



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. Larry Doke, Chair
Cut Knife-Turtleford

Ms. Danielle Chartier, Deputy Chair
Saskatoon Riversdale

Mr. Herb Cox
The Battlefords

Mr. Muhammad Fiaz
Regina Pasqua

Hon. Todd Goudy
Melfort

Ms. Nicole Rancourt
Prince Albert Northcote

Ms. Nadine Wilson
Saskatchewan Rivers

[The committee met at 15:02.]

The Chair: — Welcome, everybody. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Human Services. I'll introduce the panel first. My name is Larry Doke. I'm the committee Chair, joined today by MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Nadine Wilson, the Hon. Todd Goudy, MLA Herb Cox, MLA Muhammad Fiaz, and sitting in for Danielle Chartier today is MLA David Forbes.

Before we get started here I would like to table HUS 53-28, Ministry of Health: Responses to questions raised at the June 15th and 16th, 2020 meetings.

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

Subvote (LR01)

The Chair: — Our first item of business is the consideration of vote 20, Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, central management and services, subvote (LR01). Minister Morgan is here with his officials, and due to physical distancing requirements in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, witnesses may speak at the stand-up microphone podium if they are required to answer questions. I would ask that all witnesses to please state their names for the record before speaking at the microphone. Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening comments.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my privilege to be here today to share with you how the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety will use the 2020-21 budget to continue its work in health and safety of employees and employers and promote a positive labour environment.

I'm joined today with Donna Johnson, deputy minister; Louise Usick, executive director, corporate services; Ray Anthony, executive director, occupational health and safety; Sameema Haque, executive director, employment standards; Denise Klotz, director, Office of the Workers' Advocate; Pat Parenteau, director of policy; Phil Germain, chief executive officer of the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board; Jonathan Swarbrick, acting board registrar, Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board.

I would like to take this time to highlight a couple of the items and initiatives taking place within the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. But before I do, I would like to thank special mediators Vince Ready and Amanda Rogers for the work that they did the last few months. We appreciated their diligence and continuous support of both parties during the recent Unifor-FCL [Federated Co-operatives Ltd.] labour disruption.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move on and talk about decreasing serious injuries and workplace fatalities. Workplace health and safety needs to be top of mind in everything that we do. We need to do all that we can to ensure that workers are going home safe at the end of each and every day.

The Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety is taking action towards the goal of Mission: Zero. This past November,

together with the Workers' Compensation Board, we released a three-year fatalities and serious injury strategy under WorkSafe Saskatchewan. This is important work and I want to take this opportunity to thank Lori Johb, president of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, for her participation and advocacy on behalf of workers throughout the province.

As our government continues to build and grow Saskatchewan, we need to ensure that we are reducing the number of serious workplace injuries and fatalities. With a priority on health and safety, the ministry will continue its targeted intervention strategy. We have seen significant results here. They are not enough, but a definite step in the right direction.

Since implementing targeted intervention in 2013, the total injury rate was reduced by 43 per cent and the time-loss injury rate has been reduced by 33 per cent. We know that occupational health and safety activities contribute significantly to this decline. We have more work to do, but we are making progress. Part of this decline has been specifically from the work of our occupational health and safety officers. Mr. Chair, hiring occupational health and safety officers helps keep Saskatchewan workplaces safe.

In this budget, we continue to put more occupational health officers into the field. Three new officers will help in addressing some of the challenges faced in rural areas of our province and will improve response times to attend serious injuries. Investing in officers has saved money, builds relationships with employees and employers, and helps to save lives.

This past fiscal year, more than 4,000 work site visits were performed; 22 summary offence tickets were issued; more than 1,900 notices of contravention were issued. There were 11 convictions of violations of *The Saskatchewan Employment Act*, and there was \$1.6 million in fines that were levied. Our work isn't done, but the ministry is continuing to make a difference where it matters most.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move on and talk about developing a level playing field. I've explained the ministry's continued and unwavering commitment to safety. We also have the same commitment to creating an environment of fairness and making this province competitive. This year the ministry will continue to make balanced financial decisions as it ensures legislation is up to date and supports both employees and employers as it undertakes its role in Saskatchewan's plan for growth.

Mr. Chair, we want to ensure employers are in compliance with employment standards provisions of the Act. Funding in this budget will allow us to continue to help employers and young workers know their rights and responsibilities. It will allow us to continue offering the young worker readiness certificate course for 14- and 15-year-olds.

Since the program began in 2010, more than 137,000 certificates have been issued. It is important that this program meets the needs of students and of employers. As such, in 2020 a full technical and content review is being undertaken. One component of the review — we will make sure that the program reflects the province's cultural and ethnic diversity. This will help support the province's growth plan as more residents come to Saskatchewan communities. Starting with the young, the

ministry works to ensure employers understand their obligations under *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* and that they stay in compliance. Education and engagement are key to success in this area.

The ministry also continues to support workers in their dealings with the Workers' Compensation Board. The Office of the Workers' Advocate helps people appeal decisions that are made by the WCB [Workers' Compensation Board]. This work helps to ensure treatment of injured workers is properly covered by the Workers' Compensation Board insurance premiums, not the General Revenue Fund. And the Office of the Workers' Advocate has expanded its services as part of an ongoing pilot project to represent people appealing decisions by Saskatchewan Government Insurance to the Automobile Injury Appeal Commission.

Mr. Chair, I'm proud of the work and the dedication shown by the staff at the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. The '20-21 budget will allow them to continue promoting and enforcing healthy and safe workplaces, ensuring a fair and balanced set of rules are followed to protect the rights of employees and employers, offering workplace conflict and mediation services, and providing advice to help injured workers. In doing so, they create a level playing field that ensures economic growth and a better quality of life is available to everyone in this province. Thank you for this opportunity to share with you. And with that we are prepared to answer your questions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. We'll move on to questions now. Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. And I do have some, and I appreciate the opportunity to be part of the estimates for Workplace Safety, workplace relations and safety. Very important that we talk about some of the new initiatives. And I had a chance to read last year's estimates or committee and my colleague from Regina Elphinstone did a good job of asking a lot of questions. There were a lot of changes in the last couple of years, so it'll be a chance for us to talk about some of those things.

And I too wanted to say that it was good news when the Federated Co-op lockout ended. And Vince Ready has always done a good job. It was something that I think, and we all think, we all wish things could be resolved quicker at the table. But I hope that this is something that the minister will take to, when he talks about reviews, how the relevant sections in the employment Act, the old trade union Act, some of those changes and what kind of impact they've had on that.

But I do have a couple of quick questions and hopefully we can get some answers right away. My first question is about WCB and I had our staffer ask at the release of the report, the 2019 annual report, a question about the total number of claims except for health in terms of days lost due to the total number of claims.

I had been reading the 2018 annual report, and on page 44 of the 2018 report it stated that there were 3,920 claims. And I thought that you could just multiply it by the average claim duration, which was 30.17 days on page 55, to calculate the total number of days lost to claims, and that would come out to 118,000 days.

But unfortunately the person said, no, math is wrong. That's not the right answer. But we've not got the answer.

And so the commitment was made there that we would get a table with the total number of days lost by rate code. Is that possible to get by the end of this committee meeting? I know it's a quarter after 3, so I would bet that somebody's at the office. Because we are in the final days of the session . . . And I appreciate that I would normally go to the Chair, and I don't mind the Chair having the information, but it probably will never get to my desk. So the question is, can you find out the number of days lost in the health sector?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — In health?

Mr. Forbes: — Health. And that's G22.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Okay. I can give you some of those days right now.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — 2015: 57,726; 2016: 70,622; 2017: 66,118; 2018: 68,698; and 2019: 65,564.

Mr. Forbes: — Perfect.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Is that what you need?

Mr. Forbes: — That's what I needed. Thank you so much. I appreciate the . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No, thank you for your answer.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. Now if we can keep that pace up this would be great. But I don't know what I'll do about this one, Mr. Minister. You have several times . . . And when we've raised the issue of minimum wage, and I don't expect that we'll come to an agreement on what that should be today. And I appreciated the shout-out that we both agree to take the politics out. We both agree on some type of formula.

But you have stated last year and again this year, and in fact this government has stated for years now, that you've taken off 112,000 people off the tax — low-income people, not just any people, but low-income people. We have asked through written questions and they have been ordered. I have asked the former Finance minister, Mr. Krawetz. He said he couldn't tell because the information was too new. That was back when this was started to be a claim. Now we're into year 12 of this claim that 112,000 people have been taken off the tax rolls. We just can't see how that number can be accurate.

Again, it's early. It's a quarter after 3. You may not know the answer to that, but here's your opportunity. Because I actually think that number is, you might as well say 200,000, you know, because that number is wrong. It's unproven; it's not true. And I'd welcome . . . I'd be very happy to be wrong, Mr. Chair, if I could just see that math. But until I see that math, I just have to say it's unproven. And here's your opportunity.

[15:15]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well, I'll see if one of my office staff can get somebody that would come out of either Trade and Export or out of Finance as to how the low-income thresholds work. But what we've done is lifted the amount of income that you can earn before you start paying income tax. So the effect of that is anybody that would have been paying income tax at a low rate, but at a rate, is removed from that.

Now the interesting thing that's happened, is that was what happened initially when we formed government by raising the thresholds that were there, I've accepted that that was what the numbers are. And they've come back to us over the years and said that number's actually gone down — that the 112,000 that were taken off, a lot of those people are now earning enough money that they're no longer off the tax rolls, that they've earned enough money that they're now starting to pay taxes. Which I guess is a good thing that they're earning more money; maybe not so good that they're paying taxes. But the good thing is it's a sign of economic growth, and it's a further good sign that those people are moving up on whatever their employment career paths are.

But I don't know if Molly or Clint are going to be able to find anything during the meeting today. I presume that you specifically asked for this meeting today so you would have access to all the people that might be at the ministry rather than at home. So anyway, I don't know that we'll be able to find it for you during the course of the meeting, but that was the effect. That was their estimates that they knew this was the size of the workforce, the number of people that were there.

I can tell you — whether it makes any difference; I'm not sure the size of the total workforce — but about 10 per cent of the workforce is at an income level where they would be affected by a raise in minimum wage. So they're either at or close enough to that they would be in the range that it would be increased or close enough that it would get pushed up. So there's about a 10 per cent group that are there, so those are likely the same ones that would be affected by the changes that we've made to the low-income cut-offs.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, and I don't dispute that there would be some because you had changed the tax rates. And we had done that, I think under Finance minister Cline, and our claim was that we took 50,000 people off the tax rates.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm sure that if Eric took off 50, we probably took off many, many more than that. And I think, if you pardon my bad humour, the effect of it is and should be that it's better for somebody to be working than dependent on taxpayer-funded benefits to them. So the goal, I think, should be that a person should be able to keep more of the money they earn themselves. So on that part of it, you and I are on the same page.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, and I agree. It's just that the tax rates can be kind of a dull tool when you're dealing with people who may be getting off the tax rates for other reasons other than they're low-income workers. So I appreciate that answer and if you could get details to me, that would be fine, and if it's through the Chair, both of us would even be better. That would be great.

Now I had asked some questions, and this is getting into something that we'll talk more about in terms of COVID, but the

questions were ordered. So I don't know if you don't know the answers or you prefer not to share the answers, or that's just something that was happening in the House, but there were some questions that I'm very interested in getting the answers. And that is, how many days in total have been lost because of COVID-19-related injuries? Have we had any claims at all to WCB related to COVID-19?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes. The total days paid is 469. Of the claims that I'm not sure . . . Donna, correct me if I'm wrong because I don't see it on there. There was approximately 100 claims filed. Of those, I think 26 were accepted and payment started. So that would be 103 claims filed. And then 29 were accepted; 72 were not; 1 is pending.

Now of the ones that were not allowed, I sort of thought that seemed like a large percentage. But it was people that had applied for it because they weren't feeling well, but then later on were determined not to have COVID. So virtually the last time I looked at it, all of the ones that were declined, which was at that time seven . . . a slightly lower number than that, all did not have COVID.

Mr. Forbes: — Good. Yes, okay.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — So the acceptance rate for people that have COVID is close to 100 per cent that have applied at Workers' Comp. And I'm presuming that you're going to talk about presumptive coverage for COVID.

Mr. Forbes: — We can get right into that right now. It would make sense. Yes.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We provide presumptive coverage for firefighters because it's impossible to prove the direct physical connection between the work that they do and the illnesses that they sustain because of the timeline, it's cancerous, or you know, it could be a variety of other things. So the presumptive coverage, I think, has worked relatively well and it's based on the statistical difference between what firefighters have for cancers and what the general population has.

With COVID we don't need to do that kind of analysis because COVID is very new and it's easy to determine based on the tracing that's being done. Did you get it at work or didn't you? So right now virtually everybody that's applied, saying that they got it at work, did get it at work and has received coverage. So I think at this point in time it would be premature to have to consider presumptive coverage because the coverage appears to be there.

As you're aware from being a MLA, when somebody comes into your office and says, I have a problem with Workers' Comp, you tell them (a) you have to prove you're sick, and (b) you have to prove that the sickness or injury is work related. Well right now we're able to prove it in virtually all of the cases.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So now you have that communicable disease policy, which seems to me to be fairly onerous because there's several diseases that might fall into this. But am I hearing you say we're kind of doing a hybrid? We're saying if somebody comes in and they've got COVID and you can show that this was something they might have got at their work, how strenuous or

how hard is it to prove that you've got it at work? Is that becoming an obstacle for people, you know?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — At this point in time not, because of the people that have actually had the disease, that have applied, it's almost 100 per cent acceptance. So I think we're able to say when somebody comes in, oh yes, that's because of you're doing this kind of work and in your workplace there was this or that going on.

