



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

## **Hansard Verbatim Report**

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**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

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## STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Hon. Nadine Wilson  
Saskatchewan Rivers

[The committee met at 15:30.]

**The Chair:** — Okay, I'd like to welcome everyone here this afternoon to the Standing Committee on Human . . . yes, Human Services. I was thinking House Services in my head, but we're here to review the supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Advanced Education. With us today on the government side, we have MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Nadine Wilson; MLA Lori Carr chitting in or substituting in for Roger Parent; MLA David Buckingham; MLA Mark Docherty. And on the opposition side we have MLA Warren McCall substituting in for Ms. Nicole Rancourt.

So, Madam Minister, you may proceed, and if you would start with the introduction of your officials please.

**General Revenue Fund  
Supplementary Estimates — November  
Advanced Education  
Vote 37**

**Subvote (AE02)**

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee, for the opportunity to speak about the ministry's supplementary estimate request and to answer any questions. And absolutely I'll introduce some of the members of our team before we get started: Louise Greenberg, deputy minister; David Boehm, assistant deputy minister of corporate services and accountability; Scott Giroux, executive director, corporate finance; Lowell Balzer, manager, capital projects; and Leann Singer, manager, capital planning. And I would like to thank them in advance for all their consummately professional assistance and support today and every day.

Mr. Chair, in August of this year, two media conferences were held in Regina and Saskatoon to announce joint federal and provincial investment in capital projects in post-secondary institutions around the province. And these projects are being funded through the so-called Post-Secondary Institutions Strategic Investment Fund, or SIF. This federal program will provide up to 2 billion across the country to accelerate construction, repair, and maintenance activities at Canadian post-secondary institutions. The initiative will see federal funding flow to the province and in turn the province will provide this funding to the post-secondary institutions.

The aim of the fund is to generate immediate economic activity and enhance the research and innovation capacity at post-secondary institutions around the country.

Mr. Chair, provincial participation will result in \$63 million in federal investments to expand, repair, and modernize post-secondary infrastructure in the province. As these capital expenditures were not provided for in the ministry's 2016-17 budget appropriation, additional funding is needed by way of supplementary estimates. A total federal investment of 63.2 million from the Post-Secondary Institutions Strategic Investment Fund is being matched by various funding partners, including institutions, leading to a capital investment of \$136 million. The ministry is contributing 217,500 out of the existing capital budget allocation.

Projects are already under construction at the University of Regina at the College Avenue campus, in the lab building, the University of Saskatchewan's Collaborative Sciences Research Building, St. Thomas More College on the University of Saskatchewan campus, and Carlton Trail College in Punnichy. Design is under way at Parkland College in Yorkton, St. Peter's College in Humboldt, and Gabriel Dumont Institute in La Loche.

Total funding from federal sources will cover up to half, 50 per cent, of the projects' eligible costs. For Gabriel Dumont Institute, the federal government will cover up to 100 per cent of eligible costs. Institutions will be leveraging the remaining amount from a variety of sources. The costs of all these projects are fully offset by federal transfers to the province. Total capital expenditures of 63.2 million for the projects are partially offset by in-year savings of \$11.7 million, for a net supplementary estimates request of 51.5 million to support these important initiatives.

Mr. Chair, we recognize that the Government of Saskatchewan is facing significant fiscal challenges and is working to control spending throughout ministries, agencies, and Crown corporations. The Ministry of Advanced Education is reducing spending by 11.7 million this year to help the province deal with the fiscal situation. We understand this is creating challenges for our institutions, but we are confident they have the capacity to manage through them. We think these projects are very important for the future of our post-secondary institutions and for students in Saskatchewan. Thank you, and I look forward to any questions.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Do we have any questions? I recognize Mr. McCall.

**Mr. McCall:** — Thanks very much, Mr. Chair, and Madam Minister, officials. Welcome to the committee and welcome to the consideration of these supplementary estimates for Advanced Education.

I guess I have a hard time getting around what is the question that sort of comes to mind . . . And we can get into the specific projects, and there are a lot of great projects there, certainly. We can talk about what they mean to the individual institutions. But I guess the first question I have is this: this is the second year where what Advanced Education said at budget time could, as it turns out, could not be counted on throughout the year.

These are institutions that work very much in a trust relationship with the provincial government. And when the budget comes forward, that's what they plan on. That's what they count on. So that this government has seen fit to go out to this sector, not once but now twice, and say that, what we'd promised in the budget can't be counted on, is alarming. And it's not just alarming in . . . It's cause for concern from a bunch of different perspectives. One is, like how does . . . Does the minister have any concern about what this means for how people take the word of the minister or of this government when it comes to putting up funds that, again, these institutions are counting on? Does the minister have any thoughts in that regard?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Well thank you very much for the question, Mr. McCall. And I guess I would just say the response to that, quite simply, is that we can't go down the road of other provinces or the federal government. We have to be responsible. We have to be good stewards. And we have to get back to balance.

And there have been many, as I've said before, fraught, frank discussions about this. None of it is easy. None of it is taken lightly, but we are where we are. And I think the important thing to emphasize here is that the record in terms of better years I think is very important to consider and to keep these decisions in context. When we can, we do and have done.

And I would submit, I mean such things for example as the graduate retention plan which 63,000 students have benefited from in this province, the first home plan, Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship, these are valued, valuable programs that we are extremely proud of. And again, Mr. McCall, under this government, student supports have increased 330 per cent. There's been a 59 per cent increase to post-secondary institutions, 53 per cent in operating funding to our universities, and \$7.3 billion invested in post-secondary supports overall, half a billion dollars in capital funding. I call that no mean achievement.

So these are difficult times; there's no question. I would also point to the record in terms of PMR [preventative maintenance and renewal], preventative maintenance funding. It's been again significant — half a billion dollars since 2007-08. So yes, these are difficult times.

I think we're here today to speak about SIF specifically. And I would point out that, you know, we're very pleased that Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions were able to come to the table, invest in these projects that they consider to be their highest priorities and that they consider these projects important enough to use their own resources to match federal funding. And the province was able to support some regional college projects through its annual funding for preventative maintenance and renewal. But we leveraged everything that we could. They lost nothing, and we got, you know, about our per capita share.

So I believe that in spite of the fact that we are facing some challenges, we've also done our best in this regard and specifically in regard to what we're here today to discuss mainly which is the SIF fund.

**Mr. McCall:** — So in terms of, you know, next year or even the budgetary considerations that we'll have following the budget to come for 2017-18, you know, can the minister . . . What assurances does the minister have to provide this sector that it won't be a third year in a row where the provincial government promises one thing not just at election time but in the black and white of a budget and then in this case comes back with three months left to go in their fiscal saying that you can't count on the word of the provincial government; you can't count on the word of the Advanced Education Ministry?

What assurances can the minister provide that her word and the word of the ministry will mean anything to the sector as the next budget comes? Because if past is indeed prologue or the

best indicator of future behaviour is past behaviour, this is the second budget in a row where this government is coming back in behind and taking away dollars that were promised and that are counted on. What assurances does the minister have to provide the sector in this regard?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Well thank you again for the question, Mr. McCall. I wish I had a magic ball and could see into the future. As your colleague, the member for Saskatoon Nutana, herself acknowledged, it's inevitable that there are going to be shortfalls when commodity prices are what they are. And that's where we are. And so as I said before, none of this is taken lightly. None of it is easy, but certainly we start with the best of intentions.

And we certainly also mark the graciousness and the co-operation of our post-secondary institutions who have by and large indicated, despite the difficulties and challenges which I completely acknowledge, that they can absorb these changes without great impact on students, which is of course the most important thing. And we all hope things in terms of the economic forecasts improve.

**Mr. McCall:** — I don't envy the sector having to deal with a partner that they can't count on. Again, when the budgets come forward, this is what they make their plans on. This is what they in turn go out and, you know, negotiate contracts and negotiate agreements and do so in good faith thinking that they can count on the word of the provincial government. And here we are, second year in a row the sector can't do that.

[15:45]

And I guess the responsibility that we have in the opposition is to call attention to that. Because with the sector themselves, I think their response will be muted, to say the least, in terms of what they fear will be further cuts on the part of this government.

So what assurances does the minister have for the public, for the sector that when that budget is tabled in March of this year to come, that it'll be worth the paper it's written on and that the sector can actually count on the word of the minister and of this government when it comes to the funds being guaranteed in that budget, and that we won't be sitting here in some kind of supplementary exercise where those funds are then taken away?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Thank you for the editorial comment and question, Mr. McCall. As I said, I think it's very important to emphasize that the record of this government when it's come to commitment to post-secondary institutions and education in this province is exemplary. As I referenced, 59 per cent increase to post-secondary institutions, 53 per cent increase in operating funding to our universities. That's since '07-08.

