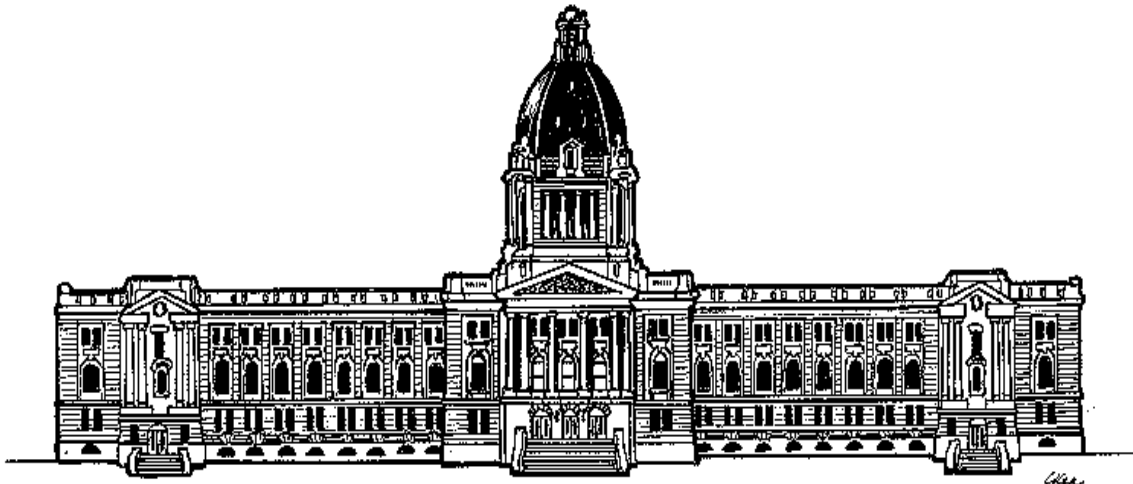




STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL
AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE**

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Mr. Corey Tochor
Saskatoon Eastview

[The committee met at 13:00.]

The Chair: — Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. This is the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. My name is Warren Michelson. I am the Chair of the committee. Also other members of the committee are: Cathy Sproule is the Deputy Chair, Kevin Phillips, Warren Steinley, Lyle Stewart, Christine Tell, and Corey Tochor. Today Warren McCall will be sitting in for Cathy Sproule.

This afternoon the committee will be considering the estimates of the Minister of First Nations and Métis Relations, and later we will be considering estimates and supplementary estimates from the Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing. Before we begin, I would just remind the officials to introduce themselves when they speak just for the purpose of Hansard.

**General Revenue Fund
First Nations and Métis Relations
Vote 25**

Subvote (FN01)

The Chair: — We will now begin our consideration of vote no. 25 of First Nations and Métis Relations, central management and services, subvote FN(01). Minister Cheveldayoff is with us with his officials. Mr. Minister, if you'd like to introduce your officials and make any opening remarks after that.

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee. Thank you to the hon. members present and the Clerk's staff and everyone associated with making this possible. I am pleased to be here today to discuss the 2012-2013 budget for the Ministry of First Nations and Métis Relations or FNMR.

First allow me to introduce my officials that are here with me today. Seated to my left is Ron Crowe, deputy minister. To his left, James Froh, assistant deputy minister, First Nations and Métis affairs division. To my right, Kerry Gray, director, finance, accountability, and corporate services. Giselle Marcotte is here, acting assistant deputy minister, northern affairs division. Just give us a wave there, Giselle.

Also in attendance are: Richard Turkheim — Richard is the executive director, northern industry and resource development — Mark LaRocque, executive director, northern social development; Doug Howorko, executive director, northern regional economic development; Seonaid MacPherson, executive director, strategic initiatives; Trisha Delormier-Hill, executive director, lands and consultation; and Alethea Foster, executive director, relationships and policy.

Mr. Chair, before we get to questions, I would like to provide some brief opening remarks. The mandate of this ministry is to improve the social and economic outcomes of First Nations and Métis people and northerners. With First Nations and Métis making up some 15 per cent of the overall population of our province and 85 per cent of the northern population, the ministry provides government with a focused approach to common issues and opportunities.

First Nations and Métis Relations is the face of government when it comes to Aboriginal and northern issues. The ministry manages working relationships with First Nations, Métis, and northern individuals and organizations. These relationships allow for the honest and concrete discussions that often diffuse emotional issues and provide input into government decision making, thereby providing practical solutions and avoiding public disruptions.

In addition FNMR plays a central agency role on behalf of government in developing policy to improve outcomes, for example, the northern action plan, Jordan's Principle, and the Saskatchewan children and youth agenda engagement. Other concrete examples include the delivery on the promise of the Treaty Land Entitlement Agreement, ensuring certainty on land title transactions, administration of the gaming agreement, and delivery of the province's legal obligation to consult and accommodate, which is designed to remove uncertainty for business and investors, a critical requirement for future economic growth.

FNMR has had a significant role in the North, including northern economic development; counselling and coaching to northern resource industries as well as other external clients on sensitivities, interests, priorities, and emerging issues; as well as best practices in establishing effective long-term business relationships with northern stakeholders, First Nations, Métis Locals, and municipalities.

In summary FNMR responds to First Nations, Métis, and northern issues while focused on long-term change — working together with colleague ministries on practical opportunities to improve education and employment outcomes, to reduce fetal alcohol spectrum disorder births, to prevent suicides amongst First Nations, Métis, and northerners — and contributes to significant and lasting economic and social benefits for all citizens of Saskatchewan.

It is common knowledge that the First Nations and Métis population is growing faster than any other segment of Saskatchewan's population. Recent forecasts have the Aboriginal population in Saskatchewan at under 15 per cent in 2006 and steadily increasing to over 20 per cent by the year 2036. Now recent immigration numbers may slow some of these percentages somewhat, but nevertheless the trend is very clear. So why does this matter?

Aboriginal citizens have lower incomes, mainly due to lower education achievements, higher unemployment, and they experience poorer health outcomes than the rest of the general population. Saskatchewan's economic growth creates potential opportunities. However, unless focused and collective action is taken, the gap between First Nations and Métis and the rest of the general public will only grow, putting more pressure on the justice system, health system, and social services.

More and more young Aboriginals are moving to urban centres, and this will continue. If Aboriginal education outcomes and employment participation improve, young Aboriginals will have a significant impact on creating safe communities where everyone will benefit. As well one of the keys to economic development in the North is improved education outcomes and

increasing employment skill levels. The North, which is comprised of 85 per cent Aboriginal people, does not have a labour shortage but rather a skills shortage.

FNMR has a valuable role to play in all of these areas as we are delivering on the province's legal obligations and strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

To the particulars of the ministry of First Nations and Métis relationship budget for 2012-2013, FNMR's budget of \$82 million for 2012-2013 is roughly the same or about point three per cent lower than the 2011-2012 budget. This is primarily due to lower funding obligations under the treaty land entitlement agreements, adjusted funding for requirements to match historical utilization of the Consultation Participation Fund, the elimination of payments for the northern enterprise regions, cancellation of the fish freight subsidy program, completion of the financial support for fish marketing transition to a free market system, and the removal of funding for the education task force of \$333,000, which was one-time funding that was made available last year.

The FNMR budget, the FNMR gaming agreement budget is \$2.47 million higher due to higher forecasted casino revenues for Saskatchewan. The FNMR budget maintains funding commitments for the treaty land entitlement agreements and for all commitments under the First Nation and Métis gaming agreements. This budget also ensures that we will continue funding ongoing programs and policy development through our ministry.

I would like to emphasize the fact that the officials of the Ministry of First Nations and Métis Relations continue to work with the leadership of other government ministries and agencies. In addition I am extremely pleased that this budget provides \$172.4 million, an increase of 4.7 million or 2.8 per cent, for First Nations and Métis people across the entire budget.

Some examples of this funding are: Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration, an increase of \$1.8 million in funding targeted to First Nations and Métis initiatives and institutions; continued funding by the Ministry of Education to support the First Nations and Métis education initiatives fund and the high school completion fund; over \$1.5 million in support of First Nations resource agreements by the Ministry of Energy and Resources; and increases to Social Services — the First Nations group homes, an increase of 11.1 per cent; First Nations case management payments program, family finder program, Saskatchewan First Nations Family and Community Institute, and the First Nations response model group home, an increase of 1.6 per cent in each of these areas.

Mr. Chair, we believe that the budget for 2012-2013 is a balanced and prudent plan to achieve these objectives. With that I will be happy to answer any questions that members may have and could call upon my deputy minister and other senior officials to provide details when necessary. Thank you again for the opportunity, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister Cheveldayoff, and welcome to the officials. Are there questions? Mr. McCall, I believe you had some.

Mr. McCall: — All right thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and welcome, Minister, officials from First Nations, Métis Relations. It's good to join you once again in this forum.

Just a word of explanation off the top. My colleague the member from Cumberland is Northern Affairs critic for the official opposition. We've other hours scheduled for estimates. The Northern Affairs questions will be coming along at that time. So please don't feel left out, Minister or officials, if there's a distinctly First Nations, Métis Relations focus in the questions today. I guess the — because the Northern Affairs questions certainly are coming — I guess the first question I would have for the minister relates to the . . . And I'm glad that the . . . I guess a bit of a clarification, Mr. Chair, off the top.

Certainly the minister has touched on the mission of the ministry. But also in the remarks, and this is how different expenditures are profiled by the government, of course, is that other expenditures of government were made mention of in the minister's opening remarks. So I'm glad he's discussed those. And certainly some of the questions we have will touch upon those as is fitting for the First Nations, Métis Relations being the lead ministry on First Nations and Métis issues within government, and of course we'll have follow-up questions for the related ministries. But certainly if our questions touch upon matters where the ministry is working with other ministries, I'm sure the Chair will look kindly upon those questions, especially given that the minister has opened in the manner that he has.

I guess the other things I'd like to say off the top is that I certainly agree with the minister that in many ways Saskatchewan doesn't face a labour shortage; it does face a skill shortage. And we're very interested to see what happens with the joint task force on, what had started out as the task force on, First Nations employment and education and what comes of that. Certainly there is a timeline attached to the document that was initially signed last May. So I guess we'll start our questions there, Mr. Chair, for the ministry and officials.

