point and then . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So no, and there isn't two lists. But it isn't a first-come, first-served list. The program that we collapsed was rather a first-come, first-served list which was the affordable housing. So there is a list, and it's a priority-first list I guess is what we could call it.

The positive thing is that in the province is those lists have gone down considerably. So the wait is not all that lengthy any longer. That's largely due to the amount of building that's happened both in the private sector, and Sask Housing

Corporation has been quite aggressive in getting more stock on the market. We're seeing rental units being built, which hasn't been done in the last number of years. Now that is happening, which balanced the market again. So that's helped to address those wait-lists. But it's not a list of names that as soon as you're at the top, you receive a housing unit. It is a priority list.

Mr. Forbes: — I'm not sure I understand that, in terms of . . . So you've got in, and you have arrived at a certain point, assessment. And so your name then is forwarded, and it's put on the list, and you may be, let's say number 28 on the list. But because there will . . . Now I guess this is where the confusion comes for me, is so then do you just keep going up as how — you know, units become vacant — a normal waiting list would work? Or can people jump in front of you because they have higher points than you did, sort of a combination? Or are you on the list and how many points do you have?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So, correct. Someone, you may be . . . There may be two people waiting, and you're one of them. And someone arrives that is a more emergent need, they will get that house or that unit. And there will still be two people waiting, and you're one of them.

But maybe what would help — and I'm not sure the officials have this information here — is what is now the average wait for perhaps not the number-one hot priority. If you're on that list, how long are you going to be there if you're not like an emergency situation. And I think we have that.

Mr. Forbes: — You're not saying I should submit my written questions again, are you?

Mr. Allen: — I'm sorry. It's very community-specific. So I mean if we want to talk about a particular community, and North Battleford happens to have come up, I believe it's a one-month wait in North Battleford, anywhere from half a month to a month in North Battleford.

Mr. Forbes: — So what's Saskatoon?

Mr. Allen: — Saskatoon, one and a half months.

Mr. Forbes: — Regina would be . . .

Mr. Allen: — Regina is a little longer, 3.5 months.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So what that demonstrates, I think, really well is where the vacancy rates are at. Saskatoon's had really strong improvement on the vacancy rate over the last six years. Regina has as well, but not as much. Their vacancy rate's a little bit lower. So I think that demonstrates the market again and where it's at. So it's not, even though you might be number two on the list and been sitting there, it's not a horrific long time that you're on that list.

Mr. Forbes: — Now as you explained last week in terms of, so now people can go to the . . . Your thinking was that people now can go to the affordable housing projects that Sask Housing is partnered with in the community. That fills the niche of affordable housing. So how many . . . We'll go through a couple of communities here. One, is it the same rental arrangement or costs of rent that would be . . . Well let's start

with some specifics. In Saskatoon, who has some affordable rental units? Do you have a list handy?

Mr. Allen: — That's a good question. I suspect somewhere in this pile of documents I have a list and, if not, I should remember them off the top of my head. But I'm afraid I don't recall them off the top of my head, and I'm not sure quite where to find them in here. I can say though in Saskatoon, for example, the transition of affordable housing to social housing, we own 600 of those units ourselves. So 600 low-income working families can now access social housing at 30 per cent of their income where they used to pay more.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. But what I want to know is though, so you've taken 600 units and put them into social housing. Now your thinking is, the minister's thinking is there's 600 more units out there that you've created through affordable rental partnerships?

[20:15]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Not necessarily, no. We haven't. There has been no . . . Or affordable housing built through partnerships, through the rental incentive — RCI, rental construction incentive — and there's been other programs we've had. But we're not looking at unit per unit. Nor should we . . . in increasing social housing, that'll take some of the pressure off of the need for the affordable housing, although I still think affordable housing serves a purpose. But the organizations, maybe we'll have to get that list unless we've all of sudden found it.

So for affordable housing in partnership in Saskatoon, we have 70 units which are on 22nd Borden . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . You know that? There's eight units on Bedford Road.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Okay. 46 units at Bethany Manor.

Mr. Forbes: — But the new ones are Sask Housing Authority, right? The ones on Bedford Road are housing authority units, are they not?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No.

Mr. Forbes: — Hmm.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Bethany Manor has 46 life lease and 10 rental. Casabella, that's on 22nd Street which has 17, specific for mental illness.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, sure. And that would be the housing coalition probably.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Okay. Then there's five units at Cedar House which is youth at risk. College Quarter phase 1 has 400 units, that's student housing . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes. Columbian Manor, even I know where that one is.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That's 51 units. Columbian Place,

Pleasant Hill is 75 units. Cress Hopkins 2 is 12 units; Cress Housing Avenue B is 10 units; Cress Pleasant Hill Village is 10 units; and then there's student housing of 27 units with Cress students. Then we have the CUMFI [Central Urban Métis Federation Inc.] housing which has . . . Between the two, CUMFI housing is 23 units. DH2 Construction is four units and that's for disabilities. I remember actually being involved in that decision when I was minister last.

Elmwood CLD [community living division] which is cognitively disabled is four units. Hartford Heights is 20 units; I don't have an address for that one. Juniper Manor, I know where that is; that's 43. La Maison, I can't pronounce the rest of it, is 12 units. There's two large family housing units, but there's no address. Monarch Yards, you would know where that is, and that's 55 units. One Arrow housing, I also know where that is, that's 15 units. Quint, you're familiar with, which is 18 units on one location and eight units on another. Shirley Skelton Manor, which is 20 units. Then there's The Lighthouse housing units, 58. Westgate Heights townhouses, which is 34; I don't know where that is.

Mr. Forbes: — Way in the west end. I think that's with a church group, is it not?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Okay.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Buffalo Berry Place which is 12 units, that's at Whitecap.

Mr. Forbes: — Let's say the Quint ones, that they're affordable rental. So they would be . . . Are they required then to have the same rental formula as Saskatoon Housing Authority? What was . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, they wouldn't. And I'll get the official to answer specific to that one. But some of the affordable housing units would be . . . It depends the program that they accessed Sask Housing money from. So if the program was with the rental construction incentive, they had to maintain the rent. So they had to keep the price, in order to access the Sask Housing Corporation funding, \$300 below market for 10 years.

So depending on what the program is and the agreement that was, or the contract that was signed, so it will vary depending on what program they accessed and when. Because of course, programs are changing. But for Quint, I will get the official to answer how they set their rent.

