



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Moose Jaw Wakamow

Ms. Nicole Rancourt, Deputy Chair
Prince Albert Northcote

Ms. Tina Beaudry-Mellor
Regina University

Mr. Dan D'Autremont
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Mr. Muhammad Fiaz
Regina Pasqua

Mr. Roger Parent
Saskatoon Meewasin

Hon. Nadine Wilson
Saskatchewan Rivers

[The committee met at 15:00.]

The Chair: — Good afternoon, everyone. This afternoon we're meeting to discuss the Ministry of Labour Relations. I'm your Chair, Greg Lawrence. We have Mr. Parent, Mr. Bonk, Ms. Wilson, Ms. Beaudry-Mellor, Mr. Merriman, and Mr. Forbes.

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

Subvote (LR01)

The Chair: — We will now consider the estimates for the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. We'll begin our consideration of vote 20, Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, central management and services, subvote (LR01). Minister Morgan is here with his officials. Mr. Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening comments, and please ask your officials to identify themselves for the first time on the mike.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to present the 2016-17 budget of the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. I have a few remarks, then I'll be pleased to answer your questions.

I have several senior members from the ministry, and supporting me here are Mike Carr, deputy minister; Louise Usick, executive director of central services; Greg Tuer, executive director, employment standards; Ray Anthony, executive director, occupational health and safety; Denise Klotz, director, office of the workers advocate; David Horth, acting executive director, communications; Pat Parenteau, director of policy; Daniel Leiva, executive assistant to the deputy minister. Also joining us today is Peter Federko, chief executive officer of the Workers' Compensation Board, and Fred Bayer, registrar of the Labour Relations Board, as well as my chief of staff, Drew Dwernychuk.

Over the last year the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety has been working diligently to encourage healthy, safe, and fair workplaces. It has made a difference. We have seen a reduction in the total injury rate from 8.65 to 6.3 in the last three years. That is a 27 per cent reduction in the total injury rate. The province recently moved up two spots in the national rankings for total injury rate.

This year the ministry continues our strong support for workplace health and safety while holding the line on spending and without raising taxes for Saskatchewan people. This year's budget will keep Saskatchewan strong and the ministry will do its part by making sure workplaces are fair, healthy, and safe.

The 2016-17 budget for the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety is \$18.463 million, an increase of \$168,000 or point nine per cent from the 2015-16 budget. The budget provides \$222,000 for an increase of two full-time equivalent FTEs for a total of 154.1 FTEs. These new positions will support expansion of occupational health and safety's targeted intervention strategy: \$200,000 because of accommodation pressures, \$211,000 to increase salaries. These are important

investments to ensure the ministry remains a leader in improving the safety and well-being of our workers.

The ministry is also doing its part to help the province get back on the road to balanced budgets. That's why we've made the following reductions: \$170,000 for reduced operating costs across the ministry, \$200,000 in one-time funding for the committee of review of *The Workers' Compensation Act*, and \$95,000 in salary dollars transferred to the Ministry of Justice.

Mr. Chair, safe and healthy workplaces ensure growth and opportunities for Saskatchewan people. They secure a better quality of life by making sure everyone has the opportunity to share in Saskatchewan's success.

The second thing I'd like to talk about is eliminating workplace injuries and deaths. Workplace partners must work diligently together to eliminate and prevent injuries and illnesses. Mission: Zero means zero injuries, zero deaths, and zero suffering. It is the only acceptable goal, and the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety has a plan to get there.

When we looked at the numbers, we determined that all of the deaths and injuries were happening at 13 per cent of the workplaces. Six of every seven Saskatchewan workplaces have already achieved Mission: Zero. We spotted an opportunity. We decided to work with employers with the highest injury rates. We helped them devise plans and strategies to get better. We did it because safety is a choice. It's an attitude. The companies we worked with in the targeted intervention program are on track to achieve a reduction of 21 per cent. That's a saving of \$8.5 million in workers' compensation claims, and we are confident this year's \$222,000 investment to put two more officers in the field through targeted intervention will save even more.

We can track monetary savings. The human savings are perhaps most important. What price do you put on a parent making it home each night to sit at the family dinner table? We have pledged to cut the province's total injury rate in half by the year 2020, with yearly targets to get us there. Through the diligent effort of our staff, our partners at WCB [Workers' Compensation Board], employers, and workers across Saskatchewan, we have exceeded those goals in each and every year. This spring we moved up two places in the rankings. When I spoke here last year, only one province had a worse injury rate. Now there are three jurisdictions looking up at Saskatchewan.

We are improving faster than our counterparts. We still have work to do, but we are making significant progress. Putting safety first requires belief and commitment. We believe and we are committed. In 2016-17 the ministry will continue to deliver for Saskatchewan people. We will expand the targeted intervention strategy. We will expand evidence-based, sector-specific inspections. We will continue our WorkSafe Saskatchewan partnership to ensure focus on reducing injury rates.

Next I want to talk about assuring a level playing field. Mr. Chair, the ministry is meeting the challenges of growth by making sure everyone follows the rules. That ensures a level

playing field for all. We conducted nearly 160 inspections of houses under construction in the past year to ensure that workers were protected. We also conducted evidence-based inspections to ensure workers are not exposed to harmful substances such as hydrogen sulfide, radiation, and asbestos.

We have set a goal of increasing compliance with employment standards legislation. We have a plan to get there. We continue to develop educational resources to help employers and young workers know their rights and responsibilities. We've launched an updated young workers readiness course, helping thousands of 14- and 15-year-olds understand their rights and responsibilities as workers each year. We are developing a series of webinars to insist employers understand *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* and stay in compliance.

We understand the need for fairness. It's why we passed changes to the essential services Act in the past year. Part 7 of *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* balances a worker's rights to withhold labour with the public's right to essential services like health care and highway maintenance.

Most employers negotiate collective agreements with the unions that represent their workers without the need for job action. In those rare circumstances where help is needed, the ministry will continue to be an honest broker offering conciliation and mediation when required.

The ministry also continues to support injured workers. Our office of the workers' advocate helps people who wish to appeal a decision on their workers' compensation claim, and is now doing so in a more timely basis.

Maintaining a competitive business environment means making sure everyone has the same rights and responsibilities. It means ensuring our laws and regulations stay modern and up to date. To achieve that, we continue to modernize the occupational health and safety regulations for mine workers to ensure that they keep pace with legislative changes. We update workplace hazardous materials rules to ensure that we are harmonized with the new global standard. We support the committee of review in its review of *The Workers' Compensation Act* and associated regulations and policies.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, the people at the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety work hard to protect workers and employers. We ensure everyone plays by a common set of rules and, in doing so, we protect our economy and our way of life.

This was a challenging year to prepare a budget. We can see targeted intervention is working, and we need to expand. But we also understand the challenges involved in preparing a budget when natural resource revenues have declined. Our budget is a reflection of our values. We're putting more resources into front-line services that protect working people, employers, and our economy. We've also found places where we can spend less without harming the people we work so hard to serve. This is a responsible budget that helps Saskatchewan get back on the road to balance. It focuses on people first. It keeps Saskatchewan strong.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank you and the members of your

committee for this opportunity. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: — Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Minister, for your remarks. I appreciate it. And we've had many times to discuss these issues, so I look forward to the next couple of hours.

But before I start I want to congratulate you and the folks at Workers' Comp and all the folks who worked really hard to get the fourth-place ranking. That's an important achievement. I know it's been hard over many, many years to make gains, and when that happens, it's really something to note. And it's important not because of actually the fourth place, but the fact that people are safer. And that's what we really want to see, and so that's a very, very good thing. So congratulations to everyone involved.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you for that. The good thing was all jurisdictions were getting better. The frustrating thing for our staff is even though they were getting better, they still were second-last. So for them the fact that they are no longer second-last means something to them. It still means of course more work to do, but it means that they are on the right track. And for them, I give them credit. So thank you for raising that.

Mr. Forbes: — And I also want to, the day after the Canadian Pension Plan meeting in Vancouver, I don't know whether you had anything to do with it, but congratulations to the government, led by the Minister of Finance.

But it's an issue on CPP that I know Canadian Labour Congress has championed for many years and the local unions have as well. And I think that needs to be noted as well, in that both sides of the House I think, I know we really think that's a good move forward — a little longer, but I think that, as you note, it's good to be prudent in times like this, that it makes it affordable as well for everyone involved.

So with that I do have questions. And you've started a lot of them, but I'm just curious at the 154.1 FTE's. Are you at, are they more or less full positions right now? Are you . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The additional two OHOs [occupational health officer] that have been approved in the budget have not yet been filled, but we anticipate they will in the near future.

Mr. Forbes: — Generally speaking, all the FTE's throughout the ministry are full and you haven't had a chronic vacancy that you're . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — I know that sometimes that happens when we're cutting budgets or trying to keep very tight, nursing a vacancy along the way for a year can make a big difference.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm told that not only were we full but we had an additional five. We had some students working and additional people working and things, so we were . . . Yes, I appreciate vacancy management is often seen as an easy way to

balance a budget, but we have busy folks and we're glad they're using resources well.

[15:15]

Mr. Forbes: — I'm glad to hear that. Now I am interested, you were talking about the inspections. So you're going to have two more inspectors. So what does that bring the number of inspectors up to?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — 53.

Mr. Forbes: — Fifty-three, and can you tell me how the inspectors are broken down? I know for sure you have some mine inspectors. Do you have . . . How do you break down your inspectors?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We have that information here and the officials will quickly grab it.

Mr. Carr: — Mike Carr, deputy minister. In terms of the distribution workplace we have the following officers designated. And, Minister, I misspoke earlier. We're going to have, at the time the two vacancies are recruited, we'll have 55 officers in the field. So we have 16 in workplace safety south, 11 in workplace safety north, 10 officers in the hygiene and ergonomics and health unit, four in radiation, four in the harassment unit, seven in mines, and three officers in the investigation unit.

Mr. Forbes: — I'll probably go through all of these. And the 16 that are in the south, obviously, are based in Regina and they're just general . . . Or where are they based out of?

Mr. Carr: — I'll have Ray . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We're joined by Ray Anthony.

Mr. Anthony: — Ray Anthony, executive director, occupational health and safety division. We currently have one health care officer operating out of the Estevan office and one occupational health and safety officer operating out of the Yorkton office. The remainder of them are in the Regina office right now.

Mr. Forbes: — So can you describe the work of the 14 then, or 13 of them?

Mr. Anthony: — There would be 12 in the Regina office in workplace safety, and one in Yorkton right now.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So how many in the south then?

Mr. Anthony: — I'm sorry?

Mr. Forbes: — How many are in the south region?

Mr. Anthony: — You mean of the 55 positions?

Mr. Forbes: — Yes.

Mr. Anthony: — I'd have to add that up in my head really quickly . . .

Mr. Forbes: — [Inaudible] . . . the number 16.

Mr. Anthony: — Sixteen, but those are general duty officers . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes. Well 16 workplace safety officers in the south.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Mr. Anthony: — As opposed to 11 in the north right now.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. And so of the 16, one is designated as a health care specialist in Estevan?

Mr. Anthony: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — And then there's two of them that are working in Yorkton.

Mr. Anthony: — Just one in Yorkton, and it's a safety officer in Yorkton.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. A safety officer.

Mr. Anthony: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — So what's the difference? What's the difference between a safety officer or . . .

Mr. Anthony: — The health care officer spends 70 per cent of their time specifically on health care. They go into health care facilities. And the safety officers spend the majority of their time, probably 90 per cent of it, going into general workplaces.

Mr. Forbes: — And those are the same as the 15 that are in the south? The 15 are safety officers?

Mr. Anthony: — The 16, yes, 16 in total; 15 in Regina, one in Yorkton. Or I'm sorry, I've got my math screwed up . . . 14 in Regina. Fourteen in Regina, one in Estevan, and one in Yorkton.

Mr. Forbes: — And then the 11 in the North?

Mr. Anthony: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — They're based out of . . .

Mr. Anthony: — There are two in the Prince Albert office . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Mr. Anthony: — And the remainder in Saskatoon.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And are they all safety officers? No?

Mr. Anthony: — There are two health care officers in that group.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And then you have the 11 in the hygiene, ergonomic.

Mr. Anthony: — Yes. There are two hygienists in the Saskatoon office and the remainder are in Regina.

Mr. Forbes: — So what does a hygienist do?

Mr. Anthony: — They work with mostly chemicals, asbestos, that sort of thing.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Mr. Anthony: — Biochemistry type exposures, that kind of thing.

Mr. Forbes: — Sure. I might come back to that one about the asbestos. And then the four in radiation and four in harassment, seven in . . .

Mr. Anthony: — Mine safety.

Mr. Forbes: — Mine safety. And have you . . . now who is the head of mine safety?

Mr. Anthony: — The chief mines inspector is Len Kaskiw.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And that's just recently, isn't it?

Mr. Anthony: — About a year.

Mr. Forbes: — About a year. Okay. Because we had a fellow there that had been there for a long time before. Right. Okay. And three that are in . . .

Mr. Anthony: — Our investigations unit.

Mr. Forbes: — Investigations. Now what does . . . So that's interesting. So they just investigate. What do they investigate?

Mr. Anthony: — Anything that meets the criteria under section 8, which is something that would wind up a worker in a hospital as an in-patient for 72 hours, or a fatality.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And then there was . . . and I know the minister was at the same forum I was, in the election, where there was a proposal made that actually people who had made an investigation on a workplace but that later resulted in an injury should not, in a sense, be investigating themselves, that there was in fact a special investigations unit that was at sort of arm's length. Do you recall this discussion?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I remember there was a concern expressed at the forum that the ministry was somehow investigating itself if there was a follow-up visit. We didn't agree with sort of the premise of what they were putting forward. The concern was expressed that if an investigation or a contact had taken place with a ministry employee, and later on there was an injury, that there would be an incentive or an onus on the employee not to fully or properly investigate it because they had inspected it earlier.

And we took the position that we don't guarantee . . . we're not there as a guarantor of it, that we don't make a distinction between what had taken place before. Their onus or their obligation is to either do an inspection or do an investigation, as the case may be, and what had taken place before has never been a factor for how an employee is promoted, not promoted, or seen as good behaviour or not. We expect our employees to

do good and proper work, so the premise of what they were putting forward was something we didn't accept. And I think I indicated that at the forum that you and I attended.

So I don't think I have anything to add to what I said at the forum. We have our people. They have an investigations unit, inspection . . . I mean, they divide the responsibilities up, but I mean somebody might move back and forth between them, and it certainly wouldn't . . . We wouldn't regard somebody as being unable to, or that they were conflicted out, or anything like that. I mean, they work for the ministry. If there's a complaint or a reason for an investigation or whatever, they would conduct it in the usual and ordinary course.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. I thought it was interesting. It seemed to me that they were saying BC [British Columbia] does this. But I'm not going to argue the point today, it's not . . . But I think it is an interesting one that when we do investigations . . . Just to get back to the asbestos group. Can you tell me how many inspections they had done and what were kind of the nature of their work?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We've focused the resources of that part of the ministry on updating and maintaining the database, and there's literally tens of thousands of properties I think on the . . . buildings that would contain asbestos. There's a window where buildings were manufactured with asbestos, and then a lot of older buildings had asbestos added in renovations or repairs at a later date. So I don't know if you've got the exact number.

But in any event they, the numbers are, it's a huge number, large enough that you would never seriously consider replacing or removing those buildings. I think when we had the discussion before we'd indicated that as long as the asbestos was encapsulated and not in a place where it could become friable, or airborne, then the asbestos was safe as long as it wasn't being disturbed.

I can tell you that in 2015-16, there was 71 inspections. Some of those might have been routine inspections; some of them might have been because of a complaint or a query from someone.

Mr. Forbes: — And I guess that's my question. Was it more . . . How can you break it down? Were there residential inspections? Were there more business? More hospitals and schools? Do you know where they were . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — For asbestos, those would have been on commercial buildings. But I don't know whether we have a breakdown beyond the 71. It would be unlikely that an inspection was done on a residential property because we don't ordinarily inspect one unless somebody asks for something on a residential property.

However having said that, asbestos can exist in residential property. There's floor coverings that were manufactured some number of years ago and a homeowner removing those, if they break them up, could inadvertently release asbestos. And there's methodology used to try and prevent that and should do it. But anyway I don't think I have anything other to add than that there was 71 and they would have all been done on older, larger buildings. I don't know, Ray, if you can add anything.

Mr. Anthony: — Yes. They pretty much come from inquiries, consultations, anywhere someone reports a high risk activity.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. There was one that was a home repair in the, I think the Nutana part of Saskatoon where a fellow was talking to me and I actually gave him a part out of the occupational health and safety . . . So I don't know whether he called but he was pretty unhappy. I think it was more around the insulation around the furnace pipes that contained . . . And he couldn't believe what he was being asked to do.

And of course, you know, when you're in — as he was explaining it to me — when you're in the middle of doing this kind of work, you just want to get it done. You're not, somehow the rules don't seem to really apply; they're for somebody else. We want to get it done today and then that'll be the end of story. And of course that's not the end of the story.

So I guess, you know, I know this is difficult to do but somehow through marketing or somehow advertising, making sure everyone knows that this asbestos can be everywhere. It's not just in schools and hospitals.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Likely the individual you spoke to had an older hot water heating system rather than a forced air system. And there's certainly . . . as insulation on the pipes and if they're removing or disturbing them, there's certainly the possibility that it's there. There's certainly some that have got a cellulose fibre that they use for insulation that isn't dangerous but until you have examined it and know how to tell the difference, the risk is certainly there. And so the point is well taken. And I hope that you said to that individual, be careful. Get a qualified expert to do this because if you do inhale it or breathe it, it may be only a very small quantity but if the fibres lodge in your lungs that could very well be a mesothelioma or you could have a . . .

Mr. Forbes: — I think it was after the fact but he refused to continue doing the work and I don't know how it all resolved. I don't know much more details than that. But I think this is an example of, you know . . . And I don't know how you do it. But I know that whether you have things at Home Depot or the Co-op or whatever so people can know that asbestos is out there when you're doing home renos.

The other one is, I wanted to touch base on the harassment unit. You've got four inspectors there. And it'd be great to hear a bit of an update. How is that doing? I hope harassment is actually going down, not up. But you have the four inspectors?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The figures are somewhat, would appear to be somewhat deceptive because there was a greater awareness, to the extent that people are no longer afraid to raise an issue and bring it up. If that has the effect of bringing up our numbers, that's a good thing because people are seeking help that they need. And if our numbers go up, I don't think it necessarily means our workplaces are getting worse. It means that people are raising legitimate concerns.

[15:30]

But I will give you some numbers. In 2010-2011, there was 630 intake calls. That went down in '11-12 to 400, but then in

2012-13 it went up to 2,031. 2013-14 it went down slightly to 2002. 2014-15 it dropped again to 1,935. And this year starting April 1st for the government's fiscal year, there's been 340 to date.

Of those, the numbers that actually were not resolved, that actually involved actual investigations, that number has actually dropped or actually even been fairly steady. 2010-11 it was 181 investigations. That dropped in '11-12 to 74. '12-13 it was up to 168; '13-14 to 186; '14-15, 216; and this year to date, 26.