And again, I mean, it must be said that the ministry is sharing in the burden and paying its share of 500,000 in administrative savings, 400,000 in deferred unallocated spending. We are doing our very best under difficult circumstances to work with institutions. Those were not obviously easy calls, but as I said before, I appreciate the graciousness and spirit of co-operation. I do believe they understand that these are challenging times. And this is not the time or place to get into speculation about

commodity prices or where we'll be. It's where we are now. It's, as I said, not an easy, unchallenging time, that's to be sure.

But again, as you reference the record of this government and what you perceive to be various degrees of ill will, which I absolutely discredit and discount, I would say it's important for some historical context here that we do look at the record when you were in government. And I would say that our record and your record, it's night and day. I mean over those 16 years you presided over, let's not forget, a 139 per cent increase, 139 per cent increase in arts and science tuition at the U of S [University of Saskatchewan]; 103 per cent in . . . 33 per cent increase at the U of R [University of Regina]; what was then SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology], 336 per cent increase. So in terms of goodwill, I would say that wasn't investing in post-secondary education; it was crippling it.

**Mr. McCall:** — Well if these are the things that give the minister cause for concern, perhaps she could explain to the committee how it is that Gradworks was announced to be wrapped up today. And the meaningful dollars and work experience that that has put in front of learners in this province, perhaps if the issues that the minister has explained are of such urgent concern for her, perhaps she could explain the thinking of the government in wrapping up Gradworks at this time.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — I will say on the program you referenced, Mr. McCall — that CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan] program, not Advanced Education — certainly in terms of impacts on students, that remains a top concern of course for the ministry and for me. And the hiring freeze that has been discussed, that has been brought in to address the funding situation and fiscal situation that we're currently in, does not affect the interns and co-op students and so on whom the ministry brings in.

**Mr. McCall:** — I thought with your express interest in the file that you'd have a bit more to say about why Gradworks is so disposable at this time, but I'm left wanting, Mr. Chair. Perhaps the minister can explain how it is that . . . And again this goes to the integrity of the ministry and the ability of the sector to count on the undertakings made by the ministry on the people of Saskatchewan's behalf.

Can the minister explain to the committee how it is that, having signed a five-year funding agreement just before the last provincial election with NORTEP-NORPAC [northern teacher education program-Northern Professional Access College], how it is that it wasn't, you know, months after that election that the ministry came forward reneging on that commitment — as further proof that the word of this government when it comes to folks involved in post-secondary education in this province, you know, they can take it with a massive grain of salt — how is it that that five-year funding agreement that was renewed was reneged upon right after the election?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Well as you'll know, Mr. McCall, any multi-year agreement has a termination option and is subject to annual appropriation. That is standard practice which you'll be aware of. And in 2015, a one-year funding agreement was proposed and NORTEP [northern teacher education program] chose to pursue a five-year agreement, but provincial funding

was not guaranteed.

**Mr. McCall:** — Does the minister recognize that there's a certain pattern when it comes to undertakings made by this ministry and this government when it comes to advanced education? That, you know, get the cheque as soon as you can and cash it because the undertakings can't be trusted; does that not concern the minister or officials in the slightest?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Okay. Well once again, I would say, there were a number of questions in that question. I guess you're going back to your original question about mid-year realities. And again I'll simply say the relationship and relationships that we have established with our post-secondary partners and our post-secondary institutions are valued, valuable, honourably carried out. We have regular meetings and discussions about the realities. And in contrast to the kind of ill will that you seem to be alluding to, I would point to the co-operative, gracious tone — realistic, but gracious — that was demonstrated by our post-secondary institutions last week upon news of this mid-year reality.

And again I would simply reference that when times were better, we invested substantially in post-secondary education. Now when times are not as good, there have had to be these corrections and, again, not taken lightly, not not advocated for, not discussed — quite the contrary. And that's where we are.

It is about attempting in a broad way to manage the books and manage things responsibly, and I do believe our post-secondary institutions understand that. I do because they also are undertaking their own initiatives, pursuing possibilities and ideas that might work better for them in terms of partnerships and collaborations and so on, which we absolutely welcome. But I do think that there's a recognition that in these times some things have to be thought out differently and looked at differently. And in many ways, that is to be welcomed.

**Mr. McCall:** — Again I think what is welcomed by the ministry partners is a partner that they can count on. And it's people's livelihoods, it's the well-being of the sector and all of these important tasks that we set out for it that are into the mix.

So I appreciate that the minister would like to gloss over the gravity of what this means for people being able to count on the word of the ministry or that their contract will mean something, that their undertakings will mean something. But if the minister can't recognize it, I don't know what hope there is for the situation, this being the second year where, here we are, this ministry has gone back on its undertakings to the sector. So it's . . .

The minister was talking about the difficult years that were part of the 16-year legacy of the government that I had the privilege of being a part of. Can the minister identify if in any of those years, the government went back into the budget, having determined it and having, you know, agreed upon what the situation was going to be, did they go back in and then renege on their commitments? Can the minister share that with the committee?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Well if we're going to begin to revisit these things from this purely political lens, I would then point to the

early '90s when post-secondary funding was most definitely cut. We can get into an either-or. We can get into all the other sectors that were seriously undermined and affected during those years. All I would say and come back to, Mr. McCall, is that in terms of post-secondary education and advanced education, which is what we are supposed to be discussing here today, that commitment has been very clear with all the investments and commitments that I have referenced prior to this.

And again I think that all one can expect in difficult times when money doesn't grow on trees is that you can retain an open and honourable relationship with your stakeholders, which I am absolutely committed to and which I believe the ministry is absolutely committed to. And it's simply about levelling with them and indicating that these aren't unchallenging times. And that's what drives this — no ill will, nothing of the sort — only an open and honest and honourable continuation of what has been a very strong, a very strong investment and commitment these last years since 2007-08.

[16:00]

**The Chair:** — Before we proceed I would like to welcome two additional members sitting in on the committee: MLA Muhammad Fiaz and MLA Cathy Sproule. I'd also like to remind members that we're talking about the 2016-17 supplementary estimates and the funding of 51-plus million dollars. And while it's nice to rehash the '90s — my hair was the same colour, not multicoloured as it is now — I wonder if we could talk about the supplementary estimates, please. I recognize Mr. McCall.

**Mr. McCall:** — Sure thing, Mr. Chair. Great counsel, as ever. And I guess my question to the minister would be this. In terms of the dollars under consideration here today, what sort of safeguards are there for the sector that the dollars being granted aren't going to be clawed back in some way, shape, or form in the next year, as has been the case this year and the year previous? What's your advice to the sector? Is it to, you know, cash those cheques as fast as they can? What advice might you have?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — First of all, I'll of course remind you, Mr. McCall, that this is federal money, and so these arrangements have been made. The flow through of funding will obviously occur. The proposals were put forward by the institutions themselves that were, institutionally speaking, near and dear to them, which they were willing to also contribute funding toward. As I say, these proposals were subject to repeated screening and were okayed and are now subject to quality control in the sense that there are quarterly reports that are presided over by members of the ministry and then working with the federal government to ensure that everything proceeds based on the evaluation criteria and smoothly and surely forward.

**Mr. McCall:** — So perhaps I've not understood correctly. Is the minister saying that these are all federal dollars and it's just flowing through the provincial government?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — No, we have the 217,500 that I referenced in my introduction. The majority of the money . . . For example

with Gabriel Dumont Institute, that project is 100 per cent virtually funded by the federal government. But most are 50 and then the rest to be matched by the institutions in various forms, some loans, etc. And the 217, as I say, 1,500 that is being contributed by the provincial government.

**Mr. McCall:** — So new dollars here on the part of the provincial government, once you net everything out, amounts to how much?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Sorry, I couldn't hear the question, the first part.

**Mr. McCall:** — Once you net everything out, how many new provincial dollars are represented in this expenditure that aren't flow-through, that aren't leveraged, that are actual new provincial dollars coming forward at this time?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — \$217,500.

**Mr. McCall:** — So \$217,000 which necessitated . . . to put that together, was underwritten by \$11.7 million in cuts. Am I understanding that correctly, Madam Minister?

**Mr. Boehm:** — So the funding amount coming from the federal government of course covers half the cost of the project, with the exception of the Gabriel Dumont project which is 100 per cent federally funded. The federal government required a funding partner in the case of this particular program, and that funding partner will — for the remainder of those projects, the other seven — will be the institutions themselves, with the exception of the 217,500.

**Mr. McCall:** — So again there are \$217,000, like once you get past flow-throughs. And I think I heard the minister say something untoward about the choices that the federal government has made in one of her interventions, when you'd think that, in the case of these dollars, the minister would be thanking the province's lucky stars that we had a partner like the federal government in terms of the Strategic Infrastructure Fund. Does the minister want to clarify that for the record?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Well one thing I would point to, Mr. McCall, there's nothing about lucky stars in this; it's about economic realities. And again, let's not forget that since 2007, we have provided nearly 494 million. That's half a billion in capital funding for post-secondary institutions.