So we haven't had anybody apply for coverage that received it at a social gathering or something else. We haven't had those kind of applications. But so far it's been relatively easy to say, oh yes, this was workplace related. It was because of contact with individual X or individual Y. So I don't think we need to look at a statistical likelihood. So I think we're using the same method of processing the claims that any other illness claim would be done. And I'm seeing nodding from the official.

Mr. Forbes: — So that's a little different than what we've heard though, where you have, if I'm wrong on this you can say no, we're doing exactly that policy on the communicable disease policy. You're taking more of a just-straight-disease policy. Or are you making them prove that it's . . . You know, it just seems to me that when I read that policy it was pretty onerous, and you're trying to prove . . . Like we're already at second base when we know COVID is out there. We don't have to prove that part to the extent. Is that fair to say?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'll read the portion that may apply and may answer the question:

The WCB may consider a communicable disease to have arisen out of and in the course of employment where all of the following conditions are met:

There is confirmed exposure in the workplace.

The time period when the worker contracts the disease is in close proximity to the confirmed workplace exposure, and

The nature of employment increases the exposure risk of contracting the disease as compared to the general population.

So I think that's sort of what they would look at in this case, I think, in the case of COVID because it's new. And if you were a worker at, say, the Brooks, Alberta plant and you'd know, okay everybody that was residing at such-and-such a place that was a housing facility operated by the plant, everybody that worked there was at risk. And of the 40 people that lived there, 20 of them got COVID. That's the answer.

Mr. Forbes: — Fair enough. We'll watch to see how this goes. The other thing, and this plays into a couple other questions I have, but the prolonged . . . We don't know how long the public health order will stay in place, and you know, there's speculation that of course we could go down as the different phases of reopening happens. That's fair, and that happens and that's what will happen, but in the background that public health order will stay in place. Will that have any impact on people being able to claim this at WCB? That heightened awareness that we're still in

a state where we have to be vigilant about COVID-19, that may be a year or two; you know, the province may be operating full tilt, but we're all still operating on a public health order.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't think the claims that are there now are related to the fact that the order is there. The order gives the chief health officer the ability to make orders regarding where people can be or what they must use for safety equipment. But I don't think that would make a difference as to whether the claim or the illness was transmitted at a workplace. If it was shown to be transmitted at a workplace, whether or not the order was there, you're covered. I don't think having the order there would give you any greater level of coverage or any less. I'm seeing the same nodding heads.

Mr. Forbes: — Back to the 100 or so claims and the 26 that have been accepted, are they all in the health sector? Are any in retail? Are any in transportation, other sectors?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It's under a variety of rate codes, and it's a little difficult from them to tell what kind of work the individuals were doing. Fifteen of them were Health Authority hospitals and care homes, two were mining, one automobile, one co-operative, eight were government workers — and I'd be speculating what those were — two office professionals, so sort of across the . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, good. Well we might as well continue talking about it.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think, Mr. Chair and Mr. Forbes, the COVID situation is new to all of us, and I think we want to support our systems, citizens in the best manner that we can. So I've been watching what the coverage has been out of Workers' Compensation Board to see to it that the coverage has been extended where it should be, and so far they appear to be doing exactly what we would hope that they would be.

We're also watching with regard to the various benefits and the various programs that exist to make sure that we're covering off commercial tenants and workers that are getting the CERB [Canada emergency response benefit] benefit and the fill-ins that were there. So I think we're at a point where we're trying to make our programs interlock with the federal programs and wanting to do what's absolutely the best for the citizens of the province. And hopefully, I'm sure you and I will agree the best thing that could happen is that they find a vaccine or treatment.

[15:30]

Mr. Forbes: — Absolutely. And if we all remember our own social obligations to be healthy, which is very important, which I think is pretty key. What you folks do in occupational health and safety particularly, is be safe. You know, I think that's a very important thing to do.

So that's good to hear. Just a last point on that. In terms of WCB, are there people within WCB that once this became a big issue, became sort of specialists, became sort of, this was their thing, this is their . . . So if somebody called in about a COVID-related issue, they kind of have, they're starting to develop a corporate knowledge in that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm going to let Mr. Germain answer that directly.

Mr. Forbes: — If I could, a follow-up while Mr. Germain's walking down. The other thing that's very interesting about COVID-19 is the long-term effects in terms of you don't get it and then you're over it. You can have some long-term effects in terms of your lungs, the impact on your heart, that type of thing. I'm not an expert, but I understand that you could be hit with this very hard, so yes.

Mr. Germain: — Thank you for the question. As it relates to adjudicating and managing COVID-related claims or pandemic communicable diseases, we have a small team that, when a pandemic hits, those are the individuals. It's a very specific, small group of claims managers that adjudicate and manage those specific claims based on their experience.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you. This has been an issue that's been raised with us. And of course, you know, we were very happy and willing to support the motion in the last day, the bill about the leave. And that was good. But I know there's been a couple of orders in council, some regulation changes that have happened that we've heard about various ways.

And the latest one . . . There was two that happened, and one was sort of an update, and one that was passed on March 19th that dealt with temporary layoff notices. And the idea was the March one really said — if I'm reading this right; if I've got the right one — that in fact you had to recall people within four months, if I've got that right. Let's see. But the last one, this is order in council 225, when it talks about the public emergency period and how that can go on for quite a long period of time. Am I reading that right? What would the first one, if I . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes I think if I can put that into context a little bit. When the pandemic started, there was a large number of people that were laid off. Ordinarily if the pandemic hadn't been there, those people would have been entitled to pay in lieu of notice, and that would have effectively given them an ROE, record of employment, and that would have severed the employer-employee relationship.

What we were asked to do and strongly supportive was that the employers said, we don't want to sever the relationship; we know that our obligation to pay the severance is there, but we would like to extend the period of time that we could have the temporary layoff, and recall those people.

So we agreed to that period of time. I think initially it was 12 weeks and then extended it to 16 weeks, 12 weeks in a 16-week period. So the purpose of it is that during that period of time the employee would be entitled to access the CERB or whatever the government benefits, the federal government benefits, were to that period of time. The severance that would be payable by the employer sort of hangs in abeyance. So if the worker goes back to work, fine, then no money is paid. If they're not recalled at the end of that period of time then they get that severance period.

So the severance doesn't go away. It just postpones the period of time that they would be sort of held somewhat in abeyance while they're collecting the federal benefits to hopefully be able to be recalled to work.

And I think everybody was supportive of the idea that we wanted the workers to go back to work. We didn't want to leave them in a place where if they got paid the severance pay then they would receive, say, whatever number of weeks severance pay they would, and then if all of a sudden they were recalled, then they've got this money that they've been overpaid, double paid, whatever else. So we just straight extended it. And that was done in virtually every province in Canada.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Well that's interesting that it was done in every . . . That's interesting because the question then becomes, how long can this go on that you . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm told that some of the provinces were ahead of us on doing it. We were late coming to the party.

Mr. Forbes: — Well but how is there . . . Is there a time period? You know, when I saw the first one I thought, okay well there's that 16-week period, and you know, the federal money seemed to be fitting that time period.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think, you know, it's sort of determined as we go along. The expectation that I think most people have is as long as the federal benefits are there, as long as the state of emergency exists, that we would postpone the obligation on the employer to pay it.

Now I want to make it clear. We're not eliminating the obligation of the employer. We're just postponing it so that that person is able to go back to work without having to look at repaying or whatever else or getting a double benefit on that period of time. It's not an ordinary or routine layoff; it's a suspension of their employment during the time of the pandemic emergency.

Mr. Forbes: — So again though, we don't know how long this may go on for. You know, it could be a year. But you've tied it now to two things. One, the federal support, the CERB and/or the ending of that. But that's not mentioned in the regulations, is it?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No. But the regulations are being extended for that period of time. And then I don't know what the recovery is going to look like as we come out of the pandemic. So whether you'd say okay, you know, whether you stagger things or stage them, the intention is not to disentitle somebody to have a benefit, but to suspend it because they're getting a different benefit in the interim.

And I think that as we go along, those decisions will get made based on our consultations and our discussions with federal Minister Tassi, the Prime Minister, and what's taking place in the other provinces. We're looking for some consistency. I want those workers to be in a position that as their employer ramps up and reopens their restaurant or whatever else that they're able to go back to work.

Mr. Forbes: — So for example — and I mean there's lots of questions about this — if an employer recalls their workers in October and this is still in force, those people have lost their pay that they would have got, their notice pay, right?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That's correct because they would have got the CERB pay or whatever the federal benefit was . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. They may or may not have got that, but that was the plan.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That's correct. The expectation is that the programs were lined up . . . That because you were getting the other money, which you would not have gotten save for the pandemic, then you would go back to work without having received that money. You're correct.

Mr. Forbes: — So that's really important, that CERB part. And do you know how many people are impacted by this, how many companies? Do we have a sense how big this elephant is?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The employers that are now sort of reopening are now required to either recall those people . . . And if they don't, then their liability for those claims are rising. So we've had 78 claims. So not a huge number, but we've certainly had them. So if you're an employer, the expectation is that once you ramp up and start working again, you recall the workers right away.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. So when you say claims, 78 claims, is that 78 companies? Or is that 78 workers?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That was 78 workers.

Mr. Forbes: — Seventy-eight workers, okay. Now if this goes on quite a . . . you know, several months, and we are into month three or four, what happens to benefits like holiday pay, health benefits, that type of thing, if this goes six or eight months?

Ms. Haque: — My name is Sameema Haque. I'm the executive director for employment standards. The layoff provisions are set up in a way that the employees never lose their minimum entitlements under employment standards. They are just in abeyance for the time period that they are on a temporary layoff situation. If the employee is recalled, they get all their benefits as per norm as if their employment had been sustained.

If the employee is in a temporary layoff situation, that temporary layoff period is still part of their employment period, so they continue to earn benefits during that period. It's part of the term of employment during the temporary layoff period.

Mr. Forbes: — So I don't know, maybe I just didn't hear what I was looking for. If they have health benefits at work, like they have their drugs paid for, do they still get that while they are laid off, temporary or permanent?

Ms. Haque: — Health benefits are those kind of benefits that are not part of employment standards regulations, and so they are above and beyond the minimum standards. We don't regulate those, so that would be based on the particular contract that the employer has with the insurance company.

Mr. Forbes: — Now when I first saw the regulations come out in early April, I think it was, I thought this would only apply to those who did not have union contracts. But I understand these regulations apply to people with union contracts. Is that right?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes and no. Our expectation was that it would apply for everyone. Some people are advancing the argument that our current legislation says that if you have a better

or superior benefit under your union contract, that that would take priority over what's in the regulation. We may have to look at a change in legislation or regulation or something, because the intention was not to have somebody receive both the federal benefit and the employer benefit at the same time. So far I'm not aware of anybody advancing that claim, but we're aware that that . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So a lot of it hangs on that CERB. But I'm hearing from people now that . . . I don't have the old regulations, but people would have, if they'd been working at a place for 10 or 20 years, would be eligible for a significant layoff notice. What was the maximum? Was it eight weeks?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — You're exactly right. Some people would be. And that would be crippling to employers that have every intention of recalling those employees. But where there's been another benefit inserted for the benefit of those employees, then we would not want to jeopardize the viability of that employer by saying, you must pay this in addition to the money we're receiving from the federal government. So that's what virtually all of the other provinces are doing, is eliminating the possibility of somebody double-dipping. And our goal is to try and make it fair and equitable with the idea that, we hope as soon as possible, that people are back at work.

Mr. Forbes: — But if someone . . . And you know, the hypothetical could arise that CERB is finished; the federal government has run out of money, cannot do that anymore. And so the person then is looking for work and gets work. Then they're considered to have severed from the original employer, who may have owed them a couple of months. Is that right?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Do you want to say that again just so that I'm able to understand your scenario?

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Yes, I know. It gets kind of complicated, but people do raise these because these are individual cases. The employee — call him Joe — has worked in this company for 20 years, gets laid off. He should have been getting eight weeks of pay in lieu of notice but doesn't, goes on CERB for six months, finds that the federal government has cut that program, looks for another job, gets that job. In the 10th month the company restarts. Now the question is, he has another job. Is he deemed to have left the employment?

[15:45]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm told the answer to your question. If an employee resigns, there's no severance. There's no termination.

Mr. Forbes: — So he loses the eight weeks pay?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well if an employee quits, they don't get the severance. The severance is for a laid-off worker. So what the effect of the program's doing is they sort of maintain the status quo during the period of time the person is working on CERB. If they choose to go somewhere else, then they're there.

You sort of raised the spectre of what would happen if the federal program ran out, and I think that's a discussion to have. I think that sort of, you know, right now they're intended to dovetail and

fit together. We haven't had a discussion that I'm aware of with anybody in the federal government as to what would happen if either the province went the different direction or the feds do, but it's something that I think we want to work to.

Our goal has to be that we want to work for the benefit of the workers in the province. So this isn't doing away with an entitlement. It is merely suspending it during that period of time so that we're able to have the employees take advantage of the program that's there from the federal government and not sever their relationship with the employer so they're able to go back to work.

Mr. Forbes: — Now have you communicated this with the SFL [Saskatchewan Federation of Labour] and other worker groups so they understand this? Because you know, this only came to my attention last week about the second change. There's a lot of people who are, I think, out there who are unaware. They're sort of going by the late-March regulation that it was all going to be within 16 weeks. I don't know how common knowledge this is.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't think anybody did. A lot of news and the idea was the programs, all of the ones that are there, are either continued or expanded through the pandemic. So I don't think we've looked at it saying oh, this is a change here or that's a change there. So I don't know what would have been included on . . . We apparently did a webinar and updated the website, and I believe it was included in one of the announcements that were done by the Premier and the chief medical officer because those are done on a daily basis.