Mr. Forbes: — So you have four-digit numbers in terms of complaints lodged.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes. And that doesn't necessarily mean they're all legitimate. And I think if you look at the number that go on to an investigation, that's a sign that a lot of them get resolved at an early stage. The matter gets raised; there's an investigation or a query made, and that often will end the issue. And it doesn't mean that it should have happened initially, but it's . . . I think the fact that there is a relatively low number of investigations compared to the intake calls, I regard that as a good sign.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, yes. Good. But there was a special process, I remember in the legislation one . . . I think there is a year limit. They talked about how these things need to be resolved and not drawn out. But some of the early steps were mediation or dealing . . . trying to resolve it at the workplace to make sure that, you know, respecting the complaint but also trying to mediate it. Can you talk a little bit about how that's been working?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'll let Ray answer the question. I can tell you that discriminatory action investigations, which is related, those numbers we started tracking in '12-13. Those numbers have stayed relatively low. '12-13 there was 58. '13-14 there was 17; and then '14-15, down to 64. And this year is 7 to date. So I mean, I'm not saying . . . and that's sort of a related issue, but I'll let Mr. Anthony sort of go through a bit of the process and what sort of the early resolution looks like.

Mr. Anthony: — We have worked with our mediation services group in the ministry. Those parties that are willing to have a mediator intervene, we will. But they do have a right of appeal, and so if they choose to exercise that right, well then it goes on to the Labour Relations Board who appoint an adjudicator to hear the particular case and decide. And then beyond that, they have another right of appeal to the board itself and then . . .

Mr. Forbes: — So now . . . But this was something that may have been lost in the translation over to the employment Act. There was a special adjudicator assigned to this harassment unit. I don't think that special adjudicator . . . is that special adjudicator still attached to this unit?

Mr. Anthony: — There are a number of adjudicators that are designated for hearing harassment cases, a number of them.

Mr. Forbes: — No, but for this particular unit at the beginning, there was a special adjudicator that was specialized in dealing with harassment units, the concerns.

Mr. Anthony: — Yes, in the old Act they used to call it a special adjudicator. I think now they just call it an adjudicator, but there was a number of them. There was more than one. Yes.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Given the numbers that are there, we wouldn't . . . you would not deal with it adequately with one. So what they've done is they've chosen to take all of the adjudicators that are under that section and not designate some specifically. They just said, all of them shall be trained and shall be ready to deal with this.

Mr. Forbes: — Do you have the numbers of how many people go to mediation, have agreed to go to mediation?

Mr. Anthony: — I'm afraid I don't right now.

Mr. Forbes: — All right. Well that's encouraging to hear that it's still there and it's an important part of the services.

I want to talk a little bit . . . Now, public accounts is probably going to be released in the next couple of weeks, I assume. So you all have the numbers of how you actually spent your money in the last couple years, I think. Is that right?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We would have our year-end numbers. So yes, if you have some financial questions and you'd like to ask them . . .

Mr. Forbes: — I do have, yes, because typically when we ask these questions, you don't have them because we're in March or April. But now you do.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes. We don't . . . Ms. Usick said we don't have all of the information, but ask what you have and we'll see if . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. Okay. Well I just want to know, last year in occupational health and safety, you had set aside \$8.250 million. What was your actual spend in that year?

Ms. Usick: — Okay. Louise Usick. So in 2015-16, our budget was 18.475 million and our actuals were 17.967 million. And in occupational health and safety specifically, our budget was 8.250 million and our actuals were 8.322 million.

Mr. Forbes: — Good.

Ms. Usick: — So, very close.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. And what about employment standards?

Ms. Usick: — Employment standards, the budget was 2.809 million, and the actuals were 2.840 million, so a difference of 31.

Mr. Forbes: — Very good. And then down into Labour Relations Board.

Ms. Usick: — The board was 1.081 budget and 883 actual, a difference of 198.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And the workers' advocate?

Ms. Usick: — The workers' advocate, 840,000 budget, 798 actual.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Good. Thank you very much. A couple of things about OHS [occupational health and safety]. One, but I have to give you my update on Jimmy's law. You know, I think I'll talk about this forever. But my latest experience was in a beer store on Saturday night. And I went in — and you'll be proud of me, Mr. Minister — I went into a private beer store and . . .

[Applause]

Mr. Forbes: — A round of applause.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Before you take too much credit for that, I appreciate that it was a private beer store, but was it one of the ones that you partly own — a co-op?

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, no. No, unfortunately, unfortunately I won't be getting a dividend back on this purchase.

But I just happened to be talking to the clerk — and you know, as we all do that, whenever we are in a store and we get kind of chatty — and I said, so how have things been working in this store? You know, and the guy, he thought it was kind of an odd question. And there were three of them, three young people, I would imagine, in their early 20s.

And I said, well you know, I'm a politician. I represent this area and I've been doing some work on Jimmy's law. Have you ever heard of it? And one of them had, but hadn't really understood what it was about. And I said, well you know, it's about protecting late-night retail workers. How late do you work here? He said, till 3 o'clock in the morning. I said, have you ever had a violent crime happen here? And this kid had, about a year ago.

So he was describing what had happened, and it's just mind-boggling to hear somebody describe . . . A group of six young guys came in. He was in there by himself. One came, stood beside the cash register so he could get the stuff. The other guy had a gun. He thought it was a twenty-two. He's not an expert in what the guns were. And then the others just emptied the liquor, you know, just grabbed all the liquor they could.

Now they had a system in the store where you could lock people in, but you couldn't lock people out. So when you see a group of six people coming in at a quarter to 3 or 2:30 in the morning, you just know this is not going to be a good situation. And so it was interesting that . . . And the police came. They took the . . . you know, did all the things they did. But it still reminded me of the issue that we still have, and I really hope at some point we can get to a point where this is also seen as a workplace incident.

Now he wasn't injured, but clearly this was something in the workplace that should not have happened. And as far as the police were concerned, they did their job. There was a crime scene, and so they dealt with it that way, and the young worker thought of it that way too. He didn't really think of it as a workplace in that he could've been injured, he could've you

know, even psychologically or physically. And to me, at some point we have to, you know, do something about this. And I don't know whether it's a connection with the police or some sort of work.

And I'll talk a little bit about PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder]. I'm not sure if this falls in with that, but it sure is a psychologically scarring event. And whether it's an accident or what you might call it, it really, you know, as the young guy was recounting what happened to him, it was a serious event in his life. And you know, he's probably going to be working in retail doing this kind of thing for a bit. So is it safe? No, it isn't safe. Can we do something better here? I think we have to think about these things.

So as a follow-up to, you know, protecting retail workers in those kind of violent circumstances, have you thought, or have you had your policy people do any follow-up work thinking about how we can protect retail workers against violence in the workplace?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I appreciate the point that you're making, and it's a type of trauma that ought to not happen in a workplace. It's not the type of thing that you sign up for when you take a job at a convenience store, or a late-night gas station, or late-night liquor store.

You raised the issue of PTSD. PTSD is covered under our legislation. It is a legitimate . . . I think if it can be shown that it was caused by an employment situation — and the type of situation you describe, they would have their medical evidence that would indicate what the worker is suffering from — the worker would indicate the incident that took place, and then it would be up to the Workers' Compensation, the doctors that do it. There's not presumptive coverage for it, but nor should there be on something like that. That's not an everyday part of the occurrence. But we would certainly want to encourage everybody that did have PTSD from a workplace issue that they would do it.

Now I'll give you a little bit of background as to the things that have taken place in '13-14. They've conducted 148 work site visits, and then in 2014-15 we had a 77 per cent compliance rate with what our requirements are.

And then we have a partnership or relationship with the western convenience retail stores association where the operators are partnering with us to try and provide some training, some background, some assistance for the workers in the store and also for the stores themselves. And that's the type of things that we'd talked about in previous years where there would be a limited amount of cash on site, visibility so the windows wouldn't be obscured, well lit, training for the workers, a panic button, and a variety of other things to try and make it safer for the worker.

[15:45]

Now we'll probably never be at a point where we would eliminate what would be a criminal act. But what we can do is try and make sure that those workplaces have taken as many steps as they can to try and minimize the risk through lighting, signage, and cash manager processes and the different things

that they might do to try and make sure that their workers are as safe as possible as well as making sure that their business stays safe as well.

So they have a website. There's a web-based tool that gives people some assistance, and we make it a practice to try and if there's a complaint or an issue or somebody makes a referral to us, we certainly want to be able to respond to that as quickly as we can. And then I can tell you that a number of the visits that are done by the workers are done on a random basis or, you know, they're traveling and they see something that's not as good as it should be. Most of us are in and out of convenience stores and gas bars as we travel across the province, so you often see things. And then I would encourage you and the members of your caucus if you go into a convenience store where the windows are obscured or it's poorly lit or there's not the requirement to prepay gas late at night or whatever the circumstances are, I wouldn't regard it as you telling tales out of school to come forward with it.

Our workers would go and have a visit and would work with them, and not for the sake of compliance alone but more importantly for the sake of a look into having a workplace that's as safe as possible for the workers that work in there. I don't think we should lose sight of the fact that a lot of those workers that are in there are often entry-level workers or people that are . . . for them the job is critical. They're working late or different hours, and we should make sure that we do everything we can to make them as safe as they can at work.

Mr. Forbes: — So a couple of things in terms of this. You know, you were talking about how you have targeted a certain group of workplaces that have high incidents, so in this case where you have high violence because you often read the newspaper to find, you know, scan the papers to find out where there are robberies or even just from the police, and then you can visit the workplace and say, listen these are the kinds of things you can do to make your workplace safer.

In this case, the store was only open until three, so it wasn't a 24-hour store, so the regulations didn't apply to it because it actually closed at three.

But the other one is the post assistance. Like you have, and it sounds like, a lot of really good stuff in terms of what happens before, but what happens after? What happens in the workplace after the violence takes place? Do you advise the workers and the employer: these are your avenues for what you should be thinking about once the violence has, if it did happen, the next day, you know? I mean, the training is what to do in case of the robbery, how to act, and in terms of that. But it seems like it's the next morning we don't often think about.

Mr. Anthony: — If we become aware of it, we certainly visit the work site and make sure the employer is in compliance. Like we do advocate best practice, but we can only enforce what the regulations allow us.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. And I know the fellows from Western Grocers or certain convenience stores, do they have a post plan? Like, what happens if they need counselling or if there's that type of thing?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I've looked at the material. The material seems to be focused on trying to develop safe practices for avoidance and mitigation of the likelihood of it. I don't think there's, in their material, there's a response package for what's there. I guess our expectation and hope would be that if a worker needs assistance, they would either ask the employer or would contact WCB directly for assistance. And I know the services that are available for them. The point you raise is one we can certainly take under advisement and that. But it's not something that's included under the current program.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. Okay. I'd appreciate it if you would. And I know the folks from that organization often come by, and if you raise it with them and I'll raise it with them, think about post-event plans.

Okay, now I want to just talk briefly on the PTSD. So as you say, it's covered by the Workers' Comp, but we've seen movements in other provinces. Do you want to make any comments in terms of vis-à-vis what we see happening in Ontario and Manitoba?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — At the present time, Workers' Compensation covers post-traumatic stress disorder. It's a recognized disorder. It's covered. And we have seen people referred to that. A number of other jurisdictions have included or are considering including it in the presumptive illnesses where the worker would not have to prove the causal connection between whatever incident it is and the PTSD. We have done presumptive coverage for a number of cancers and health issues that would affect firefighters because of the nature of their work. At the present time, we don't offer any presumptive coverage for PTSD in any area where it's there.

We know that a number of other jurisdictions have looked at it or have it under active consideration. When I met with the committee of review, which is in the final processes of their work, we raised it with them in advance saying — when I met with them initially — I said we anticipate that you will hear people requesting this or asking that it be looked at. So the committee of review may or may not make a recommendation, but it's certainly been raised, and there were certainly submissions put to them.

So what we've done is we want to be somewhat proactive on it, so we've asked the ministry to start to do some background work in anticipation of what the committee of review may or may not say, as far as what's taking place by way of an interjurisdictional comparison and looking at what the science and what the best information is. And that work is under way. We expect that the core report will likely be out in the next few weeks, so we'll look at that as something that we'll want to look carefully at. But even if they don't make a recommendation on it, it's something that we know is taking place elsewhere, so we want to collect information and make a careful analysis on it.

Mr. Forbes: — All right. Well you've taken three or four of my questions. That's very, very thorough. That's . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — If you'd like, I could go on longer, and maybe I could shorten the meeting up a little bit.

Mr. Forbes: — No, we do have to . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We have the commitment of time.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, exactly, this must be . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm sure you've met with some of the same people that I have, so we know that for a lot of our citizens it is an issue. We recognize that, and we want to be responsive to that, but we also want to make sure that we're using the best science and looking at what is an appropriate thing to do.

When we looked at cancers earlier, it was difficult to prove specific scientific link between some cancers and the work that was done by firefighters. And we were able to establish that we should go forward with those on a statistical basis. We were able to show that firefighters had a significant percentage higher of people that got or acquired esophageal cancer than some of the other ones. So based on the fact that there was a statistical greater likelihood that we were able to say, okay, that would be sufficient even though there may not be a scientific link, there was a statistical link, so we chose to make the coverage there. So that's the type of question that we've asked the officials to look at.

And then there comes the issue of who would get covered for PTSD. You know, it's largely been lobbied at this point by the members of IAFF [International Association of Fire Fighters] and appreciate where they're at. There would also be similar exposure, similar issues raised by members of the police service, people that would deal with, say, a crisis, nursery, sometimes nurses, a number of other professions.

So the issue would be, is there a statistical link there or good science to show those type of linkages that are there. We don't want to expand presumptive coverage simply because it's maybe a popular thing to do because there's certainly an expense to having it. What we would want to do is make sure we had good science or good statistical data and then as well look and see what's taking place when we do the cross-jurisdictional comparison. So I don't know if that answers . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Those were my two points — to do, you know, a cross-country look and see what the best practices are and just learn more because this is clearly new in some ways but some ways old, you know, because people have said and have told me that it is covered by WCB . . . [inaudible] . . . But we are learning a lot more about how much is out there, and it's very, very important and the science as well.

And I guess that would lead me to my next question because you have alluded to it a bit. The committee of review, I think they're a bit overdue, are they not?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't know when they regard their work as being complete. I'd met with them initially at the outset, and then I met with them, with the Chair and with the . . . [inaudible] . . . I believe they are in the final process of their work.

Mr. Forbes: — You don't have any sense of when that will be done or . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The deputy minister indicates there's a likelihood that we'd have it by the end of the month.

Mr. Forbes: — This month, like the end of June?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Wow.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — From my discussion with him that would indicate that was the target where they're at.

Mr. Forbes: — Well that's good work, and we'll be looking forward to seeing what's in it. And I know that there's been a lot of issues raised over the past year, that people are looking forward to seeing what they come up with.

My next question really focuses around Workers' Comp and their extraordinary funding position that they find themselves in, and I have a few questions about that. And my question would be . . . Maybe I'll wait for the officials to change and . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — For the benefit of Hansard, we are joined by Peter Federko, CEO [chief executive officer] of Workers' Compensation Board.

Mr. Forbes: — Good and welcome. So in the paper, *Leader-Post*, 6th of May — I think these were after the AGMs [annual general meeting] or a series of meetings that you had — there was an article about the WCB ruling on the \$281 million rebate by early June. Has WCB made the decision about what they're going to do with the \$281 million?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — They have not as yet, and no money has been paid out. It likely will be done in the relatively near future, but there has been no decision and nothing finalized by then. As you're likely aware, WCB is independent, but I know there's discussions between Finance and whatever takes place, but the decision has not as yet been made.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. I'm just wondering if we could back up a bit for people watching or reading, and I don't want to jump right in the middle. How did the WCB come about these two very fortunate years of having . . . I think last year it was \$140 million surplus and this year, 281?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That's correct. There's two things, one small and one large. A relatively small portion of the surplus comes from the reduced claims that were paid out from better performance within. And the larger part of it comes from the performance of the investment portfolio. The investment policy of WCB requires them to hold reserves of 120 per cent of their claims, so they have a significant investment portfolio. The portfolio is invested with the services of a professional portfolio manager. They seem to have done well in the markets, and the portfolio has done really well.

[16:00]

Having said that, I don't think we would want to suggest to them that because they had two good years, that they should either reduce the amount of premiums or treat it any differently because you could, as well, have a bad year or a bad two or

three years. And I think early on when I had this portfolio, we had one year where there was actually a small loss showing on the portfolio at the end of the year. I think we had a reported loss because of a market dip at the end of the year of, I think, 6 or \$7 million. It came back very quickly in the new year. So I think the cautious approach in the amount of money that they've held has served them very well and has served the workers of Saskatchewan well.

But the issue is that they now have the excess, and the money came from investments that were made by the employers in the province and that should be where it will find its way back to once the WCB has determined what is a reasonable amount to try and allocate for future claims or future risk with either the potential for a spike in claims or lower performance in the markets.

Mr. Forbes: — Can you be more specific in terms of how much the reduction in claims, what is that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes. I think Mr. Federko would have that number. I know it was by far the smallest part.

Mr. Federko: — So cumulatively, the reduction in claims has had a very, very big effect on creating this funded position in the first place. But with respect to the excess surplus in 2015, we reported a net income of about \$132 million; 25 million of that, so a very small portion of that, actually came from premiums in excess of the costs of our organization, including the claims costs. So we had about a \$25 million surplus coming out of premiums in excess of costs, and then the balance of the 132 coming directly from our investment portfolio.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So am I getting this right then? Are you saying that 25 million is due to because of the reduction in claims?

Mr. Federko: — It was really two things.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Mr. Federko: — So first of all the payroll . . . So our premiums are collected on the basis of whatever the payroll base is in the province, and we saw greater growth in our payroll base in 2015 than we had expected. So when we set the premium rate for 2015 we were projecting a lower payroll number. It actually came in higher and so we collected more money than we thought we would.

The second thing was the number of claims that fell off was far greater than what we had anticipated. So we had targeted a time-loss injury rate of 2.2 per cent; it actually came in at 2.07 per cent. So the combination of greater revenue because of greater payroll base and reduced number of claims generated that \$25 million.

Mr. Forbes: — So now in that, has that happened many times where you've over-estimated the number of . . . or under-estimated the number of people working and you've had too much money because of that?

Mr. Federko: — No. So if we look back at our kind of 20-year history. This would be one of the very few years — I think

there were only three in the last 25 years — where our premium revenue actually exceeded our claims costs. Every other year the investment income is what has propped us up and built that surplus of 20 per cent, as the minister said.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And then this reduction, I mean it would be great to see that reduction continue on at this rate, but that probably won't happen. Or will it? I don't know. So . . . [inaudible] . . . it was 2.27 and went down to 2.02. Have I got those numbers right?

Mr. Federko: — We started out at 2.41 at the end of 2014. And we were hoping we would hit a reduction down to 2.20. We actually saw a reduction down to 2.07. Mission: Zero's betting on continued reductions in that injury rate.

Mr. Forbes: — And I hope it does. I hope it does. And then what are your plans for next year? What do you think it will go to next year?

Mr. Federko: — I really can't imagine where we'll end up the year. You know, we started out the end of 2015 with accumulated unrealized gains in our portfolio of around \$185 million and that's down, to the end of April, that's down about \$90 million. Now it came back up again in April, and now it's dropped back down in May. So it's going to be really contingent upon whether the markets settle down and the volatility is taken out of that.

The other unknown is we don't know what the payroll numbers are coming in like at this particular point in time. We had forecasted a modest growth for 2016 but we're seeing a little bit slower payroll come in, but we're just very early on in our assessment process. So I couldn't even speculate where we might be.