The task force, as it was initially signed, there was a fair amount of documentation that went with it in terms of timelines, in terms of focus. And of course that document was signed with the then chief of the FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations], Guy Lonechild. When it was announced earlier in the session at last — and again we're glad to see that work under way in earnest — it had been expanded to include Métis initiatives in its purview.

So I guess if the minister could tell the committee, how did that evolution take place? It started out with a First Nations focus and then expanded to include Métis people. How did that come to pass?

[13:15]

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much for the question, to the member. And what the joint task force was wanting to do was certainly to address the gaps between First Nations and Métis individuals and those of the rest of the province. And we certainly saw that the larger gap was between First Nations, and the Métis weren't as far behind. But certainly the goal all along was to ensure that both of those gaps were addressed.

We had discussions right from the beginning with First Nations individuals, and with Métis as well, and invited them to become part of the task force in whatever way they chose, whether a formal part or an informal part of the discussions. And we initially focused on First Nations because of their experience in delivering education on-reserve and, you know, very early on had some very good discussions with politicians and officials in the room at the same time. And I believe it was sort of, you know, one of those roll up your sleeves and get to it for the whole day, talking about all kinds of different aspects and putting everything on the table.

So you know we feel that this is a creation not driven by the government by itself but driven by the common interests of First Nations and Métis and the government of improving educational outcomes in the province. So certainly we feel that we have the basis for some good work. There are some timelines and some deadlines going forward. But we feel that it's taken a while, but we've got some very good individuals that have accepted the challenge of leading this group as well.

Mr. McCall: — I'd certainly agree with the minister as to the calibre of the individuals that have been at last appointed to the task force. I'm certainly, I'm well familiar with the work and the resumés of Gary Merasty, Don Hoium, Rita Bouvier. These are outstanding individuals that have been appointed to this task force. And again we look forward with a sense of urgency to the work that they do.

But as regards . . . I guess I'm just looking for clarification on the task force itself and how the evolution has taken place over what has amounted to the last year. One of the admirable things I'd thought at the time of its signing for the task force was that there was some fairly distinct timelines set out. One of those timelines was that the task force was to have been struck by the end of summer 2011. That of course was not the case, the task force having been announced in March.

So again what had started out as something of a point of admiration for the opposition in terms of looking at the task force being struck, in terms of some of the definitive timelines attached to it, it seemed that right out of the gate the detail and the relatively firm sort of parameters in which the task force was to be doing its work, it didn't seem to matter. It didn't, the paper that had been signed didn't seem to be, it didn't seem to be as informative as we'd initially hoped.

So again, the task force was to have been struck by the end of summer 2011, was finally struck March of 2012. That's a significant lag in terms of what should be a fairly vital body that should have a great impact on the future of this province in terms of the employment education outcomes that the minister has referenced. So could the minister just explain, by way of clarification, what happened. Why did it take so long to get the task force under way?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Well thank you very much for the question. And you know, right off the top, I'll agree. It took longer than I would have liked to have seen. The time period was quite lengthy. But most importantly, we wanted to be respectful of our partners.

And I think it's fair to say that the First Nations community in

Saskatchewan over the last year has seen many changes at the political level and, as a result, on every level, every committee that was involved. So we wanted to be respectful of the change in leadership and the resulting time frame as well. And part of that responsibility is with us as well as we entered into a provincial election in the fall, and for, you know, a period of months this wasn't able to move forward.

But at the end of the day, what we thought would be most important was to ensure that we respected the wishes of the partners and, at the end of the day, could say that we got the very best people that we could. And we are now in position as of March to be able to say that — that we're very pleased with the individuals that have come forward, all very, very busy people that have agreed to take on this added responsibility.

But I can tell the member that the passion that they displayed when the announcement was made and their commitment is something that gives me a very good feeling going forward. So the timeline is a little longer than we would have liked to, but we're in a position now of feeling very good about the future and the potential outcomes.

Mr. McCall: — Okay. So again I don't dispute that there's a lot of busy people involved but certainly more that there has been some change in the leadership in terms of principals that had initially signed on to the agreement but changed. Though there may have been, in the individuals that signed the document in May of 2011 . . . The FSIN remained. And in terms of, you know, again trying to understand what was the precise reasoning for the holdup on the launch of the document, is the minister saying that it wasn't the fault, to use a word, of the ministry but rather the fact that partners had requested this delay in the launch of the task force?

Mr. Crowe: — Good afternoon. My name is Ron Crowe, the deputy minister of First Nations and Métis Relations. Again as the minister has stated, there was some . . . We would have been more comfortable in launching into this sometime earlier. Some of the challenges that we did face, and I'll just go into a bit of not so much detail but a little bit more specific, there was the leadership issue at the FSIN. And the former chief did hold the education portfolio. There was a change in that as they went through the summer and into the fall. And there was an attempt, several attempts to reach out to ensure that there was some continuation of the conversation leading up to the establishment of the joint task force through some of the conversations that we had both formally and informally with the representatives of the FSIN.

Eventually a new portfolio holder was chosen at the conclusion of FSIN's election in October. Vice-Chief Simon Bird now holds that portfolio. And as he needed some time to get comfortable with the portfolio, have the formal and informal conversations and understand the plans behind the joint task force, we were well into going into a new calendar year until we establish that level of comfort on both sides. And after we established that level of comfort, that's when we were able to make some tremendous moves in launching the task force.

Again a lot of it had to do with some of the challenges that FSIN had faced, the portfolio changes, the comfort level with the portfolio, and ensuring that we all had a joint understanding

of where our goals and objectives laid in establishing the joint task force. We're all part of the reason why it took as long, but not from a lack of effort but the need to ensure that there was a comfort level with our partner and the partners and the launching of the task force.

Mr. McCall: — Well I thank the deputy minister for that answer. And again I guess from perspective observing this unfold again, when it was initially signed, one of the things we'd admired about it was that it set out some pretty distinct timelines. And that seemed to be equal to the task at hand because this is a very urgent file for the people of Saskatchewan. But if even the striking of the task force, if that can't be lived up to in terms of the agreement that was signed, surely the minister and officials will understand, you know, the worry that the opposition has in terms of the rest of the agreement being lived up to and what is to come.

But I guess in terms of the agreement that is there now, was there an abridged or a revised edition of the agreement that was signed by the FSIN? And I have another follow up on that sort of point, but is there a revised agreement?

Mr. Crowe: — There is no revised agreement, but what we do is have a mutual understanding as to some of the timelines that we're looking at now. I think it's important to note that no one walked away from the agreement. It was a matter of circumstances that impinged upon the time frames that we initially set out. Some of that we had absolutely no control over and therefore couldn't . . . and really was an evolving situation.

I think what we wanted to do was ensure that we lived up to the spirit and intent of the agreement to make sure that we're moving together with our partner, the FSIN, on this. And I believe right now we have a good understanding of what timelines that we're looking at. We're looking at hopefully having a report, an interim report by November of this year, followed by a completion, ending report hopefully in February.

But at the same time, we want to make sure there's some quality to that, to the report and the work that they do. To hold them to time frames without dealing with and doing the research that's needed, I think would be unfair. But those are generally time frames that we've all agreed to, and it is I think an understanding that both, all partners have, including the task force members. And I think it's, again, it's important to note that nobody walked away from the spirit and intent of the agreement. It was the intent of everyone to continue on with trying to reach the goals and objectives of the agreement itself.

Mr. McCall: — Is there consideration of releasing a revised copy of the agreement? Certainly there was a great amount of fanfare that accompanied the signing of the document. As I've said, we, as the opposition looking to hold the government to account, appreciated the definitive nature of various of the timelines and details that were included in the document.

Given that the start of it has gone out the window, and again I appreciate the information that the deputy minister has provided the committee in terms of the projected completion points or the future benchmarks for this committee. We appreciate those. But is there going to be something that puts that down in black and white that we can then measure the commitment of this

government to the important task in front of this committee?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you to the member for the question. And certainly neither party has asked for that type of information or that, you know, we move in that direction. What we have is that the people remain at the table, that the goals are being focused on. And we're just anxious to move forward and to give the committee all the time that they need to examine and to work towards the benchmarks that are in place.

Mr. McCall: — Okay. Well I guess that's in some respects again this is a government that like to talk about the mandate letters and the difference throughout accountability measures set out for the government. And certainly there was a great amount of fanfare that accompanied the signing of this agreement, and you know, that's part of the work we're in for sure.

But in terms of the public looking to government for not just words but measurable actions and in terms of how the opposition has got a job to do in holding this government to account, we appreciated the fact that the document was fairly definitive. But I guess what the minister is saying now is that, you know, we'll see how it goes. Is that a fair characterization?

[13:30]

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — What we're saying now is that the most important thing is the end result and the outcomes, and we want to make sure that this committee has all the time necessary. We wanted to be respectful in the beginning of the partners and the timetables. We wanted to establish benchmarks and reach them wherever possible. Again, as the deputy has indicated, we've established future benchmarks going forward. They are not cast in stone. There will be some flexibility on it because at the end of the day we want to be able to say that everyone has had all the time necessary to study this very important issue.

This issue didn't come about with the election of this government in 2007. This issue has been there for many, many terms and many, many governments, and we want to see this as a visionary document going forward, and I'd hate to provide, you know, any excuses for any shortcuts in the future. But certainly we think that the benchmarks that are in place are manageable. We'll continue to discuss that with the committee members, and you know, we'll provide updates going forward.

But what I can say with certainty is that I have a comfort level that, at the end of the day, we will have a document based on the individuals and their commitment that will be a guide for us going forward and something that I think we can all be happy with.

Mr. McCall: — I guess a different question for the minister on the same topic: the inclusion of Métis concerns in the work of the task force. That wasn't there at the start of the task force's work. Could the minister explain for the committee how that . . . the evolution that was undergone by the committee's mandate or the task force's mandate from May 2011 to March of 2012. How did the Métis come to get included in the work of this task force?

Mr. Crowe: — As previously indicated, it's always been government's desire to deal with the gaps that exist both in the First Nation and Métis community on education outcomes. It's always been a desire. When we got into the conversations earlier on, we made that indication known to the First Nation representatives and we also made that indication known to Métis representatives as well.