Mr. Forbes: — So the take-away is watch for the end of the CERB and then things will be changing, and maybe changing right across Canada, but here particularly in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — You know, I would watch for that, and I would hope that the end of CERB is sort of seen as being a return to normal, that people are going back to work. And I'm hoping that that's the case. I'm watching with some significant amount of concern what's taking place south of the 49th parallel. The people in the US [United States] seem to be going through a horrific second wave that's just starting to take hold and getting worse by the hour. And I'm hoping that that doesn't take place here.

So what I would like to see here, or I think all of us would, is that the social distancing and the sanitization that Canadians, and particularly Saskatchewan residents, are doing continue to pay off, and that we're able to gradually continue to release . . . As you're aware, restaurants have somewhat reopened. Retail has somewhat reopened. People are starting to travel and go out.

I don't know. I came to Regina this morning, and I drove through the McDonald's on north Albert at about 7:30, quarter to 8 because I get up bizarrely early. And there was two cars in the parking lot, and the drive-through had a long lineup. So people are still not comfortable going to a dining room when they know it's open. And I don't think it's much different at the Tim Hortons.

So I think people are getting used to it. And I'm hoping that when that does start to open up and people start coming out more that there is no second wave here, that we don't have people

spreading . . . And I hope people continue to hand sanitize. Sandy is a stickler for it. I have, I believe, three things of hand washing stuff and wipes in the car and it's . . . Anyway, good on her for doing it.

Mr. Forbes: — Just to tell stories, you know, when I'm out knocking on doors in all the past elections I've always brought sanitizer. So I've always had a collection. You never want to be sick. Maybe you do, but not during an election.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — You should be married to Sandy. She would be the perfect mate for you. Same thing when we go out. The sanitizer is in one or both pockets and we sanitize between each house. So if you've shaken hands, passed a brochure, whatever else . . . and I think that's just good common sense. I don't want to be sick at any time, but especially during an election. So if you're feeling . . . If you're missing the idea of door knocking, you're welcome to come over and door knock in my constituency.

Mr. Forbes: — I might, but I don't know if I'll be spreading the good word about you.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — You know, I've said in the past a lot of good things about you in committee and elsewhere, so I would welcome you coming over and saying good things about me.

The last time that you and I met in committee was on March 10th and then I think I commented that you and Cathy Sproule — it was towards the end of it — and quoting myself again of course:

I want to wish both of them the very best as they move on with their career endeavours. And would like to say to both of them that I've sat in committee on both sides with them — with Mr. Forbes especially; I've sat in opposition going back to the days of the wiener roast tax — and we've had some times where there was sparring, but in all cases, Mr. Chair, it was for the good of the citizens of this province. And I want to thank them for the work that they provided.

Now in the event that there is no election coming up and that I come across them again, I will immediately seek to withdraw and apologize for the remarks that I've just given.

Well today I'm going to leave those remarks on the record. And thank you for your service.

Mr. Forbes: — I feel totally disarmed, Mr. Chair. What can I say now, hey? An hour into this, but anyways I continue on and we have a lot of important work to go ahead. But I appreciate that, and that was kind of you to say then. And we'll go from there.

But I want to talk a little bit about the Ombudsman report and, you know, it talked about how the ministry had 24 complaints. And you know, I went back and the average has been about 23. So it's a little bit more than usual, not like some of the other ministries. And you know, we have someone here from the Labour Relations Board and I understand they usually have one, maybe zero, one or two. So they don't get many complaints, but somehow . . . What is the nature of the complaints for the ministry?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'll let Donna answer that. I think because

we're the type of entity where people come to us with complaints, with problems, it's incumbent on the ministry to try and do the best they can to make people feel comfortable or address concerns. We may not be able to always give them the answer that they want, but it's troubling when people are dissatisfied to the point that they go to the Ombudsman.

If they choose to go because they weren't satisfied with an answer, we can accept that. But if it's because they were dissatisfied with how they were treated, that's certainly troubling. But I'll let Donna speak to it in a little more detail.

Ms. Johnson: — Thank you. Thank you, Minister. Donna Johnson. And to your question, Mr. Forbes, typically the inquiries that go to the Ombudsman are just as the minister noted. They are people who have some questions or issues. They may have come to us initially or they may just have an issue that we can help them with. But as soon as they're at the Ombudsman's office, by phone or email, they record the fact that they've had that visit from the individual.

And sometimes the claims that they are dealing with are the result of someone who has seen us in the ministry and are now looking for another recourse or another opportunity to go at the same issue hoping for a different conclusion. But sometimes it is individuals with an issue, not sure who they should talk to, and then they get directed to either occupational health and safety, employment standards, or the Office of the Workers' Advocate.

Mr. Forbes: — So you're saying these are not formal complaints. These are just the phone calls, the initial phone calls.

Ms. Johnson: — It can be a combination of both.

Mr. Forbes: — So what would you have for a number of formal complaints?

Ms. Johnson: — I'm sorry. I don't have the report in front of me.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So you couldn't tell me whether it's labour standards or occupational health and safety.

Ms. Johnson: — Not at this moment.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Ms. Johnson: — But I could get that for you.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Well I'm just looking at this where, you know, when I look at the averages and Workers' Comp in 2010 had 112 and the height was 2015 when it had 126 and now it's at 76. And it seemed to be on the downward, whereas the ministry had 18 in 2010 and has consistently floated around the 23 mark — 28, 26, a height of 33 in 2013. So I'm just wondering, has that concerned you at all? Like why are we staying at that level that people are calling out and what the nature of those calls are?

Ms. Johnson: — Yes. Well, I'm going to ask Sameema Haque to respond in a little more detail.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Ms. Johnson: — But many of the issues that go through the Ombudsman's office are related to what individuals think would fit under employment standards. And then when they ask the detail of their question, they find out that actually it's an issue that goes beyond our legislation. But Sameema will provide a little more detail here.

Ms. Haque: — So, Mr. Forbes, while I don't have the exact numbers, the last I looked at the report most of those complaints were related to employment standards. The typical issues that we see in those are people that put in a claim for something that is above and beyond employment standards legislation.

An example would be tuition reimbursement, where the employee is looking for tuition reimbursement for a course that they have taken. That is not part of the minimum standards and we can't entertain a claim like that. And so then there is, you know, obviously there's communication and there's discussion and we attempt to make the claimant understand where legislation ends and this is above and beyond that.

But certainly they have a right to proceed ahead and make a complaint to the Ombudsman. Whenever there is a complaint, the Ombudsman office will contact us back and we look at and do a second review of the file to ensure that we've covered all our bases and this is almost an audit of the file. And we've never had to — to date, in the last two years — ever had to go and do any sort of a reassessment.

Mr. Forbes: — So when you said, not need to do a reassessment from the complainant's point of view . . . But I'm just wondering from the ministry's point of view that, you know, it seems to me that the ministry's had a good record of looking at their past track record trying to analyze how they can improve. So this is one where you would look. So we get 24 calls a year over to Ombudsman. What can we do? Is it consistently the fact that people are looking for payment for education? Then obviously the person . . . That seems to be a common one. How can you address that? I'm saying that as an example. But have you gone back and done the real deep look at why do we get this number of calls?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think if we look at the size of the labour force in Saskatchewan, it's a very small number of complaints. I think because of the nature of this ministry, you want to look at every complaint that comes in and see whether there's something you can do to help the individual resolve their problem. But as Sameema mentioned, there would be people that wanted tuition or something else, so they would have made an enquiry of the Ombudsman. And hopefully at the end of that process they would feel satisfied with it. And I'm glad we have got the Ombudsman or we've got those other processes that are there.

So I don't think we'll ever get to a zero. There's always people that want to feel that they have explored every option that's available to them and that's their absolute right to do so, so we respond to them. But I think we look at the complaints that come in and if there was a mistake made or review that can be done that resolves it in their favour, so much the better. And we try and deal with them but I don't think we'll ever get to a point where that there is none. And I think the fact that it stayed at this level, or if anything come down slightly overall for the last number of years, the officials are doing as well as they can.

[16:00]

I'd use this as an opportunity to talk a little bit about the Workers' Advocate, Denise Klotz's office. We used to have a lot of issues that ended up at MLAs' offices, yours and mine both. And those ones were often from somebody that had been disentitled and we'd have to tell them, well, there's appeal periods. There's whatever else they had to go through.

So I think where they're at by having the Workers' Advocate, they've helped a lot of the people assemble the other information. They might go, well you need a fresh doctor's report, you need this, and help them with their appeal, or if not a formal appeal, help them in resolving things, getting their claim processed. And I think there's a reasonably high success rate on dealing with them. So I think those are the type of things we can and should do as much as we can to try and serve the clients.

Mr. Forbes: — I want to talk a bit about your staffing and your org chart and how you do your work. How many people, how many FTEs [full-time equivalent] do you have in the Labour Relations and safety ministry?

Ms. Johnson: — I'll take that question. Thank you. In LRWS [Labour Relations and Workplace Safety], we have 170 FTEs and that includes the Labour Relations Board.

Mr. Forbes: — Fair enough. And then within the minister's office?

Ms. Johnson: — Sorry, I must correct myself already: 178.1 FTEs in 2020-21.

Mr. Forbes: — Sorry?

Ms. Johnson: — Still including the Labour Relations Board, 178.1.

Mr. Forbes: — Point one. Okay. So the minister's office has how many?

Ms. Johnson: — Five in the minister's office.

Mr. Forbes: — And then your office, the deputy minister's office has . . .

Ms. Johnson: — Oh sorry, five for the deputy minister's office and the minister's office together. So three in the minister's office and two in the deputy minister's office.

Mr. Forbes: — Three in the minister's office, and that's not including the minister. Or is it including the minister?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We're trying to count the number of people that could be counted on the fingers of one hand. However, having said that, I believe that they're getting close to very precise and accurate numbers. In any event, between the DM [deputy minister] office and the minister's offices, there's a total of four.

Ms. Johnson: — There's five in the deputy minister's office and the minister's office combined. So that's one in the minister's office; four in the deputy minister's office.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Not including the minister.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay.

Ms. Johnson: — That's right.

Mr. Forbes: — Communications. How many people in communications?

Ms. Johnson: — We have three people in communications.

Mr. Forbes: — Three. And corporate services?

Ms. Johnson: — Corporate services. I think that would be . . . Sorry for that. In central services or corporate services, we have 11 FTEs.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Labour relations?

Ms. Johnson: — In labour relations and mediation we have six FTEs.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And employment standards?

Ms. Johnson: — 39.1.

Mr. Forbes: — 39.1. And you have different units within employment standards, right?

Ms. Johnson: — Yes, we do. Within employment standards, again, total of 39.1. We have our legal and education services branch, which includes our FWRISA [*The Foreign Worker and Immigration Services Act*] people and our education and training services people. So there we have six FTEs. And then in the compliance and investigation services branch — just going to do a little quick math here — we have 31.1.

Mr. Forbes: — Do you have a foreign recruitment and protection unit?

Ms. Johnson: — Yes, it's part of our legal and education services branch, so within the foreign worker area we have three FTEs there altogether. That was part of the six that I mentioned off the start.

Mr. Forbes: — And I think this came up last year in estimates. It may have. I remember reading about this. So I find it interesting that it's foreign recruitment and protection. I get the protection part, but I don't get the recruitment part. Why is that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think it goes back to when the foreign worker process was under a different portfolio. It was under Trade and Export. So it was there, so we assumed responsibility for the worker protection side but we don't do the recruitment side. So we would work to make sure that if we had workers that came on a temporary work permit to work in our ag facilities, that those people would be protected by whatever, and we would reach out and do whatever services are required there. But as far as recruiting, that would be done still by the other ministry.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, and I think that's appropriate, you know, because I always feel like your job within this department is protection and safety and relationships, that type of thing, not

necessarily the economic aspect of recruiting. So why do you keep that as part of the name?

Ms. Johnson: — We have actually changed the name. Most recently, just over the last six months or so.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There's been an update. Go ahead, Sameema.

Ms. Haque: — So I guess from the recruitment aspect of it, Mr. Forbes, we are at the start end of it. Any employer who wants to recruit foreign workers must register with us. So we do the employer registration piece. That is the only aspect of recruitment that we're involved in. And the registration involves, you know, a set of documents that they must submit which we go through to determine the employer's eligibility, and then they're registered.

Mr. Forbes: — That sounds fair. All right, good. Thank you. Occupational health and safety, how many staff and how are they organized?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — While they're gathering the information, we have each year made a modest increase in the number of occupational health officers. Some years one or two; some years three or four. And people sometimes ask, well why don't you do more? And it's a matter of developing capacity and focusing them in the right area.

So with the targeted interventions that we've had we've said to those workers, you identify which workplaces, which rate codes are the ones where the greatest risk are and where we can reduce numbers. So they've actually done remarkably good work over the last number of years. They've focused on the large employers and driven down the numbers with the rate codes that are there.

And then they're now working at focusing on small contractors. And these are two- and three-employee employers and they might be roofers or siding people. And these ones, it's harder to develop the understanding or identify where the compliance issues are. When you're dealing with Evraz or something, a larger player of that nature, they've got an OHS [occupational health and safety] unit and whatever, so you're dealing with somebody that's dealing with it from a broad point of view. So we're getting really good results.

Now you know, a small roofer that'll have two or three people, and if nobody's looking they won't use the tie-offs and then somebody falls or slips. So those are the type of injuries or significant injuries we're seeing right now are from people we've haven't known of. And so that's where they're focusing there. So the additional increments that were there, we're trying to use them as carefully as we can so we're able to get good benefits from them. But we don't want to just flood the area with workers, with those that are not well trained and are not able to track their skills. I don't know if you want to speak to that.