Mr. Allen: — So for most the projects that the minister just went through, the rents are set at below market rents. So an affordable rent, and it has to be affordable for our target group. So it's not affordable to anyone making anything. It's affordable to the folks that we're interested in serving, and affordable with that 30 per cent price or 30 per cent of income in mind. So it's not precisely social housing. They can charge a fixed rent that doesn't vary by tenant or by unit at all, but the business plan is built upon it being sustainable. In other words, they can continue to operate by charging those tenants that level of rent and without getting into a rent-g geared-to-income, or

what we call RGI.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. So I'm wondering, you know, there's several and there are probably several different targets that you've had in your agreements with these different groups because you've had over, I think it's over 400 agreements — right? — across the province? Housing agreements, is that right?

Mr. Allen: — The 400 that I believe you're referencing is probably a number from us, and that's the number of non-profits that we work with and have worked with since 1970-something. Since 2007 we've funded, I'm estimating based upon my list, 100 projects.

Mr. Forbes: — So 100 different agreements that would be out there. Would that be a fair assumption then?

Mr. Allen: — That would be correct. They'd all have basic, similar sum and substance, but 100 different funding agreements because we register a mortgage in each case as security to protect the taxpayers.

Mr. Forbes: — So I was thinking about this in terms of our conversation last week, and the idea if somebody's looking for affordable housing in a rental place in Saskatoon, now we have these different groups, and there might be 10 or 20 different groups out there that now provide affordable rental arrangements. And I guess you could always go to Saskatoon Housing Authority to see how it works, but you could try your luck with one of these groups. But is there . . . There's not a database or easy way to access if I was looking for housing.

You know, we met with Carmichael today, and they were a very interesting group because they actually do have a housing list they produce every week of Carmichael. And I thought that's kind of a neat idea. So is there a list per city where you could go and say, you know, I'm new in town and I'm looking for affordable rental. Who are the groups I should be talking to? And some may not be appropriate, but some would be very appropriate.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. You are right, and that would be very helpful. And I'm not sure, and maybe you would know, United Way talked about doing this database in Saskatoon. I'm not sure they did complete it.

Mr. Forbes: — 211.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — United Way . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Yes.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Talked about doing a database for Saskatoon. I'm not sure that they completed it or if they do offer that service. As you said, Carmichael in Regina does. But do we have a coordinated one for each centre in our province? The answer is no.

Mr. Forbes: — But you would have that information. I'm wondering if United Way, when you're thinking of that, 211 was there. I wonder, I should take a look and see if they have housing. And it's on the internet as well. Yes.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So what the officials just offered is we could have a list that we could update, say, annually and maybe have more available for our community-based organizations. That could be the Open Door Society, you know, the Carmichael — there's a number of organizations in each of our major centres that perhaps it would be very helpful if we provided an annual updated list.

I don't think we'd go through the work of finding out the vacancies anywhere. It would just be a list and the contact number. And I think that we could do that as a housing corporation.

Mr. Forbes: — That would be a great idea. And I think, even as MLAs, we often get approached and we can't say . . . but we could say, here's a list: Quint is the neighbourhood. CUMFI might be appropriate. And if you're a student, here are the things. So I would really encourage you to take a look. And it would be just a matter of updating once a year or when you have new units come into place. It would be interesting. It'd be a great, great thing to offer.

And again I think the wonderful thing about affordability is that this is one where, you know — and maybe I'm just old-fashioned — but you just want to rent a place and you just want to pay a fair price and you don't have any social issues here, you know. And particularly, as I talked about what the Northwoods situation, where you're just a single guy or whatever, you just want to find a safe place to be. So that would be really great if you could do that. I think that would be a great idea.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So we'll commit to doing that, keeping in mind that we have to also make, you know, clarify that it's just the ones that we're aware of and we're involved with and not give the false perception that that's the only thing in town. And also, especially through our offices we also have to make sure — and I know you do — that depending on their situation, social housing may be the option that's best for them.

Mr. Forbes: — Well just as we're brainstorming here, it may be appropriate just to do it through the housing authorities, when people go there and they can get the list there. And then that could be your conduit to the information because they are your conduit to each community. And it'd be updated, you know, because our point of reference really is to go to the housing authority, and they know about housing best.

So I'll leave that with you, but I do have a couple more questions about the bedbugs. And so I'm just wondering when you said 117 units, could you tell me though — and I thought the number sounded reasonable; I didn't have the wherewithal to check whether that was a good number or not — but is it concentrated in major cities or is this right across the province? Can you tell me where the . . . You don't have to tell me where each of the 117 are, but can you say that Saskatoon is experiencing a high number? Regina? There's none in Moose Jaw?

Mr. Allen: — They're in a variety of locations. They don't pay any attention to geography or income strata or age. So they're in seniors' units in Moose Jaw. They're in family units in Saskatoon. There's no one place that seems to experience them

more than others, other than, you know, the larger the centre, the more units you have, the greater the likelihood you're going to have an incidence of bedbugs.

Mr. Forbes: — So you're saying that 2 per cent is pretty much uniform right across the province, maybe up a little bit, down a little bit, but more or less the same?

[20:30]

Mr. Allen: — I haven't studied it in that way, but I do know that we do have bedbugs in most of the larger communities, smaller communities not as much. But some of that has to do with what I'll say is the transience, you know, the turnover of tenants, people moving in and people moving out and people bringing their possessions that may have some bedbugs on them.

Mr. Forbes: — Last night we were talking with the Office of Residential Tenancies director. I don't know what his main title is. And Sask Housing's name came up in terms of some of the concerns people come forward with. Can you talk a little bit about in terms . . . I was looking through your annual report. I think that, or maybe you referenced that last time, 80 per cent — you did a survey — 80 per cent satisfaction. Four out of five tenants feel pretty good about their landlord, but you still have concerns brought forward to the ORT [Office of Residential Tenancies]. Can you talk a little bit about those concerns? And what do you do? How do you encourage a good dialogue with your tenants?

Mr. Allen: — I'll be happy to take that. I just want to go back and say something about social housing. Social housing is a word. Social is a word. It doesn't imply that everyone who lives in social housing has social challenges. In fact the vast majority of our family tenants are single working mothers with no social challenges other than to happen to be low income. Our average senior tenant is an 84-year-old woman living on pension with no challenges other than being an 84-year-old single woman who has limited income.