Mr. Forbes: — Right, but you have the 120 per cent. There is a safety net that you have, right, for that kind of thing.

Mr. Federko: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — And that's 120 per cent of . . . And that's what people sometimes say is too high; it's too much.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think the goal is that this is an insurance scheme and it's set up to benefit injured workers. Somebody else pays the premium. And I can understand them wanting a lot of accountability for that and that's reasonable and should be expected. But the goal that WCB has as an independent entity is to make sure that it's adequately funded, that it maintains an adequate level of funding, and an understanding that payroll contributions could drop, injuries could spike, or investment performance could change.

I believe the total amount that was paid out last year was \$141 million. So it's a huge amount of money that gets paid out and a lot of it is for workers that are on long-term disability or permanent disability or death benefits. So the best thing that we can do is continue to reduce the injury rate, and from an economic point of view, not pay out that much money. But just from the idea of the human effect on our work force, the pain and suffering that our workers should go to . . . whether it's a mild injury or very serious one. The best thing we can do is

focus on Mission: Zero and the targeted programs that we've got to try and drive the numbers down.

Mr. Forbes: — So just to clarify, 141 million went back to employers.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No, the \$141 million was paid to injured workers. Hang on, I want to get the right number here. The total amount paid to workers was — and it's a staggering number when you look at it — \$220 million gets paid to workers and family members of workers. So it's huge. So if you think of us as being a little over a million people, it's about \$200 for every man, woman, and child in the province that gets paid to it, so it's . . .

Mr. Forbes: — So you know, the 141 million and the 281 million, those are staggering numbers, and it's great fortune and great, you know. Wow, what different kind of news to deal with. Usually we're dealing with negative numbers like we are in the general budget.

And I am interested, you know, how you say there's two numbers at play here but, you know, there are two schools of thought out there. I know the SFL [Saskatchewan Federation of Labour] and some of the organized labour say hold some of that back, that we should not necessarily see it all go out back to the employers. The employers say it is our money so we're due it and, you know, I mean . . . But there are three parts to that pocket of money. You know, there's the number of workers, the payroll part of it, the deduction; reduction in the number of injuries; and of course the huge part about the investment.

So I'm, you know, I'm of the school of thought . . . And I hope that when WCB does make its ruling that even a small amount of money, you know, clearly there can be a significant refund, but a small amount of money could go into some sort of legacy project around the fact that, you know . . . And Saskatchewan could be a real leader in terms of occupational health and safety if there was an area that we really wanted to really break through. And I don't know. I don't know. You know, I mean that's the old dilemma is, do you just throw more money at it? Does that really make a difference? Or is it something else? I mean you could put a lot of money towards it and have no difference.

So I'm really curious about the discussions around the table. Is there other ways that we could be using a bit more money? I know, for example, in terms of occupational health and safety, and a lot of people don't realize this, but occupational health and safety is funded by Workers' Comp. It's not funded through taxes or anything like that. And yet their funding has maintained relatively the same, about eight and a half million dollars, and we haven't really changed that number for many years. And actually the real cost per, or the real spend per employee or worker over the last few years has remained the same.

But if you take the fact that there's more workers, and there is a cost of living, then in fact we are spending less on workers than we have been in past years. And here's an opportunity to have . . . Just a little bit more could make a big difference. Another million dollars in occupational health and safety probably could be a real good thing.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The analysis that's given is, how much money do you need to operate the OHS system? Not how much is available — there may be less; there may be more. The role of it is to provide the funding for OHS and that's done each year. There's a transfer made from WCB to fund the operations of the OHS including the education, the employer committees. All the rest . . . [inaudible] . . . are funded 100 cents on the dollar from that program.

The fact that the fund has performed better ought not be seen as a simple opportunity that those things should simply spend more money. Their level of funding should be determined by the need and by the effectiveness of the programs that they're running. Let me use the converse argument. If there was a drop in performance or a shortage, we wouldn't say, well let's cut back by 3 or 5 or 10 OHOs. We would say, no, we will make that up either by adjusting rates or whatever else. So I think we would use the analysis separately and say we need to fund OHS and the operations at a correct amount or a good at a proper amount.

And the fact that the fund has generated a surplus is, well, a good problem but we don't see that as opportunity to try and transfer funds there. If we had a shortfall we would look to the employers and we would say, we are going to have an additional premium, a surcharge or whatever else to try and cover that. And in the same fashion if there's excess funds, those funds are the property of the employers who made the remittances. And the fact that it's working, they're the ones that ought to receive that money back. It's their money and we shouldn't simply say, because it's there we want to just take it.

I understand the argument and I appreciate that the people say it's an opportunity, but I don't philosophically agree with it. Philosophically, I think those employers paid the money in with the idea that they were going to have a well-run, effective system. They do. Their system performed better than expected so we expect to give them money back. And the idea that we would do some of the things that people were speculating at the forum that you and I were at, I'm not supportive of those.

Mr. Forbes: — So have you done a look across Canada? I don't know how many occupational health and safety inspectors there are in the other jurisdictions for 10,000 workers or 100,000 workers. We seem to have . . . There's 55 inspectors for 550,000 workers so that's 1 per 10,000.

[16:15]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, I have some information for you. And it's difficult to compare, to make an apples to apples because they have different functions, different responsibilities. Newfoundland and Labrador, they've got 27. Nova Scotia has 40. Prince Edward Island has 6. New Brunswick has 29; Quebec, 286; Ontario, 430; Manitoba, 54; Saskatchewan, 52; Alberta, 148; British Columbia, 281; Yukon, 10; Northwest Territories, 8; Nunavut, 4.

So if you look at our companion — this is data for 2014, so ours will be up a bit since — if you look at the data compared to what the population of the province is in, we're pretty well bang on to what they are. If you especially look at Saskatchewan, Alberta, BC, we're very consistent with what the other

provinces are. So we don't see a ramp-up of those officials as (a) producing a significant benefit, and we wouldn't be supportive that it would be a cost-effective tool.

A lot of the other things that are being done right now and not just done by the OHOs themselves, there's also a lot of training that's being done, a lot of public education that's being done, and other things that are undertaken also funded by WCB.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. How is the times for appeals? I wonder if Mr. Federko could . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'll ask Mr. Federko to do it. We had a period of time, roughly a year ago, where the appeal time was approaching a year. It was in excess of 360 days. Then we had some staffing changes with the board members that were done last summer, last August, and I'm told that the appeal period has diminished by a significant amount. But I'll let Mr. Federko answer this.

Mr. Federko: — So we have seen really great reductions both at the first level of appeal, the appeal department, as well as the board level. And so to Minister's point, we were seeing board decisions taking in excess of a year, over 300 days. As of last week, board members were issuing their decisions within 120 days, so a very dramatic reduction in the number of days to decision.

At the appeal department level, we are running it about, on average 18 days for a decision to go out. That's from notification of the appeal to actually a decision being rendered, so really, really great reductions and improvements on that front.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I inquired as to whether there was a likelihood that the amount of time could be driven down much further — and I guess that might be something Peter might want to answer more specifically — but I'm told that there's a reasonable amount of time required for the worker to get the medical information collected and the information prepared to go forward to the board. It's not a matter of simply saying, we'd like to do this on Thursday. It's a matter of saying, okay what do you need to do? Do you have the medical information? Do you have that? And a lot of that is put together by the office of the workers' advocate, which has been doing remarkably good work at assisting the workers in assembling their information and often resolving them prior having an appeal.

Mr. Forbes: — Now I'm wondering . . . Getting back to, you know, so anticipating the refund of some, whatever, 141 million last year, and I don't know. I don't have the answers right with me in terms of . . . I think I've asked the written question about how much actually came back to the provincial government because you're a significant employer. How much would you be anticipating in terms of getting back of the \$281 million?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes. This is a year ago, and \$34 million was paid out last year back to government.

Mr. Forbes: — Back to government.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — So we can kind of anticipate that it would be around 60-some.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Actually I think I might even have that. But last year, post-secondary received 1.292 million; elementary and secondary, 2.11 million; health authorities, 19.88 million; cities, towns, and village, which isn't the provincial government, 5.31 million; Government of Saskatchewan and other ministries, which would include Health . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, for other government agencies, total of \$5.50 million for a total of 34.114 paid out last year. And I think this year . . . The full \$280 million would be paid out. It would be in the range of roughly double this because the amount is roughly double.

Mr. Forbes: — Have you done any follow-up or heard any stories about what they did with that money? I mean I have heard some of the studies have done work around occupational health and safety, have reinvested it back into some of their programs. But I don't know what the provincial government's done with its money.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think a lot of the work that was done by the ministries would have been done not based on what a refund or potential refund was done. It was because they were directed to do that as part of their responsibility as an employer. A real strong direction was given. I know the deputy minister and the DMs were sort of given a strong direction that for governments to have a high injury rate is not acceptable. So a lot of work was done in, particularly in the health region.

The health region had, not traumatic injuries, but they were lifts and strains. And there was a huge investment made by the health regions in putting in lift equipment and training people in the use of the lift equipment. And I've toured some of the facilities and seen it. The stuff is state of the art and easy to use. And I think initially there was . . . the workers weren't trained up or there was sort of a sense, oh well, I'm tough. I've always done this before.

We're at a point in time now where a lot of our workers are aging baby boomers — neither you nor I are looking in the mirror, of course — but the fact is that a lot of our workers now can't do the same lifting that they could at 22 or 25 years old. They're now people that are 50 or 55 years old. And then they'll have a problem from repetitive lifting or from trying to do a lift that at one time they could have done readily that they can no longer do. So the health regions made a huge commitment, and as a result of that they drove down their injury rate substantially. I don't have the numbers, but they . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Are you talking in the past couple of years or are you just talking recently, with this refund?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Oh, in the last two or three years. I think I've had this portfolio five or six years, and I think it's been the last three years that there's been a huge pressure put on the . . .

A Member: — It started in 2012.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It started in 2012. And it was simply because the injuries were there and I think people weren't as aware of them or focused on them because they weren't a

trauma type of injury. But when you looked at the number of people that were off on WCB claims, a lot of them were lifting and that type of strain. So that was the pressure or the direction that was given back to the region Chairs and to the . . .

Mr. Forbes: — But what I'm thinking is that many, you know, health regions now would be getting this refund, and they would say this is an opportunity buy more lifts. Because it's a one-time refund, they could be using it for capital as opposed to, you know . . . and then really reinvesting in occupational health and safety.

And I would hope that the provincial government, when they get their refund — because I know the provincial governmental is short of cash — \$60 million would go a long way to pay for a lot of programs.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — My understanding is that the health regions have done the things that they need to do by way of acquiring the equipment and the initial training. And I would hope that part of their budget would be they continue training, and continued awareness of what they need to do. And I hope that they wouldn't say, oh we have this extra money, and they wouldn't be dependent on that. We would hope that they would be making the right decisions with it.

I can't speak to them for how they would budget or apportion that money, but our goal would be that they're doing the right things because it's the right thing to do, not because of some unexpected refund. I'm glad they have the money back. If they choose to put some more of it in there, that's their decision. But our goal is that they do the right things. They do the safe things, and they don't do them that, oh we have an opportunity to do them. They're doing them because it's their job.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I think, I mean, there's only so far you go with that because I mean we're all feeling the pressures of the downturns in the economy here in Saskatchewan — every provincial organization, the health regions. And so I think they'd be smart enough to say this is one-time money. But if they did come across a refund, because of WCB, of 1 million or \$2 million they could say wisely, we can invest in the capital because these lifts, for example, are pretty expensive. And it's a one-time opportunity to get ahead of the game because, you know, there are going to be pressures for the next several years and, in particular, next year.

And this leads me to the next question around transformational change in labour. What do you anticipate will be happening there? We've gone through lean. We've gone through a lean program, and now we're going to go through transformational change. And of course you're going to be asking questions that I wouldn't be surprised you've already asked in this ministry. And so what does this, what does transformational change mean to you?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think that's a really good question. It's early on in the process, but I think at the present time we're asking a lot of questions. And we're saying to health regions, we're saying to the ministries, we're saying to the school divisions to start talking about the businesses that they do and how best they can deliver those services.

So ask the first question: are the programs that are being delivered still needed? Can we have a program that's redundant? Can we consolidate it? Is it something that is serving a useful purpose? Look at all of the avenues that they have for saving money. But look at a particular program and say, is this the right way to do it? Is there a better way to do it? Do we need to do this at all? Is it something that we're duplicating with something that's done by another ministry?

The Minister of Finance has said something that I've said to school divisions: everything is on the table. Do we do governance right? Do we do, you know, do we have the right number of school boards, school divisions? Is there a different way that we can do things? What about governance? What about administration? What are things that we can do that won't affect front-line services or the things that our citizens have indicated that we can or that we should be doing for them?

We've said to school divisions, sit down with a blank sheet of paper. How would you make this look like if you had no constraints as to how it was done before, but how best you can do it. Because the people that work in this ministry — at Workers' Compensation Board, workers' advocate, Labour Relations Board — are the true experts in this. They see how this is done every day.

[16:30]

So these are the people that we should be saying to them, how would you provide OH & S? How would you make sure that somebody that had a complaint, somebody was injured, how would you see that process from the time it presented itself or the prevention process, how would you do this in a better or more effective way? Are the online ads most effective? You know, we've got billboards up over the province. What's the best way to try and do it?

Or do you go onto job sites and say to a group of workers, okay we're sending somebody out to give you a training lesson and an awareness program. Do we look to the bigger employers? And we've got some bigger employers, some of the mining companies, some of the metal working companies that have had amazing results at driving their injury rates down. So do we say to those people, what are you doing differently? How is it that you're doing? You know, and you see some of the things that they're doing.

You'll go to a job site. There'll be a muster point, so as soon as you go onto the job site, before you can go out, you need to go through a process. I did a school tour of a school that was under construction. So the first thing when I get there, is they make sure that I've got boots, goggles, safety vest, hard hat, and then I signed the thing. And then they tell me, okay if something happens you need to stand back, you know, get out of the way of whatever is taking place. There is a muster point here. You'll go there and you'll wait until, you know, so we can account for everybody that's still on the job site.

When I had summer jobs when I was in university, it wasn't like that. Nobody knew what a visibility vest was. You might wear a hard hat, but you probably didn't wear goggles. You probably didn't wear gloves. We have a high rate of injuries with some businesses with cuts and things in their hands

because people are moving steel and sharp objects.

So all of those things are the type of things that we're saying to employers. You're doing this. Can you tell us, can you share that information how you train people, how you do things to give our government the best opportunity to try and do things better?

And one of the examples is the Ministry of Highways. We have safety issues on our highways through construction zones. Well you try and name something that we can do to drive that down further and, you know, it's likely something that's already done — reduced speed limits, better lighting, photo radar, training for people that are there, public awareness.

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, time is to share.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — So anyway.

Mr. Forbes: — Sorry, I do have a few questions.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It was a transformatively long answer.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. So how's that going to be organized? Are you going to be doing a series of meetings in the fall about this? Have you figured this out?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We've said . . . Okay, I'll give you a shorter answer. We've said we will start working, getting your thoughts put together and wait for a direction that will come from cabinet.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Thank you. And I think it could be quite significant in terms of what happens, particularly if we get into health regions and changing health regions. And then you start to get into the unions and who represents what. That was quite an issue back a few years ago with . . . I think the Dorsey report had a big impact on that, before my time.

I don't know if you've . . . the changes to EI [employment insurance] because of the situation in Saskatchewan, has that had anything to do with the ministry or you had to recalibrate because of that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There's a bill before the House — the compassionate care extension of benefits Act — where if you have to care for a family member or close friend during critical illness or a potentially terminal illness, we require the employer to give 28 weeks off. The federal government is providing 26 of EI benefits after a two-week waiting period, so it brings our legislation in line with them. And that's the only significant change right now.

Mr. Forbes: — I think we were, I was thinking more of, you know, the fact that the number of weeks required before you were eligible. And we weren't able to . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That doesn't affect us.

Mr. Forbes: — I'm wondering, you know, one of the questions I had a few years ago with the employment Act was some of the data that the ministry would be able to gather and now maybe can't. I'm wondering how many shops in the province have

10-hour days, or four-day work weeks? And that was one thing that had changed, but are you keeping . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Going to 4-10s doesn't require a permit anymore. That's something that's done directly, so I don't know whether we . . .

Mr. Carr: — So we don't track on an active or ongoing basis what hours of works occurs across workplaces unless there's a question or a complaint that comes forward. Then we have some awareness. We do know that in 2013-14, which we issued 150 permits allowing four 10-hour days, but we do know that there were significantly more workplaces using that shift configuration in the province than the 150 who had permits to do so.

Mr. Forbes: — Now how would you know that? Are you . . .

Mr. Carr: — It's again the anecdotal information that you hear from people talking about what's going on in communities. And certainly from our perspective, we know that there are a significant number of workplaces that are utilizing different shift arrangements based on, again as I've said, the anecdotal information that's shared with us.

Mr. Forbes: — Now how many people work in the labour standards?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — 31. 31.2.

Mr. Forbes: — 31.2?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, I don't know if they count me as the point two or not.

Mr. Forbes: — Can you tell me how many are inspectors?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Sorry, I stand corrected. 36.1.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And how many are inspectors? Policy folks? That type of thing.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, we'll be joined by Greg Tuer who is responsible for that branch.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Mr. Tuer: — In terms of our breakdown, I'll do it by program area because that's how I have it written down.

Mr. Forbes: — Sure. Yes.

Mr. Tuer: — In our compliance and investigation unit, and that's the program where we investigate the formal complaints that come in, so we have in that program, we have 14 officers, two managers, and one director. In addition to that, we have 10 what we call intake staff. So they're the people who, when someone comes in the door, they'll speak to people, take complaints, and they're the people that take our calls on our 1-800 line.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes.

Mr. Tuer: — Our compliance and review unit — so they're the people who work on prosecutions, on our anonymous and third party complaints — we have two officers in that unit. Our collections unit — so once we've been through a complaint, we've established that money is owed. And if we can't get an employer to come in to compliance voluntarily and it goes to a certificate, that's when they would get involved — we have two officers in that unit. Our education and training services unit has two staff, two educators in that unit. And then in head office we have executive director, executive coordinator, and two admin staff.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Are there any vacancies? Are you fully staffed up?

Mr. Tuer: — We're fully staffed today. We actually have a retirement coming up right away, so we'll be staffing for one position, but fully staffed.

Mr. Forbes: — Oh well, there you go. Now I was going to say what's the average, you know, lifespan? What's the word I'm looking for? How long do the people last in your shop?

Mr. Tuer: — You know, it's an interesting question because when I started with the division about five years ago we, actually I think we still have the highest average age in the ministry. But we have people who have been around a long time. We also have a number of officers in our rural locations who come to us as a second career — so former police officers, former RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police].

Mr. Forbes: — And what about the collections unit? How active is the . . . Do you have a year by year . . .

Mr. Tuer: — I actually don't have the breakdown for the collections unit itself, but our division on average over the last five years has collected about 1.8, \$1.9 million.

Mr. Forbes: — Now would you have a way . . . So if somebody comes in and they feel like they're owed money, and you haven't been able to collect, how much have you not been able to collect?

