



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Hansard Verbatim Report

No. 38 – May 8, 2018



Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

Twenty-Eighth Legislature

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Cannington

Ms. Danielle Chartier, Deputy Chair
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Mr. Larry Doke
Cut Knife-Turtleford

Mr. Muhammad Fiaz
Regina Pasqua

Mr. Todd Goudy
Melfort

Mr. Warren Steinley
Regina Walsh Acres

Hon. Nadine Wilson
Saskatchewan Rivers

[The committee met at 18:30.]

The Chair: — I'd like to welcome everyone to the Human Services Committee. Tonight we are reviewing the estimates for Advanced Education, central management and services, subvote (AE01). And later we will be looking at Bill 94, *The Saskatchewan Advantage Grant for Education Savings (SAGES) Amendment Act, 2017*.

With us this evening we have myself, Dan D'Autremont, as Chair; Danielle Chartier for the opposition; MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Larry Doke, MLA Muhammad Fiaz, MLA Todd Goudy and MLA Warren Steinley and the Hon. Nadine Wilson for the government. And observing at present for the opposition is MLA Trent Wotherspoon.

Madam Minister, welcome, and your officials. If you would like to open the session with some comments, please go ahead.

**General Revenue Fund
Advanced Education
Vote 37**

Subvote (AE01)

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you and your committee about the Ministry of Advanced Education's budget for 2018-2019.

First, allow me to introduce members of the Advanced Education team. Mark McLoughlin is my deputy minister. David Boehm is behind me. He's the assistant deputy minister of corporate services and accountability. Tammy Bloor Cavers, the assistant deputy minister of sector relations and student services; Scott Giroux is also behind me here, executive director of corporate finance; Ann Lorenzen, executive director of universities and private vocational schools; Mike Pestill, executive director, technical and trades branch; Todd Godfrey, director of capital planning branch. I don't see Rikki Lindell, I didn't see Lindell. And Tessa Ritter, my chief of staff, and several other ministry officials that we'll introduce as they come forward.

Mr. Chair, this year's budget of over 729 million for Advanced Education will help Saskatchewan stay on track. It continues to invest in students in post-secondary institutions while controlling costs. When combined with other supports across government, the budget includes almost \$855 million in financial and training supports for students. In this year's budget, we have maintained our commitment to students through programs like the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship and graduate retention program.

Government is investing \$34 million this year in scholarships, grants, and loans for post-secondary students. We will provide considerable support for operations, nearly \$650 million for post-secondary institutions. In fact, Mr. Chair, since 2007-08 the province has invested over \$9.1 billion in post-secondary institutions and student supports. This includes nearly 600 million in capital funding.

Last year we changed the student loans program to make it more transparent and fair. We continue to invest in First Nations and Métis post-secondary institutions and programs, and we're providing capital dollars so post-secondary institutions can invest in preventative maintenance and repairs. I'd like to take you through some of the details.

In terms of student supports, again this year, as we have been for over a decade, our ministry is strongly committed to our students. We're investing \$9 million in the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship. That scholarship provides \$500 per year of direct tuition relief to Saskatchewan high school graduates. Since its inception five years ago, the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship has provided \$44 million in tuition relief to nearly 40,000 students. In 2017-18 the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship program helped 21,500 Saskatchewan students reduce their tuition costs. And since the scholarship started, close to 8,800 students have received the full \$2,000 in scholarships. If you graduated from high school in Saskatchewan and you are attending a post-secondary institution, the scholarship is automatically applied to help reduce tuition costs for Saskatchewan students.

Mr. Chair, this government is providing \$3 million in funding in 2018-19 for the Saskatchewan Innovation and Opportunity Scholarship program. Since program inception, nearly 23,800 scholarships have been awarded overall. Last year about 4,360 scholarships were granted, with an average award of \$2,100. The scholarship is targeted at students in emerging fields of study, key priority areas of institutions, and international education.

Mr. Chair, this budget continues to provide tuition tax credits to thousands of graduates through our graduate retention program. In fact, since the introduction of this program, 69,000 highly trained professionals have benefited by choosing to establish careers right here in Saskatchewan. And approximately 406 million in GRP [graduate retention program] tax credits have been paid to those 70,000 post-secondary education graduates for the tax years 2008 through to 2016.

The graduate retention program provides income tax credits of up to \$20,000 for graduates who live and work here, supporting our economy. This year the program will provide close to 72 million in income tax credits to help support the efforts of Saskatchewan's employers and the recruitment of graduates from both inside and outside the province.

Mr. Chair, scholarships and savings are important supports for students, but some people need more help. That's why we're investing 22 million in a Student Aid Fund to provide loans and grants, and last year we revamped our student financial assistance program to make it both more transparent and responsive. And I'm going to take you through a few of those details now.

In August of 2017 we introduced a system of up-front grants for students. The provincial grant of up to \$1,000 now provides students with predictable funding, and it is targeted to those students who most need the support, based on both student and family income.

We replaced a complex and confusing system with one that's simple, fair, and predictable. Lower income students in a typical eight-month program receive about \$4,000 in combined federal and Saskatchewan grants. Combined with the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarships, students could qualify for up to \$4,500 in non-repayable assistance. Students know in advance what funding is available for their post-secondary education, allowing them to plan for their futures. And I would just insert here, this was something that was lobbied hard for by student union organizations across the province.

Mr. Chair, as I explained, we have maintained our generous system of tax credits under the graduate retention program. This means that, in some cases, undergraduate tuition in Saskatchewan ends up being completely reimbursed through the GRP to graduates who live and work here after their studies.

Mr. Chair, we are meeting our fiscal challenges and staying on track by continuing to provide strong support for Saskatchewan's post-secondary institutions, with a budgeted investment of over \$673 million in operating and capital grants. That reflects robust and stable funding for our post-secondary institutions, and we have a record of support for post-secondary institutions over the past decade.

After factoring in this year's budget, we have increased operating funds to our two universities by 53 per cent in the past 11 years, which is well in excess of increases in the cost of living over that same period. Since the '07-08 budget year, the provincial government has increased operating funds to the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] by 58 per cent. Since '07-08, the provincial government has increased operating funds to the U of R [University of Regina] by 38.7 per cent.

Mr. Chair, because of the financial situation we are not initiating any new capital projects this year, but we do continue to provide capital support to post-secondary institutions. The Ministry of Advanced Education will provide over 22 million in '18-19 for preventative maintenance and renewal projects at post-secondary institutions. These investments will allow our institutions to support students by replacing equipment and making needed repairs. Over the past decade, we've invested \$598 million in new buildings, equipment, and safety upgrades across the sector.

Mr. Chair, this year the Ministry of Advanced Education is investing more than \$17 million to support post-secondary education for First Nations and Métis students. This funding is helping indigenous students develop their skills and knowledge to participate fully in Saskatchewan's economy. In the '18-19 budget year, the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training, formerly the Ministry of the Economy, will also invest \$28 million in skills training and employment initiatives for indigenous people. And, Mr. Chair, since '07-08 direct investment in indigenous post-secondary educational institutions and programs has increased by over 71 per cent, from 26 million to almost 45 million.

The ministry encourages institutions to create programs and supports so that more indigenous students enrol and succeed in post-secondary education. The ministry also provides targeted funding for two very specific initiatives. The first is Saskatchewan Polytechnic's indigenous student success

strategy. Since 2011-12 government has provided annual funding for this institution-wide initiative to address barriers to student completion. In '18-19 Sask Polytech will receive 581 K for this.

The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies student support services model supports students from recruitment to employment. Government had provided this annual funding since the '14-15 budget year in response to its 2013 joint task force on First Nations and Métis education and employment. In the '18-19 budget year SIIT will receive 356 K for student support services.

Our investments in education and skills training are showing results, with nearly 16,300 indigenous students enrolled at post-secondary institutions in Saskatchewan in '16-17, a 34 per cent increase in enrolment since '07-08. Since 2007 the total First Nations and Métis post-secondary attainment rate amongst those ages 25 to 64 in Saskatchewan has grown from 42 per cent to 47 per cent, increasing faster than the national growth rate, which has gone from 48 per cent to 52 per cent over the same period.

And, Mr. Chair, our institutions are working hard on specific programs and services to help our First Nations and Métis students. For example, the U of S has a strong commitment to indigenous education and engagement. Indigenization is a key priority of President Stoicheff and a strategic commitment in the university's plan over the next year. You may know that in addition to that, President Stoicheff has an MOU [memorandum of understanding] with Chief Bobby Cameron on this very issue.

Since 2009 the U of R has been indigenizing the university and implementing specific initiatives to support the success of indigenous students, faculty, and staff on campus. The university has an executive lead, indigenization, to coordinate implementation of the university's indigenization plan and, I think, importantly an indigenous advisory circle that supports and advises faculty and staff on indigenization issues.

The First Nations University of Canada is developing a federally funded national centre for collaboration in indigenous education, which will be a virtual centre for educators and communities across the country to share information on indigenous education. Sask Polytech recently refreshed its provincially funded indigenous student success plan through consultations with various indigenous and non-indigenous businesses, students, staff, and elders.

SIIT developed a two-day workshop on the history of residential schools in Saskatchewan, the legacy of this experience, and the education direction proposed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. Approximately 120 people have been trained, including participants from the U of S, Saskatoon Police Services, and the health sector.

The Gabriel Dumont Institute has recently received federal funding for new initiatives, including a Métis centre of excellence in Saskatoon, Métis entrepreneurship, driver education, an expansion of classroom space, and instructor housing in La Loche. Indigenization at Saskatchewan's regional colleges varies; however all colleges consider it to be a priority.