Yes, we do house a significant number of people who have other barriers, but social housing in itself is a perfectly acceptable . . . In fact it's probably a better response for low-income families than some of the affordable projects I cited earlier because we will charge you rent based on 30 per cent of your income. And that means that if you're only making \$25,000 a year, we're going to charge you less than Silver Sage or Gabriel or Cress will, most likely. I won't say that categorically or uncategorically. But you know, social housing is a very valid response for low-income working people, just as it is a very valid response for low-income people who have other challenges, such as women fleeing violence or addictions or other barriers.

With respect to the Office of Residential Tenancies, we're the largest landlord in the province. We would expect to have some interaction with the Office of Residential Tenancies. We have tenants who don't pay their rent and, while we might encourage them to pay their rent, sometimes that encouragement's not enough, and eventually we end up having a movement towards eviction.

Sometimes we have tenants who aren't good neighbours. They engage in behaviour that is very, very disruptive to the people living around them. And we have tenant relations officers who work with them, encourage them, perhaps go so far as to threaten them, you know, that if they don't change their behaviour, they won't be living there any longer.

When those events happen, when it's an eviction for non-payment or an eviction because people aren't having quiet enjoyment, then the Office of Residential Tenancies gets involved in it.

Sometimes the tenants don't like how we're behaving as a landlord, and when that happens they go to the Office of Residential Tenancies. We hope they will engage with the local housing authority first, but sometimes it's the local housing authority that seems to be the problem for them. And so we would welcome them to contact us directly or the Office of Residential Tenancies, and we'll work with them to try to remedy whatever needs remedying.

Mr. Forbes: — So how many instances or times would you be called or call the Office of Residential Tenancies?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So my understanding, evictions would be undertaken by the local housing authority. I'm being advised that we don't keep a . . . We don't track that. Like we don't keep a database of those numbers, so we can't answer that question.

Mr. Forbes: — Now we just had the Ombudsman report come out just I think this week, and housing, now it went down from 75 to 70 complaints. What would be the nature of those kind of complaints?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm being advised that a lot of the complaints, and it's not a lot considering the number of units we have, but are in fairness of the process. So they will question . . . As you had mentioned earlier, the perception is that wait-lists should be first-come, first-served. And so when you have a waiting process to a wait-list, they may question the fairness of the process of that, is where a lot come from.

Others may dispute where their rent's been set at. I can give an example actually of one that I knew of. Because it is based on income and their income had changed, they didn't feel that the rent had responded quickly enough.

Mr. Forbes: — And I might just shift gears here slightly, but I do want to talk about the Ombudsman. I think I'm more or less finished with housing unless something hits me before 9:45, in the next hour or so. But thanks, Mr. Allen, for your answers.

I do want to just focus on the Ombudsman's report. And while it seems to be improving a bit — I don't know what the year over year for many years is — but it's 731 complaints received. And in fairness, I want to say there were . . . The Ombudsman had mentioned some of the good people who've done some good works, and some bouquets to the people who've done good work there. That's always a good thing.

But significant numbers in terms of especially around the income assistance disability services, whether it's . . . And I

guess it would be both SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability] and SAP. SAP had about 383 concerns, and SAID had 126. It actually was the one that went up a little more. I don't know if you have any comments or concerns of what this means for people.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So the positive news is the complaints are down, and you'll never zero because it comes with the nature of the services provided. There will always be those that will question what they've been provided, or they will question perhaps extras that they think there should be extra funding for. It's not within our policy to fund, be it that special diet items. I know I had one case that came to my office, and he had rather a unique idea of what his special diet should be and how he should get extra funding for it, you know. So I think because it is such a personal service that's offered through Social Services, that the nature of the services we provide will always have a level of complaints going to the Ombudsman.

And I met with our Ombudsman last week or the week before and really commend her for the work she does because I think that office is critical for government as a whole, both yourself and mine, to ensure that programs are working well. And there's times where we do miss something and, by going to the Ombudsman, they come up to a resolution for the situation. And that's the other positive thing is almost all of them are resolved to some level of satisfaction for both government and the client that has challenges or issues.

Mr. Forbes: — So is there anything particular — we've got two officials here — any trends, anything that you've learned from this? Or how do you, at the end of the year when the report comes out . . . Clearly, you know, when you look at some of the other departments, they only get one line. Social Services gets many lines. So what do you take? I appreciate the minister's met with the Ombudsman. That's a very good thing.

Mr. Tweed: — The ministry, as you're aware, in our income assistance program deals with many individuals and families who come to us at a time of their most need, and there are literally tens of thousands of decisions rendered each month on our caseload. So the number of complaints that come forward are important for us to learn from and to observe on. We also learn a great deal through our appeal process and the Ombudsman. One of their first responses to an individual would be, have you gone through the appeal process with the ministry? And you might be aware, Mr. Forbes, that again there are relatively few numbers of appeals that are lodged.

The types of concerns that come forward can vary from, I feel that I wasn't treated properly. And we have remedies for that, and we work very diligently with our staff who are very professional in their approach with individuals but again, they interact with people at a very trying time in their lives. So it's a circumstance where, if you're not eligible for a particular benefit or the particular benefit that you are eligible for isn't what you were expecting, it can lead to an inquiry. And so we learn from those sorts of inquiries, and we work and meet very frequently with the Ombudsman to understand the nature of those complaints.

The other thing that I would offer, if I may, just one additional piece of information, is that even though there are a significant

number of decisions rendered, the Ombudsman actually investigates very few formally of the complaints that they receive. So those ones that we respond to formally, we have a really good working relationship with the Ombudsman, take the recommendations seriously, and I think I can say without hesitation that for the most part those recommendations are accepted and acted upon.

[20:45]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Just to add to that, the officials meet with the Ombudsman quarterly so that if there is all of a sudden a trend that is showing through, it could be identified relatively quickly. And it isn't just a trend in a particular issue that seems to be causing a problem. You may also see a trend, is there a particular office which is receiving more complaints than another? And if so, then they can look into why is that office maybe not meeting the clients' expectations more so than another office. So you can, by those meetings happening quarterly, you're not just identifying issues before they become very problematic. You can also identify locations.

Mr. Acton: — If I can just add to that again, in addition to our staff and staff of the Ombudsman meeting, I also meet directly with the Ombudsman at least twice a year, sometimes more often than that, just to see if there's any issues that we think might be arising or if there's anything that the Ombudsman has spotted that perhaps needs the involvement of a deputy to get it solved.