It's not a matter of adding on at midpoint. It was always our desire to ensure that . . . Because we're not dealing with just exclusively on-reserve. We're dealing with off-reserve or we're dealing with urban. We're dealing with northern factors.

It has always been the desire to ensure that Métis issues are addressed in this joint task force and reviewing some of the barriers and obstacles and looking for means to see success from the Aboriginal community in education outcomes. I couldn't say that at any point in time from midpoint, other than from the beginning, it's always been our intent to not only deal with or address the barriers for First Nations but as Métis as well.

Mr. McCall: — But again though, that wasn't the deal that was signed May 2011. So at what point did Métis get officially on board for this endeavour?

Mr. Crowe: — The agreement of course was signed by Chief Lonechild on behalf of the First Nations. It was very clear that the First Nations would not speak for the Métis, that the Métis would have opportunity to make representation to the panel. And again it's always been the interest of government to ensure that we deal with the education gaps for the Métis community as well as the First Nation community.

Mr. McCall: — So it wasn't a matter of the FSIN and the leadership of the FSIN at that time being prepared to sign an agreement, and no such preparedness on the part of the Métis Nation at that time, so you went with the FSIN. We have heard from the MNS [Métis Nation of Saskatchewan] that they wanted inclusion in the task force. So while we're glad to see that expanded focus as arrived at in March of 2012, again we're trying to understand how that wasn't the case in the first place.

Mr. Crowe: — Again, and it's always been our intent to ensure that we, that the panel, in our instructions to the panel, deal with the education gaps that occur in the Métis community as well as the First Nation community. We've had preliminary conversations with both the Métis and the First Nation representatives. And we have never been told formally or informally by the Métis community that they wanted their own task force. There was always an interest of participating in the joint task force and we made that opportunity available as we move forward with the creation of the task force.

Mr. McCall: — I'm not trying to be dense, Mr. Chair. But again, if that was the case, why wasn't there a joint signing in May of 2011? Why the evolution?

Mr. Crowe: — We just wanted to ensure that you have an understanding. The opportunity has always been afforded to the Métis representation, the Métis community to be participant in the task force. Where we landed on is the opportunity to ensure that they have representation, make representation especially

when it deals with some of the issues that are specific to the Métis community. Again the joint task force is not just for First Nation successful outcomes. It's for the benefit of both First Nation and Métis and trying to eliminate that gap on education outcomes. That opportunity has always been there.

Mr. McCall: — Okay. I guess we'll carry the line of questioning further, Mr. Chair. But certainly this is one of the central challenges facing this province. It's one of the most important challenges facing this province and again we've seen a lot of, we've seen task forces and we've seen summits and we've seen conferences, and there's an increasing amount of hope that has been invested in this particular task force. And alongside that we've seen actions by this government on other fronts just like one as related to the Aboriginal employment development program that was unilaterally cut a couple of budgets ago, different changes in terms of the First Nations and Métis education branch in the Department of Education. We're very interested to see how this task force works out and we can't emphasize enough the importance of the work in front of this task force. So we'll see how this works out, Mr. Chair.

I guess if I could to go through the ministry's expenditures in a more particular way. There are certainly a number of changes in the expenditure in the ministry. So I guess again what we'd like to get is particular detail going through the vote 25 in the different changes in the amounts from last year's estimates to this. And I guess the first place we'd like to start with in that regard concerns the gaming agreements. So the minister had made reference in his opening remarks to the increase in the First Nations gaming agreement allocation. Could the minister restate that and provide in greater detail to the committee in terms of what that constitutes?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — I have provided the member with, you know, the overall numbers. If we want to get into the details, I'll ask Mr. Gray to provide an overview and we can continue on with that line of questioning for sure. So I'll ask Mr. Gray to provide the details.

Mr. Gray: — Kerry Gray, director of finance. So under the subvote (FN03), First Nation gaming agreements, the first line has an increase of 2.6, almost \$2.7 million. It's related to increase in forecasts for specifically SIGA [Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority Inc.] casinos. The second line, Métis Development Fund, has a small decrease of \$186,000 and that related to a small decrease in the future forecast for SGC [Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation].

Mr. McCall: — Thank you for the question, Mr. Gray. Or thank you for the answer, Mr. Gray. If you could please explain a bit more, in a bit more detailed sense, is that a function of a particular casino doing better or worse, or how does that work? I know in years past for example the new SIGA casino at Swift Current initially out of the gates hadn't performed as well as had been anticipated, so that impacted the amount. But how does this break out, Mr. Gray, or Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you to the member for the question. We can provide generally the information regarding the SIGA casinos. Northern Lights has indeed increased their profit. BATC [Battlefords Agency Tribal Chiefs] also increased. Painted Hand decreased, and Bear Claw and Dakota

Dunes were roughly the same. And Living Sky in Swift Current still continue to operate at a loss; they haven't reached their target break-even yet.

Mr. McCall: — Is the minister officially able to quantify those occurrences? What does that mean in dollar terms? And, Mr. Chair, if I might add, we're always happy to have documents tabled with the committee if that'll help the proceedings. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[13:45]

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thanks very much for the question. All the information is here. It's just not in the format as the question was asked, but we are able to discern the answer. As far as Northern Lights, it is an increase of \$400,000 year over year. BATC is up some \$700,000. The Painted Hand is down 112,000. Again Bear Claw is about a break-even. And Dakota Dunes is again, it is in the neighbourhood of four and a half million dollars, but it is actually down about \$50,000 from the year before. But I would say that that is pretty close given the level of profits in the two years, something in the 1 per cent range. Living Sky continues to operate at a loss in the 3 to \$4 million range, which isn't totally surprising. In talking to officials, they understand that it would take some time for that casino to get up and running and to get to a profitable stage.

Mr. McCall: — I think we may have discussed this in past, Mr. Minister, but if you could state for the committee, at what point is Living Sky expected to break even and then start generating profit. What does the medium-term plan look like for Living Sky's profitability and how that impacts the gaming agreement?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — The latest information that we do have is somewhat dated. The last update that we had from SIGA was that they were looking at a four- to six-year range before they would break even, and that information is almost a year old. So they're looking at three to five from here. But you know, we can undertake to get the actual projections from SIGA if the member would like.

Mr. McCall: — I would appreciate that, Mr. Minister. Any idea of when you might be able to provide that to the committee?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — We'll undertake to obtain it as soon as possible and provide it as soon as possible. My discussion with SIGA officials was quite general regarding it, and I didn't get into the specific operation. Again, I have responsibilities for Gaming Corporation as well as responsibilities for FNMR and SIGA. And I didn't want to be asking for that level of information at the particular meeting I was at. But certainly it's quite proper to obtain that, and we'll undertake to do it.

Mr. McCall: — Thank the minister very much for that response and that undertaking. I guess shifting focus a bit the . . . Certainly it's an interesting year on the First Nations front, the gaming front in particular with the gaming framework agreement currently under negotiation.

And certainly over the last year we'd seen a fair amount of communication back and forth from this government and

various of the colleagues of the minister's with SIGA in terms of the conduct of SIGA's affairs. I guess how much involvement did the minister have in those communications and the calls back and forth? And how this relates of course particularly . . . There's a fair amount of question raised around the administration component of SIGA as relates to what's out in the line operations. Does the minister have any comment on that or any update on that for the committee?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much for the question. And certainly the member is right. That gaming framework agreement is up for renewal, and many discussions are taking place.

There was over the last year some concerns that were voiced by colleagues of mine. And to the specific question of my personal involvement, I had very little involvement in this. Mr. McMillan as minister in charge of SLGA [Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority] was the lead, and it was very much focused through that area of responsibility as the regulator. Again, I have responsibility for Gaming Corporation, and it was felt that it would be best to have one minister leading that file that didn't have responsibilities and couldn't be perceived to be furthering the interest of a competitor.

Mr. McCall: — Okay. I guess the minister raises an interesting question which is, you know, referring back to your opening comments and certainly the mandate of the ministry in terms of being that point of first contact and the role that First Nations and Métis Relations has played in past negotiations of gaming framework agreements. Certainly SLGA has been the lead and that's been the case. But am I understanding the minister correctly, that being both the Sask Gaming Corp minister and the First Nations and Métis Relations minister that's provided some challenges in terms of what role the minister has played in this file. Am I understanding that correctly?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much for the question. I wouldn't call it specific challenges, but it made the decision quite clear that in discussions I have had with Minister McMillan that he should take the lead in this regard. And you know, we have as officials from FNMR are part of the ongoing negotiations of the gaming framework agreement but that I wouldn't be a Co-Chair or anything like that in that regard seeing that I have other responsibilities as well. I think it's worked well, but I think it's fair to say that, you know, as a government we're looking at the whole regulatory situation and the operation of Gaming Corporation and to see if it can be done better. We're always looking at other jurisdictions and other provinces and how they do it. And you know, lotteries comes into play and other areas as well.

So it's fair to say that we're always looking at ways of doing better, but as far as the gaming framework agreement goes, I think we've put that responsibility with the appropriate minister and the appropriate regulatory body, and I'm comfortable. And I have sat in one meeting, and it was at the request of the FSIN, and it was, you know, very general, just to talk about ongoing discourse of how the meetings were to take place. But in going forward, I've left it to my officials to be part of that larger group led by Minister McMillan.

Mr. McCall: — Again, I guess, like I appreciate the conflict or

the potential conflict that the minister outlines. But again it's one of the, oh, I think it would have been a year ago, if not two years ago, being in attendance at the FSIN assembly and the question of online gaming coming up and undertakings that the minister had made to ensure the perspective and the consideration of the issues that arise for First Nations and gaming issues as relates to online gaming. And again, I thought that was a helpful suggestion on the part of the minister. But again to try and figure out consistently the role that the minister is playing, it's interesting to get a clarification on this.

So for the gaming framework agreement, what is the status of the negotiations? And what is the particular involvement of the First Nations and Métis Relations in those negotiations, and when is the anticipated completion or conclusion for those negotiations?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much again for the question. There was a couple of questions in there. First was regarding online gaming and wearing my hat as minister in charge of the Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation. The undertaking that we have with SIGA and First Nations is that we would share all information. It's fair to say that both organizations have been looking at the online gaming situation. We've come up with very similar numbers showing that about \$30 million of activity takes place in the province on a yearly basis, and none of that is benefiting Saskatchewan residents whatsoever.