Mr. Tuer: — Well over that same five-year period, we averaged about \$2.3 million that we found owing, and we collected about 1.8. So we average between 75 and 79 per cent that we collect each year.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Now I'm curious to know in terms of the young workers follow-up — and I think we've had this question — because we've had a way of people taking their program online, and that's fine. And I'm curious to know, have you been able to determine how effective that has been in terms of both labour standards that . . . in well, I guess, fairness and safety, that the folks taking, the kids taking the program end up being safe workers, and they end up being treated fairly in the workplace?

Mr. Tuer: — We were just having this very conversation yesterday with our group that was working on that course. We don't have a way of tracking. We don't currently track the age of someone who files a complaint, and we don't currently track whether or not they've been through the young workers course.

But over the period of time that we've had the course we've issued over 110,000 certificates, so I mean, it's got quite an impact.

Interesting, we were just having some discussions with Workers' Comp, and an official there has pointed to . . . They've seen a drop in their youth workplace injury rate to a 12-year low. And so while we can't draw a direct cause to the young workers course, I mean, it's one of the things we think is contributing to that.

Mr. Forbes: — It's too bad that, if there wasn't some way of asking permission, because I know it's a privacy issue, but if there's some way of tracking that. And I don't know whether other provinces do the same thing. Do other provinces have an online training program for young workers?

Mr. Tuer: — Not like ours today, actually. We've been contacted by a number of different jurisdictions to see if they can use our course. One of the things we do, every other year we do a survey of the school divisions to see who is using them; so again, trying to get an idea of what the scope is.

And two years ago when we did the last survey, there was about 79 per cent of the school divisions that responded, said they were using it in the career education courses. So we feel like we're getting to a large number of the youth out there.

Mr. Forbes: — That's good that there's . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That's one of the things that we regard as a success that we've done. And it's difficult to say, when something doesn't happen, how good a program is and what caused an injury that didn't happen. But for the people that have taken the course — and I have, even though I'm not old enough anymore — it has valuable information on it.

It talks to them about what their rights are, both with the right to say no to dangerous work, the information in regard about hours of work. It's an incredibly worthwhile thing. And it appears that from people who have taken the course, we have very few complaints or very few workers that have been disadvantaged because of it. So we regard it as being something that's valuable, and I'm glad other provinces are looking at it.

Mr. Forbes: — Do you have a sense that it is a program that has some rigour, like not everybody passes it? Or it's so easy that anybody could?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I urge you to sign up and take it. I mean if you get it wrong, you go back and you take it again. Some of the things when . . . You know, you're familiar with a lot of the things because of your role here, so you'd probably get 50 or 60 per cent. Seriously though, if you go, I'd encourage you to go and do it. Have a look at it and see what you think.

The course is designed not to cause people frustration, but to say, oh you're wrong on this — go back, take it again, whatever. And the course looks easy, but when you've taken it, once you've gone through, you realize you've learned for a broad range of things, pretty valuable information.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Fair enough. Now I want to . . . I have a

question about the workers' advocate.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'll ask Denise Klotz to come and join us.

Mr. Forbes: — Hi. Now has the number of advocates increased in the last few years? I think you've been batting around nine or so.

[16:45]

Ms. Klotz: — Yes, Denise Klotz, workers' advocate. Yes, we have eight advocates and one manager of advocacy services, and so yes, just two years ago we had the addition of two full-time advocates.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, so what's been the impact of having the two new advocates? What's been the delivery of service and that type of thing?

Ms. Klotz: — Our delivery of service is we've reduced our wait time for service for clients contacting our office from nine weeks to, we averaged, seven days last year in '15-16, and we continue to hold that average. And we achieved 87 per cent standardized quality service representation for last year, and that's all the staff meeting their standards of our caseload management.

Mr. Forbes: — Two things. That's phenomenal, seven days. So now what was the change? Just two people or what caused the improvement?

Ms. Klotz: — Obviously the increase in staff component was significant, as well as we have a numerous number of service standards in place that we continue to establish and then monitor to ensure that our files are moving at a sufficient rate through the system.

Mr. Forbes: — Would you be having the same number of files coming through?

Ms. Klotz: — Actually we're up. We're up about 10 per cent for the number of files that we're opening in the office.

Mr. Forbes: — Can you just give me maybe — say — the last four or five years if you have the number of files? Or if you don't, just . . .

Ms. Klotz: — I do not have the last number of years. Last year we had 574 that received a level of service. Or that was '14-15, sorry, and last year in '15-16 we had 636, and the number of appeals also increased up to 457 from 409 the previous year.

Mr. Forbes: — So are you seeing just around the same ballpark, or are you seeing a bit of an increase in people coming to your office?

Ms. Klotz: — We only went up 3 per cent from '14 to '15. We had about 1,575 to 1,651 contacting our office last fiscal.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Now I'm just making some notes here. And so 87 per cent adherence to standards, is that what you're saying?

Ms. Klotz: — Yes. Standardized quality representation is what we refer that to, and that's our caseload management. So each advocate, we have numerous standards established to manage the caseloads as they come in to our office and do the summaries and do the assessment and do the appeals if there's going to be an appeal, or research and write for medical, all of those components. We have numerous standards on that.

Mr. Forbes: — So do you do any analysis of what kind of cases are coming before you, that you're seeing more of a certain type or an emerging trend that you haven't . . . Because you're dealing with a lot of data, it sounds like.

Ms. Klotz: — Yes, we are dealing with a lot of data, and actually the trends analysis component of the exact types of cases that we're delving into is something that we're really developing and honing in on this current fiscal year. So I don't actually have any numbers from last fiscal on specific types of cases for you.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The work that's done by the advocate are people that will have had a level of frustration because the claim was initially denied, so the expertise they've had that they don't treat people as they're just off carping and complaining, whatever else. These are people that have got a legitimate need, that the issues that they need to have addressed are of critical importance to them. And also more important, you know, a large number of those complaints are allowed because of the assistance the workers' advocate gives them. So these people aren't just seen off, you know, as being disgruntled people. These are people that have a need and a very legitimate one, so we . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, and my point is that, you know, if there's some insights in terms of certain types of cases are not being well received over at WCB, that certainly that could be shared. And you know, we see that all the time at my office where we see housing becoming a big issue or TEA, you know. Things go up and down, it seems to be, as new policies get implemented. And sometimes they don't go over so well, and so you probably see some of those folks. And so okay, well that's good news then. It seems like you're doing okay.

Ms. Klotz: — We are doing very well. The advocates are doing a lot of great work in there, yes.

Mr. Forbes: — And it is well needed, and we refer a lot of people over there, and I'm so happy to hear seven days because that can make a lot of . . . There is a lot of frustration out there and going down from . . . What did you say it was? It went from what to seven days?

Ms. Klotz: — It had been up at nine weeks, and it's reduced now to . . . All of last year we maintained an average of seven days.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. Okay, so for about . . . nine times five is forty-five down to seven. Very good. Just a couple of quick snappers here. Your 1-800 number, what are the hours of that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think it goes off-line at 5, and then it forwards to Mike's house.

Mr. Carr: — Our OHS 1-800 number is 24-7-365.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay and is that staffed live?

Mr. Carr: — It is staffed by a service after hours, and the service makes a referral to the duty officer. In employment standards, it's normal business hours, 8 to 5.

Mr. Forbes: — Now have you thought . . . and what kind of numbers do you get at the labour standards through the phones? And I'm also thinking in terms of 8 to 5 is like a work day and whether that is, you know, people would either phone before, after, or during lunch. They probably don't phone from their place of work about this, but quite often labour standards issues are after the fact as well.

Mr. Carr: — So employment standards has averaged about 33,000 calls annually, and the calls are all responded to within our performance standard within 24 hours. If they come in on a Friday, we're back to them on Monday. We tend not to have the same kind of requirements, although one of the things that I'll share with you that we have done is we've gone to an electronic complaint form or an inquiry form where the individuals can use their smart phone or their computer at home and raise the issues with us.

Mr. Forbes: — I'm wondering in terms of having somebody live there. Have you done any analysis about when people call in? What is your busiest day? I can tell you what the busiest day in my office is. It's Tuesday. And so I don't know if you folks have done any work around that.

Mr. Tuer: — Yes we have taken a look at that, and I think you see sort of a normative bell curve. In the middle of the day, kind of between 10 and 3, we see our peaks. And similarly the week, you know, Tuesday through Thursday is when people tend to call it. It drops off as they're on either side of the weekend.

Mr. Forbes: — Do you find that most of the calls are coming after the person has left their place of work? They have either been let go or they've quit, so it doesn't really matter whether they're calling during the day because they're out of work anyways?

Mr. Tuer: — We don't really find that on the calls because I think on our call centre we have both employees and employers calling. But what we do see in our formal complaints, the vast majority of people are no longer employed.

Mr. Forbes: — Then I'll just quickly take a look through . . . So I assume the Supreme Court ruling on essential services is all kind of wrapped up, and you're making progress on that. I understand that the government has paid for some of it, but they're still working on some of the damages, I think.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'll give you the quick update. The Act is passed, proclaimed, and in force. No one has used the Act, as you're likely aware, at the present time. I think the fact that it's there gives both the employer and the employee comfort that they have an escape valve if they need it and they're not able to resolve it.

The initial claim to court claimed damages, so when it went

through the various appeals, it was directed back to the trial court by the Supreme Court so that damages could be assessed or determined. No court application has been brought for damages, and our understanding from talking to the lawyers that the claim for damages would be minimal. People claim for and get their court costs, but it's hard to ascertain what damages, if anybody actually has sustained . . . Like I'm glad for the sake of the workers that we have this, but the fact that it wasn't there the year before or two years before or five years before or even ten years before, how different is a worker's job or a worker's workplace?

Mr. Forbes: — I'm thinking the SFL's Supreme Court ruling and the fact that there was costs awarded and damages awarded. And I understand the costs have been dealt with, but damages, because of the work they had to do, has not been dealt with.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The damages claim would still be pending if they choose to bring it back.

Mr. Forbes: — All right but they haven't.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Not so far as I know. But the court costs have been dealt with by the taxing officer of the court and of course . . .

Mr. Forbes: — So there was a cost to this whole thing, right?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We never said there wasn't. I mean the successful party in most pieces of litigation are awarded court costs, and we pay them if we're on the unsuccessful side. And if we're on the successful side, we would certainly be asking for court costs going the other direction, so I don't fault anybody for having asked for them.

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Chair, I think I have just about got all my questions answered, and I know we are pretty close to the hour . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Three minutes? Two? Should I ask the minister to continue . . . Have you talked to your advisory committee about transformational change?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I haven't. We're due to have a meeting of the advisory committee, and that may well be a topic that comes up.

Mr. Chair, if we're in the process of winding down, this may be an opportunity for both the critic and myself to thank the various people that are here, and I'll certainly defer to Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, I think it is time to thank the officials. I appreciate the officials, seen them many years, and they're doing good work over in Labour and WCB and all the associated agencies. And thank you very much for your answers, and with that I conclude my questions.

The Chair: — Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To you and the members of the committee, thank you very much for your time for being here, and to the Hansard folks that are here. We did adjust the temperature for you. You'll notice we are very responsive to needs. It's part of our ongoing

commitment through OH & S to make sure that people are comfortable in their workplace.

But I would like to thank all of the officials that are here today. I know this is part of their regular working day, but the amount of work and time that goes into preparation for this is something that's a massive undertaking, and the binders of material and the stuff that's there. So these are people that work hard for the benefit and good of the province. We are making progress in this ministry, and it is because of the work and the commitment of the people that are here and the staff that works for them. So I would like to thank not just only those that are here today but also those that are working in the field, doing the inspections and doing the very good work of this ministry. So thank you.

The Chair: — Mr. Minister, I would like to thank you and your officials. Mr. Forbes, I would like to thank you for your questions. The rest of the committee, we will now recess until 7 p.m. when we will be back with Social Services estimates.

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

The Chair: — Good evening everyone. We'll start with introductions. We have Mr. Parent, Ms. Wilson, Mr. Kaeding, Mr. D'Autremont, Ms. Beaudry-Mellor . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . it's that French . . . Ms. Rancourt, and Mr. Forbes. I'm your Chair, Greg Lawrence.

We will now consider the estimates for the Ministry of Labour Relations . . . Oh, wrong one. Next one. We will now consider the estimates and March supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Social Services.

General Revenue Fund Social Services Vote 36

Subvote (SS01)

The Chair: — We will begin our consideration of vote 36, Social Services, central management and services, subvote (SS01). Minister Harpauer is here with officials. If you would please introduce your officials and make your opening comments. And if anybody else comes up, if we could have them introduce themselves.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good evening to all the committee members. With me today I have . . . To my left is my deputy minister, Greg Miller. From child and family programs we have Assistant Deputy Minister Tammy Kirkland, and Natalie Huber, executive director of service delivery.

From income assistance and corporate planning I have Assistant Deputy Minister Constance Hourie; Elissa Aitken, the executive director, program and service design; and Marnie Williams, director of program design and operational policy.

From disability programs I have the assistant deputy minister, Bob Wihlidal; and Bob Martinook, the executive director, community living service delivery. And from housing programs and finance, the assistant deputy minister, Don Allen; and Miriam Myers, the executive director of finance.

The theme of the 2016-17 provincial budget is keep Saskatchewan strong. In the Ministry of Social Services we do that by continuing to invest in people through programs that support children, youth, and families, people experiencing disabilities, and people needing income assistance and housing.

In 2016-17 we have increased the budget for Social Services by 5.1 per cent to 1.052 billion. That's a record investment in this ministry and clearly demonstrates our government's commitment to help the province's most vulnerable. In fact, 74 cents of every tax dollar paid by Saskatchewan taxpayers goes to health care, education, and social services.

However these are challenging economic times and there were difficult decisions we needed to make. We based those decisions on a number of factors such as fairness and equity for clients. We also focused on the core business of the ministry and on the sustainability of our programs and our services.

On budget day we announced some changes to a few of our income assistance programs that will come into effect later this year. We will consider the resources a beneficiary receives from the Saskatchewan rental housing supplement when calculating the amount of additional shelter funding that they may receive in the Saskatchewan assured income for disability or the SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability] program. We will discontinue grandfathering for Saskatchewan assistance programs or SAP [Saskatchewan assistance plan] and SAID clients who receive excess shelter benefits as a result of living in communities that previously had low vacancy rates.

We are going to end the practice of exempting the seniors' income plan and the Guaranteed Income Supplement top-up benefits under SAP and in SAID. And we're going to end the practice of grandfathering benefits for families with children aged 13 and over receiving the Saskatchewan employment supplement. These changes will result in greater simplicity and fairness and ensure that our programs are targeted to those most in need.

The province's 2016-17 budget addressed the needs for transformational change in the delivery of high-quality public services. We want to ensure the sustainability of the services Saskatchewan people need and deliver them the most effective and efficient manner possible.

In my ministry we will undertake a redesign of our entire suite of income assistance programs. This will simplify administration, improve client service, and support transitions to independence and participation in the economic and social life of our province. The redesign will make our income assistance programs simpler and easier to understand and give our staff more time to work with clients to get the help they need to make the sustainable transition to independence. That's one example of how our transformational agenda will benefit the people of Saskatchewan. It was announced prior to the election as a response to our poverty reduction strategy.

I'd like to talk about the ministry's 2016-17 budget and some of the work going on in each division beginning with the child and family programs. This year the budget for child and family programs is 243 million and an increase of 7.4 per cent. Funding of 37.9 million, which is up 9.5 per cent, will support

prevention-related programs and services to prevent children and youth from coming into care and to reunify families as soon as it is safe to do so. The ministry partners with community-based organizations to deliver these programs which include intensive in-home supports for parents who may be struggling.

In spite of an increased funding and emphasis on prevention, the number of children coming into care has begun to rise. Since 2012 the number of wards has increased by point six per cent. At the same time, the number of children placed in extended family has increased by 10.6 per cent. We believe there are a number of reasons for this increase. We have seen an increase in newcomer families, overall population growth, and a steady increase in the population under the age of 18.

The launch of the revised child abuse protocol in the fall of 2014 resulted in greater awareness and understanding of the duty to report child protection concerns, and the police in major cities report increases in drug-related and domestic violence arrests and incidents, which can also result in children being brought into care.

My officials have reviewed costs in child and family programs, including special needs and discretionary expenditures to determine if we can find some efficiencies while still ensuring the safety and well-being of children, youth and families. Work on the review of the child and family program legislation will continue this year. Changes being proposed will bring our legislation in line with that of other jurisdictions and support the continued transformation of our child welfare system.

Some of the proposed changes include changing the definition of the age of the child, enhancing prevention and early intervention supports, and supporting youth in care as they transition into adulthood. We will also continue the work that has begun under the child and family agenda. The human services ministries are working together to innovate, enhance, collaborate, and align services through initiatives such as the early years plan, mental health and addictions action plan, the disability strategy, and the poverty reduction strategy.

Our government will continue to use its collaborative cross-ministry approach to effectively address the complex issues facing vulnerable children, youth, and families. Earlier today I talked about the innovative support or approach our government is taking to address such issues through Canada's first social impact bond. I was pleased to announce that, as a result of progress to date on the Sweet Dreams initiative, 21 children have stayed with their mothers and out of foster care for more than six months. We expect this to increase to 22 children in the very near future, and we are only two years into the five-year project. Along with helping families stay together, Sweet Dreams also helps them find safe and secure places to live and to help the mothers to upgrade their training and find employment. Social impact bonds are a new and innovative way for government to pilot projects without investing public dollars until the project achieves success.

I'll turn now to the ministry's disability programs and its budget of 201 million. This includes funding for CBOs [community-based organization] to provide residential spaces and programs for people with intellectual disabilities, and the

expansion of the safety net of supports that are available. We will continue to focus on transitioning people living at Valley View Centre into new homes in the communities of their choice. To date, 30 individuals have left Valley View and moved into community-based services, and currently projects are under way to transition 55 residents in 2016-17. These transitions will be staged throughout the year. While we move people into the community, it's imperative that we have the right supports in place to make these transitions successful.

In 2016-17 we plan to build a home in Regina to provide crisis prevention and outreach support, part of the safety net I mentioned earlier. This will add to the crisis supports that are already available in homes in Saskatoon and Moose Jaw. Transitioning people from Valley View is about including people experiencing disabilities in their communities. The theme of inclusion is central to our disability strategy. Ministries that have begun work on where to start actions identified in the strategy.

Developmental work has also started in six key areas: accessible and safe transportation, respite for families and caregivers, accessibility legislation, residential services, service coordination and collaboration, and awareness and understanding of the rights of people experiencing disabilities. We will continue to progress on the disability strategy as we move forward with implementation.

Next I'd like to speak about some of the priorities of the ministry's housing division for 2016-17. One of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation's key objectives will be to support provincial initiatives including the disability strategy, the poverty reduction strategy, and the mental health and addictions action plan by helping those vulnerable populations that are hard to house.

Another housing priority is the delivery of the new first home plan for students involved in the graduate retention program. Under the plan, recent graduates can borrow up to \$10,000 of their future tax credits as an interest-free loan to be used towards the down payment of their first home. The response to this plan has been excellent. In the first week after the program was launched, the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation received 113 applications. The first home plan is another way our government is making Saskatchewan the best place in Canada to go to school, find a job, buy a home, and start a family.

The province continues to participate in the federal-provincial Investment in Affordable Housing Agreement. Over five years this agreement will bring federal funding of 45.9 million to Saskatchewan to help those in need of affordable housing. This does not include the province's cost match for this agreement or our other investments in housing and housing affordability.