Two northern colleges — North West College and Northlands College — serve student bodies where the majority of their students are indigenous and thus have programs and long-standing approaches targeted specifically at indigenous students.

[18:45]

Mr. Chair, my ministry has five priorities for the post-secondary education system. Our system must always be accessible, meaning everyone can attend and succeed. It must be responsive, meaning it aligns with economic, social, and community goals, meaning it is flexible; it's always seeking to align with the changing needs of students and employers. It must be sustainable, meaning the business model aligns with fiscal realities, and institutions work together and with government to avoid unnecessary duplication. It must be accountable, meaning we set goals and achieve them openly and transparently. And it must be high quality, meaning students complete their programs with the knowledge and skills they need to contribute to our economy here at home and around the world. And these principles guide us in everything we do.

Mr. Chair, you may have heard that the responsibility for the Status of Women office has transferred to the Ministry of Advanced Education. The Status of Women office acts as a catalyst within government to raise awareness of issues affecting women and their families, and to ensure gender considerations are integrated into all aspects of government decision making, legislation, and program development. The office works with government and community partners across the province to identify and address equality gaps. And we're looking forward to strengthening our relationships with key stakeholders to begin working on addressing interpersonal and domestic violence issues here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Chair, Saskatchewan continues to face a fiscal challenge. Education is the engine that drives our knowledge-based economy. A stable post-secondary sector is a critical piece of our plan to keep Saskatchewan on track. If we want our students to excel in Canada and around the world, they need to have confidence they're receiving a high-quality education here at home.

Thank you for listening, and I look forward to questions from members of the committee.

I forgot to introduce, Mr. Chair, Jessica Kilbride, from the Status of Women office who is seated at the very, very back there. Can you give a wave, Jessica? She's also here today. So I apologize for that, Jessica.

The Chair: — Okay. Thank you, Madam Minister. We are considering vote 37, Advanced Education, central management and services, subvote (AE01). Are there any questions?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well maybe just before, just thank you, Minister, of course for being here but most importantly . . .

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Trent Wotherspoon.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister, for your time here tonight. Importantly thank you to the officials that are here

tonight, others that are probably patched in to some of this work here tonight. Thank you to the officials across the province and importantly all the partners in Advanced Education. We'll get into many of those partners here tonight, but thank you for what you do for students to those partners. I know that the critic for Status of Women is going to lead off questioning here tonight.

The Chair: — I recognize Ms. Chartier.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very happy to be here tonight to have an opportunity to ask a few questions and to . . . I have to acknowledge that I'm happy to see that the Status of Women office is now a line item again. I've been an MLA for almost nine years and it disappeared a year or two into my time as an MLA. And it was in Social Services but had disappeared, so I'm happy to see the transparency that it is a line item in Advanced Ed. So I see this year it . . . the allocation is 256 million. Can you tell me what that money will be, what is the expectation of that expenditure as it's gone up, almost doubled from the previous year?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — It's 256,000, not million, firstly. That's okay; it's warm in here.

Ms. Chartier: — Oh sorry, yes. I was feeling very optimistic.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Well let's leave you there; it's okay. I'll let Jessica also jump in on this but let me just start by saying, you know, this year for our Status of Women office I'd like to share two things with you.

One, this year is going to be a refresh year. There are a number of things that we are looking at to focus the Status of Women office on. I think we need to move beyond funding for events on women's day and look towards more skills opportunities for women and step-up opportunities for women, particularly around the entrepreneurship piece.

Obviously our engagement on interpersonal violence is going to continue. That's a very important piece in this province and so that's going to continue to be a priority. But Jessica's going to take the opportunity to engage with a number of stakeholders and get some sense of where the community would like to see us take this office.

I'd also like to say before I turn it over to Jessica that I'm extremely pleased that the deputy minister of Advanced Education has housed the executive director of the Status of Women office within the DMO [deputy minister's office] and is supporting the Status of Women executive director within the DMO and has been a fantastic champion for the Status of Women office and for some of the gender discussions that we've been having across government, not just in this ministry. And so I'm quite grateful for that. I think it's a great place for us to be, particularly since I also have the innovation file, and I think the synergy of those three things is really quite critical. And I'll turn it over to Jessica for further comments.

Ms. Kilbride: — Thank you, Minister. It's Jessica Kilbride, executive director for the Status of Women office. I would just add, you know, the priorities around more targeted research, training and education opportunities, and looking at opportunities to pilot solutions for Saskatchewan women. These

are sort of some of the focuses in what are a couple of transition years for the office.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. So for that the \$256,000 . . . I'm used to Health estimates where the numbers are sometimes a little bit bigger . . .

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — I know. That's so big.

Ms. Chartier: — Yes. How much of that is salary then? Or are we thinking there is still just one position?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes. So the approximate salary of that is about a little over half of that, okay, not quite. But keeping in mind that the DMO is supporting this office with resources within the Ministry of Advanced Education, and so it's not just Jessica. It is Jessica as well as a number of the staff within the minister's office or in the deputy minister's office, which I'm quite grateful for.

Ms. Chartier: — So I just take you to . . . I'm happy to hear that perhaps there's some admin support and other support. Just going back to a freedom of information request that we did where the former ED [executive director] is pointing out that . . . For example, one email from April 11th, 2017, "Hi Bob. When you are a one-person office, all tasks, even admin tasks, end up as one's responsibility. Just saying." So that was from the previous ED. So I'm wondering what kinds of supports will be available to the executive director through the DMO's office.

Mr. McLoughlin: — Hi. Mark McLoughlin, deputy minister. One of the things I think is important to note is, although it is housed with us in Advanced Education, this is a cross-government responsibility, and so the hope is that we are able to align it with other ministerial activities, which Jessica's doing a fantastic job in that and going out. And she's had the opportunity to come and present at the deputy minister's council and subsequently get out and go to various ministries to talk about the work that's under way.

Inside the deputy minister's office of Advanced Education, we have administrative support that's allocated to that position. We have support in communications. We have support in finance, and we have support within our strategy branch. And so we're doing as much as we possibly can with internal resources without having to tie into any extra financial cost.

Ms. Chartier: — So of that allocation, the 256,000, a little over half is for Jessica's salary. And so what is the anticipation that the rest of the money will be spent on?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So this year, and I'll get Jessica to jump in again here as well, we're looking at testing a few solutions for women. And I think there's a number of things that Jessica is thinking of. I'll have her speak to those.

Ms. Kilbride: — Yes, thank you. As I said, well the office has always done a certain amount of research and so that's part of what the budget will go toward is continuing to invest in gaining a greater understanding of issues facing women in Saskatchewan.

But to the minister's point, you know, the Status of Women

office has this unique opportunity to sort of look across the entire system and consider factors in various parts of women's lives across the province, pull all of those things together, maybe identify some gaps, and pilot some solutions that are potentially best practices from across the country. It gives the office which has that unique vantage point into sort of what's happening in our province, and look into sort of more specific things that we could adopt in Saskatchewan.

Ms. Chartier: — So will some of that money . . . Obviously we've had two presentations in the last six months from Women Entrepreneurs, both in the fall at a reception and then around a national study that was done. So is the expectation or the anticipation that some of this money, will there be a pilot on grant programs for women entrepreneurs?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — It's too early to say because we're also looking at the interpersonal violence and abuse piece quite significantly. But that said, in the Innovation Saskatchewan portfolio that we have and some of the work that we're doing on start-ups, you know, there has been some direction to make sure that women are included in the process. Seven of the 37 companies that Co.Labs has incubated — and I realize this isn't Innovation Saskatchewan but it does speak to your question — seven of the 37 have been female-owned companies.

We need to see why there aren't more of them and address some of the barriers that are there. So some of that might be work that Jessica looks at. There's a couple of other potential pilots that we're also looking at as well that are reflective of the interpersonal violence space.

Ms. Chartier: — Can you give us some sense of what those pilots look like?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — I think it's a little bit too early to say that just yet. I think we need to wait for a bit before we commit to that.

Ms. Chartier: — So in terms of research, obviously it hasn't been a really robust budget in the past. So I know the Status of Women office, when it was down to a one-woman show, was very much about International Women's Day and granting, so there hasn't been a ton of research. I know last year there was the report commissioned on women in the labour force. But is the expectation that you'll be looking at further research in a variety of areas and contracting out? I know you had . . . That particular piece was contracted out. But is that the expectation?

Ms. Kilbride: — Yes, and I'm familiar with the report that you're referencing. There were also, as early as August of 2016, 10 socio-demographic reports that did a great job of taking a look at the data and considering what women are experiencing across the province. And so they're reports that explore, you know, the experiences of rural women, women living with disabilities, newcomers in our province. And so that's some really great work, and I think it's about identifying ways to deepen our understanding through some research. And it would look similar to some of the research work that's been done before, that you're referring to.

Ms. Chartier: — Just so I can make sure I have a handle on the

rest of that budget then. So some potential pilot projects and possibly some research — is that what we see the rest of that budget . . . And no additional staff because you're arguing that you're being supported through the DMO. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Just going through the FOI [freedom of information] here, obviously gender-based analysis is, I believe, very important. It's important to look at how policy and legislation impacts everyone and it takes that gender . . . that lens. I'm just . . . This was a giant FOI here. So it was mostly, it was redacted because it was gender-based analysis in government decision making, so it was obviously on decisions that government . . . I recognize why it was redacted. But it says here "The Status of Women office has provided gender-based analysis support to executive government as requested."

So is that . . . In terms of how much that's happening, when it comes to developing legislation and creating budgets, how much gender-based analysis is being undertaken?