We've undertaken to look across the country and look and see what other provinces are doing, and we've had discussions with British Columbia and Alberta and Manitoba. Very recently Manitoba made the decision to enter into online gaming, and we continue to agree to share the information with SIGA and with First Nations representatives.

As far as the gaming framework agreement goes, there have been three meetings that have taken place. I understand there's two more meetings coming up in the next month. That discussion is going well, and they look towards the end of June as a completion time frame. So I'm happy with how they're progressing.

I mentioned earlier that I was involved with one meeting at the request of the FSIN just to ensure that things were moving along, and at that time, I invited the FSIN to contact me if there indeed were any concerns regarding First Nations and Métis Relations. So that invitation still stands, and I have not received any correspondence over the last month since that last meeting.

Mr. McCall: — And I apologize to the minister for mixing up two questions. You've now mixed up two answers, very nicely returning the favour. So to take up the online gaming question and returning to that, is their decision point impending and how that again impacts the broader question of gaming in the province of Saskatchewan and relates directly to the vote in front of us today. Is there a decision point coming on online gaming for the government?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much for the question. We have been studying it for quite some time, and at some point we're going to have to make a decision on it. We don't have a specific timeline on that decision yet. But certainly

Manitoba moving forward and making their decision, we see the industry of Manitoba and Saskatchewan being of similar size and, you know, with them going forward I think it's fair to say that we're going to have to take a very close look at that in the near future.

[14:00]

Mr. McCall: — Exactly. So is the minister saying that there'll be a decision taken within the budgetary year in front of us on that front?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — I can't say for sure that there is a timeline, but I would hope that a decision is made within the next year, certainly.

Mr. McCall: — A second question, and perhaps it's not as direct an impact, but certainly that \$30 million of gaming activity that the minister referenced, surely that impacts the gaming framework agreement, if not directly, certainly indirectly. Is that anticipated in the negotiations undertaken with the First Nations with the gaming framework agreement?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much for the question. My understanding of the discussions, each of the two sides was asked to come up with a number of issues — their top issues — and that was how the agenda was put forward. And online gaming was not one of the top issues for either side, so it is outside the gaming framework agreement as far as I understand. But again I continue to have discussions with SIGA and First Nations about sharing information, and I think that satisfies both parties at this time.

I can share with the member that, you know, the profits that would be seen from online gaming would take some time to ramp up, so it wouldn't be an immediate cash cow or anything like that. But at the same time, we do see other provinces moving forward. And you know, Manitoba has provided a portion of the money for recreation facilities on First Nations and, you know, that would be part of the decisions that we would have to make as government as well as how that plays into it. You know, does it work into the Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation flow back to First Nations, or is there some other model? And that's something that we would give some thought to.

Mr. McCall: — I thank the minister for the answer. What are the top issues that are being shared back and forth by the two sides in the consideration of the current round of the gaming framework agreement?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much for the question. I'm advised by officials that it wouldn't be appropriate at this time to release that information because it is part of the negotiations between the two groups naturally. And without the undertaking to consult with the other side, I think it would be just appropriate not to go any farther in that regard.

Mr. McCall: — Well you can't blame me for trying, Mr. Minister. I guess, and it is a related question and it is definitely part of the public discourse around the agreement: is there any anticipation of an additional casino in the province of Saskatchewan under the terms of the gaming framework

agreement?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thanks very much for the question. I'm told by officials that it is not part of the discussions of the gaming framework agreement right now. But I can tell the member that a couple of years ago I know that studies were undertaken to look at if indeed there were potential in other places, communities. Estevan and Lloydminster were looked at. But the decision was made at that time that, you know, we're in a situation where we felt that we have the appropriate level of gaming in the province. And the Living Sky's situation played into it as well, that we felt it was appropriate to make sure that that casino gets on its feet before we expand anything.

And again we looked at other provinces. We see that I think there was some 28 casinos operating in Alberta with some concern there of the viability of some of them. So as far as the bricks and mortar casinos, we feel that we have the appropriate number at the present time, and I believe SIGA shares that sentiment as well.

Mr. McCall: — So again there's nothing under the gaming framework agreement that would see plans for a casino unfolding in the year to come in either Lloydminster or Estevan or other communities throughout the province?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — To my knowledge, there's no discussions about a new casino on the horizon for Saskatchewan at this time.

Mr. McCall: — I thank the minister for the answer. Again returning to the question of the back and forth between the province and SIGA, what is the status of challenges that the provincial government was making of SIGA in terms of the appropriateness of their administration costs and different sort of board fees and on? Is that an ongoing file and is the ministry involved in that in any way?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thanks again for the question. As far as, you know, correspondence that took place between SLGA and SIGA, generally I think what the goal of, you know, this government, the minister, and I believe the Premier was involved as well, it was that we have the very best governance possible. And whether it's regarding boards and how they operate, board fees and expenses, that's something that we endeavour to ensure happens within government, within the Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation, for example, and we're asking SIGA to do the same. As far as the specifics of how that is being negotiated, I'm not privy to that and I don't have an answer for that but I can assure the member that the negotiating team on the side of government will be pushing for enhanced governance scrutiny. And from discussions I've had with SIGA officials in a general sense, that is indeed their goal as well and I think that can only be well served for the public and the taxpayers of the province.

Mr. McCall: — So again to ask the question perhaps a different way, the governance issues, as the minister terms them, have been folded into the negotiations on the gaming framework agreement? Is that an accurate statement?

Mr. Gray: — Kerry Gray, director of finance. I think the point

that we'd like to make is that a number of these things are under discussion either outside or inside the GFA [gaming framework agreement] and we don't want to prejudice any negotiations, whether they're inside the GFA or outside the GFA, by getting into detail prematurely or outside of the discussions that are taking place with SIGA or with our partners.

Mr. McCall: — Certainly I appreciate that, but surely the ministry is able to respond whether or not they are within or without the GFA discussions themselves, not the import of those discussions. Are they in or out?

Mr. Gray: — Again I think the only way we can really answer that is we continue discussions with SIGA, the government continues discussions with SIGA. SLGA continues discussions, both inside and outside the GFA. The things that have been identified within the GFA are not . . . Both parties are free to bring up additional things to talk about. So I don't want to prejudice that process in any way by talking to it in any detail.

Mr. McCall: — Again I'm not trying to be difficult or obstinate or a jackass or anything like that, but are these . . . The government opened up a pretty considerable conversation with SIGA as relates governance. This is parallel to the negotiations of the gaming framework agreement, so are they part of those negotiations? Will those governance issues be resolved with the conclusion of the negotiations with the gaming framework agreement? Is that anticipated by the government or not, in which case those questions go on and we'll be interested to see how they get resolved otherwise. But are they part of the negotiations or are they not?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — As I indicated earlier to the member, I'm not part of those negotiations per se but I can say that, from a government standpoint, that the governance issues and ensuring that we have governance that is indeed very strict in the province, whether it's a Crown corporation or whether it's something in the private sector like SIGA, we want to ensure that we have the very latest and the very most up-to-date and strictest governance guidelines. And that overall is a priority for government. Whether it's part of the specific negotiations, that's a question better asked to Mr. McMillan. But I would say he would probably have a similar answer, that not wanting to prejudice those negotiations at this time. But from an overall policy perspective outside of the gaming framework agreement, whether it's involving any Crown, any board, we want to make sure that the strictest governance guidelines are followed.

Mr. McCall: — And we certainly agree as the official opposition. I guess what we're looking for assurance on is the fact that the largest single increase in the minister's portfolio under consideration here today flow from those gaming framework dollars. So it's entirely within the scope of questions for this ministry and for this vote to seek assurance or to seek further information on how the concerns and questions that have been raised by this government around the governance component related to this gaming framework agreement, how those will be resolved. So it's not to tip the government's hand on what the negotiation stance is or anything like that. But will they be resolved with the conclusion of the gaming framework agreement in the latest iteration or not?

[14:15]

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — I think those are questions that can be posed when the agreement has been finalized, and certainly the member would have the opportunity to talk to the minister and others involved in those negotiations to ensure it happened. I don't think it's an appropriate question to be answering when they're in the middle of those negotiations. I gave the member the overall perspective of government and the importance that governance plays in the present government, and I think we'll leave it at that.

And you know, there will be a time when negotiations conclude that an explanation will be provided of what the result was. And I think that is the best way not to prejudice those negotiations that are ongoing right now. There is always a point in time when you enter into negotiations that you undertake to keep certain things private, and I would suspect that that should be honoured in this case.

Mr. McCall: — Well again not to prolong this too extensively, Mr. Minister, or Mr. Chair, but it would seem that this government's engaging in a fair amount of picking and choosing when it comes to this file. There was a lot of negotiation, if you will, that took place through the media this fall and in the summer as it related to the activities of SIGA, but now of course that we're here talking about the gaming framework agreement and dollars that are under the purview of the public purse, suddenly we can't talk about them. And we in the opposition find that fairly frustrating, and we find that to be less than forthright. So surely the minister can understand the frustration that we have in terms of holding this government to account when the government had a lot of things to say back in the fall about SIGA, but now when it comes the job of this committee and getting the information that holds this government to account, that demonstrates transparency and accountability, suddenly we can't talk about that. So we find that very interesting.

As relates to the Métis Development Fund, could the minister or officials explain to the committee the decrease in that fund.

Mr. Gray: — Kerry Gray, director of finance. If the member will remember, the Métis Development Fund for a number of years was based on a flat rate of \$2 million, and then last year a new formula kicked in which resulted in a substantial increase in dollars flowing to the Métis Development Fund. And the small decrease this year of 186,000 is a result of a small decrease in the forecast for SGC casinos.

Mr. McCall: — Can the official or the minister outline for the committee again briefly the formula involved, the new formula that kicked in last year, and again how that precisely works as relates to the decrease in the funds we see here before us.

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Again thank you very much for the questions from the member. Referring to the last set of questions, I think some of his questions would be more appropriately put to Minister McMillan as Minister Responsible for SLGA and someone who is part of those agreements as well.