You know, there's a couple of items that are cited in this report where, you know, somehow our system was not serving our clients very well. There was one where we're using a database out of Health and then we're saying, well you know, you don't qualify. Well that's not really what we're about, and sometimes it's helpful to have the Ombudsman spot that and then I can work with that office and we can get it fixed. So we do have a good working relationship and I really appreciate their perspective on things. And there has been a few times where we've encouraged a client to go there or I've contacted their office to say, would you look at this case? Like maybe we've got it wrong because, you know, we've got a client that's not very happy and we think we're following the rules but maybe we're too close to it.

Mr. Forbes: — I just want to share what I do with the Ombudsman when someone comes that's interacted with Social Services, particularly around child and family services and their children have been apprehended. And they want advice about who to see. And they think they should go see the Children's Advocate, and I actually say, probably don't go see him. Go see the Ombudsman because the Ombudsman's there for your rights as a parent. Parents have rights, and that is to make sure that the Act has been followed, and the Ombudsman will work through that.

The Children's Advocate really is there for the child, and in a sense that's maybe not the best person to go to. And it hasn't been, I would gladly say that in the last little while, a few years, it hasn't been a big deal, but that's . . . We've got a protocol and I don't know if we've talked to the current Ombudsman about it, but I know that the existing staff would be aware of that because the parents were falling through the cracks, and they

were feeling like if they championed the cause of the child, they would be doing themselves a favour and actually, ironically, maybe not because they have rights themselves. I don't know if you have any comments about that, but that would be the one that I would say.

But the one thing I wanted to ask, and this is interesting and just reminds me, and you know, maybe you'll say that I've said this before. And I'll say it again. Has Social Services ever considered having a fair practices office? I think particularly with housing, when we get concerns with housing it's a lot about fairness and about . . . And it is a concern that in fact it's a bit of a power relationship. They don't want . . . It's like any landlord. They want to stay on the good side of the landlord, but they don't know how to express their concern. And so we work with, in this case, Saskatoon Housing Authority, and I have to say I think we've got a good working relationship with the folks at the housing authority. But the numbers of complaints . . . And I look and I know SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] has a fair practices office and so does WCB. And now they would, obviously their numbers would be reduced, but it would definitely be a first step.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It has been considered. We haven't decided to move in that direction. Now you had pointed out housing, and of course for income assistance we have a process, an appeal process which works well. And there is two levels within that appeal process. So that is, in essence . . . And I know even with a fair practice office, sometimes they ask for an appeal process. I know that from having the past hat of the Crown corporations. So they'll say, yes that's nice, but you know, what's your appeal process? We haven't made a decision to move in that direction right now. It would be something to consider. But for most of our programs it is captured in the appeal process. And the deputy minister would like to add.

Mr. Acton: — If I could, I've certainly thought about this. I'm always concerned that it creates another layer for folks, and so we've been trying to work with our staff around a standard of fairness. We do some training in conjunction with the Ombudsman's office on that, to make sure that we look at things through the right lens, and try to encourage our staff to find that balance between obviously adhering to the policy and yet looking at individual cases and trying to do what makes sense. So I think that . . . I mean from my perspective anyway, the jury's still out on whether that would move us forward or not.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I would argue for it, but not having all the information, but argue for it. And I think particularly I see it in housing, and not in a negative way in the sense of just a better tenant-landlord relationship. And I think that would be a good thing. And as the official mentioned, you're the biggest landlord in the province. And I mean I think the thing is, in some ways you want to keep your tenants. And in many ways, it's not a permanent home — for seniors it is though — and the best way is to keep them happy, and I think that's a good thing.

But talking about the appeal process, how are the numbers for the appeals? At both levels, what are the current numbers?

Mr. Tweed: — I have some information here, Mr. Forbes, and the most recent published report from the appeal Chairs is for

the fiscal year 2013-14. So it'd be a year out of step. So in 2013-14 there were 314 appeals launched at the regional level. So as you know, there are five regional appeal committees situated around the province. Following the decision of a regional appeal committee, either the ministry or the client may appeal that decision one step further to the Social Services Appeal Board, which is a provincial body. Eighty-three appeals went to that level in 2013-14.

Mr. Forbes: — So what were the results?

Mr. Tweed: — Of those appeals that went forward, in favour of the ministry at the regional level, 256; 58 in favour of the client launching the appeal.

At the provincial level, if the appeal moved to that second step, so 83 appeals in total went forward in that year. This is, it appears, it may have been a misprint here in the appeal report. I'm going to offer that I don't have information with me. What I can tell you is that the majority of appeals at the appeal board would still be ruled in favour of the ministry. I think there's a bit of a misprint in the information I have. We can certainly get that information, yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you for that. Now so when you said that that year there were 300-and-some appeals, how does that fit into, say, a five-year trend? Are they around the 300 number?

Mr. Tweed: — It's actually interesting to observe that the number of appeals that have been launched is being reduced. So to go back five years or thereabouts, and I can give a count year by year, in 2009-2010, there were 370 appeals launched at the regional level; in the following year, 2010-2011, there were 454 appeals; 2011-2012, 319 appeals; 2012-2013, 440 appeals; and then in '13-14, the year that we referenced earlier, 314 appeals at the regional level.

Mr. Forbes: — Next year should be about 400 then. It tends to go up and down. All right. Well thank you for that. And so I know you had over the past few years changed the process in terms of advocacy, and now you're having fee for service more or less for that. How has that been working? You've had a couple of years under the belt, I think now, that experience. How much activity has that happened?

Mr. Tweed: — So in keeping with the information . . . I believe you asked this question last year as well, Mr. Forbes, in terms of how things were trending. So our year-to-date information, the year just having finished, so there may be some additional information to come on the books, but on average, as you know, our programs and the basic income and assistance suite, so for social assistance and for the Saskatchewan assured income for disability program, offer an allowance for individuals who pursue or wish to pursue an appeal and have access to an advocate. Average number of cases that we've expended that allowance for in this year is about one per month.

Mr. Forbes: — That's 12.

Mr. Tweed: — It would be if you accumulated them. It would be 12, yes. It's important to note that there are other costs that are incurred by individuals when they make an appeal, whether that's travel or accommodation and so forth. And those costs

are also provided for, although not tracked separately.

Mr. Forbes: — I find that number . . . I mean it's interesting because I know that there's active people. I think of Equal Justice For All in Saskatoon that's no longer receiving core funding but would be working as advocates, I believe. So would you know who the 12 were that received the funds for this?