Lastly I want to talk about income assistance. The budget for income assistance program including SAP, SAID, and TEA [transitional employment allowance] is 494 million which is up 4.4 per cent compared to last year. The TEA program alone increased by 19.5 million as a result of directing fully employable clients to TEA rather than some of them to SAP. This is a positive change as this program provides more targeted and streamlined services for clients who are employable.

The SAID budget for this year is 210 million which is up 2.8 per cent. More than 14,000 beneficiaries are receiving SAID benefits. Our government introduced SAID in 2009. At that time, we committed to evaluating the assessment tool to ensure that we were reaching the intended beneficiaries — those with significant and enduring disabilities. We will continue to seek the advice of the disability community on this work.

Another of the ministry's priorities this year is the poverty reduction strategy. The strategy lays out a bold target to reduce the number of people who have experienced poverty for two years or more by 50 per cent by 2025. At 10.1 per cent, Saskatchewan is the second lowest percentage of people living in low income, but we can do better.

Social Services is working with other human services ministries to develop an implementation plan with targets, expected outcomes, measures, and timelines for key actions. We'll be looking for opportunities for new and innovative ways to help our most vulnerable families, such as the healthy families initiative that was announced just last week.

Our first steps will include implementing the early years plan to enable all Saskatchewan children to reach their potential. We will be expanding housing opportunities for those who experience difficulty in accessing or remaining in home due to physical disabilities or mental illness or addictions issues. And we will be, as I mentioned earlier, redesigning our income assistance programs to improve quality of life for people experiencing low incomes.

We'll be looking . . . We're going to be taking a look at all our programs with the goal of making them simpler to administer, sustainable, and easier for clients to understand, while still providing support to those in need.

Currently ministry staff are looking at options for developing a simplified online application. They're looking at partnering with other ministries such as Economy, Advanced Education, Corrections, and Health to develop a client-to-capacity assessment tool to provide a better sense of the client's strengths as well as challenges that they are facing when it comes to finding employment or successfully completing training, and reviewing the current suite of income assistance programs in order to make them simpler.

This is the kind of transformational change our government is undertaking to ensure that critical programs and services can be sustained and that they are being delivered in the most effective and cost-efficient way.

In closing, I would like to recognize the ministry staff for the work that they do each and every day to help Saskatchewan people. They do not have easy jobs. And in fact I believe they have some of the hardest work in government, yet they carry out their responsibilities with care and compassion and with respect for the people they serve. With their efforts our government could not achieve . . . Or without their efforts, our government could not achieve its goal of improving the quality of life for all Saskatchewan people, especially those that are most vulnerable.

The 2016-17 budget and the province's continued investment in

people will enable them to carry out their vital work and to keep Saskatchewan strong. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I will entertain questions.

[19:15]

Ms. Rancourt: — First of all, I want to thank everybody for being here. I want to thank the ministers, the directors, and the committee members. I know on evenings like this a lot of people would much rather be in their comfy clothes watching TV or doing other things, but this is very important work, and I appreciate all your time here.

Social Services is a new portfolio for me, but I am a social worker, so I'm quite familiar with a lot of the programs and services, but I'm looking forward to learning a lot more about it. And I do really respect the work that you guys do. It's hard work, just like the minister said, and you work with the most vulnerable people, and I really appreciate that. But like I said, I've got a lot of questions here because I'm really eager to learn a lot more about the services you guys provide.

I'm going to start with some of the questions I have with regards to the budget. Under the child and family program delivery, there is a stated increase in salaries from 35.335 million to 39.026 million, so that's a difference of 3.691 million. So I was just wondering, was any jobs created with this increase? And if so, how many?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So I'll get that answer. But I just need to do a quick correction because my deputy minister pointed out I might have said that SAID is increased by 2.8 per cent, but it's actually been increased by 4.8, so I'm correcting that for the record. And I will get the answer to that question.

So overall we have through the years increased the number of front-line workers in child protection by I believe it's 93, but in this particular budget that wasn't from an increase in staff. It was rather a misplacement of the number from the previous year's budget in a place where it shouldn't have been. So it was moving that number from the goods and services to salaries because that's actually where the expenditure was. So it's correcting a past misplacement of an allocation.

Ms. Rancourt: — Was there any salary increases for any hired staff in this budget?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm going to ask Don Allen, who is the bookkeeper on that, to say what the collective bargaining increases would have been.

Mr. Allen: — Thank you. Don Allen, assistant deputy minister, housing programs and finance. So in each of the subvotes where there is staff, there is a certain amount of funding increase within each budget to compensate for expected increases to compensation, whether it's through expected collective bargaining adjustments or changes with respect to out-of-scope staff. I could go through each subvote if you'd like or leave it at that.

Ms. Rancourt: — Yes, if you have the list there, that would be great.

Mr. Allen: — Certainly. In subvote (01), central management services, there's an addition of \$1000 for the increase in the minister's statutory salary. In executive management, there's a 1.65 per cent adjustment which equals \$24,000 on a budget of last year . . . This year's budget is \$1.704 million, I'm sorry. That's it for subvote (01).

Income assistance and disability services, subvote (03), down in the category of — where is it; there it is — income assistance and disability services program delivery. I apologize, I had a number, and she's telling me it's different. I'm showing \$743,000 in that subvote.

Our next one is in child and family programs, \$626,000 in subvote (04). Client support, subvote (05), there's \$166,000 for salary increases, and subvote (12), super subvote (12), \$105,000 in housing.

Ms. Rancourt: — So was there any increases to employment, like in jobs?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So our FTE is down to 1,706.7 from 1,731 FTEs and primarily due to the completion of the Linkin project. The Linkin project is now complete, so that is a decrease of FTEs by 21.3. And then there's an additional three.

Ms. Rancourt: — I was just curious about that because with the increase of kids in care and possibly some of the income support, an increase of that, I'm surprised that there is going to be loss of jobs.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Three.

Ms. Rancourt: — Okay. So you mentioned with the goods and services, some of that being misplaced in the previous budget. But is there going to be any goods and services cut?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So in essence goods and services is running the offices, so there's no increase, but there's no decrease. So any inflationary increases, they will have to look for efficiencies.

Ms. Rancourt: — So with the loss of some of the FTEs and no increases in the goods and services, will this impact the delivery of programs?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No.

Ms. Rancourt: — Under the child and family community-based organization services, there is a stated decrease from 87.509 million to 87.056 million in transfer for public services. So the difference is 453,000. So CBOs provide services and supports that the ministry does not, so why is there a decrease in funds to them?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So I'm going to have Tammy Kirkland join me with the specifics. But just in a broad base, we contract with more than 200 community-based organizations throughout Saskatchewan at a cost of approximately \$260 million annually. So when reviewing our contracts, which we do each and every year, we felt that we could reduce or discontinue some of the funding because it isn't our core service or core delivery or it's being delivered through a third

party. So it's money that flowed not to a CBO directly for services but to a school division or a regional health authority. And we also had a program that was underutilized.

So I will get Tammy . . . You know, of the \$260 million expenditure, there was the \$453,000 reduction identified, and Tammy will give you the specifics on that.

Ms. Kirkland: — Tammy Kirkland. So I'll just run through each of them and the amounts. Big Brothers and Sisters contracts across the province for a total of 74,538. Those were located in Regina where there was reduction of 11,328 for the Big Brothers Association; Young Women's Christian Association of Regina, \$12,086; Lloydminster Big Brothers and Sisters Association, 3,878; Yorkton Big Brothers and Sisters, reduced by 3,610; and Saskatoon Big Brothers of Saskatoon reduced by 43,636.

In the areas of counselling, support, and education, we had a contract with the Saskatoon Regional Health Authority in Humboldt, which was discontinued for 46,929; Family Services Saskatoon, a reduction of \$75,077; Catholic Family Services of Saskatoon reduced by 62,169; the board of education of the South East Cornerstone in Weyburn, reduction of 35,846; and the board of education of the Holy Family Roman Catholic in Weyburn, reduction of 5,980.

The next category was teen parent programs, discontinuation totalling 87,612. One of those contracts was to the Sun Country Regional Health Authority in Weyburn for a discontinuation of 59,159. And the board of education school division in Yorkton for savings of 28,453.

And finally intensive direct services contract with the Board of Education of Saskatoon, a savings of 23,237. And Yorkton Tribal Council, a reduction of 41,934.

Ms. Rancourt: — So for some clarification, what kind of contracts would you have with these boards of education that resulted in these cuts?

Ms. Kirkland: — So for example, with the school division in Saskatoon, the contract was for an employment program aiding youth in finding employment. So it was an employment-based program and it was universal, as in not targeted specifically to child and family program clients.

[19:30]

Ms. Rancourt: — Was there a few other?

Ms. Kirkland: — Yes, for sure. We had another one, for example, with the — I'm trying to find it here, sorry — with one of the health authorities, which I'll find, which was for a mental health and addictions counsellor, and again a universal contract not specific to clients. And in that situation, we also have an arrangement where if we have specific clients, we pay a fee for service for those.

Ms. Rancourt: — These seem like to be pretty significant program cuts, like with regards to counselling for these youth and the Big Brother program. That's a great mentoring program. And like I'm a little bit disappointed to see the teen

program, teen parenting program cuts. And also if there was programs to help people get employment, I thought that was what the plan was for this government and placing people in employment. So I see these as being pretty big cuts for a lot of these vulnerable families.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So many of them are just 20 per cent, and they have funding from elsewhere as well. The Big Brothers Big Sisters for example, it was a 20 per cent cut. We still provide them with money, but they do have means of raising other funds. We don't disagree that these are great programs; that's not in dispute. It is a fact of our budget increasing by 5.1 per cent and targeting the most vulnerable and the children in our care.

I am a big supporter of the Big Brothers Big Sisters and think they do great work, but quite often they are not children at risk. So you have to make choices in difficult times, and we decided to target the most vulnerable and find efficiencies elsewhere. In some of the cases, the school division or the regional health authority will probably continue so that it won't necessarily be cut; it's just, you know, they will have the funds to continue what they're doing. But like I said, it's very small in comparison to the entire budget, and you have to make decisions.

Ms. Rancourt: — So I've heard you say before you had to prioritize the most vulnerable. Can you expand on that? Can you explain what you mean by that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So we have a child coming into risk, or the families that are, you know, where there's a drug addiction . . . And I go back to how we're increasing our prevention. And I know you raised it in question period that we have more children coming into care; are you not worried about that? Well absolutely, so that's where our supports need to go. So if we want to allocate more money to that prevention services for our families that are on the edge of a crisis or have a small reduction to Big Brothers Big Sisters, I think my choice is the prevention services for the family that's on the edge of a crisis.

Ms. Rancourt: — So the teen parenting program and counselling wouldn't be preventative services in your mind?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — There are programs offered for teen . . . like, it wouldn't necessarily be the only program in town. There are quite often other providers.

Ms. Rancourt: — So under the child and family program maintenance and support there is a stated increase from 97.205 to 113.850 in transfers to individuals. So that's a difference between 16.645. How is this new money being allocated?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So 3.715 million is an increase to annualize the development of specialized residential options for children that are medically fragile or with very complex needs. An example of that would be placing a child in Hope's Home. That would be an example of where that funding is going.

4.216 million is an increase for private treatment, based on 6.273 million increased to address caseload increases and private treatment rate increases, which is intensive private

treatment such as Ranch Ehrlo, Eagles Nest Youth Ranch. Those facilities have increases. It is a 2.057 million decrease based on a reduction in private treatments basis, through the development of transitional spaces that we've undertaken.

There's a 5.691 million increase for caseload and per-case changes in foster care, extended family care, and therapeutic foster care; and \$123,000 decrease in supports to 16-, 17-year-olds based on the caseload decrease. There's \$2.3 million increase for family supports, and 846,000 increase for caseload and per-case increases in assisted adoptions.

Ms. Rancourt: — So will this result in any new services or programs?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Unless there's some innovative initiative that comes forward that we see is worthwhile, there isn't one built in. Such as, you know, if there was another Sweet Dreams opportunity, or in Corrections we had the healthy families announcement. So unless we had something like that that we could use within our allocation, we don't have anything planned specific. This is more expansion of existing.

Ms. Rancourt: — So will this result in some new jobs being created?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — A lot of our delivery is through community-based organizations, so it would be their jobs. One expansion specific — because we did the pilot project in Saskatoon — of intensive in-home supports of families on the edge of crisis, we're seeing some positive results from that initiative. We'll be expanding, with the funds in this budget, we're going to be expanding that to Regina. But again a lot of it's third party service delivery.

Ms. Rancourt: — What was the amount of money allocated to foster care and extended family care in 2015-16?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — 2015-16 would be 97.205 million and this year will be 113.85 million.

Ms. Rancourt: — So how is this money being allocated within foster care and extended family care?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So it'd be the numbers that I gave you previously and the breakdown that I gave you previously. I don't have . . . We don't know because it'll be based on caseloads of extended family and foster care. And we don't know throughout the year that exact number, so you have projections.

Ms. Rancourt: — So you're just projecting it to be more?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Correct.

Ms. Rancourt: — So is there a plan for foster care recruiting and retention?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We have increased quite considerably advertising and reaching out. We work with the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association, and they receive funding to do a lot of that outreach. And I'm hearing — just going to their supper two weekends ago, I think it was — they're seeing some

positive results, so I'm encouraged by that, of people coming forward. Their efforts, it's reach out, but the best advertisement for foster families, quite frankly, is foster families. And sometimes maybe the worst advertisement for foster families might be foster families. They have a really great video that they've now put together with a very young and enthusiastic foster family that they're going to be utilizing to try to promote and encourage more foster families.

Ms. Rancourt: — Because my worry is, like there is a policy about having only four children per house policy, and I'm wondering how that's going to be upheld if we don't work on a plan to start recruiting more.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Well we're always working on recruiting and, trust me, I share your concern. The four children per household isn't fast and solid. It's a guideline. There are exceptions where you could have more than four if you have a sibling group. And I've said this publicly many times: if we need to have more than four in a house but it keeps a sibling group together, than that's what we're going to do because I think it's more harmful to divide the group, the sibling group. And sometimes with these families, we do have the larger sibling groups.

The other thing that we do when there's more than four is — which hadn't been done in the past, and again we're working with the foster families association and they coordinate it — is that we put supports then in those homes that have more than four. We may have supports in some homes that have less than four if they're high-needs children as well. So you sort of, you gauge it, whether or not it may be more appropriate. In a smaller number of children if they're higher needs, they may need supports, but after four, we're looking at in-home supports to support that situation.

Ms. Rancourt: — Can you tell me a little bit more about the foster care association?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The Foster Families Association?

Ms. Rancourt: — Yes.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. The Saskatchewan Foster Families Association has their head office in Saskatoon, and we give them a fairly substantive allocation of funding. They are the liaison for the foster families. They deal with the recruitment and work with the foster families. They also, as I said, are the coordinator of the in-home supports and they coordinate the PRIDE [parenting resources for information, development, and education] training as well. They're co-located with our PRIDE training, which stands for, I'm going to get someone to tell me the acronym . . . She's just checking. We all just use PRIDE.

So I'll just give you a description of PRIDE. It actually was initiated by the previous government, by the previous NDP [New Democratic Party] government. It was a training program that was initiated, and then when we formed government, through elders they incorporated a culture component as well.

And it's viewed by . . . other provinces have modelled it now as sort of the state-of-art training for foster families. We're going

to get that acronym for you. And we've also introduced online training for PRIDE, which helps the families that find it a little more difficult to go to a location where it's being offered.

Here we go. So it's parenting resources for information, development, and education.

Ms. Rancourt: — So what exactly is, like I don't know, the modules or whatever in this PRIDE that the foster families will get training in?

Ms. Kirkland: — So we'll get you specifics on that, but some of the examples would be, there is a cultural component to the PRIDE training. There is childhood development. There would be things around resources in the community to meeting the needs of the children.

So I don't have the details of all the modules but there's a pre-service that foster parents take prior to their approval to become foster parents, so that's more of an information, and gathering information about them and them about us and the job. And then there's practitioner training following their approval and that's where there would be components, as I said, on FASD [fetal alcohol spectrum disorder], on resources, the First Nations component, things like child-rearing practices, protocols around safety in your home, first aid training, those sorts of things.

Ms. Rancourt: — Do you know if they get much training in reactive attachment disorder?

[19:45]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — There's specialized training through the FASD network but there's always . . . Because of the unique situations of a lot of the children that do come into care, I think there's always room to look at different things that they may, or at least have it available. You know, we're expanding what would be training for counselling for autism; would that be helpful? You know, things like that that we will always consider and take a look at, at least having preliminary training for the foster families. Because those will be issues that a lot of their children will be dealing with.

Just some information going back to where you started, you know, down this particular section of your questioning. In February of 2012 we had 68 homes that had more than four children, and right now we have 40 that have more than four children. Part of the reason why you can have more . . . And you're going to say, you've got more children but where are you putting them because you have less homes.

We have done like an incredible effort in finding family members as much as possible, and that has been I think extremely important. It's extremely important so we don't stress the system, because as you said, it's a shared concern of the fact that it's harder to get foster families. And that's because of all the reasons I've outlined before. We have more two-parent working families. We as a society are choosing fewer children, so it's becoming a challenge in society, and we have our two children but we don't necessarily want to take on more. So it's becoming a challenge not just in Saskatchewan but elsewhere.

So with reaching out and sourcing family members, I think it's important so the kids are in a stable home, but it's also within their culture in many cases, which I feel is extremely important as well.

Ms. Rancourt: — I would agree that keeping children with family would be a good priority to have, and I think most families would also appreciate that. So what is the process that you guys go through to ensure that kids could be placed with family?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I will get the officials to elaborate more, but of course you begin with the parents, and they will sometimes identify those members in their family that they think would take the children. With our First Nations agencies, in many cases it may be a band member but living off reserve, but they may have family on reserve. So our First Nations agencies have been very detrimental in helping us . . . or instrumental, not detrimental. Let's try that again. Very instrumental in helping us source family members, but Tammy can probably elaborate in other ways that we source those family members that are able.

Ms. Kirkland: — Certainly, and as the Minister said, often it's by knowing the families themselves. We also have dedicated staff within our ministry and that we partner with, with First Nations agencies, Family Finders family connectors, and their role is to reach out to community and family and people of interest that can provide that option. And then of course once those people step forward or are identified, there's a whole process around approval and then around how we then support those people to look after those children.

Ms. Rancourt: — So during this process at times these kids need to be kept in care?

Ms. Kirkland: — Depending on the situation, yes, but some children may come into the care of the ministry and go into a foster home or an emergency-receiving home pending placement with a family. If they are families, we get families whom we've known before and in those situations we might very well know that auntie in the next community is available to care for that child, and that can be the immediate plan. So it really depends on the circumstance and how well we know the family.

Ms. Rancourt: — Will there be a process to license foster homes in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It's not considered right now. We have a fairly rigorous set of conditions that they must meet that actually is more rigorous than that that's being requested by the provinces that do license their homes. So I think it is the standards that we ask them to meet more than the just saying they're licensed.

The other reason why we aren't at this point, and I've had this discussion with the Children's Advocate because he's called for this as well, is we have no evidence that there's improved outcomes if the home is licensed or not licensed. It's the process of how you approve that home that I think is the most important factor.