[19:00]

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So one of the areas that . . . Jessica and I have had many conversations about gender-based analysis and which policies to apply it to across government. I think the one that presents the best opportunity for us is the Saskatchewan . . . the STSI [Saskatchewan technology start-up incentive], because we are starting that from pretty much the beginning and we'll have an opportunity to put a gender-based lens. It's got a sunset clause obviously, in two years, and so I think it gives us a real good opportunity to do some analysis of that program as it rolls out and identify barriers in it.

I think it gives us a good opportunity, I think, to pilot a GBA [gender-based analysis] that we can have show the difference that it makes across government, and so that's the one that we've been talking about the most. There's been other conversations about other policies, but that's the one we're looking most significantly at. I'll let Jessica also speak to some of the other work that's getting done.

Ms. Kilbride: — Yes, so the Status of Women office does have an inter-ministerial committee of advisers on women's policy. These are representatives from ministries, agencies, and Crowns across our system, and so this is a group who will be involved as we move forward in refreshing the office. This is a group who are sort of representatives in their ministries where, you know, legislation's being considered or program development's being considered, and they're looking to, you know, reinforce their ability to use gender-based analysis with respect to those programs or legislation, and they'll contact me directly and we'll work together to help them bring GBA to their work.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, so it just . . . I mean obviously that you've got . . . So you're saying that this interdisciplinary or inter-ministerial committee will be the ones doing the gender-based analysis.

Ms. Kilbride: — No, it's not necessarily that they'll be doing it. They're sort of the touch point between the Status of Women office who will, you know, pull together best practices around

gender-based analysis, gender-based analysis plus from a federal perspective, and so they might be the contact and say, people in my ministry are considering changes and they'd like to talk with you, and so that would be part of how we would work to help them bring that policy lens to the work they're doing.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. So you would be . . . Your role is that of support for gender-based analysis.

Ms. Kilbride: — That's correct.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. I'm curious actually, just this past weekend . . . Again I'm putting on the record that I am a believer in actually gender mainstreaming, but gender-based analysis is a good way to develop policy. And we have a federal government of whom I'm not necessarily a fan, but I did certainly appreciate this last budget where they did comment. I don't know really where the rubber hits the road, if it'll prove fruitful, but they did say that they used that gender lens in creating policy.

But we have a former premier here who just this weekend had commented about, he wasn't a fan of gender-based budgets; he was a fan of budget-based budgets. So I'm just curious, your perspective as the Status of Women critic — or pardon me, that's me — the Status of Women minister, your thoughts on gender-based analysis as a tool to provide better policy for people here in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Well first of all I guess, I'm not going to comment on the former premier's comments because I don't think that's appropriate in this place. But in terms of GBA, I think one of the things that I would like to see us do is to demonstrate the value of it in a policy that we can show clear differences between. And so that's a conversation that Jessica and I have had many times, and that's why we will be looking at the STSI.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. So is the hope then . . . I just want to reiterate what I hear you saying. So you're taking one opportunity here to prove its worth. And there was a time where . . . I won't go there. So you're hoping to illustrate to your colleagues, your fellow ministers, the value of gender-based analysis?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — We're hoping to test the value of gender-based analysis.

Ms. Chartier: — You don't think it's been . . . the value of gender-based analysis . . .

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — I haven't tested it on government public policy.

Ms. Chartier: — You as an individual . . .

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Correct.

Ms. Chartier: — But in terms of evidence from other jurisdictions around . . . I mean gender-based analysis has been around a long time.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — And if gender-based analysis worked on a full scale, we'd have different outcomes for interpersonal violence across Canada. And I'm not sure that we're there yet. So I do want to see us move to try this at a small scale with a piece of legislation that we're starting right from the beginning, not kind of partway through a program where we can't really see the outcomes. And I think this is a good place to try it.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Just backing up here, I've only been the Status of Women critic again here just for the last couple of months. It has been several years, so I just want to double-check. So Jessica, you were hired over the summer?

A Member: — No.

Ms. Chartier: — No?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — No. She's been there since . . . Two years?

Ms. Chartier: — In the executive director role?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes, since the departure of Pat Faulconbridge.

Ms. Chartier: — Has that been already two years?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — July of 2017.

Ms. Chartier: — July of 2017. So you've been the executive director since July of 2017.

Ms. Kilbride: — That's correct.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. And had you been involved with that particular office prior to that?

The Chair: — Excuse me. Before we get too far down this road, you're getting into personnel issues that may deal with privacy, so you need to be considerate of that.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So I'm not sure the rationale for the question.

Ms. Chartier: — I'm just curious. I know . . . Was there, I guess the question is, was there a PSC [Public Service Commission] competition for this job?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — You know, it was a standard competition. I'm a little concerned that it seems like you're questioning the expertise of the executive director with this line of questioning, and I'm concerned about that.

Ms. Chartier: — Well, and you can assume anything that you'd like to assume. I'm just curious if there was a . . . And if that's the answer, that it was a standard Public Service Commission competition, that's great. That's simply my question, if there was a standard PSC competition. And if that's yes, that's fabulous.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes. Go ahead.

Ms. Kilbride: — So yes, I did participate in a standard competition for this just like any other role I would say.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Fair enough. That is all for my questions for tonight. I know you've got a lot of Advanced Ed stuff ahead of you outside of this. I appreciate your time and I'm looking forward to hearing the stuff around women entrepreneurs and the connection between innovation and this work, because I think that there's some really good, there's some wonderful opportunity there. So thank you for your time.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes.

The Chair: — Okay, substituting for Ms. Chartier is MLA Trent Wotherspoon. Go ahead, Mr. Wotherspoon.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks so much. Thanks, Mr. Chair. Thanks, Minister. Just a few questions that are sort of standard ones that we've been bringing to each ministry on the front end. Can you speak to the number of FTEs [full-time equivalent] in the ministry? I think I've noted that there's not a change. Maybe speak if there's been redeployments — so the number if there's been redeployments — but also if anyone's been seconded to Executive Council.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So our FTE count is unchanged from last year. It's 143.9.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So I noted that, thank you. Any redeployment in that complement of FTEs?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So we do deploy staff from branch to branch within the ministry where demand dictates, but not outside of the ministry.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right. And are there certain initiatives where you're redeploying staff, so certain trends within the ministry or certain initiatives that you're putting together?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Probably the most prominent area or example of this is we are deploying some resources into an indigenous advisory position, which will help inform some of our strategy and policy around indigenous education and particularly attainment.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks. It's an important area of focus. I'm interested in what that looks like, I guess by way of redeployment from a staffing perspective, and then who else is being engaged externally on that front.

[19:15]

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So thanks for this question. So the indigenous adviser will serve as a lead. We have been working as a ministry on indigenous education for some time, but there is a need to coordinate those efforts and begin to track both interventions and outcomes to see what are we doing that works and what do we need to do more of. And so the adviser will work with our policy and planning branch within the ministry.

That individual will also work with other leads in the system, so for example from the Ministry of Education, and also the

Ministry of Social Services is doing some work in this area. And then of course, connecting with the U of S, U of R, and Sask Poly, all of whom also have indigenous strategies and/or Aboriginal student success models — particularly Sask Poly, but you're familiar with the indigenization efforts at the other two institutions as well.

I should add, and I think it's important to note, that that position needs to be someone who has really strong connections in the First Nations and Métis community and so that those partnerships can happen as well.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks so much. So the indigenous adviser is one person, that's what's anticipated right now? It's one person that will then link to other organizations, partners in Advanced Education, in other ministries. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes, we need one person who's the touch point.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well it'll be an important role. Have you, are you redeploying somebody from within the ministry to take on that role? Or how are you going about filling that important position?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — It's an open PSC competition and so obviously we put forward the criteria for someone who would want that role, but internally staff might compete for it and also externally staff might compete for it.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks. And there's no change in FTEs otherwise, as far as the total number, so there's some movement though to create the space for this important role?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Reprioritizing.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Where's the FTE being pulled from? Does this represent one FTE?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So we are going to use one of the existing vacancies that we have within the ministry. And I think it's important to note that the advisory role will also be housed within the DMO.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks. I look forward to this role and the important work that will be supported. Again there is very important work that's been taken on by partners, by institutions across the province. So I look forward to how the ministry can co-operate on this front, and lead, so thank you.

And we're sitting here in estimates tonight. To be honest, I'd much rather be out at Piapot tonight. One of my good advisers, indigenous leader George Favel, has his wake here tonight; he was lost. And I certainly know, you know, in my work before coming into this Assembly, in education, he was a close adviser to me and to the programs I was involved in, and someone who's been there along my public service as well, on the political front. So I just thought we should remember George tonight. I'll get out to the official funeral tomorrow. But I think these are very important roles and relationships.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — I'm sorry, if I can say, I'm sorry for your loss. And I think this position will in some ways mirror

the position that Corey O'Soup used to play, and I think that's kind of the model that we're thinking of.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks. I look forward to this coming into action and benefiting folks across the sector and across the province.

Touching on the matter of travel, we've touched in with other ministers on this front. What are your plans as minister for travel this year, and what's the ministry's plan I guess, particularly as it relates to out-of-country travel? Can you note whether you were out of country as minister last year, whether you have intentions on that this year, and then speak in a broader sense to the ministry?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So there is one international trip planned, later this month in fact. We were invited to participate in the signing of a number of memorandums of understanding with Mexico and so we will be supporting the work of the three university institutions as part of the Canadian alliance.