Mr. Tweed: — So the payment would be made to the individual making the appeal, not to the agency.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, and then as well as Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry I think works as advocates as well. So I just find it odd that between the two of them, that they'd be more active than that. And especially the number of appeals. So that means out of 300-some appeals, only 12 are having an advocate come along with them?

Mr. Tweed: — It's only 12 that have been paid an advocacy fee. I believe the agencies like the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry and so forth would assist more clients in their appeal endeavours.

Mr. Forbes: — They could apply for the advocacy fee as well, could they not? Or the person would apply for it and then pay the anti-poverty . . . And I don't know. I mean this is not a question that they asked me to ask, so I don't know what the process is here. But if Bob is filing an appeal, he can get an advocate and file for support, right?

Mr. Tweed: — That's correct, sir.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. And how much is the fee that . . .

Mr. Tweed: — \$45.

Mr. Forbes: — Forty-five dollars. Now does that cover just the first appeal or can it, if the person then decides to appeal to the provincial level, can they apply again for the next \$45?

Mr. Tweed: — You get \$45 for each level.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Interesting, okay.

Mr. Acton: — Well from my perspective, we've been striving very hard to make sure that we've got a fair process, and I don't know whether this is a reason for it or not, but I believe that our clients are treated very respectfully. And I think we've got some real strong folks sitting on both the regional and the provincial appeal board, so I think that it's much more of a collaborative discussion there, and so I'm not sure that people always need a particular advocate. I'm not opposed to them bringing one but I, you know, when you look at the stats I think . . .

[21:00]

I also meet with the appeal board at least once a year to chat with them not only about what they're seeing in terms of how they're ruling, but if there's situations that perhaps they're supporting the ministry because that's what the regulations say, but you know, do they think we've got a stupid policy? And to try to get feedback there, to try to find out if there's other things that I should be working on or trying to address.

So in general, I guess, I'm not too concerned about the number that have advocates with them as long as I keep checking or trying to follow to make sure that I think folks are getting a fair hearing and are being heard and have a chance to voice their concerns. And if we've got it wrong, then we get it fixed.

Mr. Forbes: — I'm just curious, because I ask this question every year. It's been pointed out. But it is an interesting one because both groups are very active, and I talk to them frequently, but we haven't talked about this necessarily. People going through the appeal process probably only go through it once or twice in their lives, I would think. It's not something . . . so they don't get the sense of this is collaborative. They get the sense this is the way it happens.

And I don't know how people become aware of the fee. You have a booklet though probably, right? I've seen the book a few years ago.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So it's in our handbook that's given to them, to clients, and I think the worker goes through the handbook with them initially, or no?

Mr. Tweed: — The worker, it's part of their role to ensure the client is aware of their rights and their responsibilities, and certainly to apprise them of information that would be contained in the program handbook. There's quite a detailed handbook for the Saskatchewan assistance program and one that's just about to be released for the Saskatchewan assured income for disability program.

Mr. Forbes: — And that in terms of the appeal. And the appeal process, is it the same for both SAID and SAP?

Mr. Tweed: — As it relates to the financial eligibility, yes.

Mr. Forbes: — And it's the same process and the same board or group. Right, okay. And they're made aware that they have an ability to have an advocate come along, and the fee is \$45.

Mr. Tweed: — They are, yes. That is correct, sir.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, good. All right, thank you for that. And I have some basic questions here. We're getting close to the hour and one is . . . Somebody asked me to raise questions about community living supports in Creighton, especially for kids who are aging out. And being so close to Flin Flon, I think it gets to be kind of a confusing circumstance. And I know I've written a letter to the minister earlier in the year and you've responded about the challenges of distance in the North, but Creighton is a significant community, and the issues of people with intellectual disabilities staying in the community but having the supports there.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'll give you the broader answer and then we have officials that will join us to give more specifics. So we fund 13 CBOs [community-based organization] that serve northern communities that provide day programs and group homes. And in 2014-15 the funding for northern CBOs will be over \$14.3 million.

I will get . . . Specific to Creighton though, however, I will get one of the officials to answer.

Mr. Wihlidal: — Good evening. Bob Wihlidal, ADM, disability programs. We have had meetings with the Government of Manitoba actually as it relates to services in the Flin Flon and Creighton area as recently as January of 2015, looking or exploring the program needs in the area and economies that can be achieved between the two ministries in the two provinces. So we're actively looking at ways to expand service there.

Mr. Forbes: — And that has been part of the issue and, I guess, are you consulting with the local community about how they perceive that? I mean, they are very close for people to access services in Flin Flon, but then the question is payment or costs and that kind of thing. So is that part of the discussion that you're having with them?

Mr. Wihlidal: — I have to say I haven't got a lot of details about the discussions that have been had. I haven't been in those meetings. But I am aware that our director for the North area has had at least one meeting and they're having those discussions both with the community, but also with the Government of Manitoba officials.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Well I really, really, really encourage you to fully engage in this because I know it's been an issue and actually it's been raised a couple of times, like Cumberland House, which is not nearly as close to a Manitoba circumstance. But when you're up in the North, it's very isolated, and particularly with issues around intellectual disabilities, it can be really a tough go.

So okay, well thank you for that. I'm curious about . . . Today the federal budget came down and there were some issues around . . . We're curious about the federal universal child care benefits and the repeal of the child tax credit — I'm not an expert in this area at all but it is a change — and whether or not your ministry had any input or any forewarning this was going to happen. How is this going to impact families in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So the first answer is no, we didn't have any input. But we'll get Gord Tweed to rejoin us because he is best to explain the impact that it'll have on us.

Mr. Tweed: — It'll probably take me a second to find the proper papers, but what I can tell you with greater expediency is that the universal child care benefit is currently an exempt income source under all of our income assistance programs. So the changes that were announced today by the federal government with respect to enhancing those benefits will only better the circumstances for low-income families.

Mr. Forbes: — We're understanding only 49 per cent of the benefits will go to families with young children who incur child care costs, and 50 per cent will go to families who do not have child care costs and have older children, so I'm not sure if that makes sense. But because the children are staying home, it's a better benefit for them. Is that what you're saying, Mr. Tweed?