As far as the latest question, the Métis Development Fund, a

new funding arrangement came into effect in the 2010-2011 fiscal year, and it moves from a static contribution of \$2 million to the Clarence Campeau Development Fund each year to a formula-driven arrangement under which the Community Initiatives Fund and the CCDF [Clarence Campeau Development Fund] share 25 per cent of the gaming revenues from the Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation based on a 80/20 split on the first \$10 million and an equal share, 50/50, after that \$10 million threshold has been reached. So what happened was indeed that number escalated quite quickly in 2010-2011 from the \$2 million up to the point of \$3.4 million and then, in 2011-2012, and is estimated to decrease somewhat from that record level to \$3.288 million.

So I think there's some risk involved with it, but the upside is very strong for the Métis Development Fund, and they're seeing some of that upside. But it will vary from year to year as well.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Minister, for that answer. Moving into the First Nations and Métis affairs division under the allocations, starting off with the treaty land entitlement, there's a reduction of roughly half a million dollars in that expenditure. Minister, care to characterize that for the committee?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much for the question. There was a reduction in the flow-through money for the treaty land entitlement, which represents a decrease of \$500,000. \$3.1 million will meet the current treaty land entitlement obligations for George Gordon, Muskoday, and Pasqua. The decrease of 500,000 is due to the completion of the provincial payments to Canada for the Sturgeon Lake First Nation Treaty Land Entitlement Settlement Agreement of 2007. So that indeed has come to an end and represents the decrease.

Mr. McCall: — Some time ago the minister made an undertaking to the FSIN to look at increasing the per-acre amounts being used in the addressing of TLE [treaty land entitlement] concerns. How has that played out? How's that undertaking been made good, and how does that translate into the figures under consideration here?

Mr. Crowe: — I can speak briefly to this, to the question. There has been some direction provided, and we are currently in negotiation with those communities right now in terms of a per-acre value. And those conversations are being considered by the communities through the negotiation process. We haven't come to an agreement at this particular time. I think there's still some consideration being done by some of the communities, but I think they've received the proposal that we've put forward favourably. But again that's a conversation or that's part of the negotiations that our officials are moving towards. And hopefully we'll be coming back with some more definitive answer to that particular question following the round of negotiations that are taking place.

Mr. McCall: — I'm anticipating that will necessitate an increase in the per-acre value. Will that in turn necessitate an increase in the dollars allocated under the TLE subvote, or is that expected to relate to future years?

Mr. Crowe: — A couple of things on that. We will ensure that the funds that we have allocated this year will resolve and meet our obligations for those three First Nations in this fiscal year,

and any consideration to additional resources or revenues per acre will be considered in future years. This year we'll be taking the time to negotiate those processes and understand what our obligations are pursuant to the negotiated settlement.

Mr. McCall: — Is there a retroactive dynamic to any of these things or is it going forward? There's no sort of balancing up that will take place next year, or is this a straight-ahead expenditure for this year?

Mr. Crowe: — We're currently negotiating with communities that have recently had their claims validated through the process, and we're currently negotiating only with those communities that have put forward new claims. Government has met its obligation under the '92 framework agreement for most of the communities and fulfilling the three remaining communities under the current regime that we have under the '92 agreement.

Mr. McCall: — Thank the deputy minister for the response. What other negotiations are under way?

Mr. Crowe: — We're currently in negotiations with four First Nations communities: Big Island Cree First Nation, Sakimay, Mistawasis, and Ahtakakoop. Those are the communities we're currently in negotiation with.

Mr. McCall: — I thank the deputy minister and directors for that response. Moving into the First Nations and Métis Consultation Participation Fund, 2011-12, it was estimated at \$2.1 million which itself was a decrease from the year previous. This year it is reduced to \$1.2 million. To contextualize the current year's figure, how many applications were made to the fund in the year previous?

[14:30]

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much to the member for the question. We have a number for the number of applications supported, which was 16, but we don't track the number of applications that were submitted in total. That's for the fiscal year 2010-2011. In '09-10 there was 11 applications supported at that time. Overall the, you know, the funding decision around the \$1.2 million mark was an average of what we had seen over the last number of years and we felt that this would be an appropriate number going forward, realizing that we do have a legal obligation going forward and if that number has to be adjusted into the future, it would be. But we feel the \$1.2 million should be sufficient to cover the obligation going forward.

Mr. McCall: — The \$2.1 million from 2011-12 estimate, was that fully subscribed, equal to that amount?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Indeed, thank you for the question. The total grant amount for the 2011-2012 year was \$1.7 million. So it wasn't fully subscribed. It was \$400,000 undersubscribed.

Mr. McCall: — Okay. Now the new year saw changes in the parameters for the consultation fund. Could the minister or officials describe the changes that were announced by way of press release on January 16th, 2012, to the terms of the

consultation fund?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Again thank you to the member for the question. He is indeed correct. Effective January 16th, 2012, FNMR refocused the scope of the grant funding and has adjusted the fund criteria to provide for project-specific consultations where government has provided notification the duty to consult has indeed been triggered. FNMR is confident that funding the project-based consultation will meet the government's duty to consult obligations. FNMR maintains the direction to fund initiatives related to the duty to consult outside of the existing criteria, but certainly we feel that having project-based consultations are directly what the fund should be funding.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. Is the minister able to provide to the committee the new criteria that the ministry is utilizing for this fund? Just to be very clear on what I'm requesting, there has been a document used in past — I've got one dated August 2011 — in terms of the criteria that is provided to people interested in the fund. Could the ministry provide to the committee the latest iteration, which I would imagine reflects the changes made earlier in this year.

Mr. Froh: — Yes, we can provide an updated criteria. We're in the process of actually posting or putting it on our website, and we will certainly provide you a copy. And it will contain all the information, I hope, that you seek.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Froh, and Minister. I guess a further question is, just by way of clarity, what was the deadline for the previous consultation criteria in terms of application for those funds?

Mr. Froh: — Thank you for the question. In terms of a deadline, anything that was under consideration, under review was considered at that time. And once the criteria was changed, everything was communicated back to the folks that were still under review. That's my understanding.

One added thing: we always work with communities, and so our staff and our officials are actually working with people. And as these changes are coming out, we've been communicating with folks. And we've been trying to address or respond to their needs under the new criteria.

Mr. McCall: — So just to be clear, as of the public announcement by way of press release on the ministry's website, is it fair to characterize the situation that all applications that had been made before January 16th, 2012, would be considered under the old guidelines, and everything after the release of that information by way of the ministry's website would be subject to, any sort of ongoing applications would be subject to those terms? Is that an accurate characterization?

Mr. Froh: — Thank you. Everything that was in the system under review at the time was then subject to the new criteria as of January 16th.

Mr. McCall: — So everything, applications that had been made on the old criteria were then subject to new criteria. Am I understanding that correctly?

Mr. Froh: — That's correct. And we've been working with communities. So and our officials having to go back and ask — it's been a fluid situation — but going back and talking with communities based on the new criteria, being able then to work with them to find what we can move forward with the new criteria.

Mr. McCall: — How the heck does that work?

Mr. Froh: — We've actually been able to move forward on four funded applications, and we've been able to determine and to provide a conclusion on to some proposals we weren't able to fund under the new criteria. So it actually arrived at decisions that were communicated and are being communicated as we're able.

Mr. McCall: — Again it's probably a function of my relatively simple mind, Mr. Chair, but applications were made in good faith under existing criteria previous to January 16th. The change was made on January 16th and then the applications were . . . having been made under the one criteria were then adjudicated under the new criteria. There was no thought that the existing applications should have been at least grandfathered or considered under the terms under which they'd been made.

Mr. Froh: — I want to see if I can get all that straight. Thank you. The way it actually has resulted in being able to come to conclusion in a positive way, I think, for a number of communities and moving forward where those proposals, how they were submitted, that were no longer eligible under the criteria, those were denied. But we were able then to continue to work with those communities under the new criteria moving forward. What it has resulted in us moving forward and supporting First Nations and Métis where there is a requirement or obligation for the government to meaningfully engage under a government consultation process. So we are continuing to meet our obligations under our consultation policy framework and we're continuing to work with First Nations and Métis under applications to the fund.

And I'm actually pleased that we're able then to continue moving forward with proposals and under the new criteria. And that's been a positive development. And I believe it is producing some success at a community level in terms of informing government around its duty.

Mr. McCall: — How many applications were under consideration at the time of the change to the fund?

Mr. Froh: — I'm going to get that number back to you.

Mr. McCall: — Well I guess this is the thing. If that was in fact a positive development, leaving aside the sort of process questions that this undoubtedly raises, and I'd, you know, be interested to know what the auditor makes of this approach to process, but leaving that aside, the official, the minister has characterized this as a positive development in terms of enabling applications that would have been previously denied to proceed. Can the minister or officials please quantify what that statement means?

Mr. Crowe: — I'm going to try and answer your question this

way. I think what we've been able to do by nailing down the criteria and communicating that with the communities that have application and have expressed an interest in the fund, what we've been able to do is to be able to take these proposals and applications into the way that brings it to some conclusion, that allows us to meet our obligations under the duty to consult and ensures that some of the projects that are going forward do fulfill the commitment for consultation. I believe that we will also be well positioned to maximize the fund that we have available so that we can actually get the communities, the resources that are needed under the province's legal duty. I see this, as the criteria and the clarifications around that, allows us to make good decisions and good negotiations with the communities in order for us to meet the obligations under the duty to consult.

Mr. McCall: — Again, Mr. Chair, I'm reminded that the deputy minister is a horseman of some renown so he'll be familiar, of course, with the proverb that you shouldn't change horses in the middle of the stream. In terms of what this means around process, again I'd like to see what the number of applications were made under the old criteria only to be evaluated under the new criteria. How was the decision made to change the criteria? Was that made by way of cabinet decision item? How was that change brought about?