We'll be travelling to Mexico to sign a number of memorandums of understanding on international education, and so that is going to happen later this month. We're attending at the request of the Canadian alliance, in particular President Vianne Timmons.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks so much for that information. I'm interested to see sort of the work of the ministry, to see if there's any changes by way of contracting out services or programs. Are there changes on this front? Is there new contracting out being undertaken or anticipated in the year ahead?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — The only thing new this year for us will be that the ministry is undertaking what's called a completer survey. So they're looking ... They will be contracting out a survey to be done that will examine students who did not complete their program and try to understand why, so what were the reasons for exiting of a program. Dollars for that particular contract are actually flow-through dollars from the federal government from the labour market development fund. But that is the one piece of work that will be contracted out this year.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks. Sounds like an important project. Who do you have doing that work?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — We don't have it out yet.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. And that'll be put through a traditional process, tendering process?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — What about sale of assets? Anything planned this year or anything anticipated? Anything under discussion as well?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So the only assets that we have are some of our IT [information technology] assets and nobody wants to buy those unless you're in a museum.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for that information and I'm not interested in your IT assets either.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Aw, come on.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — You mentioned federal dollars. Could you just canvass how many federal dollars flow in and through the Advanced Education budget? So you've got the total budget of such and such amount; how much of that is federal dollars?

[19:30]

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes. So we just need a clarification because there are different pots of money, and some of it is coming from what is now ICT [Immigration and Career Training] and being restated to us. What are you referring to specifically?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So just the . . . You have the budget for Advanced Education for a total sum of — what is it here? — whatever the total sum is. I'm just wondering, and maybe this is something . . . I'm sure the officials could itemize it in a couple days pretty easily. Would you be able to, if you can't bring it briefly to the table here tonight, in the next couple days make sure that you're providing that back to this committee, but a breakout of federal dollars that are flowing into this ministry? So how many of these dollars are provincial dollars? How many are federal dollars? And if you are able then to itemize where those are coming from federally and where they're being directed through this ministry, that would also be very helpful.

Mr. Boehm: — David Boehm, Ministry of Advanced Education, assistant deputy minister. So there are a number of pots of funding that we receive in the form of revenue from the federal government. And the key amounts would be an amount for the delivery of student loans, about \$1.1 million. And then we also receive some administrative dollars for the federal government's Strategic Investment Fund. In terms of the Labour Market Development Agreement, the issue that we were talking about most recently, that money does not flow directly into our revenue account, but comes into the revenue account of Immigration and Career Training which we would then access for the survey that was mentioned earlier.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for that information. Is it possible for the minister to get us a document as a committee in the coming days just detailing the federal dollars, which funds they're coming from, and where they're being deployed in the ministry?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Sure.

The Chair: — Madam Minister, if you are supplying copies to the committee, we would like eight copies, please.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Okay.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you very much. And also as it relates to the recommendations of the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission], of course this is important to this ministry. On this front, I think we could probably spend a full three or four hours here tonight in earnest on this front, and maybe we could have a special meeting at some point as well.

What I'd really appreciate is if you could provide to this committee as well a status report on the recommendations that pertain to the Ministry of Advanced Education, and then note the progress and action that's being taken on each recommendation. And if you're able to, you know, take that on as an undertaking and provide that back in the next couple weeks. Is two weeks reasonable on that front?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — I can do some of this right now.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — My preference would be for it to be detailed, to break down all recommendations that pertain to the Ministry of Advanced Education, to itemize the actions that have been taken and the status of those recommendations and then further work that's going to be undertaken, along with timelines to do, you know, that accompany those actions that are planned.

The Chair: — Madam Minister, if you're supplying further information, one of the other ministers said within 30 days.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — I have a bit of a workup I can do right now. So with respect to recommendation no. 62 — which calls upon the federal-provincial-territorial governments in consultation and collaboration with survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators to make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, treaties, and Aboriginal peoples, historical training programs, etc. — we can report that we have provided necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into the classroom. I think one of the initiatives that we have that speaks to that is the First Nations University of Canada, which offers the Dene Teacher Education Program. Again that speaks to recommendation no. 62.

We are also committed to significantly raising the achievement and graduation rates of First Nations and Métis students. I think I can do some reporting on that at a later date, about where we're at. I know for sure at Sask Polytech it has been quite high in terms of their overall student enrolment piece.

Again with respect to recommendation no. 62, the Ministry of Advanced Education has provided Aboriginal awareness training from Aboriginal consulting services to over 90 per cent of ministry staff. Advanced Education also provides annual base operating funding to all of its post-secondary institutions and targeted funding to two specific initiatives, which I spoke about in the opening remarks, which are Saskatchewan Polytechnic's indigenous student success plan and also SIIT's student support services model.

The U of S of course has indigenization as their key. They've also developed an MOU with FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations] Chief Bobby Cameron, where the president of the University of Saskatchewan will present to the FSIN on progress towards meeting its goals. And the reverse as well, which is quite unique, I think in this, is that Chief Bobby Cameron will also make that. The new vice-provost at the U of S, Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann, is developing indigenous strategy as an extension of that university's strategic plan.

You're quite familiar I think with the U of R's plan so I won't spend too much time on it. You know it fairly well, I think. They have an executive lead as well that also speaks to recommendation no. 62.

And of course FNU [First Nations University of Canada] is doing a lot of work in this area. If you want me to go into that I can, but I think you're pretty familiar with that. Sask Polytech also has an indigenous student success plan just seeing some tremendous results. You know, they had a significant proportion of their students who not only graduate but are employed upon graduation. And they are working to have indigenous content in all programs by 2022, which I think speaks to again recommendation no. 62.

SIIT's vision is to create work-ready achievers and role models through student-focused, market-relevant programs. They have a two-day workshop on the history of residential schools in Saskatchewan, the legacy of this experience, and the relevant calls in the TRC report. Approximately 120 people have taken that workshop, including participants from the U of S, Saskatoon Police Service, and the health sector.

And GDI [Gabriel Dumont Institute] is federated with Sask Polytech to provide technical training through the Dumont Technical Institute, and affiliated with both of them to provide a Bachelor of Education in Saskatchewan urban native teacher education program. GDI has recently received also federal funding for new initiatives, including a Métis centre of excellence in Saskatoon. I think also speaks to this recommendation no. 62: Métis entrepreneurship, driver education, and expansion of classroom space and instructor housing in La Loche.

And then with respect to recommendation no. 63 which is calling on the Council of Ministers of Education, or CMEC, indigenous education is one of the topics of discussion that we will be addressing in July this year at the CMEC discussions.

And so we can also give you a paper copy of these roll-ups, but . . .

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes, thank you. And maybe what you have is sufficient. But if it clearly defines the relevant recommendations to your ministry, the gaps in responding, the actions that have been taken, the actions that are planned, just all the pieces around the progress towards full implementation on this front. So thank you very much.

And I guess just as you went through this here, and maybe we'll get back to this later in an important place, we've of course had a lot of debate about the concerns of eliminating NORTEP-NORPAC [northern teacher education program - Northern Professional Access College]. How's that captured in your lens that you're applying to the TRC? I guess the elimination of that program, which of course was a vital program and a successful program, how does that fit into your assessment of progress towards recommendations on the TRC?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So I have visited with Northlands. I went up quite early in my tenure as minister, and with my deputy minister we went up to Northlands and spent some time there. I can say a couple of things, and this directly

relates to the TRC recommendations, particularly recommendation no. 62, is that Northlands is able to offer an expansion of programming beyond what was there before for a student body that is almost . . . The majority are indigenous, and I think one of the . . . There is a couple of benefits here.

One is that the expansion of programming has been much more comprehensive to the number of . . . range of programs that are available to students in the North, but also that Northlands has the ability to reach into a number of communities that NORTEP did not, and so it means that Northlands is going to be able to offer programming in other communities in the North. For example, they've been looking at things in Buffalo Narrows — that's just one example — so that students don't have to travel down to La Ronge necessarily to access programming, so that's I think a very important point.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well we won't get into the debate too far here tonight. Certainly folks were devastated with that cut. I know you weren't the minister at the time, and it's a real loss for the North, and it was one of these programs that so much energy and so much capacity had . . . that energy had been put into, so much capacity had been built and it was highly successful.

[19:45]

I am interested as it relates to registrants for the program. Where are the numbers this year, were they this past year, for registrants and graduates? And where were they in years past for NORTEP-NORPAC?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So as of March of 2018, 13, there were 13 graduates last year from NORTEP. Those students who were in year 2 — there were 18 students that were in year 2 — 15 of those have graduated from Northlands.

Of students who were in year 3 — there were 18 students that were in year 3 — and 15 of those students ended up graduating from GDI . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Sorry, yes, they're now in year 4, but they're graduating from GDI.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — On this front could you just break down maybe a bit of a tracking of those students and what you've had for registrations as well and provide that back to this committee as well. I know it's, you know, fairly accessible to you there, maybe not a month on this one, if you can get it back in a few days, if that's reasonable?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you very much. And what's the best way to do this? It comes back kind of with the instruction to the committee. I'd appreciate that as well.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Certainly students across the province are really struggling with affordability. It's a real barrier to many. It's an impact in that choice or the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education. I want to hear from the minister's perspective how this budget makes education more accessible.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Okay. So let's run through a couple, you know, a number of things. Firstly, last year we moved to change some of our student loans program. I spoke to this in my opening remarks. I think that's a very important move, that we've moved to an upfront direct support program which is targeted really to low-income students to help them plan better for their education. They're able to have transparency and predictability to the funding that they can receive, in order to plan, of course their program and their education. So that's the first thing, and that's directed towards low-income students in particular.

The second thing is that fixed-rate contributions have gone up by 8.1 per cent. Those fixed-rate contributions specifically will help benefit First Nations and Métis students, single parents, Crown wards, and people with disabilities — all of whom are vulnerable with respect to accessing post-secondary education.