Mr. Tweed: — So my understanding of the federal benefit would be that it's not actually contingent on you having a child care need as a parent. It's a tax credit or refundable tax credit that's provided to parents.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I'll leave that with that. But I'm wondering as well . . . Today I asked you about a program that was cut, the Radius program. I don't know if you have any further information on that this evening, but I would ask, were there any other programs that were cut in this year's program? And maybe I would also use the word cut, ended, not renewed — all of that.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So specific to the questions that you asked today which was on Radius . . . and just for clarification, this was one particular service that we chose not to fund. And one of the reasons is the children that they're serving are not our clients, or many of them are not our clients, so that we actually don't have first-hand knowledge of where the money or how it's being spent. So that's problematic. There wasn't a lot of clients being served and obviously with \$65,000 . . . And there are other community-based organizations within Saskatoon that provide services. So my office contacted the mom who raised the concerns and a conversation's taken place, and an official will also talk to this mom to try and identify what services she was receiving and where perhaps she could access those services.

The Radius Saskatoon organization, their main service area is actually in job training or . . .

Mr. Forbes: — From what I understand, it's an educational service for children with learning difficulties.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That's not their main service. Actually they . . . Yes that was kind of an add-on and . . .

Mr. Forbes: — I mean it's been a long time since I've worked with Radius.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So they actually receive in total just under \$760,000 from our government, basically coming from . . . That's from all sources for all of the services they provide. So the \$64,000 amount that was coming from Social Services for children with disabilities just basically wasn't our clients. We really didn't have a handle on the services. So that was one that we reduced.

There are other reductions. We also will not be continuing to fund the Community Family Resource Centre in Lestock. And again the outcomes were not measurable and questionable, and we are definitely moving more towards outcome-based funding.

There will be a \$56,000 reduction to the Yorkton Friendship Centre. And I'm just going to get the officials to remind me of the program because that's not all of their funding either.

So in this particular case again it was duplication of other organizations such as SIGN [Society for the Involvement of Good Neighbours], which I'm sure you're familiar with, the United Way, and Boys and Girls Club of Yorkton, so to provide the same services. So it was duplication of some of what they were doing.

Of course there's Radius. There was Mutual Equity, Trade and Investment which is at Archerwill. If I remember correctly, the service they were providing was not to our clients as well, and that will be a reduction of \$131,000. Ka-pa-chee Centre in Fort

Qu'Appelle is a \$200,000 reduction, and I believe that one speaks to lack of results as well, but I'm going to get that confirmed.

Right. The services that they were to be providing is provided as well from SIGN and the Yorkton Tribal Council child and family services. And here in Regina, Foxvalley Counseling is providing those services.

We are discontinuing . . . It was an initiative to have a respite database with the Prince Albert Métis Women's Association, and we just didn't feel that we got the results we were wanting in a comprehensive database being put together.

And the last organization is the Tisdale and Area Community Action Co-operative, is a reduction of \$6,400. And I think they were doing financial money management counselling, but it's not our clients. And if there is some of our clients, we will directly counsel them.

Mr. Forbes: — All right. So just as we were going through that, it's twigged on me that in terms of early childhood, I didn't hear. You didn't cut anything from early childhood. I know we were all lobbied, and I don't know if you were lobbied. The early childhood and education folks did a great thing just before budget time, and I just connected the dots with the reports and, you know, the recommendations from early childhood education. I think they do outstanding programs throughout the province. And again that speaks to that inter-ministerial group that, while it may not be necessarily out your funds, it really impacts your clients in a lot ways. So I think that . . .

[21:15]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — There's two programs that I think are very, very important. That's your pre-K [pre-kindergarten] — and again, as you mentioned, both of these are through the Ministry of Education — and then what we call ECIPs [early childhood intervention program]. Our government has quite aggressively increased the number of pre-K programming.

The ECIPs has more been maintaining. We haven't expanded another ECIP centre, but agreed the work they do is quite critical. It is probably the ECIPs are our most at-risk children, and the concern — and we discussed that last time when we were together in estimates — is whether or not the federal government will continue to fund their share for the on-reserve children that access the ECIP programs. So far they are, but that has been questioned.

Mr. Forbes: — Good. Thank you for that. So I'm curious about secondments. Are there any of the staff from Social Services working in Executive Council been seconded over to . . .

Mr. Acton: — Yes, there are two staff that are currently on secondments at EC [Executive Council], and they're both administrative support folks for the deputy minister to the Premier.

Mr. Forbes: — Now there was in January, I think, the Premier announced this travel freeze. So I guess that's my question: how's that working? How many out-of-province trips — do you

take many? — have you taken this year? Have you been out of the country at all?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I haven't even been out of province, so I am your non-frequent flyer.

Mr. Forbes: — You know, I was just talking to the Minister of Justice too. He doesn't travel very much.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Probably my most costly trip — and I think it's extremely worthwhile and I hope you agree with me — was that I did take, along with officials, a trip to a number of northern communities, and it was a two-day . . . We went to La Ronge of course, La Loche, Pinehouse, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Buffalo Narrows, spent a night in Buffalo Narrows and continued. Quite a worthwhile trip meeting with a number of community members in the North. And in that situation, I do use the exec air in order to even cover those number of miles in two days. But that is absolutely the extent of my travels, so my out-of-province travel's the far North.

Mr. Forbes: — Fair enough. And I do think especially when you're travelling to the North, I think that it is reasonable to fly I mean for a whole variety of reasons: safety being one of them, fatigue, and being able to accomplish stuff. And at the end of the day, you know, whether it's mileage, whatever, I think it's not a bad idea. I mean we have the technology to travel better and easier, so we should be able to do that.

Now I've talked a little bit about some of the contracting that you've done, and so I'm not sure whether I'll go through many of these things here. And we did talk about lean last year extensively. But really has there been any more work in terms of lean initiatives this year?

Mr. Acton: — In terms of what we've accomplished last year, we've had a number of events throughout the year I think, and our plan is to continue. I don't see it as much just as lean, but it's really about, how do we improve our business? And often it's really about bringing folks together and getting them to try to problem solve. And if I can get everybody in the same room and get them to discuss what the issues are, generally they're pretty good at coming up with solutions.

We have used that model in terms of mapping out our Linkin financial and the payment process before we start to get it into a computer system, to sit down and say, so how does this really work? So we can kind of map out how the paper's going to flow and the approvals are going to work to make sure that when we get this all computerized, it'll work smoothly.

We've used it around our CBO contracting process to make sure we can streamline that. We end up with a number of folks involved in the contracting process with various community-based agencies in terms of who reviews the formal legal contract and then what are the appendices that outline the outcomes or the services that we want done. Then of course we've got somebody in a specific division, whether it be child and family or whatever, that's working with that agency as well. And so sometimes we get a lot of cooks working on the same document, if I could use that term.