Ms. Johnson: — Yes. So to answer your question, in occupational health and safety division we have 93 FTEs. And those are breaking down . . . I'm assuming you'd like the breakdown there as well.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes.

Ms. Johnson: — All right. We have in safety services south 21 FTEs and that includes our health care safety unit. And in safety services north we have 27 FTEs and that includes ergonomics and our mine safety unit. And then we have 16 FTEs in risk assessment and planning, 13 FTEs in legal and harassment, and 14 FTEs in health standards. And then there are two FTEs in the executive and head office.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Do you have a quality assurance branch, a group, unit? Quality assurance and stakeholder relations?

Ms. Johnson: — Quality assurance is part of risk assessment and planning.

Mr. Forbes: — And that would be the 16.

Ms. Johnson: — Part of the 16, that's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. Okay, thank you. And then you have 13 in legal, which also includes the harassment policy folks. And there's a part . . . When I was reading about it, the harassment, and they have a second part of their title. What was it? Something prevention. Discrimination prevention?

Ms. Johnson: — Yes, it's related to the human rights or discriminatory actions that may take place in a workplace that our investigators will look into.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, right. And the harassment office has changed over time because there's no longer an adjudicator there. The adjudicator has gone over to where the adjudicators reside.

Ms. Johnson: — LRB [Labour Relations Board].

Mr. Forbes: — LRB. And I am correct on that? I think we used to have a special harassment unit that had a special adjudicator and that was done away with in the employment Act.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The goal is to move the adjudication which is a quasi-judicial function away from the . . . [inaudible] . . . and to have it somewhat arm's length. So by having it at the LRB it's a better fit because you don't have the same person adjudicating that has to sit at the next day at the staff meeting or coffee with a worker that they've overruled.

[16:15]

Mr. Forbes: — Sure, fair enough. So you have two sets of legal teams. You have one within the employment standards, that group of five or six, and then you have a group of legal. And then you have . . . Last year I think you started funding for a second special prosecutor who resides in Justice, I assume.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — They're not listed in the FTE count here. They're an expense to this ministry and there are two prosecutors that are dedicated to this. So when they asked for the second one, I spoke to the Justice minister and was able to negotiate favourable terms.

Mr. Forbes: — Right, fair enough. I know that hasn't always been the case with the Justice minister and the Labour minister. We had a case where the left hand wasn't talking to the right hand. And now it's good to hear that that is . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can tell you my relationship with the Justice minister is an excellent relationship. I have had this file — and I'll put this on the record — 10 years today. And one of the things that I've worked at was trying to make sure that we were able to do prosecutions in an appropriate and meaningful manner. So I get regular reports from the prosecutions unit to make sure that they're getting a good level of support as is required to prosecute the cases and making sound decisions.

I don't interfere with the individual decisions at all. Those are done at arm's length as they should be. But when the prosecutor has got concerns about not getting information or a court time or whatever, we want to make sure that we're able to be responsive as we possibly can.

We've also brought in, for training purposes, we periodically bring in former police officers that can give advice to the workers to make sure they're able to understand the necessary . . . for how to take a warrant statement, how to have continuity of an exhibit, and the work that they need to be able to do to be a witness, to make sure that they're able to present the case as fairly and objectively and accurately as they can. And we don't have things where exhibits were lost, misplaced, or not appropriately presented.

And my understanding is that they're doing an effective job. Having the second one there is an indication that . . . part of the additional challenges the judicial system has on delays and other things like that. But they're doing, I think, a very effective job.

Mr. Forbes: — That's good. So my question within the legal team. So of the 13, how many of those now . . . And just what you've talked about, and you talked about it last year, that many of these would be investigators who would be trained to take statements correctly, look for the right kind of evidence. So they would not necessarily . . . They would be coming in after the fact, after it's been identified this is a potential situation where we need to follow up. They've gone through the two or three warning systems that you have, that this is going to be now a pretty serious thing. So what I'm getting at is of the . . . If you break out the harassment people, or maybe that's still part of it, how many of those 13 are actual occupational health and safety inspectors?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Five of those people would be inspectors. And then, how many OHOs [occupational health officer]?

Ms. Johnson: — Sorry. We have 68 officers altogether in the safety services, north and south. And in the group that I referred to as legal and harassment, the 13 there include seven who are focused on harassment and discriminatory prevention claims, and five in the investigation unit.

Mr. Forbes: — So are there different . . . I assume an inspector has to be certified or pass certain classes to be considered an occupational health and safety officer, is the term. Or is it inspector? I'm not sure. And are there different grades of what that occupation is? What I'm getting at is, how many can actually go out and take a look and make a call?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I would hope most of them can, but I'll let Ray Anthony speak to it. We refer to them as OHOs for occupational health officers. So that's a term that's used.

Mr. Anthony: — Thank you. Ray Anthony, executive director, occupational health and safety. There are 68 right now, field staff that have duties. They include ergonomists; radiation safety officers; risk assessment and planning statistical officers; mining, engineers, investigators. harassment discriminatory action people; ergonomics, health care, and safety officers. They are all either radiation safety officers or occupational health and safety officers. They all carry that designation by appointment by the minister.

They have different skills. Obviously the ergonomists, some of them are certified industrial hygienists, some of them have different degrees, and of course some are engineers in mining and that. It depends. The investigators tend to have police backgrounds, investigation backgrounds, that sort of thing. So it depends. Normally it's like being in the army a little bit. There's kind of a baseline of 23 different classes that they take internally and externally, and they make probation in one year.

Mr. Forbes: — And then when you're talking about the investigators, they are in that legal team. Am I correct?

Mr. Anthony: — Yes. There are, as Donna said, five people in investigations, four investigators. One's an attorney that works with them to put their files together to be sent over to Justice.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. Well I just want to say this is very important work, and it's good to see this proceeding this way. I've been watching very closely the case involving the young man at the children's hospital and it's still before the courts. And it looks like it'll be at least four years from the time of death, which is something that I hope we can all, you know, use as some sort of indicator that this is why we want to do the best we can do in terms of all that kind of stuff, gathering evidence and that type of thing. So all right, thank you very much for that.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thanks for the comment. You're exactly right. When you meet with a family or become aware of those kind of circumstances, it's everything we want to do to make sure that we give the right supports to the investigators and to the prosecutors to make sure that we're able to prosecute where it's appropriate.

And the Canadian court system, such as it is, it takes time for things to get through. And there's been recent decisions in the Supreme Court that are capping timelines on the processes. So it may make it even more challenging as we go forward to try and get things to trial. But if that's the case, that's probably a good thing. We're able to get a resolution.

I think some of the families I've met with are just frustrated that they go to court, find it's adjourned, somebody's fired a lawyer, whatever the various things that have taken place. So I try and go every year to the Threads of Life walk, which is a walk with families of people that have lost a family member through a workplace injury. And it just tears your heart out to spend time with those people. And you realize that they've lost a son or a daughter or whatever, and they're waiting to see what's going to happen on a court decision or whatever. So for those people, I think all we can do is offer them our sympathy and hope that as employers, or people that are responsible for employers, that we're able to reduce injuries in subsequent years. So thank you for raising it.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. Now, let's turn to Workers' Advocate. And you've talked a little bit about it and you've talked about . . . So how many do WCB and how many do SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance]?

Ms. Johnson: — We have 14 in the Workers' Advocate overall. And 12 of them work on WCB claims and two are working on the SGI claims.

Mr. Forbes: — So how's that going with SGI?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Initially when we started having the conversation about this, we were concerned about how long of a timeline was to get the WCB appeals done. So we sort of thought, okay, there's good level of expertise on it. So we thought we would try and cross-pollinate a bit. So we had some of the people started working together and looking at how the processes worked. Well it turned out that WCB has now reduced its turnaround time on appeals to three to four months, you know, a relatively acceptable time. But at automobile injury, it's still taking about a year.

And you would think at first blush that the claims, the process should be very similar and the timeline should be similar. But they're not. Even though it's a no-fault system for the auto injury ones, people that avail themselves of the auto injury process often retain outside counsel, which they don't have to, but they do. And often it's a more formalized approach. They want to get additional information; they look at accident reconstructions or whatever to go through that process. So it often takes significantly longer.

So I think at this point in time I would say they're sharing information. And what we were hoping initially was that . . . [inaudible] . . . would come and give help to the processes here. Probably more of it's going back the other way. But because of the similarities, I think it's a worthwhile exercise and both sides are encouraging by supporting the information going back and forth. So our intention is to continue it for the time being.

Mr. Forbes: — Fair enough.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It's one of the trade-offs that we made with Justice.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Sorry, just to get back to occupational health and safety. So you've talked a lot about targeting your investigations. And I think I read in last year's estimates about complaint driven. You really essentially have either complaint-driven or targeted. But do you do any random, just a complete random investigation?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes. I'm going to let Ray give you some numbers on the thing. I think there's a difference between random and unannounced. So the target has been that you identify workers or a category where there's a higher risk, and you will probably do a significant number or a number of those unannounced. You arrive at it and you go through the process.

Where we've done random ones, there is a push — and I think you've had the file long enough — it was a push of convenience. So we were doing random ones. So the random ones were, you know, you'd go out and you'd say oh, well, you're a bookkeeper

working from your house and you have no employees, but you've chosen to put yourself on the list. You know, they've got there. Or somebody that's running a janitorial business for 30 years, one employee that's related to them, and never had a complaint. So we weren't doing anything that were particularly beneficial to reducing the numbers. So the better one was there.

So I'll give you some of the numbers for the 2019-20 year. The targeted visits were 2,842. Of those, 1,174 were officer-initiated; and then complaints, 714; notifications, 506. So the total workplace visits were 5,236. So that resulted in notices of contravention, 2,431 issued; a compliance undertaking, 317; officer's report, 2,104; some type of note to the file, 384. So that's of the 5,236, that's the reports issued were 5,236.

So of those, 20 files were sent to Justice; 9 prosecutions initiated; 12 prosecutions where some were from a previous year; 1,664,500 in penalties; summary offence tickets, 122 were issued; 109 guilty pleas, one in progress; 12 were stayed or withdrawn. So we're . . . Of those, not all of them were in the previous, were there, but since we've been doing them.

[16:30]

So we're trying to make sure that the enforcement is not simply a matter of having somebody go out and give somebody some paper, that people need to know that if we give you a notice of contravention or a compliance order, that if you don't follow through two weeks, three days, whatever period of time, later on that officer will be back and will give you either a summary offence ticket with voluntary payment on or a prosecution that you would end up in court for.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. I was looking at your annual report — I believe that's what it was here — and there was a performance measure for evaluating and revising occupational health and safety regulations and policies in conjunction with other jurisdictions to eliminate barriers and compliance with the Canadian Free Trade Agreement. And I think it even mentions somewhere about the new West, but I don't see that right off the top of my head.

I mean it was interesting because I think this was even written before. One of the issues was around harmonization of personal protective equipment requirements by November 30th, 2019. So have you made any agreements or has there been any public releases about what kind of things have been changed to reduce barriers?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The premiers are dealing with that at a first ministers level. And I think we're looking at doing some things on . . . And we're wanting to do more but the challenge we have is that other provinces keep changing government. We're the longest-serving government in there.

Mr. Forbes: — That's the thing to do. I can't see anything wrong with that.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — And so it takes a while when there's a change in government to get new members up to do it. But anyway we're with, and we've agreed to six Canadian Standard Association standards respecting PPE [personal protective equipment]. That includes head, eye, face, and foot, hearing,

flotation, and first aid kits. So we're trying to harmonize them to bring a standard for safety across the jurisdictions. So we will be doing an amendment to the OHS regs to adopt the changes to first aid kits, and it is expected that regulatory amendments will be made in the fall of 2020.

Mr. Forbes: — Now one of them, we did have one person come in and, I think, had got support from the ministry. It was around the religious need to wear a beard, but to have a face mask that was sealed. And Alberta has changed their regulations, and I actually think that — you know, I'm just going by recall here — the issue wasn't with the ministry. The ministry was supportive of that change. It was with the employer who wouldn't recognize it, even though it was something that made sense, and on religious grounds he couldn't shave his beard. But there were other jurisdictions who had that. I don't expect an answer from that, but that's something that's important.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, and I think that — and Ray can correct me if I'm wrong — the expectation would be, and it's a health issue and much as . . . Well two things: one, a beard could get caught, is that you would wear a net, or something, to ensure that the beard was kept where it wasn't posing a threat to the worker or to health issues. So there's the two issues that would both exist. And we would expect the worker would be able to do some kind of . . . and that would be the accommodation, is yes, you keep the beard, but you have to wear a net or whatever else that's on it.

The discussion is some court jurisprudence from some other jurisdictions that safety will always trump a custom or a religious preference, but I think what our goal can and should be is that we look at ways of accommodation and ways of being supportive of each other, that we don't look for an excuse to try and say you must do this or you must do that. We look for ways of working through it. And I think I'm not aware of any outstanding issues in our province.

Mr. Forbes: — We're all good. I'm fine with that. And I know the clock is ticking. There's a couple of things. I was looking at *The Globe and Mail*, and this is from Thursday, June 18th, 2020, but there was an earlier article about a year before that, and the investigation was, "How workers' comp fanned the flames of the opioid crisis." And the issue really was around return to work and pain management. And I'm curious to know, from Workers' Compensation, in terms of return-to-work processes, how much they monitor the pain management aspect of that.

Mr. Germain: — Thank you. Phillip Germain, CEO [chief executive officer] of Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board. So we have a policy, a medications policy. It has been recently updated to also include the use of cannabis, but within that is specific sections related to opioid use. We understand from a North American perspective the issues related to opioids and we monitor those issues to make sure there's not over-prescription.