The third point I think on the accessibility front will be that the U of R's tuition rate is below the national average. The U of S's is below the median average of the U15s. If I look at their professional programs, the University of Saskatchewan's law program is well below the average. The University of Saskatchewan's medicine program is also well below the average in terms of tuition.

We provide a number of scholarships as a ministry. I spoke to the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship, which provides new grade 12 students who are attending an approved Saskatchewan post-secondary institution with \$500 a year for a lifetime maximum of \$2,000 to help pay their tuition costs. This year another 9 million will go towards the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship. We have a loan forgiveness program for nurses and nurse practitioners, and we also have the Innovation And Opportunity Scholarship fund.

[20:00]

With respect to First Nations and Métis learners, again who tend to be in some of our more vulnerable population, we have 17 million in targeted institutional support and programmatic support. And then of course I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the graduate retention program of which 70,000 students in this province have taken advantage of in order to grow and have a career and establish roots here in this province.

So there are a number of supports in place to make post-secondary education accessible. And we have also topped up, you know . . . Of course with respect to holding the line on operational support we have, I think, made great strides in providing a number of other things like the student loan upfront, the fixed rate contributions, the scholarships, the targeted investments in First Nations and Métis education.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — With respect to the tuition and the increases that have occurred, our characterization will differ. I think this is a real hardship for students across the province. It's an increasing hardship, and it's one that's outstripping certainly the cost of living. Of course that's compounded with the cost of everything else, from utilities through housing through PST [provincial sales tax], and you name it.

So seeing the underfunding and the dramatic cuts that this

sector and these universities and post-secondary institutions have taken on, the cuts handed down from the provincial government over the last two years has really been a detriment certainly to program but also to accessibility. And I think the U of R this year is 2.8 per cent as far as a tuition fee increase, 4.8 per cent out of the University of Saskatchewan. So those are real concerns that students are facing, and it's a problematic trajectory for the cost of that very important education for young people.

I'd like to drill down a little bit to where we see reductions in student supports this year. The minister's spoken to the Saskatchewan Student Aid Fund and the redesign and loading up the support on the front end. And certainly we'll be listening to students on this front, but I think there's sound principle in making sure that there's front-end support.

My concern is the \$5 million cut to that fund in this budget, I guess. What motivated the choice to cut that important support?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Okay. So we'll speak about a couple of things. Firstly again the changes to this program were made in an effort to target the program to those most in need, and so that was what was done with this program. You know, we did the front-end loading, which you have also referenced, in order to try to make predictable and stable sources of funding for the most in need of assistance. Our other student supports are also still available.

And I'm going to have Tammy speak to some of the process changes that went along with the changes to the Student Aid Fund, which were intended to make it a lot more student centred, I think, than it has been previously. And you'll see that the uptake in that particular program has also gone up, I think as a result of some of these changes. So, Tammy?

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — Good evening. Tammy Bloor Cavers. So I'd like to talk about a couple of different things that the minister has spoken about already, if you'd permit me to do so, just so you can see a bit of the connecting of the dots, if you will.

So the minister alluded to a number of things that we've done to redesign the program. So we've focused on ensuring that students have a better understanding of what supports are available to them. So we've focused on ensuring the program is more predictable in terms of understanding well in advance of a loan year in terms of what funding is available to learners; predictability in terms of planning for learners into the high school years so they have a better sense working up towards their transition to post-secondary education, so they have a better sense of what's going to be available in terms of loans and grants and potentially scholarships. So whether it's our Innovation and Opportunity Scholarship or whether it's our Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship that supports their transition from high school to post-secondary up to a maximum of \$2,000, so all of those things are in the mix for any learners.

So then when learners present themselves or apply to student financial assistance, there's a number of opportunities for them to tap into. The upfront nature of the grants that we now provide is targeted primarily to low-income students, and that decision was made primarily to support those learners most in need. And

the minister referenced that several times this evening as well. So as a part of doing so, our program works as an integrated product with the federal government. So our funding supports work hand in hand with theirs.

In addition to that, as I mentioned, the Sask advantage grant is overlaid on top of that, given it's a universal program and not targeted within the student loan program. So there's a number of pieces that are interacting at any given time. So I just wanted to lay a bit of the premise around that, that it's not specifically in the design or the context of the student loan program specifically.

Some of the work that we've been doing . . . And I want to talk a little bit, if I may, in terms of a number of continuous improvement efforts that we've done over a number of years. Continuous improvement efforts that we've focused on have tended to overlay and overlap as a means of further improvements from one year to the next. So we began, what I would say, a bit of journey in terms of improvements to the student loan application process. I'm sure all of us that have had some engagement over the years, we know can tell a story about their experience with student loans — some positive and some not as positive. But we've worked really hard over the past number of years to make those improvements very transparent for learners when they apply for assistance.

So back in 2012-13 loan year we began a process of making improvements to that application process. So we started by introducing what we call a master student financial assistance agreement, and it requires students to only sign that document once. As they engage with our process, as long as they don't disconnect from the program for a maximum of two years, they only need to sign that documentation once. So that was the start of our journey to make that process simpler, clearer, and more transparent.

We took a step further in terms of that streamlining process and just recently in the early part of April and working in collaboration with Canada student loan program and their service provider, our service provider, Finastra, we've made that entire process electronic. So through the beauty of technology we now have that entire process done through an electronic process. So we no longer are pushing paper, if you will, through the Canada Post system. We do all of that electronically.

And again, as long as the student stays connected with us in some fashion without a break for two years, that information is retained and protected so that the flow of information moves along quickly. So much so that I think we've improved service delivery over the years from . . . We have some folks in the room here that date themselves back a few years that can say it used to take us 12 weeks to process an application and now our staff can turn an application around in a maximum of two days. So we've done, I would say, a tremendous amount of effort and focus to make those improvements.

[20:15]

Along the way in terms of improving those processes, in addition to that, I just wanted to make mention of some work in terms of the collaborative efforts that we make internally within

government. So we work with Central Services, the information technology division, in terms of allowing us to provide information on a new student portal that's recently been introduced.

And now again, eliminating the snail-mail process, we now release those what we call student loan assessment letters, we release those letters through the portal now rather than again through snail mail, which sort of added to the entire process for turning a student loan application around. By the time a student got all of the information, it could be another five days through — with all due respect to Canada Post — could take another five days in terms of that information being in the hands of students.

So in terms of streamlining and providing service delivery supports, that is another big piece that we've introduced this year.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Certainly I want to thank the official, the civil servant, for the report here today on this front.

I guess my question goes to the choice, though, to cut the actual allocation of dollars. Of course we have insufficient — and this is to the minister — insufficient funding for our post-secondary institutions to mitigate the . . . or I guess a driving force behind the tuition increases that we see. We've seen the really devastating cuts over the last two-year period which has been driving up tuition, along with other factors that are really impacting a student's education in our very proud institutions.

My question is, why would the government make the choice to cut the funding allocated here on this front for student support? I understand there's a designer program, but certainly with increased investment, we could be supporting more students to access post-secondary.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So I just want to challenge a couple of the comments that have been made so far with respect to student supports. The overall picture for student supports in the province of Saskatchewan is that right now we're at 106.3 million in supports for students in our budget. In '07-08 we were at 32.7, so there's been a very significant increase in the overall picture of student supports in this province through the Ministry of Advanced Education.

With respect to the Canada-Saskatchewan integrated loans and student grants program, the number of loans that have gone out, to date, well actually as of April 30th of this year is . . . 17,162 loans have gone out or students have accessed loans. That's an 18.6 per cent increase in the number of students accessing loans, and on average they're receiving an 8.1 per cent increase in the amount of funds that they are receiving. So there's been increases across the board in terms of student supports and in terms of how well students are being supported when they access the integrated student loans and student grants program.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So we . . . I mean tuition is a real challenge for students. It's of course higher than it's ever been. It's been really impacted by the devastating cuts that we've seen over the last couple years, but I want to just focus back in on the comments around the Saskatchewan Student Aid Fund budget line in your ministry here.

This year it's planned to be \$5 million less than last year. At the same time, you're describing an increased utilization and also an increased average amount that's being lent out, so that doesn't seem to add up. Can you just explain why that budget's been cut by \$5 million and explain the numbers as well around utilization of that and the average loan?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So the decision was made last year to target funding to those who needed it the most. And as a result of that, as I've said earlier, the number of loans has . . . We've increased the number of loans, and the amount of money that an individual receives is also higher. I would add that, keep in mind that the rest of the pool of student supports that we provide has also gone up year over year over year, over the last 12 years, from 32.7 million to 106.3. That's a very, very significant jump.

And with respect to the accessibility piece, I would argue that enrolment at all of our institutions has increased and enrolment amongst our First Nations and Métis students, who tend to be amongst the most vulnerable populations in terms of socio-economic status, has also increased.

And so I think what you're seeing here is that we've targeted a program, as I've said, to those who need it the most and we have made sure that other supports are also in place at a time that it's needed most. And we are also trying to make sure that we provide supports in a prudent way to those who need it the very most. And we're seeing some success for that with the enrolment rates, obviously, that we see, particularly of that cohort of students in the First Nations and Aboriginal community who tend to be of the lower socio-economic status.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So just on the enrolment rates, that speaks to the need for improved funding, so in the strain that our institutions are dealing with. Now on this front again, things don't really square with what the minister is suggesting here though when it relates to the \$5 million that this government chose to pull from this budget from last year. And so I continue to hear a description of those who need it most.

[20:30]

I guess my worry on this . . . What I'd like is that criteria to be laid out as far as what thresholds by way of income or where those cut-offs are because there are so many families and so many students across the province struggling to ever make post-secondary education a reality. And so there's \$5 million that were pulled back here that could have been put to use alleviating some of the pressures that students are facing with the big tuition fee increases, all the other costs that they're facing. So I'd like to hear a little bit more about where this . . . what the characterization of those who need it most and what those thresholds are.