We've used a lean methodology to get folks in the same room

and say, how can we streamline this to make sure that we actually get a contract that works for the community-based organization? We get it out there. They understand it. They're comfortable with it. We can get it signed and get the money out to them so that we don't create an impediment to them doing good work. So those types of things we continue to use.

Mr. Forbes: — Do you have a lean office or a lean director or something like that?

Mr. Acton: — We have a business process improvement team and they do some of the lean, but they also do other work for us in terms of helping find efficiencies. So we have a couple folks that work primarily on lean, provide some training for our folks, but we don't use contracts. We do it all in-house.

Mr. Forbes: — And have they . . . They've been trained in lean?

Mr. Acton: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Have they done the John Black training or have they done . . .

Mr. Acton: — No. I mean the training they've received is through corporate services, and a number of that happened in '10-11 I believe. So we're novice at this, but we manage to make it work.

Mr. Forbes: — So you have two people you say, the business efficiency team. Is that right?

Mr. Acton: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — And they would probably work in your office, the deputy minister's office.

Mr. Acton: — Well no, not in my office, but in our enterprise and risk management area, two staff.

Mr. Forbes: — So two staff that are dedicated to that. Okay. Fair enough. How about lawsuits and litigation . . . You know, it was interesting. I did raise this in Justice the other day. I don't know if you heard about that. It was an interesting conversation because . . . Well I might as well ask. Can you talk about the lawsuits, litigation, the nature of the work that Social Services finds itself? First of all, you know, a big chunk of it seems to be child and family services, so let's keep that separate for a moment. Are there other areas that you find yourselves having lawsuits or litigation? It's only child and family services?

Mr. Acton: — So it's primarily child and family. Sometimes there's an action commenced against us if somebody, you know, slips and falls on a piece of ice or there's an issue around a piece of property or there's an action as it relates to the youth when we used . . . at a youth custody facility that's now in Corrections. You know, a number of years ago there might be an action or has been an action out of that. So there are a few others, but primarily what drives our bill and our work is child and family matters. It's child protection cases, where we need to obviously work with the parents, but we also need to work with the courts and First Nations agencies.

Mr. Forbes: — So let's just back up a bit here. So you're saying there's one lawsuit involving someone that was in jail? Or can you describe more specifically the other lawsuits? Because there's only a few of them, it sounds like.

Mr. Acton: — There was an action commenced some years ago about situations of abuse of youth in a youth custody facility, and we've worked with Justice and we've continued to resolve those cases, but that's one example.

Mr. Forbes: — I'm curious. Are there one example of . . . or the one?

Mr. Acton: — There was an attempt to commence a class action lawsuit against the Government of Saskatchewan as it relates to what was known at the time as the Saskatchewan Training School in Moose Jaw, which is now known as Valley View. That class action has not proceeded at this point.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Okay, then let's switch gears to the child and family services because that is a significant bill. So if we could spend some time talking a bit about that, because when I was asking the Justice folks, the deputy minister expressed interest in this as well, and obviously he's had conversations with you folks as well about this.

Mr. Acton: — So just in terms of that . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Well the nature, the nature of what would be the issues around the law that makes it so unique and special that it incurs such costs.

Mr. Acton: — Well I guess a big part of it is when we, even when we talk about a PSI, we go back to the court and make an application to the court, and the court proceeds with an order to place a child. Or if we take a child into . . . becomes a permanent ward, I mean, we work through the court process. So we can't just kind of respectfully do . . . I mean we can't just kind of do it on our own.

Mr. Forbes: — No, but for permanent, in the case . . . How many permanent wards would happen in a year? What would be the average number?

Mr. Acton: — I don't think I . . . looking at my folks, I don't have that number with me.

Mr. Forbes: — Is it five? Is it 10 or is it . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We don't have that information here with us tonight.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — As to how many children would become permanent wards on average in a given year.

Mr. Forbes: — I'm just trying to get a sense of, so what are the nature of the kind of cases that, you know, that would come forward? So permanent wards, adoptions, and you know . . .

Mr. Prediger: — Typically most of our litigation in the child welfare or child protection area focuses around, after serving

notice to parents of an apprehension as an example, or serving a notice that a child is in need of protection, failure to be able to reconcile those issues and work with the family and build a safety plan and those kinds of things, often those matters may end up in court, in family court. And they'll look sort of two types of processes. One is hearings, where the ministry lawyers will be required to present evidence and information. The family's lawyer will need to do the same and work through that as a process. Sometimes it may resolve at that point. Other times they may be set aside for trials where they're really going through a full trial process to determine whether the child's in need of protection and if so, what kind of order may be in fact ordered by the court as an interim plan. So that may include short-term orders of custody all the way through to permanent wardship. And that's really the bulk of our child protection litigation files across the province.

[21:30]

Mr. Forbes: — So how many trials would happen in a year? What would be the average?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So again, we'll have to provide you with that information.

Mr. Forbes: — I'm curious just in terms of the, you know . . . As you're preparing your budget and, you know, have you set aside so much for legal fees? And what would that be based on?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So the legal fees paid, the actuals for 2013-14 were 1.064 million, and so we are estimating 1.34 million for this budget that we're deliberating.

Mr. Acton: — If I could add, I really . . . What I'm really looking for from our legal counsel is to help us get matters resolved. So I mean, it's true. I mean trials are expensive, and they cost us. They take a lot of time. But I'm working with them saying, help us find a resolution here, and I'd much rather pay you to do that than to run a trial, you know, in a court. So we've been trying to work with our counsel as well to help us get resolution on matters.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Just another example. Like for the coroner's inquest, we had a lawyer, you know. So there's a number of processes that largely deal, of course, with child protection but where we have to have a lawyer.

Mr. Forbes: — All right. And that's the thing that, you know, I guess I'm just not familiar with; I don't understand. And I feel like if there is \$1 million to spend, better not . . . But I mean you have to make sure. This is an important issue when you're dealing with children, and at the end of the day all the legal stuff has to be done well and the whole . . .