There is simply no question that we haven't been on the lucky side of lucky, in terms of stars, for a number of years now. These were projects that . . . It was a federal program, as you well know how these types of programs work, and so there was an initiative by the federal government with federal infrastructure dollars. This is part of their approach with their targets in terms of what types of projects fit this model of theirs, and institutions submitted proposals as a result. It's a federal program.

**Mr. McCall:** — So again, here we are considering supplementary estimates. But for \$217,500 which, you know, is certainly a valuable contribution to make to the situation, that is to be considered alongside how many federal dollars which are being flowed through? Again for the record.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — 63 million.

**Mr. McCall:** — And again, we're here because the ministry and the minister and this government have seen fit to use this opportunity to also roll into that \$11.7 million of cuts. Is that accurate?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — They're not tied, Mr. McCall; they're two different things.

**Mr. McCall:** — I believe it was the minister that rolled them up into the sort of comprehensive itemization of what we're considering here today at the start of this hearing.

**Mr. Boehm:** — So given the budgeting process and accounting processes that government use, the \$63.2 million that's flow-through funds from the federal government will come into our budget, but at the same time, any other adjustments taking place with our budget are also considered at this time. With the mid-year reduction process, there will be \$11.7 million that will be savings within the Ministry of Advanced Education. And so the two numbers are netted off to leave roughly \$51 million in terms of the adjustment.

**Mr. McCall:** — Well thank you for that. And certainly that's helpful so that I don't get in trouble with the Chair in discussing something that's not on the agenda or doesn't directly roll into what we're considering here today in terms of these supplementary estimates. So I thank you for that restatement of the impact of these dollars as regards the matters under consideration here today.

And I guess if the minister or officials could . . . There's a backgrounder provided with the \$11.7 million of cuts that accompanied these largely federal, you know, the vast amount of them being federal dollars under consideration here today. Could the minister or officials break out for the committee the \$9.3 million in reduced grants to post-secondary education institutions? Could the minister or officials please do that?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Okay. So we're talking about 8.2 million in reduced operating grants to post-secondary institutions, 1.1 million in reduced preventative maintenance and renewal funding to the U of S, U of R, and Sask Poly. And that's it for the 9.3.

**Mr. McCall:** — Again 9.3 . . . Could the minister say that again, please?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — 8.2 million in reduced operating grants to post-secondary institutions, 1.1 million in reduced PMR funding to the U of S, U of R, and Sask Polytechnic.

**Mr. McCall:** — I'm just a hard-working opposition politician, so maybe the minister can explain the discrepancy between the spending decisions backgrounder that was provided and what the minister has just stated right now, where in Advanced Education, \$11.7 million: \$9.3 million in reduced grants to post-secondary institutions, \$1.5 million in preventative maintenance and renewal funding that had not yet been allocated, and 400,000 in reductions in discretionary post-secondary projects and reviews and 500,000 in administrative savings within the ministry. Can the minister

please explain that for the committee?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — No. There is no discrepancy, Mr. McCall, because you queried the 9.3, which is what I then told you.

**Mr. McCall:** — That's preventative maintenance in that. Is it essentially two columns where preventative maintenance is then appearing?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — The 1.5 million in preventative maintenance and renewal funding had not yet been allocated. There are two: the 1.1 million in reduced preventative maintenance and renewal funding to those institutions I listed, and then the 1.5 million in preventative maintenance and renewal funding that had not yet been allocated.

**Mr. McCall:** — In the \$800,000 reduction to all other post-secondary institutions, can the minister provide a breakdown for that under the heading of the \$9.3 million reduction to operating grants?

**Mr. Boehm:** — So beyond the University of Regina and University of Saskatchewan, there were reductions for a number of the other institutions. Primarily our federated and affiliated colleges saw a 1 per cent reduction in their operating grants, and I can list each of those amounts if you would like.

**Mr. McCall:** — Please.

**Mr. Boehm:** — So for Campion College, \$39,100; for Luther College, \$38,400; for St. Thomas More College, \$70,100; for First Nations University of Canada, \$38,300; for St. Peter's College, \$11,700; for the Lutheran Theological Seminary, \$2,300; for Briercrest, \$2,100; for Horizon College, \$1,600; for St. Andrew's College, \$1,200; for Emmanuel and St. Chad, \$700; and for Gabriel Dumont Institute, \$24,100.

**Mr. McCall:** — Thanks for that. In terms of the preventative maintenance and . . . You know, I've yet to run across an institution where those dollars weren't hotly sought after. And again, that there were any dollars that went unallocated in that budget seems curious to me. Can the minister or officials talk about the kind of preventative maintenance, what the breakdown is in terms of the cut that is provided here today to those institutions?

[16:15]

**Mr. Boehm:** — So the adjustments to institutions' preventative maintenance and renewal dollars included \$275,300 for the University of Regina, \$718,800 for the University of Saskatchewan, and Sask Polytechnic saw a reduction of \$65,900.

**Mr. McCall:** — I thank the official for that answer. In terms of the \$400,000 in reductions in discretionary post-secondary projects and reviews, what is the impact of those dollars?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Okay, so that would cover project funding that would include quality assurance reviews, governance training for board members across the province, Canadian Networks of Centres of Excellence dedicated to supporting applied and industrial research . . . Sorry, no, that's working

with . . . discretionary, discretionary projects that haven't been started or administrative savings.

**Mr. McCall:** — So is the minister contending that board training was discretionary?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — In terms of governance training, the feeling has been that we've made exceptional progress over the last few years and have gotten to a point where we are, if not caught up, virtually caught up in terms of the effects that were expected and in terms of outcomes and improvements when it's come to governance training. So we feel that this is a point at which we can take, if you like, a holiday from that for a time.

**Mr. McCall:** — I hope that we're not here in future talking about the holiday that was taken from board governance training should something like what happened at Carlton Trail regional college and Muenster happen again. I'd state that for the record.

In terms of the dollars here today under consideration, of the cuts provided here today, how many of these were attached to normal budgetary process within the ministry and how much would be considered under transformational change?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — The massive majority, or overwhelming majority, would be in the normal course of business, as it were, and not under the transformational change rubric.

**Mr. McCall:** — So in the consideration of budgetary estimates for the year current, your predecessor as minister couldn't provide assurances around what was going to happen with the boards of the universities themselves in terms of the way that those boards are appointed or whether or not there would indeed be some kind of merger into one big university or . . . turning back the clock high on 40-odd years.

I guess in terms of the work that is, I'm sure, ongoing in the ministry around transformational change, what is under consideration under transformational change? What is under consideration in terms of departments being consolidated between the institutions themselves and their governance? What is there yet to come in terms of the work of this government and the post-secondary education sector and transformational change in the days ahead?

**The Chair:** — Madam Minister, before you respond, you need to consider whether or not transformational change is part of this budget or future considerations.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Yes, I agree, Mr. Chair. Thank you. It is not a part of this budget. It is part of future considerations. And they are ongoing and in many ways, I believe, will be quite innovative. I would say that when it comes to transformational change just quite generally . . .

**The Chair:** — Madam Minister, if you talk about transformational change, you will have to answer questions about transformational change.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Okay, then I'll defer to you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. McCall:** — Mr. Chair, you're fair to a fault as ever, but

thank you for that. And I guess at this time, Mr. Chair, that's, you know . . . I guess transformational change will be one big surprise to come in the budget. And you know, one can only imagine what surprises might yet to be revealed considering the way that, you know, the budgets set by this ministry seem not to matter as much as they should, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the seriousness of the undertaking that it represents, the commitment that it represents to the sector, and the way that those partners are indeed held hostage to the decisions of this government and, you know, when those decisions are seemingly made on budget day, how they get unmade in the year to come.

So I guess I don't have many more questions, Mr. Speaker. I guess just one comment. Those undertakings are a serious matter for the sector. They're a serious matter for the institutions in question. And if they can't be counted on, and if this ministry can't be counted on to keep its word, then the very important jobs that we set out for that critical sector in this province, for our society and our economy and our communities, they get all the more difficult.

And despite what the minister has had to say about honourable undertakings, the proof is in the pudding. And traditionally those dollars get counted out at the budget, and that's the indication of just how serious this government takes its word. So if we're here in a year's time for yet another third annual round of this government can't be counted on, I don't know what to say to that. So with that, Mr. Speaker, I'd thank the minister and officials for the consideration of these supplementary estimates here today, and that's all for me.

**The Chair:** — Okay, thank you. Are there any further questions? Seeing none, we will move on. Madam Minister, do you have any closing remarks before we vote this off?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — No, I don't, Mr. Chair. Thank you to my officials for your attention in this matter.

**The Chair:** — Okay, thank you very much. Vote no. 37, Advanced Education on page 13 of the Supplementary Estimates, post-secondary education subvote (AE02) in the amount of 51,452,000, is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2017, the following sums for Advanced Education in the amount of \$51,452,000.