[14:45]

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thanks very much for the question. And indeed the analysis and the development was done at the ministerial level within the ministry. Information was taken forward to cabinet colleagues as I would normally do with any type of policy change that takes place. And we felt confident at the time and we feel confident now that this policy maximizes the revenues that are available and at the same time helps us meet our duty to consult. So we feel that we are in a good place as far as the ability that we're able to meet those obligations with the funding required. And you know, this is what we feel, based on averages of the last four or five years, what will be needed going forward. But again we understand that there is a legal commitment in this regard and if indeed we need to look for additional funds, we would do that. But we feel quite confident as is the budgetary process to make the best analysis and estimate going forward. And we feel that we've done that.

Mr. McCall: — Was this change brought about by way of a cabinet decision item?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thanks very much for the question. As I indicated earlier, cabinet colleagues were informed through a cabinet information item, through a CII, as is normal process. But the analysis and the recommendation was done at the ministerial level and with a thorough analysis of the number of projects that have come forward, the supported applications, and the grant amount over the last number of years. An average is what I was looking for, and an average is what has been determined here.

Mr. McCall: — Did any of your cabinet colleagues flag with you the peculiarity of changing the criteria for a fund whereby existing applications that had been made under one set of criteria were then to be evaluated under a new set of criteria?

Did any of your colleagues flag that as worthy of comment?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Well thanks very much for the question. I know the member is quite interested to hear what goes on at the cabinet table and what the discussions would be back and forth, but I'm certainly not prepared to get into that discussion here.

But what I can tell him, that I felt very comfortable putting forward the recommendation and I feel comfortable at this time that we have got the accurate amount of money going forward when we look at the applications and the need that we anticipate going forward. So I'm quite comfortable with it and I think we've followed the appropriate process. And as officials have indicated, we've had some early success with it and will continue to monitor if this indeed is the best way to go forward. But again the underlying fact here is that we will continue to meet our legal obligations, and that is first and foremost.

Mr. McCall: — Is the minister aware . . . You know, he's been in cabinet for nearing five years, four and a half for sure. Is he aware of any other funds with, you know, millions of dollars involved where the criteria for that fund was changed and then existing applications were evaluated by the new criteria? Can the minister identify any funds where that has taken place throughout executive government or anywhere?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Off the top of my head, I can't think of any funds one way or the other, you know, to that level of detail. Certainly decisions are made at a point in time, and then decisions are made on how existing applications will be treated. I think this has been done in a fair manner. And as officials have indicated, there has been some success since that time, and they'll continue to deal with them in a fair manner with new criteria that I think is more appropriate than the old criteria.

Mr. McCall: — Again though, I appreciate the minister's thoughts, but how many . . . And I'm not sure if the officials are able to answer now, but how many applications were under consideration at the time of the change in the criteria? Are the officials able to respond to that now?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — That question has already been asked, and the undertaking to provide that information. But we don't have that information here today.

Mr. McCall: — Is there even an estimate or a ballpark? Was it a dozen applications under consideration that had been made under the old terms?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you to the member for the question. The officials do not want to speculate at this time. You know, we do have time coming forward to have further discussions regarding estimates. And the undertaking is to do an analysis and to provide an accurate amount if possible.

Mr. McCall: — Then I guess another thing we're very interested in knowing . . . And you know, pardon me using the royal "we." I'm sitting here by myself questioning the officials and minister. Another thing that the opposition would like to know is how many, what the dollar amount, as regard to those applications under consideration at the time of the criteria

change, represented.

And if we're compiling a bit of a laundry list here, what change . . . And again, it's hard to . . . This is the thing about criteria and this is the thing about the awarding of dollars out of funds that have criteria. I'm not sure if the ministry is able to comment, but how many of them would have been disqualified? And I think that's anticipated in the deputy minister's remarks around this positively impacting applications under consideration. How many would have been disqualified under the old criteria and how many would have been approved? That information would be quite helpful.

And then I guess again where this . . . I need to say for the records, Mr. Chair, to the minister and officials, the minister has rightly talked about the way that this fund relates to the legal obligations of the government. Does the minister have any sort of discomfort or concern in terms of the way that the criteria have been changed for this fund? Does he have any concern about how this relates to the legal liability of the government as it relates to the proper discharge of funds from the consultation monies?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much for the question. And indeed it is my feeling that the current criteria meets our legal obligations and all information that I have seen certainly indicates that it does and it has, and we hope that it will continue to do that. Again, you know, it is a bit of an estimate going forward on the dollar value, but we have undertaken to look to an average over the last number of years and we've come up with that number. But again if indeed that number isn't sufficient, we would look to the future to increase that number if necessary. So I'm completely comfortable with it.

Mr. McCall: — Okay. It's good to have that for the record, Mr. Minister. In terms of the — and time is going ever so fast, Mr. Chair — but in terms of the legal undertakings of the government as relates First Nations, how many lawsuits is the Government of Saskatchewan currently engaged in with First Nations or with Métis groups?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much for the question. And again it is a very broad question across government departments, and we would have to consult with Justice colleagues. But that is information that we'd be happy to bring back to our next session as well.

Mr. McCall: — I guess shifting gears a bit into the relationships and policy or into lands and . . . Pardon me, we'll go lands and consultation first. The again decrease in funds in the lands and consultation line item under vote 25, can the minister characterize that for the committee.

Mr. Gray: — Kerry Gray. I can answer that question. Under lands and consultation, the total decrease is 42,000. And in most budget lines, there's some increases and decreases that make up that number.

There was 30,000 in lands and consultations last year as one-time funding for development of a database that's been taken out; 18,000 in operating funds that was moved within the ministry to another branch within Northern Affairs; and then an

increase of 6,000 related to salaries within that branch.

Mr. McCall: — The remaining expenditure as constituted this year, can the official or minister characterize what that represents?

Mr. Gray: — Within the consultation branch on that line, there's salaries of 268,486; operating expenses of 56,201. And on the lands branch, salaries of 494,634 and operating expenses of 98,321. Adding those all together come to the 917, 918,000.

Mr. McCall: — Okay. I thank the official for the response. Relationships and policy, again one that's seen another decrease. Can the minister or the official characterize the decrease and what that represents or what has necessitated that decrease and then provide a broader sort of characterization of the activities entailed in that expenditure.

[15:00]

Mr. Gray: — I'll go through that line. The total decrease is 277,000 which is made up of a decrease of 333,000 which was one-time funding for the education and employment task force. It was an increase of 80,000 for movement of a FTE [full-time equivalent] within the branch, from strategic initiatives to relationships and policy. It was a transfer of 16,000 again for operating to Northern Affairs, and a \$16,000 transfer to Public Service Commission for the operation of Aboriginal Government Employees' Network.

Mr. McCall: — The remaining expenditure above and beyond what the officials talked about here, what activity does that represent?

Mr. Gray: — In terms of salaries and operating?

Mr. McCall: — I'm just wondering if that represents funds allocated. For example under the bilateral task force or the bilateral agreement with the FSIN, what portion is salaries? What is to support other activities of the ministry?

Mr. Froh: — In terms of transfers, this would account for our transfers to the Métis Nation for our tripartite agreement as well as our bilateral protocol for a total of \$385,000. It would also account for our Aboriginal women's program.

And, Kerry, can you provide some of the details? Well I'll just provide the totals, I mean the functions, as well as the bilateral protocol for the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations for 125,000. And we have a Community Initiatives; it's a grant program that largely supports cultural youth programs that we provide to a number of First Nations and Métis and other organizations that support our mandate.

Mr. McCall: — Again, the sums involved in each of those particular subheadings.

Mr. Froh: — I deferred that question to Kerry. He's got the detail in terms of the other numbers.

Mr. Gray: — Under relationships and policy branch, we have salaries of . . . Let me make sure I'm looking at the right one. So under relationships and policy salaries, 862,060; operating

expenses, 118,575; total transfers of 735,000 for a total of 1.7 or 1.716 million.

Mr. McCall: — And again the amounts associated with the bilateral protocol, 125,000, what is the transfer to the Métis Nation, the . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Okay.

Mr. Gray: — One twenty-five, First Nations; 35,000 for the women's initiative; one seventy for the Aboriginal initiatives.

Mr. McCall: — Okay. I guess, Mr. Chair, we'll put a pin into it right there. We had an undertaking for two hours on this. The minister and officials have been very generous to give us an extra five minutes that I'm sure we'll have taken off our account generally. But anyway we'll very much look forward to resuming the discussion with the minister and officials and thank the minister and officials for joining us today in the consideration of these estimates.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. McCall. Mr. Minister, before we take a recess, is there any closing comments that you would like to make at this time?

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Just to echo my thanks to members of the committee and to the member opposite for questions. We have undertaken to provide answers, and we'll provide those at the next available opportunity. So thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister Cheveldayoff, and thank you to all the officials. This committee will recess until 3:30.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

The Chair: — Well good afternoon, and welcome back to the Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice Standing Committee. We now continue the committee's consideration of the estimates and supplementary estimates of the Minister of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing. Just before we begin, I would like to remind the officials that if they are speaking, to please state their name at the beginning for Hansard purposes. We'll continue with our consideration of vote no. 73, Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, central management and services, subvote (CP01).

General Revenue Fund Corrections, Public Safety and Policing Vote 73

Subvote (CP01)

The Chair: — Minister Huyghebaert is here with his officials. Minister, if you would like to introduce your officials again, and if you have a statement to begin, please continue to do so.

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll introduce my officials. Deputy Minister Al Hilton is to my right. To my left is Karen Lautsch who is the assistant deputy minister, corporate services and public safety. Tammy Kirkland is behind me, to my left. Tammy is the assistant, the ADM [assistant deputy minister] for adult corrections. Bob Kary is at the back. Bob is executive director of young offenders. Murray Sawatsky is beside Bob, and he's the executive director of policing and community safety. Margaret Anderson is behind

me, and she's the executive director of corporate services and public safety. Duane McKay at the back, in uniform, he's the executive director and fire commissioner, emergency management and fire safety. Tammy Folwark is at the back, and she's program manager for the PDAP [provincial disaster assistance program] program. Drew Wilby is my chief of staff, and Sarah Hein is my ministerial assistant, and they're sitting at the back.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to take this opportunity to clarify some comments I made at the last committee meeting. At one point I indicated a study on the impacts of overcrowding and the potential impacts of Bill C-10 had not been done. In saying that, I did not mean to suggest that no work had been done by the ministry. As always the ministry does analysis on the various factors that impact on CPSP [Corrections, Public Safety and Policing] programs, including changes in the legislative environment.