And of course, this is on top of pulling away \$8 million, 7 million and some from the savings, the RESP [registered education savings plan], SAGES [Saskatchewan advantage grant for education savings] program which was a really valued tool by many across the province to save towards education. So we have tuition going up in a big way. We have certainly the housing side going up, certainly the utility side going up, certainly PST and all those other pieces being driven up by

choices of this government. And then we have the choice right here to reduce the budget allocation from last year. So I want to get a better understanding of what kind of criteria has been built around who's receiving funding.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — I think it's really important to go back to the fact that in '07-08 the total pool of student support funding was 32.7 million. Starting in '12-13, that pool of support was 97.8, 120.3, and so on and so on. So that amount of student support from when we took over government has gone up significantly. So that's a very significant student support piece that I think that we have been providing for students over the last number of years.

We'll get the characterizations of the low-income students but I would . . . I guess I would suggest that we have done a lot of work around this piece. And if we consider also, on top of this, the graduate retention program which is a post-graduate support, I think the full basket, if you will, of supports that are available to students is actually quite fulsome, and we have invested significantly in this area.

So we'll get to you on the criteria on this one particular piece, but I think it's very important to note the larger context here.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So a point of clarity on . . . So just on the minister's points . . . And I really don't want to go back like a decade on as far as comparatives because there really aren't useful apples-to-apples when we're talking about these dollars, and it gets really political at times as well.

Students right now are really struggling. In fact out of the University of Saskatchewan we've seen reports that I hope the minister has read, where students are facing incredible food insecurity as well. Students actually going hungry and making choices with where they can put their insufficient dollars to meet their basic needs. So I really hope that the trivialization of the hard reality that students across the province are facing to access education, I hope that that . . . I'd urge this government to get a better sense of the reality that students are facing.

The minister did want to go back to different numbers from '07 to now. I just would be interested, just while you're getting the information there, what was the tuition, the average tuition in 2007 and what is it today?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So we don't have the tuition rates back that far, but we are happy to provide that to you. And so we'll circle back to that for you. In the meantime, Tammy would also like to speak to the progressive nature of the student loans program, I think, which is really important in this context.

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — Thank you, Minister. So just again, just a reminder about the nature of how the program is delivered. So we deliver our program in an integrated way with the federal government. So the level of assistance is considered for the federal portion as well as the provincial portion. So any of this information applies to a combined level of assistance. So just want to make sure that you're aware of that.

Part of the changes that we made in the nature of the upfront grants, a really critical piece of that change was what we call a progressive, the introduction of a progressive grant. And what

we mean by that is any previous grants or bursaries that were available, income thresholds that a student or their respective family . . . If they made a dollar more than the income threshold, they would become ineligible, which was extremely negative for a number of learners that would be impacted every year that would be in that situation. The change that we made, and why we call it a progressive grant, is that students can, based on their income level, can receive a range of assistance in terms of those upfront grants. So combined assistance, as the minister alluded to earlier, between Canada and Saskatchewan, is up to \$4,000 for low-income students.

So I'll just get into the new progressive grants — which both the federal government and ourselves introduced at the same time — are dependent on family income and family size. So the grants, as I mentioned, are progressive, and decline as annual income increases. So for example, we often talk about a family of four and the family size of four with respect to that family income. For families that earn 60,000 or less, they're eligible for the full \$4,000 in grant assistance, in combined federal and provincial assistance. That income can rise as high as \$112,823 before families — within a family structure of four — become ineligible for that non-repayable assistance or that grant. So that nature of that progression has increased significantly in terms of how high, I guess you could say, in terms a family income can be, before you become ineligible for grant assistance.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks. I would ask the minister to undertake to provide just the detail of all the different criteria and all the different thresholds for eligibility. I'm definitely concerned by the \$5 million cut to student support on this front at a time where students are facing higher tuitions than ever; tuitions that are escalating well, you know, well in advance of, significantly higher than the rate of inflation. So that's important. And at the same time as this government's also eliminating the savings plan, about \$8 million, this year alone.

I'd like the minister to speak to those changes last year around what could be written off or what applied as a tax credit when it comes to tuition. I want to understand what the cost of that, you know, how much government saved with the changes to a tax credit last year.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So because that's a taxation piece, that's a question that needs to be directed at the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — It's fair to say that that very modest support, which maxed out at \$250 a year to families across the province, really is a real impact as well, and really is a real hit when you put together all these other pieces. So there was a lot of folks really working hard to put a little bit away for an ever-increasing cost to tuition. And I would just really urge the minister, of course, to be looking at putting the front-end dollars in, to be reversing the cut to the Student Aid Fund, but also looking at reinstating a program like this. I'd be interested as well, what's the average tuition in Saskatchewan for the year ahead?

[20:45]

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So the undergraduate arts tuition at the University of Saskatchewan this year is 6,159, full

course load, and at the University of Regina it's \$6,533.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay, and I notice as well students' associations referencing a number in excess of 7,000 this year. We'll work to make sure we have the appropriate number. But certainly what I identify from just going back a ways, is a massive increase to tuition by way of per cent. And the minister did touch on 2007 just a while ago, and going back to those numbers, in fact, you had a tuition of about \$5,000. I know there was a commitment at that time to freeze and reduce that tuition by 1,000, taking it to about \$4,000. And if you're looking at a \$7,000 tuition at this point in time, over that period of time — and I don't want to get political over these things, but the minister was — that's a massive increase for students, you know, a \$3,000 increase to a \$4,000 tuition, 75 per cent increase in a short number of years.

And of course we see the underfunding that's in the cuts that are being handed to our institutions, and the cuts then to student fund and the savings programs that are here. Could you just speak directly to the tax credit piece and just explain the cut that was made there? I know you said that the number of people that were impacted, or the cost, would be a Finance question. Fair enough. But just explain the change that was made, what the motivation was to take away that bit of relief for students as well.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Can you clarify which program you're speaking to?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — There was a tax credit. That's why I'm seeking some clarity here. Students that were filing taxes this year, there was a tax credit or a tax tool that allowed them to write off some portion of, I don't know if it was books or . . . I'm looking for a description from the minister. I know lots of students were frustrated at tax time when they went to go, you know, mark this tax item for dollars they had invested for a program they'd utilized in the past, to find out that of course it had been scrapped.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — That is Finance's so, you know, we can't speak to that.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Like books. It was a tax credit pertaining to books. Like I'm not meaning to be disrespectful, but this is an important component of the cost of education as well, and this is a change that's under your ministry and a reality that, if I'm hearing from students all across the province, I sure hope you are as minister. So I'm just looking for clarity. I believe it's around books.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So under schedule (S11), post-secondary students may claim a non-refundable tax credit on tuition and education amounts, but conditions for transferring unused amounts are the same as for federal tax credit. As of July 1st, 2017 the provincial tuition and education tax credit is eliminated. That was also eliminated from the federal tax piece.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. So this is another impact though for students. Does the minister recognize that?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Yes.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — It's just that it's a difficult time for students across this province, and if we're going to be building the brightest future within this province, that's going to mean making sure that young people can live up to their full potential, and that all people can pursue post-secondary education. And we have a real confluence of damaging choices that are being made that's making that ever harder for so many and a complete barrier for many within the province.

I'd be interested in hearing from the minister around what the budget forecast, what's been communicated to the institutions in the coming years. I believe the ministry will have provided budget numbers for the coming years for those institutions to plan. For example, the University of Saskatchewan, what's been communicated on that front?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Nothing yet.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — There hasn't been any communication at this point of the budget plans for the years ahead?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — No. We have had conversations; I have had conversations with the board of governors of our institutions, of most of our major institutions, and getting to the regional colleges. And we will work together in the upcoming budget year, but there's been no communication of expectations at this time.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. We've heard of some troubling numbers that apparently are being communicated or floated around for these institutions, and that's disconcerting. So I'll communicate that to the minister. Certainly these institutions deserve clarity on this front if numbers haven't been communicated.

And I think it's critical as well at this stage of the game, with the cuts that these institutions have incurred over the last couple of years, that the ministry's really in tune with the impacts of the budgets that they're passing along. I guess my question would be for the minister. What was communicated to her or her ministry as far as the requirement for the University of Regina for this year by way of a budget increase to simply maintain status quo operations?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — I'm not clear on the question.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So just as far as the budget planning process and the consultative process, what did the University of Regina communicate to the ministry, to the government, that they would require by way of an increase to simply maintain status quo operations?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — The operations forecast, which is due now, and we have not received it to our knowledge to date for this year.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sorry, that took a little while to get the response. I have quite a bit of other issues that I want to canvass. But my question was for the formation of the current budget, the one that we're debating here right now . . .

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — For the '18-19?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — For the '18-19.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — I'm sorry, I misunderstood your question.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes, no problem. What was the expectation, or what was communicated by the University of Regina by way of the increase that they would need in grant funding to ensure status quo operations?

[21:00]

Mr. McLoughlin: — The ministry received an operations forecast for this fiscal of 3.3 per cent from the University of Regina.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right, and so just to be clear, the 3.3 per cent, and I've got the correspondence as well, made it very clear that to have a budget I think here, I'll quote, it's "maintain a steady state of operations," the requirement was there for a grant increase of 3.3 per cent in 2018-19. So that was communicated well in advance of the budget. In the end, as noted by the university, the grant increase was zero per cent, so a funding formula shift of \$886,600 was based on a bit of an enrolment growth adjustment. But it falls millions short of what the university had clearly communicated to the minister and ministry or to the government as to what they needed.