Would someone so move? Mr. Fiaz. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Okay, we have another supplementary estimate coming in, so we will take a short recess, hopefully no more than 10 minutes . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Okay, the Clerk informs me that it being late in the afternoon, Social Services will be coming in at 7, so the committee is recessed to 7 o'clock.



[The committee recessed from 16:25 until 19:00.]

**The Chair:** — It now being 7 o'clock, the Human Services Committee will reconvene. With us this evening for MLAs we have MLA Nadine Wilson, MLA Lori Carr who is substituting for Roger Parent, MLA David Buckingham, MLA Mark Docherty, and MLA Muhammad Fiaz. The opposition, we have MLA David Forbes who is guesting here, and MLA Nicole Rancourt, the sitting member.

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

**Subvotes (SS04) and (SS03)**

**The Chair:** — We will be reviewing the supplementary estimates for the Social Services committee. So I would like to welcome the minister here this evening and, Madam Minister, if you would care to proceed and introduce your officials that you wish to have speaking. Any other official that may approach the table and speak, please ask them to introduce themselves when they do so. And so you may proceed with your officials and your presentation.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Thank you very much. Good evening, Mr. Chair, and committee members. I'm pleased to be here today to discuss the Ministry of Social Services supplementary estimates. That's echoing quite a bit.

I'd like to begin by introducing the officials here with me today. They are Greg Miller who is my deputy minister. We also have Constance Hourie who is the assistant deputy minister of income assistance programs; Natalie Huber who you met last time, acting assistant deputy minister for child and family programs. Behind us we have Lynn Allan who is the assistant deputy minister for housing programs, at the back; Bob Wihlidal, also the assistant deputy minister for disability programs; Elissa Aitken, the executive director for income assistance programs — she's not here. Tim Gross is over in the corner. And Ellen McGuire, director of child and family programs.

In many ways, folks, the Ministry of Social Services reflects what is going on in our society. Demand for our services can be seen as a way of measuring the impact of many external factors on Saskatchewan residents, factors over which we have no control.

Today, as you all know, our province is facing some fiscal challenges that are deeper and longer lasting than we anticipated due to lower resource prices. The unemployment rate has risen and at the same time our population continues to grow. In large part because of these factors, more people and families are turning to Social Services for income assistance, and more children are coming into care. As a result, the ministry is reporting a forecast overspend of 55 million in 2016-17. I'd like to speak a bit more in detail about this pressure before I take your questions.

In income assistance, of the \$55 million overspend, 43.4 million is due to pressure in the ministry's income assistance area in

these amounts: the Saskatchewan assistance program or SAP [Saskatchewan assistance plan] is 10 million; the Saskatchewan assured income for disability or the SAID program is 14 million; the transitional employment allowance or TEA is 12.7 million; and the Saskatchewan rental housing supplement at 6.7 million. Included in these numbers is the forecast pressure of 4.6 million that would have been saved had we proceeded with the changes to income assistance programs that were announced earlier this year in the budget, so those paused changes that we rolled back on. The remaining amount stems from higher than anticipated caseloads in all programs, primarily because of the economic downturn and the correlating increases in unemployment.

In September of this year, the caseload in SAP, SAID, and TEA stood at 33,522 cases, up by 3,013 cases or 10 per cent over September of last year. The increasing incidence of disability in the Saskatchewan population is having an impact on both SAP and SAID. The number of clients with a disability averaged an increase of 9 per cent a year for the last four fiscal years. The likelihood of disability increases with age. In fact the incidence of disability among those ages 45 to 64 is almost triple that among those ages 25 to 44.

The TEA caseload is made up of clients who are fully employable. The number of those fully employable clients increased by 11 per cent in 2015-16 after four years of decline, and continues to increase at an even faster rate this year. The change in the fully employable caseload correlates closely with the provincial unemployment rate. We have also seen an increase in the number of families and people with disabilities applying for the Saskatchewan rental housing supplement.

In our child and family programs area, we are experiencing a pressure of 11.6 million at mid-year. Of that, 9 million comes from child and family program maintenance and support and 2.6 million from the child and family program delivery. Through program maintenance and support, we provide funding to families, foster parents, and other caregivers who provide homes to children in care.

The number of foster parents in the province has decreased dramatically in the last number of years, from 793 in 2006 to 501 as of October 31st of this year, a decline of 37 per cent or about 292 homes. At the same time, the number of children being removed from unsafe situations and needing protection is rising. Public promotion of the revised provincial child abuse protocol in October of 2014 is thought to be one of the reasons we are seeing increased calls and subsequent reports of child abuse and neglect.

Following the release of the protocol in 2015, there were 28,959 calls to child protection intake, nearly 4,000 more calls than the previous year's total of 25,079. These calls in 2015 translated into 2,349 reports of child abuse. I should point out, however, that the category of "no adult willing or able" continues to constitute just under 80 per cent of all ongoing child protection legal status cases.

Police services in Saskatchewan, in addition, report increases in drug-related and domestic violence incidents and arrests, resulting in more calls and investigation regarding the safety of children involved. We have discussed this in question period.

With newer foster homes, we have been creating new emergency receiving spaces around the province just to try to keep up with the number of children that are coming into our care. From May to October of this year, all 96 of the emergency receiving spaces that existed in Regina at that time were full. When these emergency receiving spaces are not available to our workers, we have no other option but to put kids in hotels. Between April and October of this year, 193 children were placed in Regina hotels, cared for 24-7 by trained staff.

And I am pleased to interject here and report that as a result of our efforts to open up emergency receiving spaces, particularly here in Regina, we have had 26 consecutive days of no children in hotels. Obviously placing children in hotels is not an ideal situation but leaving children at home or in another situation where they may be at risk is simply not an option. As I said before, we have developed further emergency receiving spaces around the province for a total of 233; 96 of those are in Regina. But as recently as yesterday, all those spaces were full.

The 2.6 million overspend in program delivery reflects the salary pressure in child and family programs. Year over year the division salary base has not been sufficient to cover their complement of FTEs [full-time equivalent]. This year to address the increasing number of children coming into care and the resulting need for new emergency spaces and foster home approval, existing staff have been reallocated and term staff hired.

Reductions to expenditures of 9.2 million. My officials and I have been very conscious of the ministry's fiscal challenges and we began looking for potential savings earlier this year. Our mid-year forecast pressure of 55 million is net of \$9.2 million in spending reductions that we were able to identify. This 9.2 million reduction includes administrative savings within the ministry of 0.6 million. For example, we have encouraged out-of-scope staff to use vacation entitlements and therefore reducing liability.

We were also able to realize program savings of 8.6 million that are not expected to have a direct impact on clients. As Valley View Centre winds down its operations, we are realizing reductions in operating costs. As well the transition of residents from the centre into community homes will occur later in the year than originally planned and the provision of new community living support services has been slower than expected. These items account for 5 million in reductions.

We expect to spend 5.5 million of the 8 million budgeted for the first home plan reintroduced earlier this year to help post-secondary graduates buy a home, saving \$2.5 million. Two of our child and family programs can be handled internally, so costs can be reduced this year by 1.1 million. We will save half a million dollars by staging the provincial rollout of the flexible response approach and we can save just over another half a million dollars, 0.6 to be exact, by reducing our contract with the Children's Research Centre and proceed with work in-house. We have the ability to train the trainers now.

In conclusion, as I alluded to earlier, we are very conscious of how our ministry's financial pressure impacts the financial position of the province overall. I think it is important to remember that the 2016-2017 budget for our ministry was

nevertheless upped by 5.1 per cent, which represents record investment levels in this ministry. We are working hard to be efficient and effective at the same time that we continue to deliver programs and services to Saskatchewan's vulnerable populations. Our income assistance programs alone serve more than 100,000 people, with an annual budget of 500 million.

We are undertaking a major redesign of these programs to simplify administration and most importantly improve client service and support people's transitions to independence and participation in the economic and social life of the province. This will be the biggest change to income assistance in more than 50 years.

Across government we are looking at transformational changes like this to make our programs more cost effective and sustainable and to improve outcomes for those in greatest need.

Mr. Chair, that concludes my remarks. We would be pleased to answer questions at this time.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Are there any questions? I recognize Mr. Forbes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — In terms of the child and family services, is the Linkin system fully operational? What's it costing now to run a year?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Yes, it is fully operational, but I will just check on what it's costing to run it.

Our officials are looking for the annual operating cost of Linkin, if we can circle back to that question. Okay.