And there's the balancing act of working with the health care practitioner and the belief or the needs of the injured worker and what their health care provider is saying. And then also understanding the implications of using opioids and are there other alternatives.

So those are monitored by worker to make sure that there's access to the appropriate medical. But at the same time there's managing it and making sure that the case-by-case basis, we go in and every prescription that's approved we make sure there's checks and balances in place for opioids.

Mr. Forbes: — Saskatchewan wasn't mentioned in this article, but are you familiar with this article? Did you . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . What's that?

Mr. Germain: — I saw the headline. I did not read the article.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. I think it's really . . . You know, we often, and I'm not saying this about anybody in this room here, but you know, it's always been the case of in terms of you come to drugs and somebody just couldn't manage them, but really sometimes these things are monsters and they're very hard to overcome.

And the whole thing, inside the paper, "Injured workers, relatives, advocates say system prioritizes quick fixes over lasting recovery." And you know, these are all good people that I'm looking their pictures of. And whether they end up committing suicide or just, you know, it's just a bad, bad thing.

And the kind of the theme in the story was if we took a little bit more time in terms of not rushing people back to work, and really understanding how can we help people recover, fully recover, I mean that's the key. And we want people to work a full career, not just get out of that horizon of the injury.

So have you talked with the building trades or any other groups about this, the SFL, about pain management? I mean return to work's always a controversial issue; I won't deny that. But this is a different, different thing that really, if they are having or hearing about cases, this is something I think that we need to know more about.

Mr. Germain: — We haven't specifically engaged in a conversation with any external groups about opioids, but it is something that we monitor from . . . There's international associations that we belong to, and this is a topic that's been discussed by workers' compensation boards for many years now.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think the point you raised is a valid point, that where a worker has an addiction problem of any kind there's, you know, the immediate issue of the ability of the employee to function safely in the workplace and the limitations that there is imposed by the courts on testing. So you know, we expect our workplaces to have an obligation on the worker to disclose that there's a safety issue or an addictions issue. And that raises the issue on accommodation and what can be done to work with or work through the processes with that worker.

So that becomes more, rather than a workers' compensation issue, but more a matter of a human rights issue and a labour standards issue as to whether the worker can be accommodated in the workplace and whether the worker can or should be reassigned or whether, you know, the worker can't stay in employment or not. And I think those are done sort of on a case-by-case basis. But I think that we all worry about that.

I think I worry about opioids and addictions in the broader issue about where society is with the growing amount of drug addiction

and drug gangs. You know, it's a horrible scourge on our society right now. It's gotten into our schools and to the young people and it's across the province. It knows no social boundaries. It's everywhere and I wish I had an answer for it. You know, you look around, oh well, we're doing this, we're doing that, and nobody has an answer that's largely effective. But I'm glad you raised it and it's something we all have to watch for. And to raise it in the context of the workplace, I think is the right thing for you to do. So thank you.

Mr. Forbes: — Well this was raised to me in the building trades. Largely . . . You know, I mean I don't want to, you know, say it's this type of person or that type of person. But these are the kind of people that you would not really suspect as being, you know, the typical drug addict, but they started out as pain management back at construction. And just . . . they've got payments. They want to be at work. This is the thing. They don't mind the return to work actually. They want to be working and making money, but the fact is the addiction overtakes them.

And so I guess the other thing, and what I had talked to Dr. Peter Butt . . . You may know him from the University of Saskatchewan. He's a real expert in addictions and he was talking about the new coroner who we have and the fact that we're getting much better, potentially more information, more thoughtfulness in terms of people's deaths and how do people arrive at that.

And so I would really encourage this be something to watch. Because you know, you have that, like I say, that mindset about it, you know, people who are addicted. But that's not necessarily true with . . . A lot of people are just . . . start out just going back to work and all of a sudden they're in trouble deep and they don't know how to get out of that.

So the other thing in the paper — I feel kind of odd raising this — was the deputy minister made a comment about return to work. And this was back in May. And I'm wondering if the deputy minister has had a chance to speak to the people involved. And you know, I mean it's an important cornerstone to occupational health and safety in terms of right to refuse. And of course when we're talking about COVID, we're learning more now but of course it is and continues to be an unnerving thing. And people don't know how to approach this, especially as we're going through different stages reopening. So I'm wondering if the deputy minister or if you have any comments to make about . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, I'm aware of the comment that was made. And I would caution people with taking things out of context. The right to know and the right to refuse isn't the right to interpret yourself that you think it is. It's the right to know what the risks are, to ask the questions, and then if the determination is that it's not your decision to make, it's a factual decision that you do. You know, you have a process to go through using the committee in your workplace, working with the employer, eventually calling in LRWS or going through whatever the processes are in your collective agreement.

But what we were getting at that time was people saying, I don't want to go to work because I'm afraid of COVID. Well I think all of us are afraid of COVID. And we were at that time and continue to look to Dr. Shahab and his staff to try and determine

what is the best and what is the safest protocols for us. So I don't think any of us have the right to say, no, I'm not going to go. If you've got a compromised immune system then, you know, you deal with that process.

In the same way that coming into this room, we made the determination in consultation with the chief medical officer that we were going to have 10 people on one side, five on the other. And we have watched that and complied with that religiously. I don't know whether that's a good number. I don't know whether it should be five and five, or five and three. But we accepted that is what it is. And that's the same.

And that's where the DM's comment was that it was related to. The fact that a worker can't just unilaterally say, no, I'm not going to work because I've said the worker has the right to refuse if it is . . . There's processes that go there to determine what is, what is not safe, and to go through whether it's within the context of the collective agreement or the safety committee that's on site or whatever else. So in any event, not wanting to answer directly for the deputy minister, I have already.

[16:45]

Mr. Forbes: — It was and it continues to be a such an unusual time, and where people get their information from. And you're quoting Dr. Shahab who's obviously a strong source of who to go to. But what I quote from the paper, from this article, was . . . And if the deputy minister who is right here may want to elaborate on, but the quote is that, “. . . according to Deputy Labour Minister Donna Johnson, COVID-19 doesn't count as an unusual danger.”

So I wonder if, you know . . . Getting back to, you know, how we've talked about how maybe there needed to be more conversation about that term, “unusual danger,” and understanding what is it that they think. Or what have they heard? What do they know? I mean, this is a conversation that every employer has to have with their employee who is unsure of what to do, and not to go that they're refusing and the next step is not to work, but to say, well what do you know about this? How can I help you through this? I don't know if there needs . . . Was there an opportunity to discuss this further with Labour about this particular issue?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think the discussions are there. They're ongoing all the time. Different employers have unique work situations, and employers are going back to Dr. Shahab or other experts saying, this is what we should do; this is what best practices are. And as time goes on, it's becoming increasingly refined. We now know our best defence against the disease is handwashing and distancing. So everyone of us is, I think, carrying handwashing with them. They're doing the distancing, whatever else, but we're going back to work.

So if somebody was of otherwise good health and did not want to go back to work in whatever place where it was being reopened in conjunction with them, yes, the employer would no doubt talk to the employees and say, this is what it is; this is how we're protecting you. Do you have any issues? Do you want to discuss it further? And I think that's just normal workplace communications. But I don't think it leads to the ability of the worker just to say, I'm not going because I don't wish to. If an

employee chooses to sever the workplace relationship, it's probably their right to do it. But I think all of us want to do our part to try and have a safe workplace and to try and promote the reopening of the economy.

And I think all of us are pleased that the reopening is going as well as it should, that so far there haven't been any setbacks. The issues that we have had are in remote areas rather than in the larger workplaces. And so far we have not had an outbreak in a long-term care facility — touch wood, my mom is in one — and that we have not had it in the correctional facilities, and that we have done everything we can, where there has been any kind of an outbreak, to try and do contact tracing and follow up to try and get people to self-isolate. And I'm pleased to say most people have been really good.

So I don't regard this as an issue. I saw the comment that the deputy minister made, read it, and I thought it was exactly what was supposed to take place. So I think what's happened is that it's been taken out of context, but the comments are I think exactly correct. And to your point about wanting to have better workplace communication, I think the more we do of that, the less problems we have on any number of fronts.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, and I think that's the key. You know, I think that Saskatchewan's always had a good working relationship between the government and working people, so to continue that conversation about what that basic principle means. And I think we are in unusual times and it all depends, you know, about how people feel about this kind of thing. It's really something.

There's a couple of outstanding concerns that I have that have come to my attention. One was about a long-term care facility at Strasbourg, where the issue was really around the heat in the building, and OHS has apparently investigated this. Or have they been out to Strasbourg to investigate the long-term care home?

Mr. Anthony: — As far as I know, our people are investigating the matter now.

Mr. Forbes: — Oh, okay.

Mr. Anthony: — They've been out there.

Mr. Forbes: — You're not able . . .

Mr. Anthony: — There have been a couple of inspections at that place of employment and they've been re-contacted.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. Very important as we head into the summer and there's a lack of air conditioning. Not such a big issue in the winter, but I urge you to do what you can there. That's good. Okay, thank you.

The other one is around latex allergies and what's happening with that, that people develop an allergy or it's acquired, particularly in health, dental, other facilities where they're using the gloves.

Mr. Anthony: — Because there are other options available like nitrile and that, we haven't explored banning latex in any way, shape, or form. I mean it's pretty common stuff. There are some people that have allergies, but as long as they know that, they can be provided with other equipment.

Mr. Forbes: — This is something that's come in relatively new, so I don't know if you folks are aware of this, but apparently there's an organization in Regina that pays its employees and subcontractors on a point system. So what you do is rather than getting an hourly wage, people are paid in points, say 8.5 for a basic call. And the number of points is multiplied by 3.5 for trainees and 4 for full-time employees to determine a day's pay. If something goes wrong and they don't connect or disconnect properly, like if something in their field of work . . . And I'm being kind of vague because I don't have all the paperwork in front of me, so I do want to respect some privacy issues here, but if it's a piece . . . They get paid by piecework, and if it doesn't get completed then they don't get paid. And in one case somebody worked eight hours and only made \$18.75. So have you heard of this system?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No, none of us have. If you've got some specifics, we'd be glad to look at it or investigate. You know, we've got the . . . People are entitled to work on commission or piecework or, you know, whatever the arrangements are. And in any of those cases if somebody has got an issue with them, we're always glad to inspect, review, and determine whether it complies or not. So I haven't heard of a point system or anything.

Mr. Forbes: — Well get that person to work on that because that just . . . But I know this is one of the issues I had with the employment Act, is you folks kind of opened up that, where it was pretty clear you either got paid cash or cheque or direct deposit. And now you have allowed for other means, and that other means is by regulation.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We haven't authorized payment by points.

Mr. Forbes: — By points. Have you . . . I mean you probably haven't, so don't be a silly. But we have heard last summer of some young person being offered to be paid by pizza coupons in the store they worked in. And she asked, is that viable? Of course not, but you know, I mean this is the thing.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes. But you know, if somebody has that, we'll look at it. The idea with the other means — you know, we debated this when this went through a committee — was cash, cheque, direct deposit, and they left it open was some people don't want to have any of those things that are there. They want to have a prepaid debit card. Or there may be other reasons for it there. So we left it open that they could allow a regulation. And I'm not aware that we have made any regulations in that area that would allow for any alternate method of payment other than cash, cheque, or direct deposit.

So our expectation is that our workers get paid, that we don't pay in scrip or credits at the company store or anything else. You know, I think our employers for the most part pay what they're expected to pay and pay it in that. So I'm not aware of this being an issue.

A Member: — No such claims?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No such claims pending. But if you know of anybody, we'd be pleased to look at it.

Mr. Forbes: — For sure. I appreciate that and we certainly hope

not. And hopefully people, especially young people, aren't gullible enough. That's the thing. And I hope in your review that you do, and I think I read that you talked about the numbers, the significant number of young people are taking part in that process, but they also have a sense of being able to stand up for what is right, you know. And I think that's hugely important.

You talked about, and I noticed the clock too, you talked about three new officers that are going to be working in rural areas, the occupational health officers. What areas will they be in? And is that part of your overall targeted process?

Mr. Anthony: — Thank you. The three cities where they'll be located will be Yorkton, Swift Current, and North Battleford. And the idea is to have, as the minister said, quicker response time to incidents and to service those geographic areas.

Mr. Forbes: — Do you have any offices in the North, like La Ronge? Your most furthest north is Prince Albert, which has an airport though, which is good.

Mr. Anthony: — Yes. I think we have three positions in Prince Albert.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. Thank you. My last question will be around, and it's more of a statement, but I'm glad to hear that the fatality strategy of WCB and WorkSafe is moving forward. I hope that, you know, progress is being made on that in terms of this pandemic has slowed down a lot. I agree with you in terms of recognition to Lori Johb and Sean Tucker for highlighting and being constructive in this way. It's hugely important. I think that, yes as you said, one is one too many. And we need to get a handle on that. Has it been slowed down by the pandemic, or is it moving along fairly well in terms of your work?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The fatalities are down significantly this year. I think we probably have some year-to-date numbers. But the previous year we had the Humboldt bus crash which added a significant number in one day. But we had an accumulation of fatalities of a variety of different types and it was difficult to find trends or patterns that would enable us to try and target it any better. As you're aware, we met on a number of occasions with Dr. Tucker and looked at his research to try and . . . [inaudible]. But a province as small as ours made it difficult.