So I guess my question to the minister is, was she also aware of some of the choices then that came with the choice to underfund that institution? I think of the wrestling program as but one example. There's the Faculty of Social Work, there's the tuition, there's the volleyball program, but just the wrestling program itself which really has alarmed our community with that cut, when did the ministry or minister learn of the potential of that program being cut?

Mr. McLoughlin: — We were made aware of that on budget day, April 10th.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So the minister learned of that potential impact on budget day, when it also would have been known by the minister and the government that they put the university in a spot that they had to go and find lots of cuts and also to go out and to hike tuition. Did the minister . . . When the minister learned that that was on the table — I'll use just that example again, the wrestling program — what did the minister do? Did the minister revisit that budget?

Mr. McLoughlin: — I think in light of a tough budget environment and fiscal environment for the province, our institutions have to make as well tough decisions. And as an autonomous institution we have to respect the decisions of the board and decisions of management in regards to this year's budget.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. Well and I won't debate with . . . Thank you for your response. I'm disappointed in the minister. I'm disappointed in the government, in the cabinet, not with the good officials that go out there to do the work. The harsh consequences of the choice for this year's budget were well known by the minister and by the government, and it's just so disappointing that there wasn't any action taken to address that

insufficiency of the funding to make sure that we don't have such devastating impacts to programs.

We know the social work program, where we've got students that are stranded in Saskatoon who have invested their time and their lives to become social workers, who have had their program jeopardized because of budget cuts. We see the tuition increases that we're facing. We see the impacts on research for faculty across this province. We see the challenges for the general piece of recruitment and retention of faculty. We see the utilization more and more and more of sessionals because of the budget choices of this government. And it's just disappointing to me that when it was laid out so plainly, so clearly, and so honestly by the university that the budget impacts would be dramatic if the government went at it the way that they have . . . I'm just beyond disappointed.

[21:15]

I look at that wrestling program. It's but one example, but that was built year after year after year, decade after decade with, you know, tons of sweat and toil and energy and volunteerism. And to lose that program, it's not something that can just be rebuilt a few years from now if it's gone. You can put that effort together, but this is a nationally renowned program that has tentacles and a network that does good all throughout our community. And I'm just so disappointed that it was so clear to this minister and so clear to this Premier and this government that these impacts were on the table and yet they chose to proceed.

I'd like to adjust over to Saskatchewan Polytechnic, and of course they've been forced into a tough budgetary position. There's been layoffs that have occurred there as well, that have impacted programs. Of course students have been impacted. I'm interested in if there's been adjustments to, I think they're called temporary market stipends adjustments, for faculty out there.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So my understanding is that there are negotiations and bargaining going on right now and this is an issue that is on the bargaining table, and so I can't speak to it further at this time.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So the minister's not aware of communication to employees?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — No.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well it's our understanding that it's been . . . Again these are important pieces. These are impacts of a budget. And it's our understanding that stipends have been . . . that it's been communicated that unilaterally they've been decreased by 30 per cent.

The stipend, of course — just so folks watching at home can understand what we're talking about here — are in place to make sure that there's a measure, a bit of an adjustment to make sure that those that are faculty, that are there teaching and delivering programs at this very important institution, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, that they are compensated at a fair rate. Quite often the rate that they may earn or would earn, you know, in their profession, say as a nurse or out in the private

sector in a different space, is significantly higher than what they'd otherwise have through their agreements. So this is there to make sure that we can retain workers.

So I guess my question to the minister: would she be . . . Is she concerned by learning here tonight that it's been communicated to employees that they are taking a 30 per cent hit to their stipend? And I guess the question as well is, does it concern her that her here, along with her ministry, has no awareness of these impacts that are happening within her portfolio?

The Chair: — Mr. Wotherspoon, you are very familiar with the impacts of labour relations and the labour code. I believe you're heading down that path that is part of negotiations that the minister cannot talk about when negotiations are taking place. So I would rule that question out of order.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — It doesn't seem to be any negotiation though, at all. I appreciate the caution, and I'm aware of those cautions. It seems to me that a direct letter has gone out to those that work out at Saskatchewan Polytechnic to communicate that this impact is coming into effect on July 1, 2018. So it would appear to me by the very plainly written letter that this is in fact an impact.

So I guess the question to the minister, if she will entertain the question: does this concern her? And does it also concern her that she's not aware of these impacts — serious impacts — within her portfolio?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Once again, you know, this is a negotiation issue at the bargaining table and I'm not made aware of all of the issues at the bargaining table, and I think that's appropriate that I'm not.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So this isn't negotiation. This is a letter that's gone to those employees . . .

The Chair: — Mr. Wotherspoon, the minister has responded that that is part of the negotiations and therefore out of bounds.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — We can canvass that at a later date to . . .

The Chair: — You can canvass that next year after the negotiations are over. If you don't have any other questions, we will wrap this up or you can change the subject.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The letter's gone to employees . . .

The Chair: — That's it. We're done. I gave you the opportunity, Mr. Wotherspoon, to go to a different tack. You're still on the labour negotiations. It's done. Are you switching topics?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So I'd like to understand, the adult basic education, it's been transferred into the ministry. Adult basic education's very important of course. I'm interested in just understanding what the allocation is this year comparative to years past, what the uptake is in adult basic education, and if there's a wait-list that exists, what that wait-list is for entry in.

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — Hi. So I just want to clarify the context of the question. If you could just maybe clarify what you're . . .

just to make sure that I'm responding appropriately to the question.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sure. So I believe adult basic education's been transferred into this ministry. I think that's come from maybe the portfolio, the Ministry of the Economy before. So I'm wondering what that budget allocation is this year. I believe it's over a . . . I had the amount here somewhere. But what I really want to know is what it is this year. How does that compare to previous years? How many people are registered, or are you planning for within the program? And what's the . . . is there a wait-list for adult basic education?

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — So the short answer to that, essentially, is that ABE [adult basic education] still remains within Immigration and Career Training. What did transfer over to the Ministry of Advanced Education was a total of 91,000 in terms of operating funding for the administration of ABE to Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies and Lakeland College.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So I see the restatement, the appropriation restatement, page 162 of the budget book, vote 37 reallocates from the Ministry of the Economy vote 23 the responsibility, the operational funding. So I'll read it:

Programming for disability supports for post-secondary students, core funding for skills training, and operational funding for Adult Basic Education are transferred from the Ministry of the Economy to the Ministry of Advanced Education to consolidate funding for these functions within one ministry.

And the amount is 1.625 million.

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — So just to reiterate, the portion associated with ABE is the 91,000 associated with the administration costs for those two institutions.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you very . . . Thank you for that answer. Last year, I guess it was in 2016, the then Finance minister waded in to talking about a complete overhaul of our post-secondary institutions that play such an important role. It created huge unease for these institutions who were then cut in a major way. And it was questions that that minister, the Finance minister, was asking, "Do we need [and I'm quoting him] two faculties of engineering, two faculties of nursing, two faculties of education?" He went on. I'll stop there. It certainly reflected a lack of understanding of our high-performing post-secondary system. It maybe foreshadowed the damaging choices that were made.

The then minister is the now Premier of our province. And so my question is, where is this overhaul, or potential overhaul, at? Because it certainly impacts planning and peace of mind for our exceptional institutions.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — The other thing that is being contemplated at this time is we are currently conducting a review of the nursing program. I have spoken to this publicly as well. The review is assessing the two-provider model delivered at the University of Saskatchewan's School of Nursing and also the University of Regina and Sask Polytech's collaborative

nursing program. It's being led by the nursing dean's forum, I think, which is very important.

And the review is evaluating the two-provider model looking at the following components. The adequacy of the current model and the 690 education seats to address labour market needs, including clinical placement challenges. The costs and benefits of delivering both programs in Regina and Saskatoon. That doesn't speak . . . I'm certainly not looking at whether . . . at the programs that are offered outside of Regina and Saskatoon, but both sets of programs are being offered in Regina and Saskatoon, so they're going to look at that. The costs and benefits, obviously, of distributed education across the province and the transfer credit and learner pathways available for students.

[21:30]

You know, I can speak to a little bit of the terms of reference for this. They include an evaluation of the goals and objectives of the two-provider model and outcomes achieved to date. It includes a labour market review to assess the adequacy of the current capacity to meet urban, rural, and remote needs, including the 800 additional FTEs in the health system. The terms of reference includes the costs and benefits of the two-provider model, including distributed education in both programs; the transfer credit and learner pathways available for students to enter and exit the programs; and finally in the terms of reference are the effectiveness of the clinical placement component, including capacity and challenges. We expect that review to come out later this month.

The Chair: — Okay. Thank you very much. We have now reached the agreed-to time for estimates. Mr. Wotherspoon, do you have any short closing remarks, please?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — They'll be much more brief than the scrums here tonight, as were here tonight. I do want to say to the minister, thanks for the time here tonight. To the officials that are here tonight on a late night, thank you so very much. Thank you for the work you do throughout the year. Very importantly, to all the civil servants across the province working in this very important ministry, all the partners in post-secondary education, our incredible institutions, our universities, our regional colleges, Sask Polytechnic, our federated colleges, our indigenous colleges and institutions — thank you for what you do throughout the province. And I won't say more before I probably get cut off by the Chair, but certainly it's an important time for the sector.

The Chair: — Madam Minister, any comments?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — I would like to thank my team. I have an incredible team in the Ministry of Advanced Education. I feel very blessed actually to have the people that I do in this ministry. They're incredibly committed and competent individuals who care a lot about this sector. I'm grateful for that. And I'm also grateful to my team here in the minister's office. I'd also like to thank my colleagues who are sitting in committee tonight for being here this evening in this very, very warm room for this very engaging conversation. So thank you all for being here. I appreciate that. And thank you to you, Mr. Chair, for being the bomb.