[19:15]

**Mr. Forbes:** — Sure. A couple of short ones then. A little about the housing. I'm just curious about, you mentioned about disability, and how it's on the increase. Is there a work-related element to it to people who don't qualify for WCB [Workers' Compensation Board] or other older workers who've been injured but, you know, can't really claim anywhere else so they're coming to SAID?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Okay, sorry about that. So apparently we are going . . . There are about 15,000 that are on WCB . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Sorry, did I misstate that, Constance? On SAID. Pardon me. Yes, on SAID. And so we actually have to segregate the numbers in order to be able to provide you with a more fulsome answer to that question. So I've got it noted here, and we'll circle back to that as well.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And we can come back in the spring too. It's something that's of interest to me because I see people coming in the office; they can't complete their physio because they've got arthritis in one knee, and therefore they can't do the physio for the other knee. And then they're just hooped, and they're 55 or 58. And you know, it's something of what you were speaking, an aging population but can't manage the physio and all that other stuff.

So I think it's an important program to have SAID there to pick up. But I am curious, and I am curious. We had talked about

this many years ago. For example, on First Nation reserves, many don't have WCB coverage and could be injured. When people move into the cities, there is no coverage for that injury, and so it would fall to SAID programs and things like that even though it was work related which speaks to another issue which is an important issue. So yes. But yes, if you can come back with that answer further down the road, that's fine.

And the other one was around 100,000 users or clients. And I know you mentioned it a couple of weeks ago when we had the briefing. Could you break that down? So 33,500 are on income assistance and disability services. How does that . . . That's 1 in 10 people in Saskatchewan are accessing those services. So if you could break that down a little bit for me, that would be great.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Okay. So in the Saskatchewan assistance program, there are currently 26,571 people as of September of 2016. In the SAID program, there were 18,142 people, again as of September 2016. In the TEA program, the transitional employment allowance, there were 10,286 people; the seniors' income program, 14,179; the personal care home benefit, folks who were accessing that program, 792; the Saskatchewan employment supplement, 14,062; the rental housing supplement, 3,399. And then we don't have figures on the number of people on the child care subsidies because that goes to cases and not to individual people.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Thank you. Now my questions, and this is really the reason I'm here, is I'm interested in the rental housing supplement and the reason the increase of 6.7 million. I'm not sure if you covered that in your opening remarks. If you did, may I ask you just to revisit that briefly.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So the caseload in the Saskatchewan rental housing supplement outpaced our expectations. The 2016-17 budget included assumptions that rising vacancy rates and the increase in the market supply for housing would create additional choices for renters and help stabilize a reduced rent in the province. But what we've found is that rents have remained high in many parts of the province, and there is therefore a strong demand for this program. The Saskatchewan rental housing supplement is currently being reviewed however, as part of our income assistance redesign. So we need to see how that will fit into the overall scheme of things in the IA [income assistance] redesign as well.

**Mr. Forbes:** — I just heard, I just heard today, and I don't know if the member's heard this, but the vacancy rate in Saskatoon is 10 per cent which is unbelievable.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — I just saw that before we came here, yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Yes. Unbelievable. But you would think that would have an impact on rents, but I guess, you know, it is an interesting marketplace out there. One of the components of the supplement was that there would be inspections done of the property so that it was sort of a win-win. Landlords could boost their rent a bit but be able to get some money so they could keep up the property. That was often the concern was they couldn't afford to do the maintenance. So are there inspections being happening in particularly the two major cities, Regina and

Saskatoon?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So you asked about Regina and Saskatoon. So in Saskatoon, 766 were conducted to date this year for home inspections. And in Regina there were . . . Where's my number for Regina? Sorry, it was 766 in both Regina and Saskatoon.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay, and who's carrying out the . . . Who are doing the inspections? Who's got the contract to do that?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — The city of Regina and the city of Saskatoon carried out those inspections.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay, good, thanks. So now are there . . . I always found it odd that people could be living in Sask Housing units and be eligible to get the rental supplement. Is that still the case?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So you are correct; that is no longer the case. A person who lives in one of our social housing units pays 30 per cent of their rent geared to income.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Now when we had met in the spring or in June, at the time there was another MLA was the minister. I had remarked on, with interest, the fact that the estimate needed for the rental housing supplements, thirty-seven million two hundred and fifty, which was the same as last year. So I guess it's going to go up to about 44 million, if I do my math correctly.

And so at that time — and you had alluded to this, that you were doing some . . . the ministry was doing some analysis, and finding what they could do with the increased costs. And you had alluded to a bit of it, that the ministry had thought that with the vacancy rates going up that the rents would come down and there would be some impact there. What other things are you finding out?

[19:30]

Is there, you know . . . Is this happening across Canada, that this program is being so, I don't want to say overly subscribed, but I guess that's the way it is. It's just been such huge demand by the public. What are the kind of findings you're looking at? Can you give us some things of where you might be heading over the next couple of months or into the spring?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So a couple of things. First, you know, as part of the income assistance redesign project that we'll be doing, we will be reviewing what's happening in other jurisdictions — that review hasn't occurred yet — and also what best practices are happening in other jurisdictions with respect to rental housing supplements. There's been about a 10 per cent vacancy rate increase, as you mentioned, in the city of Saskatoon, but there's been about a 1 per cent decrease in rents. So there seems to be a lag where the market is catching up to the current flooding of supply, if you will, and so that would be the other reason to account for this issue.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And I would be interested in as well, as you're looking forward into the next months . . . You know, I think this may be pretty close to the 10 years the program has been in

existence. I think it was brought in in either '05 or '06. So you've got quite a study now. And it'd be interesting to know how, have people been on it for . . . What's the average length of time people stay on the program? Does it tend to have an effect on communities where people stay in one place? And that's a good thing. That's not a bad thing.

And the other thing, and I've always raised this, is do we know who the landlords are who are getting it? Now we know Sask Housing isn't getting it, so that's one landlord. But there are others, that it would be I think something of value to know. Are there larger corporations getting it or is it the mom and pop getting it? Who's on that side?

So I would encourage you to take a look at those kinds of answers, but I think we'll be looking for more discussion in the spring on this for sure. So with that I'll end my questions and I'll turn it over to my colleague. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — I recognize Ms. Rancourt.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I want to again thank all of the staff that are here tonight to answer questions. I really enjoy this committee work and learning a lot more about the ministry and all the work that goes behind what you guys do, you know. And so I really appreciate everything that you do and I'm happy that you guys are here again this evening on a blustery, cold day. I think winter's here.

So I'm going to start with asking some questions. I think I'm going to start with the income assistance because my colleague here was talking about that a little bit. And I want to get back to talking about the Saskatchewan assistance program. I was going to use the abbreviation, SAP. That's what I know it by but I think everyone talks that language, right? And so there was an additional \$10 million that was provided for this program. And I was wondering how many more cases do we have now since budget came out.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — There's a forecast of 610 more cases since budget.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And how does this compare to this time last year, the amount of cases?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So it's actually . . . Sorry. So our SAP caseload is actually down by 0.4 per cent from last month and down 356 cases or 2.6 per cent from this month last year.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. And so I'm wondering if the 610 more cases from budget to next budget to add to that 10 million, is all of that allotted money going towards providing more income assistance to clients or is it allocated to different areas? Could you break that down a little bit?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Can you just clarify? Are you asking about their rate card for food, shelter, etc.?

**Ms. Rancourt:** — What I'm asking is if that whole \$10 million is going towards income assistance or if it's being broken down into different levels of that program, like for staffing or for admin or anything like that.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — The 10 million is all for benefits to clients. It doesn't include salaries.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And then there's an additional 12.7 million being given to the TEA program. And can you highlight how many more people are on the TEA program from budget time.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So from budget time to now there are 1,601 cases in TEA.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And that's over. Okay. And how does this compare to as last year?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Last year our TEA caseload . . . sorry, our TEA caseload is up 95.2 per cent from this month last year. So 2,440, so which is a 95.2 per cent increase.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. And so with the spring estimates the minister at the time was talking about how there was going to be, trying to get clients off of the SAP program and more so on the TEA program when possible. So how is that transition going?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So all new fully employable clients coming into the system go into TEA. Those who were fully employable and on SAP will stay on SAP until their circumstances change.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Has there been extra money allocated to training programs to help people who would be, the additional people that are on the TEA program?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Those training programs would be covered under the Ministry of the Economy. They're not covered under Social Services.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. That led me to another question. I knew there was some aspects of the TEA program that are under the Ministry of Economy and I was wondering why there was some of that aspects under that ministry. Is it because of the employment aspect?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — The Ministry of the Economy handles all skills training and apprenticeship programs and that's why they handle that end of the . . . We handle the income assistance supports.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So is there other programs within the Ministry of Social Services that aren't under the TEA program that would be under the Ministry of the Economy, or is that the only area?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So if I'm understanding your question accurately, you're asking if there's a similar program to TEA in the Ministry of the Economy, like the provincial training allowance?