So we knew we had focused on the larger employers. One of the safest industries now in the province is hardrock mining, has one of the lowest rate codes. They've driven their rate down to almost nil. But we've got slips and falls, people with sprains, and then falls from heights continues to be a problem. But you know, we've had a combination of, you know, an aircraft crash, electrocutions or things that you don't anticipate. And you don't send somebody out saying, oh we're going to look at aircraft crashes. Well when you've had one, then you do have to start looking at them.

But in any event, the numbers have gone back to our more traditional downward pattern. But we did have that spike. And I think the staff are continuing to look at in the context of where they can best commit the resources to and where they can drive numbers down the most effective way they can. And it appears that it's bearing some fruit on that.

[17:00]

I think it'll probably be said at the end of it that the pandemic did not generate new claims, but the reduction in economic activity, and we probably reduced the number of all kinds of claims because people just weren't going out. So it was a good time to be in the grocery business but not a good time to be in the restaurant business.

The Chair: — Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of this item of business, the committee will proceed to vote off the estimates for the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety.

This is the '20-21 estimates, vote 20, Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. It's page 99 in the Estimates book. First one being central management and services, subvote (LR01) in the amount of 4,621,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Occupational health and safety, subvote (LR02) in the amount of 9,550,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Employment standards, subvote (LR03) in the amount of 2,971,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Labour Relations Board, subvote (LR04) in the amount of 1,000,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Labour relations and mediation, subvote (LR05) in the amount of 680,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Workers' Advocate, subvote (LR06) in the amount of 1,048,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Non-appropriated expense adjustment in the amount of \$92,000. Non-appropriated expense adjustments are non-cash adjustments presented for informational purposes only. No amount is to be voted on.

Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, vote 20, 19,870,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2021, the following sums for Labour Relations and Workplace Safety in the amount of 19,870,000.

Mr. Cox: — I so move.

The Chair: — Mr. Cox. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Minister, any closing remarks at all?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank the members that are here tonight and the people that make the process and our work possible: the people that do security, broadcast services, the building people, Hansard, the Legislative Assembly Service folks, who often do a lot of extra work and a lot of things that are outside of their regular hours.

I want to thank the ministry staff and all of the people that are here from WCB, Workers' Comp, and the Workers' Advocate. These are people that do yeomen's duty all year round, so we thank them for what they do to get ready for estimates. And this year I'd like to thank them specifically for the work that they did relating to the pandemic, and working from home and making sure that government was able to respond and carry on as it should. I know that preparation for estimates is a ton of work, so I thank them for that, but I want to thank them for everything that they do.

To Mr. Forbes, I would like to say some nice things, but I already said them so I'm not going to repeat them. It would go against my grain to do that. But I want to thank him for having been a competent and hard-working colleague for a lot of years, and wish him the very best as he's put out to pasture. But seriously, he will be missed. He was a colleague and a friend, so I thank him for that.

The Chair: — Thank you. Mr. Forbes, any remarks?

Mr. Forbes: — Well I'd like to join the minister in thanking the members, all the staff, especially the ministry staff, and many I've worked with over the years. And it's been good. You do good work. Thank the minister; he says very kind words. Maybe I will be out in that pasture. I'll bring my binoculars so I'll be doing some bird watching. Anyways, thank you all and I appreciate the opportunity. Thanks.

The Chair: — Thank you. We are adjourned till 6 o'clock. Thank you.

[The committee recessed from 17:04 until 17:59.]

The Chair: — Welcome back. And I would note that we have a new questioner in the crowd, MLA Warren McCall.

General Revenue Fund Advanced Education Vote 37

Subvote (AE01)

The Chair: — We will now consider the estimates, lending and investing activities, estimates and supplementary estimates, for the Ministry of Advanced Education. We will begin with vote 37, Advanced Education, central management and services, subvote (AE01).

[18:00]

Minister Beaudry-Mellor is here with her officials. Due to

physical distancing requirements, in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, witnesses may speak at the stand-up microphone podium if they are required to answer any questions. I would ask all witnesses to please state their names for the record before speaking at the microphone. If the minister needs to confer with officials in private, the minister may use the hallway or the vestibule at the main entrance of the Chamber. Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening comments.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And to members of the committee, some of whom will have their last committee meeting this evening, which is pretty fantastic I'm sure for you. I'm really pleased this evening to have the opportunity to speak to you about the Ministry of Advanced Education and its budget for 2020-2021.

Before I begin I'd like to introduce the members of my team from Advanced Education that are here with us today: Mark McLoughlin, the deputy minister; David Boehm, the assistant deputy minister; Corinne Barnett, the executive director of corporate finance; Kirk Wosminity, the executive director of student and support services; Mari Petroski, executive director of the Status of Women office; and Tessa Ritter, my chief of staff. If anybody else . . . I think that's all we've got.

So, Mr. Chair, I'd like to begin by thanking the people of Saskatchewan, especially our partners in the post-secondary sector, for their determined and successful response, I think, to the COVID-19 pandemic. 2020-2021 has challenged us in ways, I think, we couldn't have predicted. The global pandemic and the spread of COVID-19 has changed our lives. And in every province, every jurisdiction in the world, our economy and finances have been hit by the pandemic. These effects, I think, have been felt by our post-secondary sector as well.

However, I am very pleased to say that our sector is emerging from the pandemic more united than at any other time, I think, in some of our history. At the start of the pandemic, leaders from all levels across our sector started to meet daily to ensure the students and staff in every institution were safe. And we worked together in really unprecedented ways. Our partnerships only grew stronger and new partnerships emerged, forming close bonds, sharing best practices, and collaborating on solutions, all for the benefit of our students. I think it's safe to say that we have grown better together and the post-secondary sector as a community is stronger for it.

To assist in these efforts, our government repurposed \$7 million of existing funds for use as emergency funding for post-secondary students, including coverage for costs related to the six-month student loan moratorium and changes to the student loan contribution requirements. To assist in their efforts, our government has repurposed 1.5 of the \$3 million scholarships budget to provide emergency financial assistance to support students whose studies and employment were disrupted as a result of COVID-19. And on campus, schools repurposed funding within their existing budgets to address students' emergency needs.

Our government also mirrored changes to the student loan program that were initiated by the federal government in response to COVID-19 and the impact on students. Effective March 30th, a six-month student loan repayment moratorium was

put in place for the 2020-2021 student loan year. Eligibility for student financial assistance has been broadened by removing the expected student and spousal contributions, both mirroring similar federal provisions.

Our colleges, universities, and Saskatchewan Polytechnic donated and repurposed hospital equipment and personal protective equipment from their instructional supplies. Student entrepreneurs and staff worked to redeploy and procure personal protective equipment and other supports. Perishable food supplies from food service vendors on campus were redistributed to needy communities.

To put it in a few words, Saskatchewan residents in our sector worked really hard, sacrificed, and followed public health orders to keep themselves and others safe, and it paid off. Our per-capita case counts are nearly 80 per cent below the national average, and our fatality rate is over 90 per cent below the national average. This gives us confidence for schools to reopen in the fall with the guidance of Saskatchewan's chief medical health officer and the protocols that are in place.

Our publicly funded post-secondary institutions have committed to a blended delivery model for the fall of 2020. Institutions will deliver some programs and services remotely to limit physical contact, and where remote delivery is not possible, limited on-site delivery will follow all necessary health and workplace safety guidelines.

The words of our Finance minister ring true. We face the pandemic together and now we are reopening our province together and we'll rebuild and recover together. Mr. Chair, our goal is a strong, sustainable post-secondary sector that delivers the education Saskatchewan students need to successfully enter the workforce. The 2020-2021 budget has strong support for post-secondary students and institutions. It includes increased funding for all publicly funded universities, federated and affiliate colleges, technical institutes, and regional colleges in Saskatchewan. This year our government's investment of \$748.7 million in post-secondary education is \$20.9 million higher than last year. That's an increase of 2.9 per cent.

As I mentioned before, Saskatchewan's post-secondary institutions will receive an increased level of funding including: 660.5 million in operating, and 33 million in capital grants across the sector; \$472 million of support for the University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina, and their federated and affiliated colleges, an increase of 2.6 million; 158 million for Saskatchewan Polytech, the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, and Gabriel Dumont Institute, an increase of 5.6 million; and 31 million to Saskatchewan's regional colleges, which includes a \$2 million increase over last year.

We have committed a further 33 million to capital projects and maintenance throughout the post-secondary sector, including 9.6 million this year for projects at the universities and Saskatchewan Polytechnic Moose Jaw Campus, part of a new two-year, \$17 million investment, and finally we have committed \$1 million for planning for the campus renewal project at Saskatchewan Polytechnic in Saskatoon.

Our government's priorities for post-secondary education sector including supporting pathways for students that span from

education to career, growing participation in international education, and continuing to remove barriers to inclusion, especially for our Indigenous students. Indigenous post-secondary participation and student success numbers are increasing. Provincial investment in Indigenous post-secondary education has increased by over 72 per cent since 2007, and in this budget year, Advanced Education is investing nearly 17 million in Indigenous post-secondary institutions and programs.

Today more than 8,400 Indigenous students are enrolled in credential programs at Saskatchewan's public post-secondary institutions. This represents an increase of 24 per cent over the last five years. From 2007 to 2019 the number of Indigenous people in Saskatchewan who hold a post-secondary credential has increased by 60 per cent — an additional 13,000 people.

We are also providing targeted funding for Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies for its student support services model, and to Saskatchewan Polytechnic to support its Indigenous student success strategy.

The 2020-21 budget continues to provide strong support for post-secondary students by investing 34 million in scholarships and grants through the student loan program, ensuring support for students who need it most. This includes \$27 million and the increase of 750,000 for the Student Aid Fund to support grants and student loan programs. This reflects an anticipated increase in the number of students accessing the program. In '20-21 lower income students can qualify for up to \$7,500 in upfront grants when combined with the Saskatchewan student grant, Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship, and federal grants, which are increased to \$6,000 per year of study for 2020-2021.

Seven million of this year's budget supports scholarships such as the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship, the Saskatchewan Innovation and Opportunity Scholarship, and other small scholarships including French language scholarships, the Queen Elizabeth II Scholarship, which we announced last week, and the Scholarship of Honour.

Our graduates continue to receive benefits after their studies through the graduate retention program which provides a rebate on tuition fees of up to \$20,000 for eligible graduates who stay and work in the province. The graduate retention program is working, retaining Saskatchewan graduates to help employers build the economy of tomorrow. The GRP [graduate retention program] has provided \$541 million in benefits to more than 74,000 graduates since its introduction in 2008.

We also provided assistance during the pandemic for international students studying in our province and for Saskatchewan students studying abroad. Saskatchewan's post-secondary sector is taking its place on the international stage and our goal is to increase the number of international students studying in Saskatchewan. Graduates with experience abroad help employers engage in international relationships that advance innovation, build a stronger sense of global citizenship, and connect Saskatchewan, as an exporting province, to the world. And of course this benefits trade and our provincial economy.

In 2020-2021 Saskatchewan will reach further into global markets to provide Saskatchewan-developed international

education and training. This work includes new opportunities for Saskatchewan international service exports, including technology and research, as well as a provision of international education and training opportunities in our province. An expanded and coordinated international presence will increase the profile of the province globally, helping secure Saskatchewan's competitiveness and sustainability.

We're working to attract more international students to Saskatchewan and to give our students more international opportunities abroad. With the impacts of COVID-19, international education will be a key driver in restarting the economy when it is safe to do so and supporting Saskatchewan's growth plan.

We will achieve this by working to enhance the already respected international reputation of our province's post-secondary institutions and developing a cohesive approach to international education through the engagement of inter-ministry, sector, and global stakeholders. This work will include supporting this sector in international engagement, including partnership development, research, and academic activities and enrolment.

The ministry's budget also includes 0.4 million for the Status of Women office to support efforts to raise awareness of issues affecting women and to ensure gender considerations are integrated into government decision making. The office collaborates with government and community partners across the province to identify and address gaps. Our government is committed to improving women's safety, economic participation, and prosperity.

We recognize there is still more work to be done to address and advance women's position in business and entrepreneurship in Saskatchewan, and therefore we have worked in partnership with Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan on an advisory committee that we have been examining barriers to scaling up women-owned businesses in Saskatchewan since last September. Supporting women's economic engagement contributes to increased economic growth and competitiveness for our economy.

On the national scene, the Status of Women office is co-chairing the FPT [federal-provincial-territorial] task team on women's economic participation and prosperity, education, and skills development. This task team is focused on identifying opportunities across our nation to partner and strengthen women's economic prosperity.

We're also investing in research through the Status of Women office to gain a better understanding of the current state of women's participation in the STEM fields — science, technology, engineering, and math. This research will examine gaps and barriers for women entering and advancing in male-dominated and well-paid sectors such as the STEM fields and the skilled trades.

We're also committed to improving women's personal safety. Interpersonal violence is a complex issue requiring a coordinated response from government, communities, and individuals. As a government we've invested significant resources in this area through legislation, protocols, policies, programs, and services, and to this end the Status of Women office is developing a public

awareness campaign to address this issue in Saskatchewan. The campaign will highlight a shared responsibility and encourage conversations that will shift attitudes and norms that perpetuate violence.

I'd also like to draw your attention to some of the work the Status of Women office has done with the ministries of Justice, Attorney General, Corrections and Policing, alongside Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan, Regina Sexual Assault Centre, and the Regina Police Service to support a 17-month pilot project of the Philadelphia Model. The Philadelphia Model allows experts in sexual violence to work with police agencies to review unfounded sexual assault cases to ensure investigations are thoroughly and properly classified.