The Chair: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Thank you to the staff for being here. We will now adjourn consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Advanced Education. We will take a five-minute recess and then reconvene for the consideration of Bill No. 94.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

Bill No. 94 — *The Saskatchewan Advantage Grant for Education Savings (SAGES) Amendment Act, 2017*

Clause 1

The Chair: — We will now move on to the considerations of Bill No. 94, *The Saskatchewan Advantage Grant for Education Savings (SAGES) Amendment Act, 2017*, clause 1, short title. Madam Minister, would you please introduce your officials and make your opening comments.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So you've already met Tammy Bloor Cavers and you've met Mark McLoughlin and you've met David Boehm behind me, but I don't know that I introduced Kirk last time around. So Kirk is also with us today. He's the executive director of student services in the program development branch.

Mr. Chair, last fall the former minister of Advanced Education had the opportunity to introduce Bill 94, *The Saskatchewan Advantage Grant for Education Savings (SAGES) Amendment Act*. We're here today to consider that bill in more detail. This bill will suspend SAGES grant payments for the eligible contributions made after December the 31st of 2017. It will disable the accumulation of the \$250 per year carry forward of unused SAGES grant room during the suspension period. It will also be retroactive and deemed to have come into force as of January 1st, 2018. In addition, Mr. Chair, the SAGES regulations that allow subscribers and financial institutions up to three years to apply for SAGES grant will not be active during the suspension.

Mr. Chair, due to the connection between the SAGES program and the federal government's Canada Education Savings Grant, some features of SAGES will remain in place to reduce disruption to the Canada education savings plan trustees and subscribers. The SAGES program will continue to function for subscribers with existing SAGES grants in their RESPs. Mr. Chair, these amendments will allow for simplified future program reactivation and they will not affect SAGES grants already paid out.

I will note the SAGES grants already paid out must be managed and monitored to ensure that they are being used for their intended purpose. In order to do so, the Ministry of Advanced Education will continue to pay annual administration costs of between 400,000 to 600,000 to the Canada education savings program to cover transactions such as the education assistance payments that will continue during the suspension.

Mr. Chair, beginning in 2018-19 we anticipate the annual savings to the program to be approximately \$7.4 million. There was a one-time cost of \$60,000 in 2017-18 to implement changes related to the suspension of SAGES grant payments. Mr. Chair, at an annual meeting in June of last year Advanced

Education officials and Canada education savings program consulted with the trustees that are offering SAGES.

[21:45]

In closing I'd like to emphasize that the key objective for these amendments is to minimize disruption for trustees who have invested in the system changes to offer SAGES and allow for future SAGES retroactivation to occur seamlessly. I'd be very pleased now to answer any of your questions. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Clause 1, short title. Are there any questions? I recognize Mr. Wotherspoon.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — No, I think, you know, it'll come as no surprise to the minister that we're really disappointed with this cut, the elimination, scrapping of a program that provided very modest support to families working hard to save for, you know, their children's education, doing all they can to do so. And this was a very modest amount of support that would also encourage that investment. Two hundred and fifty dollars was the maximum that the province would provide and of course that reflected 10 per cent of what families were working hard to set aside.

So the minister spoke about some of whom she consulted on this front to scrap this program. Did you consult with families and the students across the province on this front?

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — So in response to your question, so the minister explained that the consultation process that we had undertaken was with the registered education savings advisory program committee that represents essentially trustees or promoters. We use that term interchangeably in terms of the financial institutions that deliver the program. So they are the primary conduit for us in terms of reaching out to children, families that are investing, whether it's parents or grandparents or whoever it might be. And the feedback that we received was — in the context of understanding government's situation in terms of financial constraint — that they were pleasantly, I would say, surprised in terms of the program not being cancelled.

So part of, I guess, the clarification I probably should make as well is that the program hasn't been cancelled. So the grant payments have been suspended. We need to continue to operate the program, as beneficiaries of RESPs, as well as the advantage grant for education savings, as well as the Canada Education Savings Grant program, people draw on those supports daily, annually in terms of pursuing post-secondary education. And we would still support families to . . . We would encourage them to continue to invest in RESPs. They still benefit from the Canada Education Savings Grant top-up of 20 per cent. And it's been described as, this is a period of monitoring our ability to invest. And our hope is to reactivate the program when we're back on track in terms of balancing the books.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Again I just appreciate the information and I'm not ever here to debate a good, strong civil servant. I really appreciate your work and your earnest approach to it.

I haven't heard anyone describe, Madam Minister, this

elimination as something that people were pleasantly surprised with. I do think people are disappointed by this modest amount of support that the province was providing. Of course the federal government plays a larger role on this front. And I think it's just disappointing that the province would choose to sit on the sidelines on this front instead of continuing to extend this meaningful support.

And you know, like the reality for families out there right now is that it's hard to put a buck away for . . . It's hard to do that for retirement, let alone for education. There's a lot of people working really hard to make ends meet and this little bit of support was a bit of encouragement and a bit of additional support that certainly mitigates the cost.

And we need to put this in the frame of what's happening in our province right now, which is that the tuition is increasing in a very significant way, a direct consequence of cuts. We see some of the other cuts that we've identified here tonight to some of the student supports that are also essential. We know that the reality for students across our province is that they're facing increases to their housing costs as well, utility increases, the PST that's been foisted on them and increased by the government. So it's a tough reality folks are facing.

And the other thing I'd like to identify on this is, was there a scan of who this impacts the most? Because certainly it's hard for families, let's say in a major city, our major cities — Regina, Saskatoon — or other places with good, strong post-secondary institutions, to save. And it's not as though every student stays within that city or that university or that college to study, but it does alleviate some of the cost when you're say in Regina and opportunities are there for a child to go, or a student to go to post-secondary within that home environment. Has there been an assessment done on this front to recognize whether or not this is a greater hardship, I would imagine, on rural and remote students in communities?

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — If I could just elaborate just a little bit in terms of my commentary around the “pleasantly surprised” comment. I should have added in, on the heels of Alberta's, what they called their ACES [Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan] program is also a registered education savings program top-up, but they cancelled the program and it hadn't been in place for very long. And their reaction to our ability to suspend versus cancel . . . I guess I should place that context because we could have gone so far as to cancel the program entirely, given that was the situation in Alberta and we made a different choice. So I just wanted to clarify that commentary. Thanks.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So because the program funnels through a series of trustees, we have no way of knowing the geographic location of subscribers. We do know that they're Saskatchewan residents.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. I think it's just a reality that those in rural and remote northern communities certainly have to relocate for post-secondary education. Certainly some in cities need to as well, but the impact's greater any time that you're removing some of the supports for those that are working hard to access post-secondary education. I think it's something really important to keep in mind in a province like ours where you

have so many families working hard, so many young people with so much potential. And of course we should be doing all we can to support the entry into post-secondary when the ability and interest is there, not remove supports or increase barriers.

Final questions. I mean obviously, you know, as an opposition we're solidly opposed to this legislation and will be voting clearly against it. But we don't need to belabour the discussion here tonight too much further other than I would be interested in knowing how many people subscribed or utilized this program in its final year and in years previous. I'd be interested in knowing how many this last year, and if it's easier for maybe five-year data or something on it, that could be provided to the committee in the coming days.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So at the end of 2013-2014 there were 36,357 beneficiaries. At the end of 2014-15 there were 46,806. At the end of 2015-16 there were 55,321; '16-17 — 64,072. And year to date, so '17-18, would be 72,532. We're just going to add to that, because these are cumulative numbers.

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — So the numbers that the minister referenced as the starting point, so '13-14, would've been the initial year of implementation, which any program takes a period of time to ramp up. But the reality is, people come and go from registered education savings program benefits. People withdraw contributions that make the SAGES grant ineligible, along with the Canada Education Savings Grant.

So we aren't able to delineate from one fiscal year to the next what the new beneficiaries are. It's tracked in that way so that's the best of the statistics that we have available.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Just to clarify on that then for my understanding, so you're saying 72,000 is cumulative, as in, that's the total number of beneficiaries or that's . . . So 72,000 students, young people across the province have an account in their name.

[22:00]

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — Correct.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So again, just on this point . . .

Ms. Bloor Cavers: — [Inaudible] . . . just a point of clarification, there can be group plans as well. So there is complexities around . . . So these, just to clarify, there are group plans where more than one individual can be identified as a beneficiary. So that isn't . . . it's not the majority, and we would have to check that to see if we can clarify and delineate that difference. But that's the nature of how the statistics are tracked by the Canada Education Savings program itself.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I'd say it's pretty wide utilization that's occurred where a province of a million, break out the number of young people in the province, 72,000 people utilizing this program or having that bit of support in place is really meaningful and important. So I'm really disappointed with the elimination of the annual grant on this front and I would certainly urge the ministry to reconsider this, the Premier to reconsider it, and of course, if they push it forward, we'll be voting against it.

The Chair: — Okay thank you. We have reached the agreed-to time for this particular bill.

Clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

An Hon. Member: — No.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 5 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Saskatchewan Advantage Grant for Education Savings (SAGES) Amendment Act, 2017*. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. I would now ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 94, *The Saskatchewan Advantage Grant for Education Savings (SAGES) Amendment Act, 2017* without amendment. Would someone move that? Ms. Wilson.

Hon. Ms. Wilson: — I so move.

The Chair: — Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Okay, thank you very much, Madam Minister. Thank you to your officials. And if someone . . . There's always a script. Okay, thank you, Madam Minister. And if a member would move that we adjourn. Mr. Fiaz. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee stands adjourned until May 9th, 2018 at 3 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 22:04.]