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Yes.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Yes, in the Ministry of the Economy they have the provincial training allowance which I can't speak to very much here because I don't have a lot of knowledge about it, to be honest. I just know that it's there.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay, thank you. And then with the SAID program, there was 14 million additional in this budget. So how many more people are on the SAID program now than from the budget in the spring?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — There are 827 more cases in the SAID budget. There are 827 more cases since budget in the SAID program.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And how does this compare to this time last year?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — It's up 4.8 per cent from this month last year.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — You made some reference to the fact that rental costs have stayed about the same and are quite high. And I'm sure as you know, when I talked about the SAID program, how I believe that the shelter allowance isn't reflective of the current rental costs and that my understanding in the shelter allowance, there hasn't been much of an increase in some of the Social Services income assistance programs for many, many years. And so I'm wondering with the increase in this budget, is any of that going to go to help support shelter allowance increase?

[19:45]

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So in the SAID program, the SAID program provides a living benefit, which is how the disability community wanted those funds to be doled out, so that they could make their own independent decisions about where they wanted to allocate resources and that that funding didn't have strings attached, that it needed to go here and there. That benefit has been increased four times over the last number of years. However, the funding that we are dedicating to this this year is all to caseloads.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And what about the shelter allowance for people who are on the SAP or TEA program, will that increase at all?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So the Saskatchewan rental housing supplement has increased seven times over its life cycle in the last number of years and was previously indexed to market rates. This year the amount of money that we've put in the budget that will go to the supplements is to deal with the caseload pressure in SAP, so it will not go to an increase in the Saskatchewan rental housing supplement.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. This is my first budget and my first supplementary estimates and so it seems like there was a lot more added to the budget. Is this typical? Like what were additions to the budget like in previous years?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So the ministry has appeared before supplementary estimates in previous years. So just to give you a bit of a breakdown of that, in 2015-16 there was a special warrant for \$48 million. A large portion of that was due to the wildfire season in 2015, and also due to increased costs for medically fragile children and cost pressures for private treatment facilities and family services programs in particular.

In 2014-15, we were at supplementary estimates for 29 million, a little over 29 million, mainly for the provision of increased cost per case for the SAID program, as well for the provision of emergency social services and higher construction costs on some of our homes.

In 2013-2014, we were here at supplementary estimates and that request was for 39 million. That was costs relating to fires and floods that occurred over the spring and summer. And then there was . . . We were not here in 2012-2013, nor were we here in 2011 and 2012. We were, however, here in 2010 and '11. And at that time the request was for 52.5 million and that was mainly for cost sharing the social housing agreement with the federal government.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So when you budgeted this allotment, did you take into account the savings that could have been found from the policy changes to the program that were announced in the budget, some of the changes that you're going to be doing?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So it was the changes that we would have . . . Pardon me, the savings that would have been incurred would have been 4.6 million had we proceeded with the income assistance changes that were announced in the budget. So deciding not to pursue with those, proceed with those changes, has lost that 4.6 million in savings.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Was that savings for making those changes with the SAID program or changes for other programs as well?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — There were five changes associated with that. And I'm just going to quickly grab some information so I can run through them again.

So I made an error; there were four. So one of the changes was to eliminate the Saskatchewan rental housing supplement exemption in the SAID program, and that would have been 2.1 million in savings.

The second was discontinuing grandfathering for SAP and SAID clients who receive excess shelter benefits as a result of living in communities that previously had low vacancy rates, and that would have resulted in 800 K of savings.

The third one was to end the practice of exempting the seniors' income program from the GIS [guaranteed income supplement] top-up benefits from SAP and SAID, and that would have resulted in 700 K in savings.

And then the final one was to end the practice of grandfathering families with children age 13 or over that were receiving the Saskatchewan employment supplement, and that would have resulted in 1 million in savings.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — With the new plan to roll out these changes as people's circumstances change, has this been accounted for in the budget in any ways?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So we did forecast for a very, very, very small number of people whose circumstances would have changed in this budget.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — How many people do you think that might

be?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So when these changes were announced, we were looking at 2,700 clients who would be affected. So it would be a very marginal part of the 2,700 clients. And people's life circumstances change all the time, so we don't have a way of tracking, at the moment, how many of those clients may or may not be affected.

And while I have this, also I want to go back, circle back to the member for Saskatoon Centre's question regarding Linkin. Since implementation was completed one year ago, we no longer budget independently for the Linkin system. It's part of our overall operating grant, so it's all lumped in to the operating.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And I'm going to ask this question because we've had a lot of calls in our office, so I know my CA [constituency assistant] will be happy I asked the question. But we've had a lot of calls for people that are on assistance that have had late payments and up to five days late. And they were told that there was some issues. I don't know what exactly those issues are, but could you guys explain that a little bit for me?

[20:00]

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So just a clarifying question: was this in relation to the postal strike, or was it in relation to a particular one of the seven programs that we offer?

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Well I know the people that I could think of were on the TEA program, and it was more recently. And they said it wasn't just one or two months; it was multiple months. And some of them were having issues with regards to the rent because they were quite a few days late and so, like I know there was a lot of calls to your office, and they said that they were trying to work out the issue. I'm just wondering what that issue was.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So we are not aware of a ministry-wide issue with the TEA payments, but however if you have information about those individuals who were having delays, we'd be happy to look into those issues and see what the problem was and make sure that whatever it was gets resolved.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Yes, I think it was more of a computer program issue, and so I didn't know if it had to do with Linkin — I know there was some issues with regards to that — or if there's a different computer program that you use for income assistance. But I hope that gets rectified soon.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — We would be happy to look into those for you.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Yes. And I'll give you guys a little plug. I know when my CA and other CAs have called your office they do get a good response, so I really have to congratulate you guys on that as well. So . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, for sure.

So now I'm going to ask some questions with regards to the programming aspects and the changes here. And so I was wondering if you could break down the expenses for the child

and family program maintenance and support.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So I first need to do a correction. I misspoke earlier about the numbers, and so I want to correct that first. In our child and family program maintenance and support of 9 million, most of that is due to the increased number in uses of emergency receiving spaces. Province wide I believe I said 233 emergency receiving spaces; it should be 255. And I said including 96 in Regina; it should be 115. I apologize for that. There must have been a missed paper somewhere.

So the 9 million that we've asked for in additional funds for our child and family maintenance and support is to add 130 new emergency receiving spaces, so that will be 130 in addition to the 125 that we already have.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And so could you expand on those emergency receiving services, where they are and what type of service they are?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So 10 of those emergency receiving spaces are in Prince Albert; 10 are in Meadow Lake; six are in Melfort-Nipawin; Regina would have 89 of the 130, right; Saskatoon would have an additional five; and Yorkton would have 10 for a total of 130 new emergency receiving spaces.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And when you see, like, where are they being? Like what places . . .

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So what organizations more specifically?

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Yes.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So I'll just give you a couple of examples — CUMFI [Central Urban Métis Federation Inc.], the Central Urban Métis Federation, has five of those spaces in Saskatoon. So those are the five new ones that we've opened there that come out of the . . . The Yorkton Tribal Council has 10 of the new ones. The Thomas Circle of Care has the majority of the ones in Regina. In Meadow Lake the North West Friendship Centre has, let's see, they've got 10 there. And Pasqua First Nation, actually Pasqua First Nation also has four in Regina, pardon me, so it's not all Thomas Circle of Care.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. What about Prince Albert?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Sorry. Prince Albert. I don't have that there. Oh here, yes PAGC [Prince Albert Grand Council] Holdings.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Then I must've missed Meadow Lake and Melfort-Nipawin.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Meadow Lake, there were 10 that went to the North West Friendship Centre and in Melfort-Nipawin it's the North East Outreach and Support Services.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And what kind of . . . Like does your staff train the people who are working in these agencies or are they

already established?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So a couple of things here. First of all, the staff obviously would have first aid, CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation], early childhood, but the CBO [community-based organization] actually trains their staff. So we provide them with policy manuals and then we have a reg team that goes to the CBOs and reviews how processes are working. We also have a community service development individual who liaisons with the organizations to make sure that any questions regarding quality assurance or processes are handled.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — I noticed that almost 100 of these placements are in the southern area of the province, Regina and Yorkton. Is there a reason why there's so many in the southern province? Is there an influx of kids in care in the southern area of the province?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So there is a larger demand for service in the Regina area, and specifically there was a real need for emergency receiving spaces in Regina because some of those kids were ending up in hotels, and so that's one of the reasons why we opened up those new emergency receiving spaces. We also had more requests from CBOs that were already capable of providing that service.

In the North, 13 of the 16 First Nations agencies that we work with are in the northern region of the province and they tend to provide more family care-based options, and that seems to be much more readily available and much more common practice there than it seems to be here.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — You were saying that it's been 26 days that there's been no children in hotels in Regina. How about the rest of the province?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Yes, that's province wide.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — How much does it cost for one of these spaces?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Receiving space, do you mean? So on average, the average emergency receiving space is \$350.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Per day?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — That is per day. Yes.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And what's an average stay for a youth or a child being in one of these emergency placements?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — We're just pulling that, and we will circle back if that's okay.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Yes, for sure. So is any of the money that's being allocated out of this \$9 million for the child and family program, is any of this due to employment increase within your ministry?