Ms. Rancourt: — So if there has been no evidence saying that licensed homes are like possibly better and that's why other provinces have done it, why would the Children's Advocate be asking for that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — He did not answer my question and I asked him to come forward with that. Ontario's a province that does license and there's one other. I forget which other province has licensing. Yes, there is another one that . . . Alberta. Alberta does as well so, you know, just to do it just because, I'm not sure why.

Ms. Rancourt: — And if you already have a rigorous process, I'm not understanding why you wouldn't license. Maybe if foster homes were licensed they might consider themselves more of a business of sorts.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I hope they don't. I want them to be a home.

Ms. Rancourt: — Okay.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I don't want them to be a placement. I don't want them to be a business.

Ms. Rancourt: — I understand your point on that, but I know some of the foster parents that I've talked to, they felt too that they didn't think the ministry considered them as professionals, and so there's the both sides of the story. And so maybe having the licensing then would hold the homes accountable too, a little bit more.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I don't think it would hold them accountable unless you changed, you know, the standards they had to meet. And I have never been approached by a foster family yet to say, I would really think it would be important to me to be licensed. Maybe now, hearing this, they may come forward. But I have attended many functions with foster families, and I have never been approached on this.

Ms. Rancourt: — Okay. Under the Provincial Auditor's report, the one that was just released in 2016 here, they said for protection of children in care they had seven recommendations. Two were implemented and five were partially implemented. Can you explain what those were?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So there were five recommendations that were considered partially implemented and they were that the Ministry of Social Services follow its procedures to ensure that children in care are protected. And as it's been cited by the Children's Advocate, there are those cases where paper processes hasn't been completed, so that will be continuously improved as we move forward.

Second, that the Ministry of Social Services adequately monitor the First Nations child and family service agencies' compliance with the ministry standards for approval for out-of-care providers. And there is a First Nations agency that will not provide the information.

The Ministry of Social Services implemented a system to know how many children are in the ministry's responsibilities, who they are, and where they live. And that goes back to that having

inadequate information from a First Nations agency.

That MSS [Ministry of Social Services] makes agreements with First Nations child and family service agencies to require timely and relevant information to ensure proper care for children who are wards of the minister. And that again relates to a First Nations agency.

And that the Ministry of Social Services seek regular personal contact with children who are wards of the minister and regularly review the First Nations child and family services agencies' child protection files.

I want to stress here that although the Provincial Auditor's cited this, that there are 17 First Nations agencies. We have . . . There's times where there has been challenges on specific, you know, situations, but for the most part we have a very good . . . There's always room for improvement, but we have a very good relationship with almost all of our First Nations agencies. And they do report in a timely manner, and they allow the quality insurance workers within the ministry to view files and if there's questions, that we get those questions answered.

So the First Nations agencies are extremely important because they provide services in their own communities and it's culturally appropriate because this is First Nations agencies working with First Nations children on reserve. So we value those relationships. Unfortunately we don't necessarily have the information sharing that is required from all, and that's what the Provincial Auditor is citing.

Ms. Rancourt: — And do you have any information on the two that were implemented? What were the two recommendations?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The two that were implemented was that the Ministry of Social Services monitor quality assurance results, establish increasing and achievable targets for compliance with child protection standards in its own service areas and at First Nations child and family service agencies, and work to achieve those targets; and that the Ministry of Social Services conduct reviews to monitor compliance with child protection standards at First Nations child and family service agencies as often as it does its own service areas.

Ms. Rancourt: — Oftentimes new child protection workers tend to be people who just recently got their social work degrees and it's oftentimes like a first entry job into social work. And I oftentimes think that we should have some of our most senior staff working in that department because they're working with the most vulnerable. But unfortunately that's not the case, and so, with having a lot of these new child protection workers, what kind of training process do you guys have to make sure that they're trained and ready to do this type of work?

[20:00]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So child protection workers have to have their B.S.W. [Bachelor of Social Work] but there also is additional training. The training is done jointly with the staff from our First Nations agencies and it includes — there's training modules — and it includes such things as our risk assessment tool training, cultural awareness training, they have

to take components of the PRIDE training that I had mentioned earlier, some training in FASD, and some training in child development.

Ms. Rancourt: — I had the question in my head but I'll ask it later. What is the rate for the turnover of staff?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We don't have that answer here tonight. We would have to get that from the Public Service Commission.

Ms. Rancourt: — Okay. If you could get back to me on that, that would be greatly appreciated. So how many staff that work for the Ministry of Social Services have social work degrees?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So a bit of a correction from what I said before because they also could have their Bachelor of Indian Social Work degrees and we don't have the breakdown. There's about 480, but we don't have the breakdown of which ones would have their Bachelor of Social Work and which ones or how many have their Bachelor of Indian Social Work degree.

Ms. Rancourt: — And how many of those . . . The Indian social work, I just consider them social workers as well. So University of Regina degree. So how many would be registered as well?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It's a very low percentage in this ministry, but 62 of them are registered.

Ms. Rancourt: — So that hasn't increased since last year. And I know there has been some talk about the ministry requiring workers to be registered. Is there any progress happening with that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So just to clarify, we don't have the 2015 data so the 62 is the same number from the same stat. So my conversation with the association, who I meet with, is because we pay for the registrations should they choose to belong to the association, I have been very upfront. In my past I belonged to a professional association because I saw merit in the value of it because there was a lot of new scientific research that I would get in the information that would be sent to me and whatnot. So I've encouraged the association, like they have to reach out to these workers and show the value of being a part of the association. We don't force them to be a member of the association, but we do pay for their fees should they choose to.

Ms. Rancourt: — Because most employers require that they be registered professionals with their association, so I could see that being a requirement for a ministry that's as serious as Social Services, but that's just me on my high horse.

But out of all of your staff, how many are First Nations, and how many of those First Nations staff are in management positions?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So we'll get those numbers as well for you from the Public Service Commission.

Ms. Rancourt: — So also I was wondering, what are the individualized preventative services that were discussed?

Ms. Kirkland: — So you're referring to the different supports that we might put in for a foster family, an extended family, an alternative caregiver, and that very much depends on the needs of the children in their homes and the capacity of the family. So it can range from daycare provisions to counselling support to special medical equipment that a child might need, parenting programs for the parents, parent aids in the home to assist them with learning child care skills and provide those sorts of supports, mental health counselling. So it's a broad range, very much dependent on the child, the caregiver, and the outcomes that need to be achieved for safety.

Ms. Rancourt: — So what preventative measures are already in place to keep children from coming into care of the ministry?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Same ones. So if we have, you know, someone's contacted us and said, you know, they're concerned about this family, we would meet with that family. And if it was counselling or maybe have someone come in and do some parenting skills and sort of help the behaviour before it becomes out of control, that's how we'd keep the families together. It might be some attachment or connecting them with some mental health services or, you know, a number of these areas where we could help keep the family whole before they go into complete crisis.

Ms. Rancourt: — How much money is currently spent on individualized preventative services?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So the total in this budget is 37.9 million and that's an increase of 9.5 per cent from our previous budget.

Ms. Rancourt: — And how many children will be affected by the introduction of the new services?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Again it's a . . . You do a projection. When you do up your budget you kind of do a projection based on the trend that we're seeing as well as past years experience. So it is a number that you're projecting, so it'll depend on what number and what supports they need.

There are times where you may have funds left over — we wish — or sometimes you have to look elsewhere in your budget and then go through treasury board to have an allocation moved from one area to another in order to cover the cost of increased utilization in that particular area. So we just make a projection of how many children will need supports and what that support will cost on average.

Ms. Rancourt: — So one thing I've been noticing when I've been looking at programming throughout the province is that it doesn't seem to be very consistent. Like the programs that we have in Prince Albert are offered by different agencies than the programs that might be offered in Regina and Saskatoon, and they might be, say, parenting programs, but just offered by different agencies and such.

So I guess one of my questions is, how do you determine where you're going to allocate your money to, you know, with regards to providing services? And do you look to see if there's already those types of services being provided in those different areas and communities before you decide to spend the money in

those areas?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Right. So all of the above, which also goes to, you know, previously when you had mentioned some reductions that we made. And we looked to just that. Are these being provided elsewhere? Is it the core mandate of the ministry? And can we reduce that in order to spend it somewhere else that we are seeing pressures?

It's probably all of the above of what you've mentioned, so are these services being offered in the community? The other thing is, is there a organization in the community that has the capacity to deliver that service?

[20:15]

In the situation of the flexible response, it was a pilot of more intense supports, in-family supports that we initiated in Saskatoon just so that we could measure the outcomes and see if there would be a result of doing more intensive intervention in families. And so that will be expanded to Regina. We'll be looking at the number of incidents within the community of families that are at risk. Some communities that's not a high number, so you're not going to put as many supports in that community as another community.

I can't say in all cases all service delivery by our different community-based partners is equal or the same. We try as much as possible, but we work with the organizations that are there and available. But we're continuously working of course to get consistency, and not consistency at the lower level but hopefully bring our organizations and the ability to deliver the services at the highest level possible. I'm not sure if my officials want to add to that.

Ms. Kirkland: — I could add a couple of comments. There's a number of ways that we determine needs and interests in a community. So we often have agencies come forward to us with proposals based on their interest, their capacity, what they're seeing in their community. We also get a fair bit of information about community needs from the Hub tables across the province. So they're seeing themes coming forward to their tables. What does that mean about needs?

And that's also a good place for us to ensure that we're not duplicating services. We're aligning with what the gaps are and what other ministries are doing. We will put out a request for proposals to gauge the capacity and interest of a community to support that. And I think also, to the minister's point around that the quality of work of the CBOs, that there is a CBO sustainability plan where part of the work that's happening is outcomes-based agreements with CBOs and how to more clearly define what outcomes we need and to measure what outcomes they are achieving.

Ms. Rancourt: — I know in your remarks, your opening remarks, you talked about how domestic violence and addiction use has been increasing, therefore has been showing an increase of kids in care. And I know, well addictions, they're trying to handle that through addictions services. But with regards to domestic violence, I realize that's usually more of a Justice issue, but if it's stemming down into having more kids in care, I'm seeing it as a Social Services issue as well. And so is there

ways that your ministry is looking at trying to provide preventative services with regards to domestic violence in communities to help reduce the amount of kids in care?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm going to make a comment, and I don't think you're going to disagree with what I'm saying. It's not a Ministry of Justice or Ministry of Social Services issue. It's a government issue, and I know you agree with that, and you see the merit to looking at it as a government challenge, a government concern.

Part of it in the Ministry of Social Services, we go back to the prevention. And so it may be the counselling that that family needs is anger issue management. So that's where we sort of intervene in that family and provide that counselling. It may be issues due to addictions that ends up in violence.

But the importance . . . I can't express the importance enough of the work that's being done on ministers' level, but more importantly the deputy ministers' level now, of the service delivery ministries getting together on a regular basis. And that's where the Hub initiative came from so that that was then driven down to the community level because it is a government issue, and it crosses all of these ministries.

It affects the children going to school. I know you worked in this area, and you know it. And so there's so many touch points on that issue, so we need to work collaboratively in all of our service delivery ministries. It affects Health. It affects Education. It affects Social Services. It affects Corrections. The Hub tables are important in identifying those vulnerable, at-risk families by looking at the data.

The other thing that we've worked on which is part of the legislation I introduced, there was a bit of a barrier with the sharing of information that, when we started to work together in collective tables in order to look at different concerns as a government rather than as a ministry, we found that there was barriers to sharing information. So we're changing all of the legislation in consultation with the Privacy Commissioner of how we can do that which will help then to identify these families, and then we can put the correct supports in at the right time. So it is a concern and I share that with you.

But I think it's going to take the work of all of these ministries coming together and working together. And having the Hubs has been important, but there's more work that we can do. Then once we identify that family then, you know, where the supports come in. But through Social Services specific is why we're looking at the prevention dollars, is where we prioritized this budget.

Ms. Rancourt: — When I think of preventative services and programs that are available, I think a lot about the challenges of having those programs in some of the northern communities or our rural communities. And so what has the ministry been doing to try to help improve program delivery in those remote areas?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'll get the officials to give specifics, but I have found with this role the biggest challenge in remote in particular — not as much rural but some in rural depending on the rural area — is getting the workers there, like the specialized workers that you need. And you talk about the

overturn of workers being rapid; it's even more so in the North. You may get a worker, but they won't stay long. So that's been a challenge getting even income assistance workers long term in the North.

So of course then we have to go to skills training because the more of northern people that you can train the more likelihood they will stay there. And some of our absolute rock stars in our ministry in the North are First Nations that have trained and then go back to their communities, and they do some great work. We had that extremely tragic incident in La Loche and our staff — I can't commend them enough there, or we can't give them enough supports. So it's a challenge, but I will again get my officials to add specifics if they're on northern supports and remote.

Ms. Kirkland: — I think one main thing that I would add is that is the real strength of our partnership with the First Nations agencies around the province because they are in those northern and remote locations, and so they are able to provide that level, a greater level of support and service to their communities. So that is definitely one of the outstanding parts of that.

It's also I think, you know — and the PSC [Public Service Commission] might be better to speak to this — but some looking at what does help with recruitment in the North. What keeps people there, you know? What added supports can we give to them to encourage that work and make them feel comfortable?

In child and family, we've also tried to organize our leadership and management team so that there are leaders that are dedicated to northern locations. So our staff are getting the attention and the support and the face-to-face that they need from senior leaders so that they feel comfortable in doing their work.

Ms. Rancourt: — So I'm going back to the budget now because I like to flip-flop. So with regards to assisted adoption, what was the amount allocated to assisted adoption for 2015-2016?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — 5.625 million. Which year? I just need to ask which year did you ask for.

Ms. Rancourt: — 2015-2016.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Okay, 2015-16 was 5.625 million.

Ms. Rancourt: — Okay. What services are already in place to assist adoption?

Ms. Kirkland: — So provisions to assisted adoption include 75 per cent of the basic maintenance rate that foster parents or extended family receive, an annual review and home visit to ensure that things are going well and that they have what they need, and the full range of special needs that we have available to children in foster homes or extended care. So back to that, do they need counselling? Do they need special equipment? That full range of special needs is available as it's appropriate and applicable to children in assisted adoption settings as well.

Ms. Rancourt: — So this increase, how many children do you

think will be affected with the increase?

Ms. Kirkland: — Sorry. Just while we're getting that for you, I have a correction. When I said it was 75 per cent of the basic maintenance, it's actually 90 per cent that they receive.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We're just waiting for that answer. There's 650 right now, so we'll get you their answer for how many more. 71. We just got it.

Ms. Rancourt: — So there's 650 kids that have been adopted, like are on the adoption program?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Under the assisted adoption, and we're budgeting for an additional 71. Many of these are, they're special needs children. Often foster parents who are willing to adopt the special needs children, so we encourage that and God bless them.

Ms. Rancourt: — Definitely it's great that they could be in a stable, consistent home, you know. How many children were adopted last year?

The Chair: — We'll take a 15-minute break, and we'll be back at, it looks like, 8:45 to resume, and the minister can have the answer by the time we get back. Thank you.

[20:30]

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

The Chair: — The time being 9:44, we're going to get started again. Ms. Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, and the answer to the question is 75 wards were adopted last year.

Ms. Rancourt: — Thank you. And now I'm going to let my colleague, Mr. Forbes, ask some questions.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. And the questions really will focus on Sask Housing, so if the officials want to get ready for that, I'll give them a few minutes to get prepared.

So my first question right off the bat . . . And I know we often have this discussion every year because of the changes in the allocations and how they fluctuate. This year it looks like a lot more money flowing to Sask Housing, some 18.7 million and the big difference, well two differences: program delivery down a bit and money flowing to the corporation up significantly. Can you explain what's happening there?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So 10.2 million of the increase — there is a budget of 18.771 million which is a significant increase; it's a 103 per cent increase — but 10.2 million of that is for the first home plan through the graduate retention program. And so that leaves 8.551 for housing project and program delivery for the year.

[20:45]

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So in a sense it's pretty close but a little bit down, and in fact probably the program delivery is down a bit from 7.6.

Now I'm just wondering, we're so close to Public Accounts being released, volume 2, where you would have the actual numbers. I think they'll probably be out in the next week or two. Would you have the actuals from 2015-16?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So point six of the program delivery decrease, point six of that is transferred to client support to support the front-line delivery. So we've just transferred it.

Mr. Forbes: — So how much was transferred, how many dollars?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Point six million, so that would be 600,000.

Mr. Forbes: — 600,000. Okay.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Right, and 100,000 is a decrease in salaries because of two full-time equivalent positions that were eliminated.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So transfer it to front line. Now forgive me if you've already covered this, but what were those front-line programs that received . . . or didn't get the 600,000?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, well they do because it's transferred to there, so it increases that area.

Mr. Forbes: — Oh, it's transferred over to . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Right.

Mr. Forbes: — To the CBO, to another. Which one is it transferred to?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So it's transferred support, administrative support, so income assistance programming, and so it comes from the housing that we just transferred it into the main ministry.

Mr. Forbes: — The main ministry then. So we would show an increase of 600,000 somewhere in one of these other lines?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Which line would that be?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — (SS05).

Mr. Forbes: — (SS05). Income is . . . Oh, client support down there and is that the one that, the service centre or . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So on page 111. Yes, so go down to client support, (SS05), and on the first line it'll say service centre client support is up.

Mr. Forbes: — Right, okay, and that would be pretty close. Now the service centre client support, what do they do?

Mr. Allen: — In Social Services, aside from housing, there's three main lines of programming. There's community living, so disability programs. There's child and family programs. And there's income assistance programs. Rather than having the administrative support — so the file clerks, the receptionists, the typists — attached to each of those, they're all congregated under this (SS05). So all of the administrative support for child and family programs, all the administrative support for income assistance programs comes from here. So if they need more help with the front line to help, you know, take some of the burden off the workers, that's where these administrative folks come in.

Mr. Forbes: — So at one point there was . . . Or are you getting them to administer some of the programs for Sask Housing now?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No.

Mr. Forbes: — No, okay. Okay, so the seven million, now what do you plan to be using that for, or how does that work?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The 10.2 million.

Mr. Forbes: — No, I'm looking now at the program delivery under housing, in the allocations under program delivery.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The 7.68 is salaries.

Mr. Forbes: — That was last year's number. It's 7.016.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — 7.016.

Mr. Forbes: — Is salaries for the housing authorities?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Right. Well 6.544 is salaries, and 472,000 is goods and services.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Okay good, thank you. I also wanted to draw back a bit. You know, one of the things that have been happening in housing, Sask Housing . . . So minister Draude, in 2012, changed the whole social housing and changed how rents were figured out at that point. And so that was fair enough. And then you did, in 2015, changed, eliminated a significant part of the affordable housing in major cities to roll them into social housing. And that was to essentially end some of the fixed rents and the cap on the rents so they no longer were capped, and increased the minimums from 100 to 300 and some, based on what social assistance rates were.

And you know, whether it's in government or whatever department, you have different labels floating around. And it gets quite amazing when you start to hear . . . And I've gone to the websites of Saskatoon Housing Authority and Regina Housing Authority, and they don't talk about social housing. Actually, I know Regina has a little, you have to look, and you have to look for social housing. But they really talk about family — and what are the three? — family, senior, and accessible housing.

And I found this interesting because I prefer those labels. I think that make sense. People can relate to them. This affordable and social housing tends to be a bit, a bit

mind-boggling because you don't really know what it means. The federal government has an affordable housing program, so you have to keep that word in your lexicon.