[15:30]

As I did indicate in my comments, the ministry has done some analysis, but it's too early to determine what the impacts will be. I hope I did not leave a different impression with the committee, but I apologize if that was the case. I'd also like to point out that some of this analysis would have been included in the ministry's submission to Treasury Board. I would point out that the analysis dealt with the precursor Bills to C-10. It is likely some of this is what informed the deputy minister of Finance's comments at the budget briefing.

It's very important to note that it's far too early to put a number such as the 200 number of inmates on the possible implications of Bill C-10. These impacts relate to future budgetary considerations beyond 2012-13 budget. There are too many hypotheticals and unknowns to accurately determine the medium- to long-term impacts of the Bill that has not yet been completely enacted by the federal government. We know there will be no impact on our 2012-13 budget because most of the components of the new law have not yet come into force, and officials are still discussing timing issues related to implementation. We will continue to work with the federal government and ask for as much information as possible on the timing and potential impacts of this new law. If there are any additional costs in the future that result from this, we will be pressing the federal government on that.

As the committee is well aware, we are presently having overcrowding in our correctional facilities. I would observe that the challenge of overcrowding is not new. Bill C-10 did not create this, and we do not know with any detail what impact Bill C-10 will have. The government understands the challenge of overcrowding and has taken action to address it.

In our budget, there are capital dollars for the projects at Pine Grove for the women and Prince Albert Provincial Correctional Centre. This will grow bed capacity in the province by approximately 200. We will continue to monitor all the factors that impact inmate counts, including the future impact of Bill C-10. And with that, Mr. Chair, I'm ready for questions.

The Chair: — Thank you for that clarification, Minister Huyghebaert. Mr. McCall, did you have some questions for the

minister?

Mr. McCall: — I surely do, Mr. Chair. And welcome, to the minister and officials, back to the consideration of estimates for Corrections, Public Safety and Policing. I thank the minister off the top for the clarification of his comments earlier in the committee. It adds to the understanding of the opposition as we seek to do our job in holding this government to account and demanding some justification for the expenditure under consideration here today in the committee, and we thank the minister for that.

That said, Mr. Speaker, I was wondering if I could get a clarification on the clarification. Certainly I would appreciate the minister's thoughts or officials' thoughts on where they think they're at right now in terms of adequately addressing the overcrowding that exists in the system. Will the 200 spaces anticipated, and what is the timeline for those coming on stream? Will those 200 spaces adequately address the overcrowding in the system, as the officials or the minister understand it?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well I might ask the officials for some more input, if you want. But as you know, Mr. McCall, the overcrowding has been there and it's been getting, it has been increasing at times. And it fluctuates; we know that. That's why the 90-bed dorm in Saskatoon was built, to alleviate the overcrowding. And that was done in approximately two years, it was built.

So we looked at what we could do in the shorter time frame to address overcrowding. And that's why we got approval last year to start the Pine Grove facility because I'm sure you're very much aware of the overcrowding at the women's facility. And so the new 30-bed facility, which double-bunked would be 60 beds, I can see it addressing the needs of today, whether . . . Again, as you know, the fluctuation is up and down in count, daily count. That facility is scheduled to be opening next July. Yes, it's opening sometime next year, and again it depends on if there's any construction delays, of course.

And the new facility in Prince Albert Correctional Centre, that would be a three-year project. So we're looking at 2014 to '15, the budget year, to finish that one. And that 72-bed facility doubled would give us 144 beds in that facility. So the 144 male and 60 female is what we're looking at.

Now addressing the overcrowding, it really does fluctuate and that's why I mentioned in the last committee that we are addressing the current overcrowding needs that we have. And will this satisfy it? It's going to help. But I wouldn't say that it's going to eliminate our overcrowding problems.

Mr. McCall: — One of the things I'm particularly interested in is, for example I know that oh, using shops or instructional space as contingent space for the quartering of inmates, you know, that's . . . And again I'm not laying that at the feet of the minister. That's long been a feature of the system. But of course what that does is interfere with the more rehabilitative aspects of the correctional system. And certainly I'm sure the information hasn't changed since I was paying more close attention to it.

But one of the best indicators against reoffending, or one of the best sort of chances that inmates have when they get back out into the general population or into society is a job. And if you're going to get a job, you have to get the skills, you have to get the education, you have to get perhaps work on life skills or addictions treatment or what have you. And one of the features of the system, as I see it, is that it's hard to be smart on crime. It's hard to fight crime if you've got a correctional system that you've got a bunch of people serving dead time, not getting skills to improve their chances when they get back out. So in terms of a revolving door or in terms of a spiralling of those criminogenic factors, it's a bad situation.

So I guess the, and I know that this will not address it full stop, period, but does the, will this open up the gymnasium at the Saskatoon Correctional Centre? Will this open up the shops or, you know, enable them to be used for what they were intended at the P.A. [Prince Albert] Correctional Centre, would enable classrooms that are being otherwise purposed at the Regina Correctional to be used for their purpose instead of quartering inmates? Does the minister have any sort of opinion on that?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — And I agree with you, your comments. Having some programming space for inmates and having programming within our facilities to me is very important to put some of our people back on the road to get them into society, whether it's job skills or addictions training or any of the training that we do in the facilities. That's been one of my concerns when we looked at our overcrowding situation because it was taking up programming space. You're aware of that. And by taking up programming space, we're still doing programming but it just gets tighter for space. And so my hope is that with the addition of these facilities, that will open up some programming space.

And I think it's fair to say that, looking at initiatives, there's varying things. And you may be aware of, we had built the cultural building. We've opened a couple of those which . . . There's some money. But again, this is again cultural, a training experience I guess with the elders dealing with some of our people in our institutions. And this all helps. So that's provided some space over the last couple of years. I know we opened one at the youth facility in Saskatoon — it's a new one — and one here in Regina at the Correctional Centre.

So yes, I'm concerned about programming spaces, definitely. And that's why, you know, I fight for monies for our facilities. And as I say, I'm very pleased that we got money this year to finish Pine Grove addition and money to start the P.A. addition.

Mr. McCall: — On that cultural aspect of the corrections system, and again it's an evolving aspect of the system, but I think a hugely important one. And in terms of people trying to heal and reclaim identity and get to know their culture, it's of huge importance.

What has the experience been of the ministry in terms of retaining that expertise, in terms of working with elders or working with elders' helpers in terms of providing that culturally critical programming?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — One other thing, Mr. McCall, that I think I should mention is when we talk about people getting

ready to be integrated back into society, I don't know if you're familiar with our urban camp in Saskatoon and the gardening that's been done. There's an awful lot of pride taken in this, and that's really a tremendous step for these people that are there because they volunteer. They're out there. They really work hard. They take so much pride in it — our staff and the inmates. But that's really a program, if you wish, because they . . . It's unbelievable to see how they work at this, at the garden. But also in the urban camp they go out and do other duties such as cleaning sidewalks for the elderly, etc.

So I think, and I agree with what you're saying, you know, like it's getting them some kind of job skills. Well even, you might say, gardening is not going to be a profession for some of these people, but it teaches them they need to be to work at a certain time, and it teaches them some pride, and they can see the results of what they've done. And this is so important when you see that at the urban camp. I know I have one individual that would like us to expand if we can. There's issues of course with land availability, etc., but that's one aspect of the job stuff that I'm very, very happy to see that it's going and it's going so well. And I'd ask Tammy to answer your other question.

Ms. Kirkland: — Tammy Kirkland. I certainly thank you for the question. In adult corrections and in young offender facilities, we have dedicated cultural coordinators that are government employees but obviously come with the background and experience to be our cultural coordinators. And they work with the elders, our cultural advisers that come to us from the community, from the various linguistic groups and areas.

In adult corrections, specifically, we have 10 cultural advisers that serve the four secure custody facilities. So they are in the facilities regularly providing programming, spiritual healing, counselling, ceremonies for our offenders, and also provide guidance to our employees, to our staff on how to integrate cultural components into the case plans for offenders. So it's a very important part of our programming.

[15:45]

Mr. McCall: — What's the experience been in terms of staff retention in that aspect of the corrections staff complement?

Ms. Kirkland: — Our cultural coordinators are fully staffed, and we've not had issues in recruiting or retaining those individuals, the four that we have in the adult correctional facilities, and I think it's the same for young offenders. It's seen as an important position, and they certainly play a balancing role for us between staff learning about the culture and the elders coming in, so recruitment and retention have not been an issue.

I think we've also strengthened that through the appointment of a provincial First Nations and Métis program manager who works with our cultural coordinators and with our elders to bring about consistency in programming and to support the cultural advisers in their work in the facilities. So I think that's also provided them a sense of team and some senior support.

Mr. McCall: — I'd thank the official for the response. Following up on the minister's remarks around the gardening,

certainly I don't know if I'd need to do a two-year-less-a-day thing to get my gardening straightened out, but I'd probably benefit from it. But it is about how you restore or build skills in people to give them a better chance, and I share the minister's interest in what are these things that we can do to, you know, give people the skills, give people the healing opportunities.

And it's not to take away from the fact that you do the crime, you do the time. It's not to take anything away from that. But if we're going to give people a fighting chance and if we're going to, you know, make sure that this is a correction and not just a revolving door, again the studies are in, in terms of the best sort of shot against reoffending is having a steady job.

So again I look at the situation we have in Saskatchewan as around the booming economy and the need for skilled labour, and we've just finished the discussion in First Nations, Métis Relations, and the minister termed it as not a labour shortage but as a skills shortage. And I like that way of stating it.

And again this goes back to our concerns around making sure that the programming aspects of the correctional system are there in full effect and that we take every possible opportunity to equip people with the skills to have a better chance against reoffending. So in that regard . . . And I am familiar with the urban camp in Saskatoon and the good work that is done there. I also think about the carpentry program at the P.A. Correctional Centre, and again giving people a credentialed skill that they can go out and have a better shot at getting a good paying job in the economy.