[20:15]

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So out of the \$2.6 million

pressure that we've identified as relating to child and family program service delivery, part of that will include temporary staffing due to increasing and more complex caseloads that we have in that area.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Why are you looking at filling it with temporary staff instead of permanent?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So the temporary allows us to actually have the flexibility to move people and positions around as demand dictates.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So how many more positions are you allocating for?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — It looks like we're going to have to come and circle back with that one.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And when you get the answer for that, could you let me know which offices they'll be placed in? Then I'm going to ask if you could . . . There was the 2.6 million that was given to child and family program delivery. Can you break that down? Or is that what the temporary employment? That's . . .

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — [Inaudible] . . . just it, yes.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. Sorry about that.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — No problem. I'm new at this too.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So how many current vacancies are in child and family services across the board?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — What do you mean by vacancies?

**Ms. Rancourt:** — That there's a vacant position.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Okay. We don't track vacancies across the whole ministry. If we knew what location you were interested in, we could get that data together for you and respond.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Well I was wondering what the vacancy rate was across the board to the different locations. And I realize that a lot of these vacant positions are being backfilled. Like I know in the Prince Albert area there's quite a few and they're being backfilled by staff from Regina and Saskatoon. And so I wanted to know how many positions were vacant and then how many of those were being backfilled, and how much a backfilled position costs like with regards to the expenses.

[20:30]

**Mr. Miller:** — Greg Miller, deputy minister. The system that we have right now doesn't allow us to answer that question in that form. We would have to calculate the vacancies region by region.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Do you have that information?

**Mr. Miller:** — As I said, we would have to endeavour to make

those calculations region by region. We don't have that information here tonight.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. I think that's quite troubling that that information isn't readily available because I would assume that that would be a costly factor within your budget when you're talking about staffing expenses and backfilling vacancies and how much that impacts a budget. And so I would really appreciate to get that information because I would think that that would have a huge impact on the increase to your budget. But if we want to do region to region, we know that just recently there was a media release that said that there was 30 vacant positions in northern areas. Can you explain that a little bit more?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So there are 34 actually in the northern region. I think you indicated 30, but there is 34. And they break down in the following way: 8 were supervisory positions . . . So I'll talk about the type of positions and then I'll talk about the locations in the North, if that's okay. So of the 34 in the north service area, 8 are supervisory positions, 13 would be called front-line child protection staff, and 13 are a collection of other staff members. They range from child care workers to resource workers. And some of these 34 come from 13 maternity leaves that are in the north service area. I don't have the breakdown of which of those are mat leaves in there. And then in terms of location, if you're ready, 15 are from P.A. [Prince Albert]; 4 are from North Battleford; 4 are from Meadow Lake; 4 are from Buffalo Narrows, La Loche; 4 from Creighton, Nipawin; 2 from Melfort; and 1 from Lloydminster.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. So how many of these positions are being backfilled?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — We're backfilling all of them.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And are all of the ones that are being backfilled people from outside of those communities?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — We are in the staffing process right now so we can't comment on where they're from at the moment.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And how much are you spending on expenses such as hotels and meals and travelling expenses to backfill these positions?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — We don't have totals yet because the backfilling process is still under way.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — How long have these vacant positions been an issue in that area?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — It started near the end of September.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So this hasn't been an ongoing issue?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Recruitment is always an issue, but it has not been an issue of this magnitude previously.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So what's being done to fill these positions, especially since your government talked about having a hiring

freeze?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So first of all, while there is a hiring freeze on some positions in government, we will be able to staff our critical front-line positions despite that. Secondly, we do have an interim plan and so we've deployed staff from other offices and will continue to do that as needed. We've seconded some staff members and we also hired a staffing coordinator to help mobilize all these issues, track the positions, and target candidates to fit those.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And when you say target candidates to fit those, what kind of things are being done, like programs or outreach to find employees?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So we have been engaging with the Faculty of Social Work to promote and engage. And we've also been talking about a communications activity plan with no-cost ways to promote applying for northern CFP [child and family programs] positions, and that would also include, of course, practicum positions. We're also exploring the possibility of non-traditional work hours for some of the northern areas. And so we're trying to figure out a number of options that might make recruitment and retention there a little bit more attractive.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — I noticed that La Ronge wasn't an area that you mentioned of having any vacancies. Do they have any vacancies at this time?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — La Ronge is supported by the La Ronge First Nations . . . no, Indian Child and Family Services. Is that correct? Yes. And so we can't speak to whatever vacancies they may have internal to their organization.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. So the Ministry of Social Services has indicated that it's going to be a priority to keep children with their family, and they want to go more so in that route. So I'm wondering if any of the money that's been allocated to this budget is set aside to put towards that goal.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So the monies that the wraparound services and supports for families would've been part of our budget. But what we have here is for the supplementaries that we are talking about tonight. There is no new money for those programs and supports here. This is just managing caseload and utilization pressures.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. So there is no money put aside for new programming in regards to this?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So a distinction. In our budget, you know, we have a number of programs that we already have: the triple P parenting program [positive parenting program]; structured decision-making tools; for example, our relationships with Foxvalley. All of those provide for those wraparound supports for families. But in the \$55 million pressure that we have currently, there is no new program money attached to that. And we are, you know, continuing to serve the programs that we currently have, and the 55 is to deal with increased utilization pressure.



**Ms. Rancourt:** — I notice that, if you look under the Public Accounts, that the funding for the Lighthouse is under the Saskatchewan assistance program, and in the 2015-2016 there was \$1,096,636 put aside to the Lighthouse. Can you break down those numbers?

[20:45]

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So the way the Lighthouse is funded is we have a contract for 61 beds and we negotiate a minimum and maximum with them on the basis of utilization for 61 beds. So the minimum was 762,000, the maximum was 1.5. And last year it was 1.01 million, so that we were right in the range.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And those 61 beds, how many are in Saskatoon? How many are in North Battleford?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Sixty-one are in Saskatoon. So North Battleford's contract is a bit different. Sorry, I still did it. Now I'm super self-conscious, Dan. The North Battleford is a different contract. It's not on the basis of the number of beds; it's on the basis of utilization. For clarity, yes, it's not on a contract. It's on the basis of per diems.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And you mentioned before that people who already receive funding for housing were using the Lighthouse. Can you talk me through some of the situations and reasons that a person might be using shelter if they already have a home?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Well I can't speak to the choices that individuals make about their individual circumstances, but I can speak to what occurred with the Lighthouse in Saskatoon in particular. So what occurred or what came to our attention was that we will pay for, and as you've heard me say before, we will pay for the first night of an emergency stay. And then on a subsequent night, we need to sit down with that individual and assess their needs and their supports.

If that individual is being provided with shelter somewhere else, then we will not provide funding to the Lighthouse to keep them for subsequent nights. Now that said, if that individual chooses not to go home, wherever home might be and wherever that we're paying for it, they can pay the Lighthouse out of the shelter that we're providing them to stay somewhere else. So that is what was occurring in terms of, you know . . . The auditor in 2015 flagged that we need to make sure that we maintain that part of the contract and that we're not paying twice for basically shelter.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And when you say the one night, do you mean one night a week? One night a month? Like what would that one night be?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — I'm going to ask Constance to step in here and walk through the process a bit.

**Ms. Hourie:** — So as the minister said, what happens is an individual who doesn't have a place to stay for whatever reason, they come into the Lighthouse. The Lighthouse has their own process on whether or not they accept that person. If they accept that person, then what occurs, or the expectation is that the next

day they will be in contact — or if it's a Friday, on Monday — that they will be in contact with income assistance program or . . . [inaudible] . . . and then they'll proceed from there.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And so if that individual has been deemed to have like housing somewhere else, what if they went back to the Lighthouse the next weekend? Like what would be the duration between them not accessing services that they can access services again?

**Ms. Hourie:** — Then again it's case by case. So if that person came again the next weekend and they, for whatever reason, required emergency shelter, they would be provided with emergency shelter.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Is this the agreement that you have with all the other homeless shelters within the province?

**Ms. Hourie:** — Yes. In fact, yes we do. It's a very similar process to the Lighthouse that we pay per diems.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Well thank you. I had asked some questions in the spring estimates and I was told I was going to get the answers, and I haven't yet. So I just wanted to see if maybe you have some of those answers now. One of the questions was, what is the average number of foster children in a home?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So our foster homes would have an average of one to four, and I just want to explain that a little bit. So when someone first becomes a foster family they may be allowed one or two children because they're relatively new to fostering, whereas someone who's been fostering awhile may have four. Four is our general limit, unless we have a large sibling group that we would like to keep together and then exceptional circumstances may be made for that.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And has that been consistent through the years or is that a larger or a smaller number than previous years, with the reduction of foster homes?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So there has been a conscious ministry policy of reducing the number of foster homes with more than four children over the last number of years.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. And so another question that I asked in the spring was, were any of the critical incidents being investigated for children that were placed in PSI [person of sufficient interest] homes?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So we don't have any current stats on the number of those that would be reviewed, but our policy requires that any time there is a critical incident that a review must be conducted.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. And do you know how many or what percentage of critical incidences happened in the previous year?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — It looks like we're going to have to circle back with that number for you.