And so anyways I'm just wondering. Are we seeing evolution back to those three words — family, senior, and accessible — or what was happening with that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So I'm going to go there and then be corrected maybe by my officials. So I agree with you; it was very confusing. So the government-owned stock, there was social housing and affordable housing. And so in 2015, as you mentioned, we began, initiated collapsing the affordable housing of government-owned housing so that it's all social housing, which is based on one-third of someone's income with some areas how that calculation is done, and that's ongoing.

We still have affordable housing, but we deliver that through third parties, so it's not our government-owned. We always had — at least I always get statistics on — in each of our major centres how many . . . well all of the centres quite frankly. We have the data of how many units are senior units, how many are family, and then some communities will have accessible, so accessible will usually be for wheelchair or individuals with disabilities, is where that would be.

So the difference that will come over time as this evolves, as you mentioned, is all of those will be social housing in those categories. Some are seniors. Some are family, and of course the family units, as you know, is easy to figure out, has more bedrooms. The accessible will have perhaps a wheelchair ramp or something like that.

Mr. Forbes: — So in terms of Sask Housing-owned units, there will be a universal rent program.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — In the major centres, yes, right.

Mr. Forbes: — And so then in some of the communities, so you'll still have affordable.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, in our smaller communities it's a little bit different because if you do a . . . Based on 33 per cent of the income, the community, some of them don't have any rental market to compare it to. But some do have, you know, a small rental market, and it is way out of that rental market price in the smaller community. So then you may end up with a vacant unit, and that becomes a cost. So you know, we'll be talking about and giving consideration down the road if something needs to be done there, but for now we have not made changes in the smaller communities.

Mr. Forbes: — So okay, yes, you know I prefer to see these three terms, like they make sense, and I think they may be sort of inside baseball to use social versus affordable because that's what the bureaucrats tend to use, and I understand. You want to keep in the marketplace, like in a city, affordable housing out there, and third party can be doing that type of thing. But we do have, you know, we're still getting some concerns about people who feel they weren't heard about the changes, that the rents aren't as reasonable as they might be and so . . . And I know these are some folks from Prince Albert who have raised this concern about this and you may or may not be familiar with the

circumstance, so I could definitely share that information with you and work it through.

I am curious because I know minister Draude and yourself also referenced about 20 per cent or approximately 600 households under the affordable housing rental program have sufficient income to afford housing on the market, and we even had talked about the 15 families who had in excess of 100,000. What is the status of those 15 families?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The specific 15 families I don't know. It is expected that about 1,300 low-income households in the affordable housing program — which is about 50 per cent — will experience a rent reduction. And of course, you're not going to hear from those folks. But of course there are those that will see an increase.

And I haven't actually . . . My office hasn't been flooded with individuals that . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . They moved out? I've just been informed 10 of them have moved out.

Mr. Forbes: — Ten have moved out.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Ten have moved out. Altogether I've got 564 affordable housing program tenants have left the program for the housing market. So that frees up 564 homes for our more vulnerable seniors and families.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. You were anticipating some 12 or 1,300?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I think around 2,700 over time, but we knew that they wouldn't necessarily . . . We're not going to force anybody to move, but 10 of the over 80,000 have moved.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. And we had talked about where these 15 lived in the province, because we have actually met some of them. Some of them were in rural Saskatchewan actually. And now maybe they didn't actually . . . Maybe the program didn't impact them in some of these rural areas because the changes wouldn't go out that far, so I guess I'm answering my own question. These were happening in the urban communities, the changes were happening, right?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The 29 largest communities, so yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. There's some rural?

[21:00]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, there is, because there's Lloydminster, Moosomin, Yorkton, Melville, Swift Current, Estevan, Tisdale, Esterhazy, Kindersley, Nipawin, Humboldt, Rosetown, Warman, Canora, Weyburn, Creighton, La Ronge, Battleford, Air Ronge, Outlook and Melville as well as Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert.

Mr. Forbes: — Would you know where the five remaining, are they in rural Saskatchewan or no?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I don't know.

Mr. Forbes: — No. Okay. And it was interesting when I was on the Regina website, it did say they actually had vacancies . . .

[inaudible interjection] . . . What's that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — In which community?

Mr. Forbes: — In Regina, in Sask Housing.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — You know, the wait-list for social housing, for our social housing, we've reduced that a lot. So your wait time is less than a month in some communities, which is great. We don't want to see a lot of vacancies of course because we want to have individuals in those units.

There's a little bit more of a wait time for families than seniors unless that's changed, but I know the last time I read some stats the wait time for a family is a little bit longer. But it's still extremely reasonable.

Mr. Forbes: — So your stats . . . and I haven't asked for them this year. I'll have to start again. But so they are family . . . You're keeping track by family, by senior, by accessible? That's your headings now?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I don't know if we do accessible. Right, so we do singles and families . . . seniors, singles and families. So the single may not necessarily be accessible in needing, like, structures. They may have mental health issues, the hard-to-house.

Mr. Forbes: — Right.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Right.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So that's one of the things about the hard-to-house . . . And I've been doing some reading, and of course home first . . . Housing First?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Housing First

Mr. Forbes: — Is the two initiatives, I mean the initiatives both in Regina, Saskatoon. So what kind of things are you doing for hard-to-house folks? And how are you part of that whole . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — One of the responses I had just prior to the election to the poverty reduction strategy that we introduced was a recommendation, and it actually was a direction we were beginning to go down anyway. And that is to focus Sask Housing Corporation's funding . . . And we get substantive federal dollars on hard-to-house. I haven't . . . Some of the hard-to-house will be the Housing First. And the reason why I'm kind of defining a little bit of a difference, hard-to-house may be someone with physical challenges, physical disabilities. And so that to me is hard to house because they can't just go into any home and be able to, you know, have mobility. So to me, in my mind it's a little bit of both.

But what we'll be looking at will be the Housing First. So it will be someone who, be it addictions or mental illness, hasn't been able to hold on to housing. In some cases we'll have to work with the community-based organizations to give those supports.

We've done that in North Battleford. I believe it's 22 units that we've built in North Battleford that has mental health supports

that goes into that unit. We have a number of other projects that we have already initiated, but that is the direction that I've asked the Sask Housing board to work on more.

We had a number of years, of course, where vacancy rates were low and the concern and the challenge was availability. So now it's affordability and accessibility is more where we need to go back to the social purpose of Sask Housing Corporation, I think we need to go. And I think that's important, one of the most important and the first initiatives in addressing our poverty reduction strategy.

Mr. Forbes: — Well with North Battleford, that just brings up the headlines that happened last spring about the bus ticket. And the Lighthouse in Battleford, and I guess in Saskatoon . . . Is that through this program, these kind of programs, you're funding the Lighthouse? Or how are you funding the Lighthouse initiatives?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Lighthouse in Saskatoon has a base contract and then it's paid per diem per client. Lighthouse in North Battleford is just per diem per client. So as you well know, we doubled the amount of emergency shelters through our province, over doubled the number of emergency shelters through, I think it's six different community-based organizations.

We increased the amounts that we paid to our emergency shelter providers in order to keep them viable. Lighthouse in North Battleford and Lighthouse in Saskatoon, some of the same but, but quite defining different issues.

Lighthouse in Saskatoon, through the federal government and the Saskatoon Regional Health Authority, initiated a pilot of stabilization beds, so that was never part of the emergency shelter program that we provide through Social Services. Lighthouse in North Battleford, of course, is just emergency shelter.

The challenge that we came to was we agreed to provide for the first night if it was late at night and someone was brought into the emergency shelter. And then you can't necessarily, if they're intoxicated, can't necessarily find out if they have a home or they're getting funding either through Social Services or, in many cases in North Battleford, from the First Nations band for shelter. But in the next morning when they could speak with the social services worker and it was established that they were receiving funding for shelter through either level of government, then we would not pay the per diem for the next night.

And Lighthouse in North Battleford has struggled then to be viable if just that one night's paid because many of the clients that were going there were indeed receiving a shelter allowance from some level of government. Those individuals, if they want to remain at Lighthouse, can pay the per diems themselves if they so choose, but we're not going to provide shelter double.

Mr. Forbes: — So what happened about the bus tickets? Did you do an . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The bus tickets, actually it's not a new policy; it's a policy that your government had when you were in

government. We do not . . . If you're down and out across Canada, by constitution you're not restricted to interprovincial travel. I mean you're just . . . That is the freedoms of our country.

There are policies around if you could receive funding for relocation. Most often that relocation is from city to city. Through the policy, some of the reasons why you may need relocation is, you have a job; that's where you came from so you just need to go back home; that may be where your family supports are. Those are the, I would say, the three main reasons. So if these individuals had those reasons, then we would provide them with the funding for the transportation to return to their own home, connect with the job, go to where family can help them.

Yes, it became . . . I can't give the specifics on these individuals obviously, but there's a policy and the policy was followed of why they were provided this. There is nothing stopping any individual who is on social assistance to take their cheque, cash it, buy a bus ticket and leave. We have freedoms in our country.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, fair enough.

Now one of the things . . . Now the new RRAP [residential rehabilitation assistance program] program, or residential repair . . . It has a new name. I think it's been a changed a few years ago, residential repair . . .

Mr. Allen: — It's either called homeowner repair, which . . . or rental repair.

Mr. Forbes: — Right, homeowner repair. Yes. So that program is always well subscribed. How much money do you have set aside for that this year?

Mr. Allen: — We've only just had our funding approved, so we're still working on the delivery plan. We have to take our delivery plan to the . . . There's a Sask Housing board, which hasn't met since the budget was handed down, before that can be approved. So we have a notional number, but not one for public consumption at this point.

Mr. Forbes: — Oh, okay. Can you talk a little bit about the program though in terms of . . . The fact is that I don't think you've had . . . Have you had a year where you've had surplus money?

Mr. Allen: — No, generally speaking we . . . the program is well subscribed. There have been years where we have done more business than others, and some of it's been intentional where we work to get ahead of ourselves.

In the advance of, we'll say in 2013-2014 when the federal funding was coming to an end, we knew that we needed to get ahead of the game in order to get people served before the federal funding lapsed, and then we had to wait for the federal government to come back with new money.

Mr. Forbes: — So are you in that . . . Now you have an affordable housing initiative from the federal government right now. Is that supporting this program?

Mr. Allen: — We have the flexibility, with much of the money being discussed in the new federal budget, to do what the province sees as a priority. So it could be repairs. It could be building new housing for hard-to-house. It could be doing a number of things. There's some parcels of the federal funding that's very specific, whether it's, you know, victims of violence or seniors housing, but there is a pretty large piece of funding, about \$19.3 million of federal money that the province can use to satisfy its priorities.

Mr. Forbes: — And it's about \$92 million, I think. Is that what the federal affordable housing initiative is? Over, what is it? Okay, correct me. I'm welcome to be corrected.

Mr. Allen: — So there's the 2014 to 2019 Investment in Affordable Housing Agreement. The minister referenced that in her opening remarks. That's 45 million, a little over 45 million federal dollars, and then the new money that's on offer by the federal government and it's, I would like to say \$54 million in total.

Mr. Forbes: — The 45 million is matched, isn't it?

Mr. Allen: — That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, okay. But then I didn't realize there was a new initiative as well with 54 million.

Mr. Allen: — Yes, so the federal budget, February 2016 had new housing money in it. And so there's some additional cost-match money, about 19 million new federal dollars that has to be matched by the province. And then there's another 35 or so million dollars that isn't cost-matched that can go directly to, say there's money for victims of violence, there's funding to repair the social housing stock. And there's about . . . I won't say the number for seniors because I think I'll remember incorrectly. If you give me a moment I can find out exactly how much it is.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, so this is good that there's more money out there. I think I was more thinking about the 90 million that was announced two years ago and it was essentially . . . So we'd be in the second or third year of that. But this other pool of money is new. Is it one-year money or is it multi-year?

[21:15]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, it's multi-year and it kind of overlaps with our previous . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Oh, okay.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So this time it'll be a little bit of overlapping.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So can you tell us what the plans are in this budget for partnering with the federal government? What are the specific plans you're using that money for?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Well if I can talk about the new agreement, many of the federal dollars are not prescriptive. So as I said, our intention with the Sask Housing Corporation is to pursue more partnerships with hard-to-house. And that might be

hard-to-house just on accessibility, so that someone that has challenges can have more, better access. But it may be hard-to-house needing to partner with a community-based organization or a health worker to ensure that they have the services they need, which goes to your Housing First model a little more. Some will go to repairs, as you pointed out. In the new agreement we'll be announcing, there is some dollars that are prescriptive for seniors and some dollars that are prescriptive to domestic violence.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So can you give any sort of specific programs or initiatives in this year's budget that you're going to be spending federal dollars on?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Other than what's in construction, no. The second agreement is quite new and a bit of a surprise, so no, we don't have it allocated.

Mr. Forbes: — Now I wonder if that's . . . What was the federal Liberal . . . I mean it was part of their infrastructure initiative, I think.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. It has a name, social infrastructure.

Mr. Forbes: — Social infrastructure.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Now in that I'm wondering, several co-ops are coming to the end of their agreements, I think, especially in terms of rent geared to income and that type of thing. Are there any plans to help them bridge into the years forward?

I'm wondering if the minister is aware of what I'm speaking of in terms of . . . They were under the . . . I forget the name of the agreements, but it was back in the '80s and these were some 25-year agreements or 30-year agreements for rent geared to income and social in the co-op housing. Mr. Allen, are you drawing a blank with this as well?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So I'm being told that most co-ops, we funded their mortgage payment, and when their agreement expires, the mortgage is paid off.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. And then will Sask Housing have a relationship with those co-ops into the future at all, or were they . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'm being advised support, counsel, and advice, but that would be about it.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And are there any new initiatives around the co-op housing model at all that . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Not right now. As you know, we do most of our . . . When we find a community in need or if we have a specific initiative, say, for housing for addictions and mental health . . . Because of course we're going to work on the addictions and mental health action plan as well, recommendations in there. We will be doing it through an RFP [request for proposal] process.

Mr. Forbes: — And particularly in the poverty strategy, I think this might be an interesting one because clearly people want to have some say in their housing, their own housing. But they can't, you know . . . They're not going to be able to afford to buy, say, a condo or anything like that. So they're not going to be on condo boards, but a housing co-op might be a very good model. And I think it was one that was used in the past, actually, for that kind of thing, whether it was single parents or other accessible issues. That would be really worthwhile considering. So I would really encourage you to keep that in mind as a potential.

Now you had, a few years ago Sask Housing had put up on the market some 300 housing units in Regina and Saskatoon and Prince Albert, or no, Moose Jaw.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Moose Jaw.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. And what is the progress of those sales, and what's been happening with that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — As of May 31st, we have 44 sales in Regina, 58 in Moose Jaw, 30 in Prince Albert, for a total of 132 units.

Mr. Forbes: — So that's out of the 300. Now was it anticipated that it would take this long? It's been a couple of years now, I believe. When did these houses . . . When did this whole process begin?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Before me. So the commitment in the previous minister was that we wouldn't sell anything until we had a replacement built. And we had stopped, because of the delay in a project in Regina, we had stopped any sales in Regina for some time. So we will still commit to that. Like we're not going to sell just for the sake of selling, but we will ensure that the housing is adequate in the community.

Mr. Forbes: — So these all have . . . You found 100. There's been 132 new units built and families have been . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, probably more so in Regina. No, I'm being corrected. So there's only 23 have been built in Prince Albert. Prince Albert is 30 townhouses. In Moose Jaw we exceeded what we sold; we have 91 apartments completed. And in Regina we're still in construction.

Mr. Forbes: — And the people in the original homes had the option of doing two things: one, moving into the new place, or buying the existing, or leaving. So have you done any studies? Did they move? Did they buy?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So to date 12 of the households have purchased the residence that they were renting. I don't have the statistics here of how many moved into the specific new place that was built.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. So you have 132 and so you could be selling up to 150 more. And there have been places built. Sounds like you're on . . . Are you on track for . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We're on track with a delay in Regina, but under construction. Moose Jaw we exceeded what we sold,

and in P.A. [Prince Albert] we're equal so it is a . . . Well and you know the aging of our stock. This will be a good opportunity to, well renew them, renew some of our housing and then of course our maintenance bills are down as well.

Mr. Forbes: — Now what was the average price or how are you doing on the sales?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So first they're being sold at market price for the community. So we generated on the 132 units, we generated 22.47 million. Quite reasonable.

Mr. Forbes: — And that's kept, that's flowed against the new builds.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Are there any future potential housing sales contemplated?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. What we're looking at, not as much in the major centres . . . I think we need the major centres to redeploy rather than sell, or, you know, there may be the odd unit where again we need to do major repairs or flip it. But we are sort of doing a scan of our housing that we have in smaller communities that are chronically vacant.

Mr. Forbes: — And that was going to be my next question.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes. So I had one community approach me, and they're interested in the housing. They are chronically vacant and their interest where they're located is they have seasonal workers, so the community would like . . . They don't want to lose the rental stock in town because they would like to attract those seasonal workers there. So there's some merit to that. So it'll be through consultation, but we're going to start looking at that.

Mr. Forbes: — So how many chronically vacant units do you have? Has it been going up?

Mr. Allen: — In rural Saskatchewan we have a significant number of chronic vacancies. The minister referenced, you know, the conversations we've been having. You know, some communities have approached us and made offers, and we're about to approach others. And most of them are aware that, you know, they've got 12 units and four of them haven't been lived in for a couple of years and something needs to be done.

So there's getting to be more and more of those. It's not growing astronomically, but more and more.

Mr. Forbes: — Can you give me a number?

Mr. Allen: — I can't give you a number across the entire system. I know the chronic vacancies, we're looking at something in the neighbourhood of, I want to say, 300 units across rural Saskatchewan. In some cases it's one; in some cases it's a little more than one.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, for sure. Yes.

Mr. Allen: — And in urban Saskatchewan, the changes that

we've made, whether it's to social housing and, you know, 30 per cent of rent and targeting it at the social housing portfolio, at those who it's destined for and not people making 80 or \$90,000 a year, and the change from affordable housing to social housing, so taking off the fixed rents and making rent geared to income, we've had an impact on the portfolio in Regina and Saskatoon, the large centres. And we have more vacancies. It's not to the point of being a problem. More so when we have a vacancy today, it's because it's in a particular, I'll call it neighbourhood or part of a community where some people are reluctant to live. In the past they would have taken anything anywhere, and now they're able to be more selective.

[21:30]

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. Now you often talk about the number of partnerships Sask Housing has, some 400 partnerships I think it is. How many partnerships or contracts or third party agreements do you have?

Mr. Allen: — If we include housing authorities . . . And you know, they're a partnership. I mean they're not arm's-length but they're still a partner of ours. There's about 280 of those. And there's about another 200 non-profits, whether it's a co-op or just some non-profit housing agency, of which there's a variety of sizes and shapes.

Mr. Forbes: — All right. Well one that I . . . And maybe you can't speak to it but I'll just ask about it because people have been asking me about it. But it was in my riding. It's not in my riding anymore: 5th Avenue apartments that I think was a third . . . There was a third party. The apartments, which were the affordable side, and the high-rise is the social housing on 5th Avenue, and I just always call 5th Avenue because I usually just think of the whole place all together. But people were . . . There was some discussion that it was going to be sold back to, there was a third party involved in one side of the building and that it was going to be sold back or it was going to be . . . Yes. Sask Housing was going to get out of that side of the building. Anyways, have you . . . Does that ring a bell at all to you?