[18:15]

And so, Mr. Chair — I'm skipping pages here, Warren, just for you — and so, Mr. Chair, I'd like to close my opening remarks by saying that this education budget and operational plan responds to the government's 2020 to '30 growth plan. The post-secondary system has a critical role to play in building a stronger Saskatchewan through a number of its targets, particularly meeting our growth plan target of 100,000 new jobs but also a tripling of the tech sector. We're going to continue to create learning and career pathways that support education-employment transition, work experience and recognition of credentials, and we're going to work collaboratively and with partners to incorporate work-integrated learning opportunities for students.

And with that, Mr. Chair, I will close my comments.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. We'll begin the questioning now. Mr. McCall.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister, officials. Welcome to the consideration of these estimates for Advanced Education and the Status of Women office. I bring greetings from my colleague the member from Saskatoon Fairview, and a couple of questions that I'll get on the record for her into the bargain. But good to be here tonight with you, Madam Minister.

In terms of the ways that COVID has impacted right across economy, society, advanced education is certainly vulnerable to the impacts of COVID. You have what's played out over the last months taking place against an interesting set of budgets or financial numbers being provided at an interesting time in the electoral cycle. And I guess those are sort of the parameters by which my questioning will be informed tonight.

But I guess I'd be remiss if I didn't start off by saying, through you and through this committee, to those that work in the sector to provide that accessible, innovative, excellent educational opportunity by which we add value to our economy, by which we add value to lives and to communities, that they have persisted through these times, to them we say, thank you very much and wish them the best as we continue to figure out how these times work.

I guess that'd be as fine a point as any to ask about the measures that were taken up by the government in the teeth of COVID.

And again I say this in the full awareness of how sudden this really impacted, but also that while you can have a pandemic plan in your desk drawer, it's something else to put it into effect. But I guess one thing that I'm particularly interested in, because it sort of brings together a number of the points in particular, but that is with the experience around the emergency student fund, and again put up to match funds in some cases alongside those of the institutions.

Could the minister or officials describe for the committee what the uptake was on that and any gaps that may have remained? And by gaps, of course, I mean the way they get made up is, you know, maybe you're eating potatoes for weeks on end, as is the case in some of the stories that have been related to me. And the kind of hardship that entails, particularly with international students who are not able to access different of the federal offerings. So once the emergency funds were exhausted, it's a pretty tough place to be in. So could the minister describe for the committee the uptake on the program? When were those funds exhausted? And what sort of gaps resulted?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So I'll begin this, and at various points will ask a number of officials to add some colour to this for you. I think the way I'd like to approach this is a little bit of the trajectory of decisions that have been made over the last little bit, really since about mid-March when COVID really hit.

So when we realized that we would have to suspend the Legislative Assembly and, of course, also start to vacate the campuses, the deputy minister immediately struck a deployment team composed of various officials within the Ministry of Advanced Education. The purpose of that team was to support the sector and ensure that our sector partners were all moving in relatively the same direction and we didn't have . . . We have approximately 70 institutions in the province, and that none of our institutions were sort of going off on their own, that there was a bit of a coordinated approach.

Very early in, we recognized in a number of . . . We held numerous calls with the sector leadership, both to try to coordinate a response but also to hear about what was happening and to try to be more responsive and reactive to things that were occurring on the ground. In about a two-week period, campuses the size of the U of S [University of Saskatchewan], for example, vacated completely and went to remote work.

And I want to take a minute here to just acknowledge . . . And we said this many times throughout this process. I don't think anyone would have imagined that you could vacate a campus of 30,000, 40,000 people in a two-week period, but that's exactly what happened. And so I need to really thank our sector partners for just the magnitude of the work that it took to vacate staff, students, faculty out of campus and to transition everything into online learning. That was just a tremendous amount of work. And they're to be commended for their responsiveness and the way that that was handled, and certainly also to the officials who supported them in that work.

One of the early things that we heard was that there were some gaps in emergency supports that were needed. And we had a number of international students across the piece who couldn't go home and then were on a campus that was largely vacated. And so at the recommendation of my assistant deputy minister,

we looked at what we had for supports that were readily available, that we could deploy quickly to those students.

And so we repurposed the SIOS grants, which is the Saskatchewan Innovation and Opportunity Scholarships, and deployed those to emergency bursary programs that existed at all the institutions that had them. And those that did not have them, we facilitated them in the creation of emergency bursaries with the thinking that those emergency bursaries were for students who would not qualify for any of the other supports that were out there, and international students were at top of mind there.

And so I don't know if you want to add anything at this particular juncture to that, Mark?

Mr. McLoughlin: — Thank you, Minister. Yes, so a couple things as well to note in respect to approaching the repurposing and redesign of the SIOS funding is in certain years we've had situations where the institutions have not been able to utilize the entire amount of money that's been allocated to them as an institution. There's matching requirements that are necessary in order to do that. So we felt in projecting out that the impact overall on the SIOS approach would be quite minimal. And it would also allow the institutions to as well, you know, re-steer their ship a little bit in respect to fundraising, to be able to ensure that they were able to back up some of the components.

And what we've seen in respect to the donor approach from the institutions, a lot of our institutions had fairly substantive emergency fund balances that they wanted to utilize first and foremost and deplete before tapping into the monies that were allocated through the SIOS fund. We've seen, since the beginning of June, very little request actually from applications from both the University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina — very, very minimal.

The utilization of the additional monies, I think, has gone a long way to both domestic and international students. We've seen a certain level of engagement as well from some of the activity that has been promoted and supported by the federal government, and so the federal government's \$9 billion fund that was allocated as well for access to students. And so the activity there in and around accessibility and opportunity, I think, has been substantive in respect to uptake and certainly been very timely in our approach.

Mr. McCall: — Okay, so at what point were those funds exhausted?

Mr. McLoughlin: — Yes, we'd have to . . .

Mr. McCall: — Again the deputy minister references applications being made entailing often to June which, you know, would track with the sort of timeline of things. But if they're being made to funds that no longer exist, those are people that are left in the breach. So if you could clarify that.

Mr. McLoughlin: — Yes, so the file . . . I wouldn't say the funds no longer exist. Institutions continue to backfill funds throughout the course of the year. And so the outreach of campaigns, which are current in both universities, don't stop. So contributions are consistent throughout the course of the year into emergency funds.

Mr. McCall: — At what point was the provincial contribution to the emergency funds exhausted?

Mr. Boehm: — David Boehm, assistant deputy minister. So a couple of points in terms of the utilization of the funds: first of all, we purposely partnered with the institutions to deliver this program because each of the institutions, for the most part, had an existing emergency bursary program. So it was about getting timely access.

[18:30]

So in terms of disbursements, 2,400 bursaries had been delivered by June 19th for a total of \$2.2 million. As was mentioned, \$1.5 million of that was the scholarship funds that were repurposed for emergency bursaries. In terms of actual institutions, and maybe I'll just focus on our three largest. So for the University of Saskatchewan, there were 444 bursaries provided up until and including June 18th, and 231 of those were provided to international students. The University of Regina, 338 bursaries were provided, of which 247 were provided to international students. And for Saskatchewan Polytechnic, 600 bursaries were distributed, and 315 were for international students.

Now in terms of exhausting the fund, different institutions are at different points in terms of utilization of those funds, and with the start of the new fiscal year for each of the institutions they will have access to some of their own funds. And of course, we will continue to monitor need as we head into the fall semester, in terms of possibility for future emergency bursary requirements.

Mr. McCall: — So is it the minister or official's, you know, guarantee that if those funds are needed, they will be provided?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — So what I will commit to is that we will continue to monitor the situation. We have had weekly, sometimes twice weekly calls with the sector to see where our community is at, and we'll monitor the situation as we go forward. I think the other thing that I would add to this is that, with respect to international students in particular, one of the biggest concerns that we heard early in, in addition to the immediate need in the early days of the pandemic, was also an urgent need to get back to research and the research labs on which they depended.

And so we worked really hard with the sector to get plans for opening up labs and research facilities on our campuses for our graduate students to get back into. We made that a priority for them. Lots of grant money and employment opportunities were attached to that. And I'm proud to say that we were able to facilitate that work.

Mr. McCall: — Okay, thanks for the undertaking, Madam Minister, and for the effort certainly. And as the minister recognized in her remarks right off the top, these are people that are far from home and in incredibly vulnerable circumstance, and will also be making decisions about what they do with the rest of their lives based on this period. So again, it behooves us all well, to make certain they're well looked after.

I was glad to see, certainly . . . It's always good to see a lift

coming into the Advanced Education budget because again, as per our kibitzing about the north end of Regina off the top, you'll never need to convince me, or spend a long time convincing me of the importance of advanced education and just the increased importance that that plays in terms of improved quality of life, quality of job, and how we all work in this community together.

So again, I think that's always . . . Those are resources that are well spent. And I guess, you know, as a long-time observer of the whole question of tuition — and I know there's lots of different ways you can profile it, you know, to all different stories or emphasize different points — but I was glad to see that in terms of responding to the lift, there is effectively a tuition freeze for this year for the universities and for Sask Polytech.

And I guess then on the other hand, it's maybe where I start to think, you know, I've hung around politics too long and I'm starting to get cynical in my old age. But this being an election year, I'm not sure about what the commitment is of this government to the sector beyond this budget year. And I know in different times in the past, there have been different approaches, different . . . On the question of tuition alone, there have been different lengths of time seized upon for freezes and fully funded, I might add.

So, Madam Minister, glad to see different things happening in this year's budget, but what sort of guarantee can the minister make that . . . And again this is not ancient history that I'm talking about. There have been years in the past decade where increases have been made to the advanced education sector's budget where that has been clawed back mid-term. I'm not talking about ancient history here. So as much as this year's budget has to recommend it, what sort of sustainability and stability can the minister pledge for the people of Saskatchewan and for the sector?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Thank you for that question. A number of things. First off, I would say that we have, over the course of this pandemic, I think, built a partnership with our post-secondary institutions that I don't think has beenprecedented. The community of practice, really in many ways, that we've built with our sector is very strong in our leadership, and I think we are moving with a collective identity in a way that we hadn't before.

I think, was it December? You'll have to correct me, Mark. I think it was December or November, I met with all of the leadership of the post-secondary sector and walked through *The Saskatchewan Plan for Growth* and its impact on what that means for post-secondary education. And we pulled out a number of action items of the 20 actions and the 30 action targets that could be focused on with the post-secondary sector.

And I'm proud to see significant movement in many of those areas already. For example, the work around the innovation economy that the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina, as well as Sask Polytech have done around the superclusters at Sask Poly. Of course the work around VIDO [Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization] that is being done at the U of S. Also COVID research also being done at the U of R [University of Regina]. You know, these have been very important.

The tripling of the tech sector has been something that they've taken seriously. We've met with engineering and computer science to have those discussions. I know the U of S has been working a lot with what was Innovation Enterprise on intellectual property and those discussions to help move in those directions. Of course growing our population and keeping young people in the province is something that we've felt passionately about — that's why the GRP is here — but there has to be jobs for those young people to go to.

And we have seen . . . One of the, I think, great lessons of COVID-19 has been the lessons of digital, the lessons of staying in front of some of the digital trends that are out there. And this is the work that we've done with — you and I talked about previously — with the cultivator and with Co.Labs that is so important that the universities are also similarly gleaning onto.

And I would also add the supply chain pieces in the health care sector has been a lesson from COVID that has been very important. And we have had discussions with the announcement around the Prince Albert hospital and what that would mean for First Nations employment opportunities in the northern part of the province in the health care sector, and what role our post-secondary institutions can play in that. And I know that there's some collaborative work being done between all of our institutions on particularly that front, as well as of course, teacher training.

So I would say that there are numerous opportunities for collaboration in new ways that we haven't seen before between institutions. I can think of the relationship between Gabriel Dumont Institute and the University of Regina or the U of S and several of the First Nations, or Sask Poly and Cowessess, that have been happening that we've really never seen before. Or collaboration even between some of our regional colleges.

So there is, I think, a very important role to be played for our post-secondary sector. We have tasked what is the Saskatchewan quality assurance board, SHEQAB [Saskatchewan Higher Education Quality Assurance Board] formerly known as SHEQAB, to look at micro-credentialing. It's work that we intend to lead at the CMEC [Council of Ministers of Education, Canada] tables which, now that we're in COVID was kind of timely given that it will be difficult to attract international students for a while.

And so we have talked many times with our sector that we need to focus on some of the working professionals that are here that are looking for upskilling opportunities and retooling opportunities, and that is the work that the micro-credentialing will provide. And we of course need to continue our investments in ensuring that there are training opportunities for our Indigenous communities on-reserve, which is something that I'm proud to say that the regional colleges in particular have worked very hard at.

Mr. McCall: — So again in terms of, you know, come next year's budget and whoever's the critic and whoever's the minister, like what sort of confidence does the minister have that that's not a very different conversation? That it's not about, well now we've got to start paying down the \$2.4 billion deficit and here's where Advanced Education gets impacted. Let alone the cuts to programming and staff that are in this budget, and we can

get to those.

If all this, you know, fades away with the passage of the year and then we're into figuring out how to deal with a \$2.4 billion deficit that we know of, what sort of assurances does the minister have for students, for the sector, in terms of what the sustainability of their funding is in the face of that?

[18:45]

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — The way I'll start this is that I don't think that anyone in this pandemic can say they're going to go back to business as usual, anywhere. I don't think that guarantee will happen for anyone. What I can say is this: that we have an unprecedented level of collaboration with our partners in the sector; that this has been an incredibly disruptive pandemic; and that disruption, in some ways, might push our sector do things differently.

And that's a conversation that's not just happening in Saskatchewan. That's a conversation that's . . . I mean if you read Alex Usher's blog, that's happening in Canada, that's happening globally to all universities and post-secondary institutions in the world.