[21:00]

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So in your opening remarks, you talked

about how with the economy and the state that it's in, and unemployment on the rise, that poverty rates are also increasing, which is increasing enrolment with your programming. So what are your other plans on dealing with the poverty rate increasing in the province? What's your ministry's plan on how to handle that?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — That is our income assistance redesign. Primarily, that's our focus. The income assistance redesign is designed to reduce the complexity of the programs and services that we currently provide, and make it much more client-centred or — I hate the word client — service user-centred or people-centred than it currently is.

The intention of doing that speaks to the poverty reduction strategy on putting people before systems for example, and also to have a single point of entry into the system. So those were some of the recommendations that came out of that report, and certainly that includes the province's goal to reduce the number of people in poverty by 50 per cent by 2050. I'd have to just double-check the year. Was it 2050? Yes.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So what is the redesign going to look like?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — You know, it's too early to say. We are going to be spending some time next week in a closed office mapping some things out. We do know the general principles of the redesign which will be, as I've indicated previously, you know, people before systems, or client-centred, transparent, simple to navigate, and I'm trying to remember . . .

**A Member:** — Sustainable.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — And sustainable over time. So those will be our guiding principles in determining how that system will work. You may have . . . You know, we have over the course of time and in very good intentions have sort of layered programs one on top of the other without seeing how they fit. And it also has made it difficult for us, as I'm sure you've seen tonight, to do I think a good job of tracking outcomes. And it has limited our ability to do that in a much better way, and so we need to get at that.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Yes, I agree there's a lot of work to be done with regards to the income programming. But in all due fairness, until we know what it looks like and what the programming . . . where it's going, we don't know exactly how effective it's going to work.

But I do appreciate the fact that you guys are looking into redesigning that, because like I said previously, my understanding is a lot of these income support programs have not been looked at for many, many years. So it's really good to make it easier for people to access and know exactly what program that they're a good fit under. Why do you believe that our child poverty rates are the second highest of any province in Canada?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So you are referring to the report that was released last Friday by my former colleagues at the U of R, correct? Okay. So I spent some time on this report which talked about the poverty rate in Saskatchewan and the children's poverty rate. A couple of things. First of all, any

child poverty rate, I want to start out by saying, is undesirable. And so while there are some differences in the way that child poverty is calculated by this report and the ministry, and I'll talk about those, I want to start by saying child poverty is child poverty is . . . Okay, so we start there.

So in their report, they talk about Saskatchewan as having one of the highest rates of child poverty. They also include Manitoba, the territories, and Nunavut, and all of those have disproportionately large Aboriginal populations. And it also talks about the fact that government transfers at the federal and provincial levels make a difference and so that those make a difference.

But I think, you know, one of the things that we can say in Saskatchewan, while not devaluing the issue of child poverty in any way, I think one of the things that we can say is that there was a significant difference in that report between the levels of poverty on reserve and the levels of poverty of children off reserve. And the levels of poverty of children off reserve, which would be under the jurisdiction of the province, was considerably less than the rate of child poverty on reserve. It was I think, if I recall correctly and I would have to look at the report, it was approximately 80 to 20 per cent — right? — as a difference. So that's the first factor. So we need the federal government to do their part in that area, and certainly I'm looking forward to the Social Services FPTs [federal-provincial-territorial] about that.

The second . . . And with respect to federal transfers making a difference, you know, as a province and as a ministry, we've invested fairly significantly in children in poverty in the province of Saskatchewan. And when I looked at that report, one of the things that they didn't take into account was all of the supplementary programs that we provide for people. So they took the basic assistance and they didn't add in the Sask rental housing supplement or they didn't add in the child care supplement. They didn't add in any of those other top-up programs that people tend to also use in our system. And we have . . . You know, we know that most of the people that we have in our programs access more than one program at a time, so there's a difference in that.

But they also use a LICO [low income cut-off] measure, and we use an MBM [market basket measure] measure. And so there is a number of, you know, there's a number of reasons why those things are occurring.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — The highest rates of poverty in the province are seen within the northern communities of North Battleford and P.A. — and I don't even really like to call us northern because anything north of La Ronge would be more northern, but they call us northern — and areas that are outside the main nine Saskatchewan cities.

In the spring estimates we asked what work was being done in rural or remote communities to reduce poverty. And the previous minister indicated that "Nothing unique. Nothing special, different, or unique," was her answer. Do you think more should be done? And is more being done?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Before I respond to that answer, I just want to update you on a previous answer that you asked

about, which was the critical injuries. So in 2015 there were 21 critical injuries. And as of October 31st of 2016, there were 10.

Sorry. And then we'll go back to those other questions. Thanks.

So I'll just run through some of the investments in the North and some of the additional benefits that we provide for people in the North.

So first on the additional investments into the North. In terms of the North, we have invested pretty significantly in housing in the North, which is a need up there. Since 2007 we've provided 30.8 million to build another 313 additional housing units. We've also invested 4.2 to help repair some of the homes that are up there which were in desperate need.

We also have invested fairly significantly in northern CBOs, particularly in child and family services. There's been a 213 per cent increase in the amount of money that we've invested in child and family services in the North. For people with disabilities, our community living service delivery, that funding has increased by 121 per cent over the last number of years.

And in terms of income assistance service delivery, we've increased funding by 428 per cent to northern CBOs that deliver services in those areas. And just to give you an example of some of the community-based organizations that I'd be referring to, we would be talking for example about the La Loche Friendship Centre Corporation, the Methy Housing Corporation for example, or Buffalo Narrows has a family support program that we would be supporting as well as in Ile-a-la-Crosse.

Now to speak to the other issue that you raised with . . . to the other aspect of this, is what additional supports are provided for individuals that live in the North? We have a northern, what we call a northern medical transportation program, and in that program it helps provide funding for emergent and non-emergent medical transportation costs. So we provide some of those benefits.

We also provide an additional 25 per cent for northern communities for household furnishing, supplies, and equipment. And we also have the northern food allowance which we add on to the basic supports for people who live in the North, in recognition of the higher costs of food in the northern regions.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So that's really good services in the northern communities, but Prince Albert and North Battleford were indicated as being the communities that had the highest rates of poverty and then the rural areas within the province. So what kind of services are being provided in those areas to help with poverty?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So outside of what I've already identified, there isn't a specific program for rural Saskatchewan. We deal with individuals on a case-by-case basis as they need services and supports. And they meet with, obviously, our income assistance workers to determine what their needs are, and then we provide them help with the needs that they need to address regardless of where they are at, or we rather . . . Let me rephrase that. Rather taking into consideration the regions that they're in, and then adding additional supports as necessary

depending on the region.

[21:15]

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. So it doesn't sound to me that there's a real concise plan on how to address the poverty rates in those areas, but I thank you for your answers and I think that concludes all my questions I have for tonight. And again, I want to thank everyone for coming and I also . . . My questions are tricky and require some detail, but I look forward for finding out some more of the information that wasn't provided today later on. And again I appreciate all of this. And I don't know if we're going to meet again until next budget, so springtime. So everybody have a great holiday season. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Okay, thank you. Are there any other questions? I saw one member who was anticipating.

Okay, vote 36, Social Services, on page 14 of the Supplementary Estimates, child and family services, subvote (SS04) in the amount of \$11,600,000, is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Income assistance and disability services, subvote (SS03) in the amount of 43,420,000, is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Social Services, vote 36, 55,020,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2017, the following sums for Social Services in the amount of \$55,020,000.

Can someone move that? Lori? Ms. Carr. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. The Clerk will now hand out the report and while that is taking place, if the minister . . . Do you have any wrap-up comments you would like to make?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would first like to thank all of the officials who have been here this evening and who have helped support me in this process and who have diligently worked to provide answers and anticipate questions. We didn't anticipate all of them, but we certainly did our best. And we will certainly get back to the member as we can.

I'd like to thank the members of the Human Services Committee for being here this evening and being such an attentive and rapt audience, and I would like to thank the critic for her thoughtful questions this evening and the collegiality of the discussion. Drive safely everyone.

**The Chair:** — Ms. Rancourt, did you have any comments you wanted to make as a wrap? Okay, thank you.

Committee members, you have before you a draft of the third

report of the Standing Committee on Human Services. We require a member to move the following motion:

That the third report of the Standing Committee on Human Services be adopted and presented to the Assembly.

Someone move that please? Ms. Wilson.

**Hon. Ms. Wilson:** — I so move, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Okay. Would someone move that the committee do now adjourn? Mr. Buckingham. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Agreed. This committee now stands adjourned at 9:18 p.m. to the call of the Chair. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 21:18.]