Mr. Acton: — The other part that I sometimes forget about and again is that a particular case, you know, counsel may have to go appear in court several times to try to work through the matter or work with our staff or work with counsel on the other side, so it's not always just a pure number. So whether you have 400 cases or not, I mean they . . . Maybe it works really smoothly and they have a court appearance and they talk to counsel on the other side and talk to our staff and they work something out. Or it might be quite drawn out, particularly if

we've served notice and the parents don't show up. The courts certainly, and I respect their decision not to be too quick to make a decision, so they'll adjourn the matter and counsel will go back again and again until we get it sorted out. So sometimes when you look at a file after, you'll see that counsel spent a lot of time going back and forth to court before they were able to reach a resolution.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm also aware of cases where we have filed to have a child become a permanent ward and the band has then got a lawyer to stop that from happening. So it isn't always just even the parents that will become involved.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. I assume too it's also future liability that something, you know, a way that Social Services did something in 2015 can be an issue in 2035. So I'm just, you know, I think it's an important area but I do think that it seems like a heck of a lot of money, and I know with other departments that they've done things differently. And so I'll watch. I have no opinion about how to do this except for we'll be watching and we'll be asking questions and that.

I just did get a note in about some further clarifications about the 2014 deaths, and you gave me some of the numbers already, but I think some of the folks wanted some clearer answers. And I think you said — I didn't write down the numbers — but so were any of the deaths determined to be homicides? I think you said the number five. Were there five homicides? Or were there any homicides in 2014?

Mr. Acton: — If I may, I just . . . One piece of information that you had asked about goes back to the appeals and we said we'd get you the information. I've got the information now. In terms of the provincial appeal board, there was 83 appeals that went to the provincial appeal board. Twenty were decided in favour of the client, 51 in favour of the ministry, so that's only 71. The balance were withdrawn or the appeal board denied the request. I expect it would be probably withdrawn, so hopefully we had resolved something.

Ms. Kirkland: — In 2014 there were no deaths that were determined as homicide at this point.

Mr. Forbes: — And regarding the critical injuries, what condition are those children in now?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That detail we don't have. We'd have to go back, or the officials would have to go back and pull their files to find out.

Mr. Forbes: — And then were there any deaths of children who had recently left the care of Social Services in 2014?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The numbers that you were given were not just the children in our care but the majority of the numbers are actually children that we've had any contact with in the last 12 months.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So that's covered in these numbers.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, that's good to know. For the 2013

deaths, 15 children had passed away in 2013 and there were, as of our last information, still hadn't had their cause of death recorded. Their causes of death were listed at that time to be determined. Can you tell us if they now have been categorized?

Ms. Kirkland: — For 2013 the number that remain to be determined are three.

Mr. Forbes: — And the other 12? You may have to tell us all the different categories.

Ms. Kirkland: — Yes, and I'm not sure that I can draw a line between the 12 that were left undetermined before. So in 2013 there were six natural causes of death, two homicide, three suicide, six accidental, five undetermined, and three yet to be determined.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. Okay, at this point . . . And I know we still have seven minutes so we can get into an argument or something, but I think I'm kind of wrapping up here. I can make up some questions. Do you have any questions on that side?

The Chair: — Well we're going to check and see if any of our members have some questions they'd like to ask the minister. Mr. Marchuk.

Mr. Marchuk: — Sure. I'm sure, Minister, that the people that are watching, glued to this presentation tonight, would be interested in the social impact bond, the first one that we had in our country and taking place at Sweet Dreams in Saskatoon.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — You bet. So as the member mentioned, we have the introduction of a social impact bond, which is the first in our entire country. And it is a partnership with government, private investors, the credit union, and a community-based organization known as Egadz which is located in Saskatoon. And what the intent of this social impact bond or the goal — or the SIB [social impact bond] as it's better known as — is where you get an investment for the capital cost of an initiative, and the investors will only receive their investment back along with a set interest amount if the project shows positive results.

So this particular project is to house single moms, and they must be enrolled in an education or with engagement with employment training. They must successfully and safely keep their children with them, and this will then be what's considered a success. So far we have three that have completed the early childhood development diploma program in which two have secured employment in daycares and one has secured employment as an education assistant on reserve. We have four that have successfully continued to live independently, and we still have six mothers and six children currently residing at Sweet Dreams.

So it is a great positive story, and we want to commend Wally and Colleen Mah who were the private investors, Egadz for the great work that they do, the Conexus Credit Union for participating in this great initiative. And we wish them future success because this is ongoing and will be measured by a third party.

Mr. Acton: — If I could just add one more comment to that, one of the interesting parts about this is how other community organizations get involved. In this particular case, the minister highlighted a number of folks. I know the program has got a lot of support from the Saskatoon Health Authority as well. They're located very close, and the authority has been very willing to engage in discussions about employment and be helpful on that.

I know that Conexus, in addition to funding, has also been prepared and done some work around financial management, how to manage your funding, budget a bit. And so it's really . . . We're seeing some real positive results. And I just want to acknowledge the health authority as well for stepping up right away to say, is there another way we can help out.

The Chair: — Ms. Wilson.

Hon. Ms. Wilson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can you describe the SAID program and how many people are accessing it?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So the SAID program was introduced in 2012. I remember so well doing the announcement because it was in the past when I was minister. I had met with a number of groups that were involved with individuals with disabilities, and they asked for a program that was separate and apart from our income assistance program to give them dignity and to give them some flexibility in maybe this program being enhanced or changed than just the mainstream income assistance program.

So we launched that, and we launched it with our partners in the disability community. To design this program, we looked at other provinces to see what they had. Basically it was a ground-level design. We've had great uptake on the program, and so our numbers are now at 13,655 individuals that are enrolled in the program. We have year over year, over the past four years, enhanced the program, recognizing that there is a significant cost to having a disability. So it was a promise that we would enhance the program each year for four years, and we've done so. And this budget includes that amount.

The Chair: — Minister, being that it's close to the end, do you have any closing comments?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So I want to thank the officials for being here with us tonight, — you help answer all of the questions — the committee members for their interest in the area of Social Services. I believe it's very important to our province. And I want to thank the opposition member who has done a lot of work, a lot of work to bring forward very thoughtful questions, and I know that he has a very significant interest in the area of what my ministry does.

[21:45]

The Chair: — Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I want to thank you, Minister, and all your staff. It's been a very, very good set of estimates. Really, I got some great answers. I really enjoyed it and thanks so much. Thank you.

The Chair: — I would like to add my thanks to all officials and

the minister and our committee members for being here this evening. Being that it's 9:45, but prior to 10:30, I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment.

Mr. Marchuk: — So moved.

The Chair: — Mr. Marchuk has moved. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee stands adjourned to the call of the Chair.

[The committee adjourned at 21:46.]