Mr. Allen: — Not at all, no.

Mr. Forbes: — It's not been a burning issue. People just raised it a couple of times, but I am curious because, you know, it's interesting. Sask Housing over the years must have a variety of agreements, a wide variety of agreements that it's hard to believe from the '70s, '80s, '90s. Every which way you can make an agreement to get something built has been done. And so some of these older agreements probably are starting to age out and Sask Housing is starting to take responsibility for the building, I would assume. Or maybe not. Maybe that's not the case at all.

But I'll just put that out there as a hypothetical because we know now we're getting into a lot of partnerships. They're still young, but are there partnerships or contracts from, or third party arrangements from the '70s and '80s that Sask Housing . . . What is the oldest agreement that you have on the books?

Mr. Allen: — I don't have the answer to that. I mean some of the agreements had a lifespan of 25 years; some had a lifespan of 50 years. So some will carry on for a considerable period of

time. I know our last agreement with the federal government from which they're providing funding doesn't expire until 2038 so we still have, for some of them, a considerable time period yet.

But with respect to third parties, there have been some third party agreements that have expired and they're now free to do what they will. They're not encumbered by the agreement and our requirements on them. And there will be others where the agreement expires in time to come.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Our most recent programs were implemented to help stimulate private development of affordable housing. So basically the agreement was that they would get dollars from Sask Housing Corporation, but they would then have to set the rent at a certain percentage below market rent and I believe they were, in those agreements, was 10 years. So those are still all ongoing.

Mr. Forbes: — But some could be two or three years that they start to expire, right?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Not quite that soon, but again definitely Sask Housing Corporation and government in general will have to watch that and see where rents are at that time because suddenly you could lose a, you know, proponent of your affordable housing which is in the private market. If the rent is such as it is now, it hasn't increased for a number of months and in some areas has decreased . . . But if it's accelerating at a rapid rate, we'll have to be mindful of that in advance of it happening.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I'm thinking of NGOs [non-governmental organization], not so much the federal government, but that might have agreements that are 25, 35 years and now would be, could be aging out, and they would get the building, I assume, and then they would be able to do what they want with it whether that's to sell it, tear it down, convert it, all depends on what the, I guess, the bylaws are, but yes.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Many of them, and I know I've talked to a few . . . I'll give an example in Saskatoon, is the Knights of Columbus, right. They have a number of housing units. It's still part of their mandate. Like it's who they are, is to keep it affordable and serving the most vulnerable. And I know I was approached on what is the direction of the Sask Housing Corporation, and I said that we're going to be directing to hard-to-house, so they're going to talk about that and see if they can play a role in that. Some will then become a profit, you know, will rent for profit, but a lot of them are organizations that have a mandate not to do that.

Mr. Forbes: — All right. Might be interesting grist for written questions.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I'd be shocked if you didn't send them over.

Mr. Forbes: — Maybe not this session. But I am curious because I do think that, you know, as well as with the co-ops, we know the '70s and '80s, particularly the '70s, were big times for housing. We saw all the high-rises go up. We saw the co-ops go up and we saw partnerships. And the one that I was

talking about, the 5th Avenue, seemed to be with . . . It was a private partnership, you know, and the same with . . . Well no, not with the other one. But you know, it's interesting how the housing market goes up and down and we're looking for partners, and so it would be interesting to know about that.

And speaking to that, though, you know, I'm curious whether you're starting to do research in it, and it's interesting to see the interest on home start, the grad program. That's very, very good. And the Headstart program, which worked really well but is closed now . . . Is it closed or is it still open?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It's still open. Headstart on a Home.

Mr. Forbes: — [Inaudible] . . . apply for a Headstart home?

Mr. Allen: — I believe they still are periodically approving some projects. There's not a lot of . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Right.

Mr. Allen: — You know, there's a lot of supply on the market so, you know, builders have to have a business case that satisfies the builder as well as Headstart.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, that would be my question. There was such a start, the Headstart homes, and I think there was about 1,400. How many homes went out under the Headstart program?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — I think it was even more than that because the goal was 1,000 but we far exceeded the goal. So right now, 322 homes are under construction, 1,700 are complete, for a total of 2,022.

Mr. Forbes: — Under the Headstart.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Under the Headstart.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. So I'm curious to know, how many of them have now gone up? Or what is the . . . Was there a requirement around resale? Like how long did they have to live in them before they sold them, or was there any kind of requirement for that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, there wasn't.

Mr. Forbes: — So my thinking is that, you know, most young people would probably stay four or five years to try to get some equity in their home and then try to resell it. And the unfortunate thing, you know, with programs like this — which is an unintended consequence and I still think it's a good program — but everybody tries to sell at the same time, hurting themselves because it floods a bit of the market because everybody on the block's trying to sell because they're all having kids at the same time and doing all. And I'm just curious whether that's, if you've heard anything about that. Does it hurt the value of the house, the units, or have they been able to retain the unit price or the value? Plus we would hope that they'd actually accrue some value too.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We haven't tracked those values. Like it is their private home and then their decisions. But we haven't

tracked the families afterwards.

Mr. Forbes: — And you haven't heard anecdotal . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No.

Mr. Forbes: — I'd be curious because anything like that, everybody worries about the price. You know, anything happens on your block, you sort of freak out that it's hurting your house value, right? And so if four units all of a sudden go up, then it could be . . . And I hope that's not the case because these are people starting out.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Yes, but they weren't built in blocks either. They're quite scattered.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. Good. That's good to hear. Okay. Now I wanted to just ask a bit about one of my few last questions, and so if you have something to wrap up . . . But it is around the rental housing supplements, 37 million this year and your estimated last year was 37 million. So I'm surprised it's exactly the same number. That must be one of the few pairs in the Estimates books that's not gone up, not gone down, just exactly the same. So you're expecting the same . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So this goes back to difficult decisions and how we need to target our dollars. I mean our budget in tough times went up 5.1 per cent, and as you said, each and every year the Saskatchewan rental housing supplement goes up. Part will help is the markets changed, so I mean we increased the amount nine times quite rapidly because we were increasing it every six months, and as the market went up and that stopped. But we're going to be eliminating the Saskatchewan rental housing supplement exemption in SAID when we're calculating the excess shelter support. So that's going to help with some dollars.

And we're going to be . . . Basically as the redesign of looking at these programs, we're going to work on the criteria because it isn't the housing pressures that once was, or market pressures that once was. So we have to really look at who's receiving it, what's the criteria for receiving it, is there options in the market — and now there is — and try and not have this become a totally unsustainable program, and really focused on those most vulnerable, most in need.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I'm glad to hear that because I really think it's one that's a good program, but really worthy of some analysis of who's getting it and is it getting to the right people. And if there's a way to make it sustainable because it was, you know, not and so . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — No, and you have pointed that out year over year of, you know, what's going on with this program. It was introduced under your government, when you were in government, and the idea at that time was to allocate, I think it was 10 million for the program. And I mean we've far exceeded that and so what's going on. Part of it was the market and you know that.

Mr. Forbes: — Absolutely.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — You know, it was needed for a number

of years, and it needed to increase to meet the accelerating rent. But now that's not happening, we need to revisit it. And you know, who's actually qualifying and is it indeed . . .

Mr. Forbes: — And I think it was something that was happening right across Canada, you know. When we brought that forward, it was, you know, other provinces were doing it and in a way to . . . You know, it's funny how the housing wave just hit right across, and it was really an important program.

Well that will be good to see how you, what you come out over the next couple of years with that analysis because I do think it's a good program. But the numbers are so huge that even if you were to take a portion of that and put it into other things, that would make it . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Absolutely. There's pressures, you know, in our budget and so this is one area that we need to ensure it's sustainable and it's actually addressing the market as it is today.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. So one last question, is that whole transformational thing for Sask Housing or housing?

[21:45]

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — As I said in my opening remarks, of course I sort of announced one of the major changes we're going to be making prior to the election, and that is also a recommendation from the advisory group for the poverty reduction strategy, and one of our three initiatives in response to the poverty reduction strategy, our first initiatives. And one is the redesign of the whole suite of our income assistance programs, the rental housing supplement being part of that suite.

But is there some way to make it simpler, easier for the client, easier for the worker? Because some of these come with a whole series of questions, and it's subjective, where one worker may make a different decision than another. So it speaks to fairness, speaks to equality, speaks to sustainability of the program. So that's what we're going to be embarking on this year is, along with rental housing supplement, but looking at the entire suite of income assistance programs. And it goes to the stacking that I know you made fun of, but some people qualify for this, and then this, and do you deduct that if you're getting this and so on and so forth. And it just becomes quite inequitable in circumstances. So it's time. It was suggested by the poverty reduction advisory group and we're taking their advice.

Mr. Forbes: — Well thank you very much, Minister, and thank you to the folks at Sask Housing and all the folks in the field. I appreciate your answers and I'll turn it back for our last few questions. Thank you.

The Chair: — Ms. Rancourt, you have the floor.

Ms. Rancourt: — Thank you. So I'm going to go back to foster care because that's such a huge portfolio, so I've got a lot of questions with regards to that. And so one of the questions I was thinking about is, what is the average amount of foster children in a home, the average?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We'll have to work on that because the numbers that we have here tonight is just children in care, but in care may be group homes, and you're looking specifically just for foster homes. So there's a number of placements. You know, there's Ranch Ehrlo; there's group homes; there's stabilization units.

Ms. Rancourt: — So we hear far too often about a lot of children that have been placed in multiple homes, and so I was wondering if there was somehow a system to have children flagged so that, just to identify if they've been in multiple homes.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — We do. We track the movement of children, and hopefully we have those statistics here because I very much wanted that number brought down of how many times they're moved.

It was mentioned by the Children's Advocate and . . . Not the last report. I think it was a couple reports ago. And just to clarify, he counted if the child or children were put in respite. Say the family wanted a break and they were put in a respite home, and then returned to the same foster home, that in his mind was two moves. And I did say at that time, like even I took vacations and left my kids with grandma and grandpa, and so it would be two times moving my kids. So I wanted to clarify that moving kids from home to home sometimes is reasonable. But I think what you're looking for is moving them and then never going back to that home, then they go to another one. So I know from briefing notes in the past that we've been able to bring the movement down, which I think is really important.

So we're going to clarify for sure and we'll say tonight 80 per cent of the kids have only two moves, but if that isn't correct, I will get a clarification to you.

Ms. Rancourt: — Thank you. So my next question is, how many case reviews were done in the past year?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — What's a case review?

Ms. Rancourt: — If there was an incident that you had to look into a little bit more.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Like a critical incident or someone reporting a concern?

Ms. Rancourt: — A critical incident.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — A critical incident. In the 2015 calendar year, there were 43 incidents that triggered reviews — 21 were critical injuries and 22 were deaths.

Ms. Rancourt: — And were some of these on-reserve or do you count those separately?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So these would all be in the care of the ministry and not the agencies. Or they would be . . . because it says four of the deaths and nine of the injuries occurred while the children were in care. But we call it in care, and we do investigations even if we've touched that family in the last 12 months. So the children may not be removed from the home, but we've had some interaction with that family, then we still

consider it our responsibility to do the investigation.

Ms. Rancourt: — How many of those deaths were suicides?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — One.

Ms. Rancourt: — So I've had this question presented to me before. And some people are concerned that . . . they don't feel that the child protection investigation was done properly or completed in a manner that they thought was appropriate. So what would be an appeal process for something like that, a situation like that?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So can we just get some clarification? A family has concerns about a child investigation or . . .

Ms. Rancourt: — It's a person that, of significant interest, yes. And they feel that the investigation wasn't done what they deem as being appropriate. So I was wondering, if people do have concerns such as that, is there an appeal process, like . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That's the purpose of our Children's Advocate office and I would advise that they have him look into it, if he hasn't already.

Ms. Rancourt: — The other questions I had was, how many youth are enrolled in the 16, 17 program?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That's another detail we'll get to you. We might get it tonight yet, but we'll get you that detail.

Ms. Rancourt: — And if you could also see how it relates to other years? I'd like to see if there's been a growing trend or . . .

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So you would like about five years?

Ms. Rancourt: — Yes. That would be great.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Okay, sure.

Ms. Rancourt: — Because one of the issues that I've noticed is that sometimes there can be a barrier for placements for youth in that 16, 17 program. Maybe they can't find someone that would be an appropriate guardian for them or other issues. So I was wondering, is there ways that you guys have been working on to address some of those barriers?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So just to answer the one year for your last question, in 2015-16, we had 146. And we'll get the previous four years for you which we won't have here tonight.

Ms. Kirkland: — So your question was in regard to what we're doing to assist the program to be . . . to work for 16- and 17-year-olds as far as placement?

Ms. Rancourt: — Yes.

Ms. Kirkland: — Okay, so you're right. It can be a difficult age group to work with, and some of the work that our staff do is working with youth and families to determine is this a youth in need of protection. Or is this a youth and family struggling with following the rules and, you know, maturity and adolescence? So that's definitely one of the challenges that

we have.

Part of what we're doing that we're really trying to focus on with youth that fall into that group of 16- and 17-year-olds who do need to be out of home and do need to be in a placement is working with our community-based partners on what are appropriate resources for them. What's the balance of having structure and safety and building towards that transition and independence? So working with CBOs. And what are the outcomes you or I would want for our 16- and 17-year-olds to be maturing and moving on? And what do we build into our programs for that? So it's a focus. It's also something we're looking at.

The minister mentioned the amendments we're looking at with child and family services Act, and we're looking at how to strengthen through our programs and legislation, transition. So for example, should the ministry be providing additional supports to youth around education for longer than we currently do, acknowledging that most youth aren't finishing university and moving out of the family basement at 22. So are there things we need to do differently to deal with that as well?

Ms. Rancourt: — Yes. The Children's Advocate talked a little bit about that in his report as well, you know, and about the changes of, you know, our reality with kids and such. And so that leads to probably my last question of the evening. You mentioned it in your opening remarks as well, about the aging-out kind of strategy. That seems to be something that needs to be worked on a little bit more, about how can we successfully support kids while they are kind of growing out of the system. So could you talk a little bit about what your plan is for that.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Right. So that's our discussions that we're having on just that very issue. And as Ms. Kirkland mentioned, we're seriously considering, when we change the Act, of changing the length of time that we would cover their post-secondary education because they may not decide to go into a post-secondary institution program that first one or two years. Our own kids in stable homes don't necessarily do so, and often we find that the children in care are less likely. But then they will decide, yes this is what I want to do, but they're not going to be completed at the age of 22. So that is probably one of the biggest pieces we're looking at.

[22:00]

And we did this in Chaz manor, I think here in Regina, was a housing opportunity that we had with Ranch Ehrlo to have kind of a unique housing. It's a bit of a studio housing, and it's for youth that there's that little bit of support to help them basically transition to being totally independent. Is there more opportunities like that that we can explore?

You know, Sweet Dreams, in a lot of ways it's more than that, but it is supports for these young women. But I've been approached, okay if . . . when they do transition out of Sweet Dreams, are they ready to be totally on their own? Maybe not. So there's a number of conversations we're having looking at proposals from communities. I think this is an opportunity that we can do something that won't even be horribly costly but really helpful.

Ms. Rancourt: — I like that you've brought up the group home aspect because I think — to a lot of the kids that are used to living in a group home with a lot of individuals around them, and then all of a sudden, oh I have to move out on my own — that's quite difficult for them, you know. And so as a family, well as a parent, I've been trying to prepare my kids to move out from day one. But in a group home setting, if you're used to having a lot of people around, it might not be having that preparation, you know. And so it'd be nice if the ministry could think of some kind of process for that.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Having two move back, good luck with that. But yes, so we're . . . [inaudible] . . . at step-down housing. There's certain situations where we think we . . . and what does that look like? You know, what does step-down housing look like?

So I have an answer to your previous question already, but we will be giving answers to all the questions that we didn't have the details. So we have, 71 per cent of children now stay in their initial placement or had one move. That's from September of 2012 to August of 2014, and then in 2015 we've moved that up to 85 per cent now. So it is something that we've been working on improving.

I don't think we'll ever get to zero because we have foster homes that retire and that forces some movement, but it would sure be nice to get as close to it as we can. So moving it from 71 per cent to 85 per cent, I feel positive about it, and it's something that we need to be very mindful of. So that's in the movement of foster children from home to home.

Ms. Rancourt: — Thank you. So my next question is, how much does it cost to house a youth in Eagles Nest, Ranch Ehrlo, and then a foster home? Those three different in a year.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Okay, so this would be the annual amounts and an average because there is some ranges. So the Ranch Ehrlo is 183,500. Eagles Nest is 166,300, and foster care is 25,300.

Ms. Rancourt: — That is a significantly big difference, yes. So how many youth are in Eagles Nest and Ranch Ehrlo?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So we're forecasting in this budget based on previous use of 97 in Ranch Ehrlo and 62 in Eagles Nest. But we will get you those specific numbers today. We'll get those forwarded to you. But that's what we're budgeting for based on history.

Ms. Rancourt: — Thank you. And what is the age range for youth to be placed in these group homes?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Are you talking specifically about Eagles Nest and ranch?

Ms. Rancourt: — Yes, both of them.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Eight to fifteen would be the age range. Now we try . . . unless there's extreme behavioural issues or extreme issues we wouldn't place an eight-year-old in either of those facilities.

Ms. Rancourt: — And then you previously were talking about a lot of different, other placement options, and so can you explain some other possible placement options.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So there's quite an array. Like we have Thomas Care. We use the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association]. We have CUMFI [Central Urban Métis Federation Inc.] in Saskatoon. We have Egadz that has group homes. There are My Homes. First Nations, some of the First Nations agencies have group homes. It would be a fairly extensive list of group home providers. Four Directions is another one that comes to mind.

Ms. Rancourt: — I'm more familiar with, like, the programs that are in Prince Albert. We have an emergency placement home called Children's Haven, and I'm assuming that the bigger centres probably have them also in Saskatoon and Regina. And they're temporary placement places for families that are having some issues. And so would some of those placements be used possibly longer term for some youth?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — It can happen, and as you said, we have that emergency placement in all of our bigger centres. It could happen if need be, but we have a number that, like I said with Egadz and CUMFI that we hope for longer term placement than the emergency placement.

Ms. Rancourt: — Yes, because we would not want to use up those emergency placements because they're very valuable, you know, in emergency time. And then you mentioned Four Directions, how much was their allocation also this past year?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — So from the province is 2.068 million. But our First Nations agencies also use them, so I don't have that allocation. So that would be what the province puts in.

Just to give you an idea of some other homes, because I said there's a list, there's Carmel House; that's in Saskatoon as well. I've been there. The John Howard Society has a group home. Light of the Prairies you might be familiar with. And they're all through third-party partners.

Ms. Rancourt: — Is there culturally appropriate . . .

The Chair: — We're going to wrap it up. We've got our time in for the evening, so that was the heads-up. We will now adjourn consideration of the estimates and March supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Social Services. Thank you, Ms. Minister, and officials. Any final comments since we're back here tomorrow?

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Just very quickly, I want to thank the officials, and I want to thank the opposition for their thoughtful questions, and we'll see you all tomorrow night.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. We'll see you tomorrow. I'll ask a member to move a motion of adjournment.

Mr. D'Autremont: — So moved.

The Chair: — Mr. D'Autremont has moved. The time being 10:14. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee stands adjourned until tomorrow, June 22nd, 2016, at 3 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 22:14.]