And how do we look at our business model differently? I think those are actually good conversations to have. In some ways, we were already having some of them about micro credentials, and how do we unbundle programs to make them more accessible for people who are already in the workforce or who are vulnerable and can't attend a four-year program for a number of reasons, but want to upskill and be less vulnerable to the digital revolution, which is something we've talked about many times.

So what I can assure you of is this: that I will remain a strong champion of the sector regardless of the position that I'm in and that we will work very hard as a ministry, whether I'm in this chair or not, to help support our sector through the disruptive changes of this pandemic and forward. And we're already doing that.

There are some resources that we are going to need to share. Instructional design is one of those that some of our institutions have capacity for and some do not. And there are some of our institutions that have a lot of experience with land-based education that other institutions don't, and they're sharing that.

And so I think that the collaboration that we're currently doing and a new eye with respect to programs, I think you are going to see a different model of post-secondary education, a slightly varied model of post-secondary education, not just here in Saskatchewan but globally. And they'll have strong champion here.

Mr. McCall: — Well I'm glad of that. But again I look to the east, I look to the west, and I see what happens when you've got governments of a certain political bent making decisions after an election. And in terms of, I don't know, be it Manitoba going to the sector and saying, you know, come up with your 20 per cent. That's a pretty wrenching set of circumstances.

So again I'm trying to work from experience here. I'm trying to work from history. I'm trying to work from the experience in the

sectors throughout the country. And as glad as I am to see one good budget coming after some other less-than-great budgets and some other decisions on the part of the government to provide funds and then to claw them back, I don't think it's outlandish to be asking for some kind of guarantee about what happens to the sector for the next budget and the budget after that.

And if there's going to be more innovation in the delivery of programming and design of programming, great. So be it. That's as it should be. But that's something very different than, you know, having your budget cut by 20 per cent and trying to make that up. Because that comes out of the students and it comes out of the staff. And the minister knows that from a lot of different directions.

So again, what is the guarantee that the minister can bring to the table that this isn't just some kind of pre-election budget that's larded up with a lot of great-looking things, but come next year, when it's time to pay for everything, that that line for the \$2.4 billion deficit is going to have Advanced Education right near the front of it?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Mr. McCall, you know full well that I can't give you that guarantee. Nobody can for any ministry, for anything anywhere. We cannot predict what's going to happen in the next budget. We're in this budget today. I need to deal with what I have today in front of me, with the reality that is in front of me today. That's what I'm dealing with right now. I'm also dealing with a vision that we have for the post-secondary sector, which we shared with the post-secondary sector in November. That's what I'm working with today. Those are the things that we're working with today.

I can't play the game of fearmongering, of what might happen after the next budget, because I don't know. I could have never predicted COVID-19. I would have never been able to predict that we would vacate 30 and 40,000 people off a university campus in a period of two weeks and move into online. I would have never in my wildest dreams said that that was even possible.

And so the reality that I'm dealing in today is, how do I make sure and how do we collectively make sure that our sector is in the strongest, most competitive position possible coming out of this pandemic? And that is where we are investing our time and energies right now. So when the whole world starts to come out of this pandemic, where is Saskatchewan's post-secondary sector with respect to the innovation economy? Where are we with respect to international? Where are we with respect to future research? Where are we with respect to micro-credentialing?

Those are the things that I'm invested in and our officials are invested in, to make sure that we are in the strongest position possible coming out of this. Because all of the post-secondary institutions in Canada and globally, pretty much, have now gone online, so the competition is going to be significant across the piece. And so what do we need to do as a sector to make sure that students stay here? And that's where we have been investing our time.

And that's why I've talked about retention. I've talked about the Indigenous student. I've talked about micro-credentialing. Because those are the things that are going to add value to our sector and increase its sustainability over the long term following

this very, very disruptive period of time in this pandemic. I don't know if you'd like to add anything, Mark or David.

Mr. McCall: — No, that's plenty enough answer for the time we've got. Thanks, Madam Minister. So again if that is in fact the measure that people should look to, you know, so again come next year's budget, if this is a very different set of conversations, they shouldn't look and say, you know, it was just a bunch of politicians being a bunch of politicians, telling you something good in election year and then see you after the election. So what sort of guarantee can the minister make against that eventuality?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — I think you're asking the same question in different ways repeatedly. And so I have to give you the same answer, which is there is no guarantee. There's never a guarantee. What I will commit to is that the sector has an incredibly strong champion, an incredibly strong and supportive ministry that is supporting their work. And that will continue.

Mr. McCall: — Okay, so one example, Madam Minister, in terms of the decisions that have been made and the budgets that have been put forward. In the face of that, and in terms of the priorities that the minister's outlined at this committee, we're faced with the Saskatchewan Polytechnic eliminating their Indigenous nursing program. You know, something that's been very successful, something that has . . . You know, in terms of Sask Polytech having a good record in terms of Indigenous education and Indigenous success, how is it that in the face of that they eliminate the Indigenous nursing program?

Mr. McLoughlin: — Mr. Chair, thank you. That in fact has not been brought to our attention, so we will need to take that away and look further into that at this time.

Mr. McCall: — Well do have a good look because in terms of what's been outlined as being priorities for this sector, it kind of flies in the face of all the good words. So I'd be interested to see what you're able to find out.

Mr. McLoughlin: — What we see today is the exact same number of nursing seats that are currently available that have been available. But we will look into that.

Mr. McCall: — Seeing the time, Mr. Chair, you're a generous man but you're tough and fair. I know that too. But I would like to ask a couple of questions as regards to the Status of Women office. And I guess just one question sort of predominates, and we've had this conversation in different regards previously, Madam Minister, in different committees as well. But what was the gendered analysis performed for the budget, and what sort of evidence do we see of that work?

[19:00]

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Thank you very much. So I can speak to a number of things, but I think the one that I'll zone in on, given the time, are twofold. One, we know that women disproportionately represent the workforce in the service and retail sectors. Those have been impacted by COVID-19.

And the Status of Women office has been working very hard on growth in the STEM fields and how we encourage women in Saskatchewan to graduate towards the STEM fields. We know

that currently only about 13 per cent of women in our post-secondary sector remain in the STEM fields beyond year one, and yet are the majority of students on campus.

So that has been an area where there's been significant investment by the Status of Women office. They are working on a research project to look at what it is that attracts women to the STEM fields and how do we retain women in the STEM fields, because those are . . . when we look at where the well-paying jobs are. And I look at the wage gap between industries. That is the one where the pay gap is the closest to being realized and equitable. And so that is an area we are spending a significant amount of time, and it's reflected as well in this year's budget allotments where we're spending money in the Status of Women office.

Mr. McCall: — With the Chair's indulgence, does the minister have a hard dollar figure to attach to these efforts?

Ms. Petroski: — Hello, I'm Mari Petroski. I'm the executive director with the Status of Women office. So specifically to the research project that we're working on with STEM, we are spending \$25,000 right at this point to do that research with Insightrix, which we did an RFP [request for proposal] process for them. And then with the WESK [Women Entrepreneurs Saskatchewan] advisory committee, we committed \$10,000.

Mr. McCall: — I thank the official for the answer. And with that, Mr. Chair, I have no further questions.

The Chair: — Yes, we've reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of this item of business and we will proceed to vote off the estimates for the Ministry of Advanced Education.

'20-21 estimates, vote 37, Advanced Education, page 23 in the Estimates book, central management and services, subvote (AE01) in the amount of 14,842,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Post-secondary education, subvote (AE02) in the amount of 697,409,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Student supports, subvote (AE03) in the amount of 36,215,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Non-appropriated expense adjustments in the amount of 138,000. Non-appropriated expense adjustments are non-cash adjustments presented for informational purposes only. No amount is to be voted on.

Advanced Education, vote 37, 748,466,000. I would now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2021, the following sums for Advanced Education in the amount of 748,466,000.

Mr. Fiaz. Agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

**General Revenue Fund
Lending and Investing Activities
Advanced Education
Vote 169**

The Chair: — Vote 169, Advanced Education on page 154, loans to student aid fund, subvote (AE01) in the amount of \$80,000,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Advanced Education, vote 169, 80,000,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2021, the following sums for Advanced Education in the amount of 80,000,000.

Mr. Goudy. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

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

The Chair: — 2019-20 supplementary estimates, vote 37, Advanced Education, student supports, subvote (AE03) in the amount of \$5,000,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Post-secondary education, subvote (AE02) in the amount of \$3,000,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Advanced Education, vote 37, \$8,000,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2020, the following sums for Advanced Education in the amount of \$8,000,000.

Ms. Wilson: — So moved.

The Chair: — Ms. Wilson. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. I would ask the minister, any closing comments?

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — No. I would just like to thank all

of our officials for being here and all of the work that they do on a regular basis as well as my chief of staff, to the members of the committee who are here for this very riveting last showdown, I guess, and also to Mr. McCall, if I don't have the opportunity, for your many years of dedicated service to this place.

The Chair: — Mr. McCall, any closing remarks?

Mr. McCall: — No. I meant . . . yes. Yes, pardon me. Nothing like saying no and then just going on and on and on, but I meant what I said about Advanced Education. It's a real way up the ladder for a lot of folks, and I know the minister knows that full well.

So we're talking about budgets here and we're talking about programs and we're talking about different services and accessibility and all in this great province of Saskatchewan, but it's really that ticket to a better life. And I know the minister knows that full well; I certainly know that full well in the family I grew up in.

And maybe to put the question one different way for one last time, you know, I hope the minister proves me wrong. I hope you prove me dead wrong and that there isn't some kind future conversation for the sector where it's like, you know, deal with this. So I'm always open to being proved wrong in this thing, Madam Minister, and I wish you luck doing it.

The Chair: — Okay, thank you everyone. We'll allow the minister and her officials to leave now and then we'll vote off the rest of our estimates.

We'll now proceed to vote off the remaining committee resolutions.

**General Revenue Fund
Education
Vote 5**

The Chair: — Vote 5, Education, page 43 of the Estimates book, central management and services, subvote (ED01) in the amount of \$13,000,675, is that agreed? . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Pardon me? Oh sorry. \$13,675,000. Agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. I was giving a bargain. K-12 education, subvote (ED03) in the amount of — this is a good one — 2,058,643,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Teachers' pensions and benefits, subvote (ED04) in the amount of 22,356,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Early years, subvote (ED08) in the amount of 98,317,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Provincial library and literacy, subvote

(ED15) in the amount of 14,393,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Non-appropriated expense adjustment in the amount of 389,000. Non-appropriated expense adjustments are non-cash adjustments presented for informational purposes only. No amount is to be voted on.

Education, vote 5 is 2,207,384,000. I would now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2021, the following sums for Education in the amount of 2,207,384,000.

Mr. Cox.

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

**General Revenue Fund
Health
Vote 32**

The Chair: — Vote 32, Health, page 75 in the book, central management and services, subvote (HE01) in the amount of 9,946,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Saskatchewan health services, subvote (HE03) in the amount of 4,159,144,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Provincial health services and support, subvote (HE04) in the amount of 236,055,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Medical services and medical education programs, subvote (HE06) in the amount of 983,068,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Drug plan and extended benefits, subvote (HE08) in the amount of 420,798,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Non-appropriated expense adjustment in the amount of 187,000. Non-appropriated expense adjustments are non-cash adjustments presented for informational purposes only. No amount to be voted on.

[19:15]

The Health vote 32 is 5,809,011,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2021, the following sums for Health in the amount of 5,809,011,000.

Mr. Goudy. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

**General Revenue Fund
Social Services
Vote 36**

The Chair: — Vote 36, Social Services, page 115 of the Estimates book, central management and services, subvote (SS01) in the amount of 56,255,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Income assistance services, subvote (SS03) in the amount of 609,494,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Child and family services, subvote (SS04) in the amount of 332,797,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Client support, subvote (SS05) in the amount of 12,690,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Housing, subvote (SS12) in the amount of 11,581,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Disability programs and services, subvote (SS14) in the amount of 264,850,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Non-appropriated expense adjustment in the amount of 7,194,000. Non-appropriated expense adjustments are non-cash adjustments presented for informational purposes only. No amount to be voted on.

Social Services, vote 36, 1,287,667,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2021, the following sums for Social Services in the amount of 1,287,667,000.

Mr. Fiaz. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

**General Revenue Fund
Supplementary Estimates
Education
Vote 5**

The Chair: — Vote 5, Education, central management and services, subvote (ED01) in the amount of 800,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. K-12 education, subvote (ED03) in the amount of 12,400,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Teachers' pensions and benefits, subvote (ED04) in the amount of 9,631,000. There is no vote as this is statutory.

Education, vote, 5, 13,200,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2020, the following sums for Education in the amount of 13,200,000.

Ms. Wilson: — I so move.

The Chair: — Ms. Wilson. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

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

The Chair: — Vote 32, Health, Saskatchewan health services, subvote (HE03) in the amount of 82,500,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Medical services and medical education programs, subvote (HE06) in the amount of 16,500,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Drug plan and extended benefits, subvote (HE08) in the amount of 24,500,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Health, vote 32, 123,500,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2020, the following sums for Health in the amount of 123,500,000.

Mr. Fiaz. Is that agreed?

[The committee adjourned at 19:23.]

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

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

The Chair: — Vote 36, Social Services, central management and services, subvote (SS01) in the amount of 3,500,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Child and family services, subvote (SS04) in the amount of 9,850,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Social Services, subvote 36, 13,350,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2020, the following sums for Social Services in the amount of 13,350,000.

I have a motion from Mr. Cox. Agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Committee members, you have before you a draft of the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Human Services. We require a member to move the following motion:

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

Mr. Cox.

Mr. Cox: — I would like to move:

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

The Chair: — Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This concludes our business this evening. I would ask a member to move the motion of adjournment. Ms. Wilson has moved. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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