Are there any initiatives above and beyond the existing sort of complement of programming that are being planned by the ministry, perhaps in conjunction with Advanced Education and Employment, or is there anything coming on stream to again better equip people upon release going back into the population to get those jobs?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — I'll have Ms. Kirkland answer that, the more specific details. But you know, we're on the same page here. You know, we'd like to see the people get as much training as they can. But you know, a lot of what we deal with in the institutions is addictions training. You've got to solve some of those issues first, and the training is very important. The programming is extremely important.

There's another initiative, and this was an initiative of the staff up at Besnard Lake, and it's along the same lines as the gardening one. And I was just very impressed when I was up there because the new director of the facility, she was just so keen on having the inmates there . . . I mean it's a low-risk camp as you're aware, but they have quite a number of jobs they do which really gives them the skill sets.

But I guess my point is, before Tammy will answer your direct question, is you've got to cure, you've got to deal with some of the problems beforehand like I say. Like where there's a drug issue or some of the other serious issues, you know, that people have when they end up in our institutions which maybe got them there in the first place, so you kind of deal with it. But you know, the idea of getting people back out and getting some training to get into the workforce, definitely.

Ms. Kirkland: — Tammy Kirkland. So I guess I'd like to start first by explaining a little bit about what we do have and where we'd like to go obviously. So each of the four correctional centres now have full-time permanent offender employment coordinators. And those folks work with our partners, some of whom you mentioned, so Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration. Social Services is a big partner with us, as well as a number of community-based organizations, and directly with employers in the various communities.

So they look for training opportunities. They look for workplace opportunities. And they have developed over the last number of years a number of recognized certificates that are offered within the institution, including things like first aid, workplace hazardous material, information system, CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation]. So things that if people can bring them with them when they come out of the facilities, they give them that first step up towards being attractive to an employer in the community.

One of the challenges we work with of course is that our offenders are with us, sentenced offenders, an average of 100 days, so a little over three months; remand offenders for 35 days. So we look for opportunities to build skills quickly. So those are the types of things we look for. So it does limit to some degree what type of employment skills you can give to somebody. But we focus on those that they can learn quickly and take away with them.

And to the minister's point around sometimes in our case management work we need to focus on other things before we get to the employment, like the addictions. And you are, I'm sure, familiar with the courage to change program that the facilities implemented a few years ago. And that really looks to work with people on their key criminogenic risk factors to get them to a point where they are open and able to participate in job readiness and job skill training. So those two go together very closely.

Mr. McCall: — Are those, the addictions programming offerings, are they fully subscribed, or is there any kind of a waiting list involved in those programs? Have we got the resources equal to the demand, I guess, is my interest.

Ms. Kirkland: — Specific to addictions?

Mr. McCall: — Yes.

Ms. Kirkland: — Okay. So we have come a long ways in that in the last few years. We have a dedicated addictions program unit in Regina where we are able to move people through as they identify and are identified through their case plan. In the other facilities, we have ongoing partnerships with addictions services, so they provide us with their trained addictions staff who come into the facilities and work with offenders regardless of which unit they're on, so it doesn't need to be a dedicated unit. So we have that capacity to provide that contact for offenders in the facilities.

We also have AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] meetings and a connection to resources on the outside with addictions services when people are leaving. So we are able to, when people are identified and willing to work on those issues, to provide them

with at least the initial support and the connections to continue that on.

Mr. McCall: — There's no opportunity for them that need or want the treatment tonight. I realize in addictions it's heavily dependent on want — the opportunities are there for people that want them.

Ms. Kirkland: — They are there, yes, yes. And we also, depending on the length of someone's sentence and where they're at in that sentence, utilize in-house addiction programs in other areas. So we can send people to addictions programming as well, yes.

Mr. McCall: — I guess another feature in the system, in addition to overcrowding, that has been at play for some time, if the minister or officials could update us as to the situation regarding remand and of the daily counts, what numbers typically, people on remand.

Because again it's been a time since I paid particular attention to these files, but a lot of the evolution in the legal terrain related to two-for-one and remand and the fact that remand was largely dead time, and relating to what we're talking about here in terms of the correctional aspect of a corrections system. So if the minister or officials could provide the committee an update on the situation around remand and what that relates to the system.

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — I'll just give you some from my notes or from the notes here. Between '91 and '92 and '09 and '10, the number of accused held on remand counts on an average day has more than doubled, had doubled, and increased by 75 per cent in Canada. As a result, remands account for 37 per cent of Saskatchewan's incarcerated population and 57 per cent of the national incarcerated population.

And I know it's down now. I can't give you the exact number, but we were in the 40-some per cent remand. So we're down from that today than we were three or four years ago and we were in the 40 per cent range of remand. And so it is down.

Mr. McCall: — It certainly was just, I think, north of 40 per cent back when I had a direct sort of relationship to the information in the system. And certainly that was something where we as a province were very interested in the two-for-one aspect of remand and how that played into remand. I guess the other question I'd ask is in terms of the decline, and again we're at 37 per cent, which I would submit is obviously better than, you know, just north of 40 per cent. So I'm glad to see that progress in the system.

I guess, how does the minister see this playing out in the short and medium term? Does the minister anticipate a continued decline in remand numbers and is there sort of an optimal remand aspect to the system that is being targeted? Or I'd be interested to know the minister's thoughts in the short and medium term as regards remand in the Saskatchewan correctional system.

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — Yes, Mr. McCall, you know that's another of those ones where we see a decline. And it's very nice to see the decline but I sure can't give you one specific reason

why there's a decline. You know, there's lots of hypotheticals again I guess. So it's very early to assess what the impact of the two-for-one would be, and I'll just read you my notes here. The Act applies to offences committed after the implementation date of February 2010, and it takes a long time for the police to complete the investigation and process cases through the courts, so I can't . . . It'd be very, very hypothetical to give you what I think the impact of that would be. Say I'm very happy to see the decline. What's going to happen in the next few months or something, I wouldn't even want to guess on that.

[16:00]

Mr. McCall: — Okay. In past, I especially think of one of the reports that ombudsperson Barb Tomkins had conducted on the system and the things that the ombudsperson had had to say about dead time and that lack of programming. And certainly I think the minister was the opposition critic for corrections issues in and around that time, and certainly it was something that I know was being worked on in terms of trying to increase those offerings and increase that programming aspect, so you just didn't have people sitting doing their remand.

What kind of progress has been made in terms of, again, that programming aspect that is so critical if it's going to be a corrections system and not just a warehousing operation?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — Ms. Kirkland will answer that, Mr. McCall. She's got more of the details on it than I do.

Ms. Kirkland: — You're certainly correct that over the last number of years, we've focused strongly on programming for remand offenders, and you understand some of the challenges with what kind of programming you can offer to people who aren't found guilty yet, but there certainly is lots of flexibility, and we've been taking advantage of that.

So offenders on remand are, they have made available to them the cultural programming we were speaking of, the addictions programming if they wish to take advantage of that, the Courage to Change programming that we talked about, which is the one-on-one work on specific criminogenic factors, has been field-tested and very successful on remand units. So we continue to provide that. Of course recreation and leisure sorts of activities, health and wellness activities, employment opportunities or skill opportunities within the facilities, so jobs that we have within the facilities are available to remand offenders be it, you know, on a maintenance crew or in the kitchen. Those types of things are also available to offenders that are on remand.

So we have definitely expanded the opportunities that they have. Educational programming, so working on their GED [general equivalency diploma] or wherever they might be in educational programming is also available.

Mr. McCall: — What percentage of folks on remand would be availing themselves of some type of program?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — We don't have a number on that. We could probably try and find one for you if you want it. Again the dynamics are so fluid that if you'd like a number, we can try and find one.

Mr. McCall: — I appreciate the challenges involved in trying to track that kind of data. But I know you track for a lot of data, so I thought I'd take a stab at it, if you'd pardon the expression.

As regards earlier in the week, there was a story in the *Leader-Post* concerning the release of two individuals from the correctional system that had served remand and had been adjudged by the system to have served long enough without having gone to trial and then were released from jail. How many people would be released early due to those kind of circumstances on a yearly basis in the Saskatchewan correctional system?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — I might have to have some help on this one. But it's Justice that really tracks this because we . . . As you know, when the court date has expired and it comes to our facility for somebody to be released, it's Justice that actually has the, would you say, release authority. And then they come and tell us to release it. So it's really a Justice issue more so than a correctional issue.

Mr. McCall: — And we'll certainly address it to the Minister of Justice. I guess a couple of other general sort of questions in terms of the federal budget. One thing that we'd discussed just before the time had expired last committee hearing was the situation around the Regina anti-gang strategy. And certainly anti-gang work generally is an increasingly vital or critical component of the work of the criminal justice efforts in Saskatchewan. The minister at that time had said that there was a proposal forthcoming from the Regina anti-gang strategy folks to the provincial ministry given that their federal funding had been, their federal funding was not renewed. I believe that was in the amount of \$1 million a year. Has that proposal been given consideration by the ministry of yet?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — Our folks are working with the RAGS [Regina anti-gang services] people right now on the proposal. We haven't got a proposal from them yet.

But I would just comment also that the anti-gang strategies and the anti-gang work that's being done is so important that that's why folks are working with them. As you're well aware, the gang situation in the province is . . . Well I think we're taking a bite out of it because we've got the anti-drug and -gang unit in P.A. that's mobile, and there's an awful lot of good work that's being done by this organization and the ones in the cities also. I know, if you followed it closely, there's pretty much a whole gang eliminated here not too long ago in Saskatoon. It was the work of their gang strategies in the city.

Specifically to the RAGS, we're working with them on a proposal, so we don't have it yet.

Mr. McCall: — I thank the minister for that response. And certainly again we share the concern around the situation with gangs, and we are glad when the bites are taken out of that kind of criminal activity and the way that these operations prey on our youth and on our communities. So we're glad to see every step is taken to fight those criminal operations.

And I guess in the sum, I just want to state for starters, I'm glad to hear the minister's comments in that regard. And we share that concern. I guess if the minister could, is there any . . . This

is a difficult situation for this organization that has had a good track record in that critical anti-gang work that their federal funding came to an end, puts them in a very difficult situation because oftentimes these organizations rely on expertise that is built up. And if you haven't got the funds coming in, it's hard to keep the people together. And again between expertise, relationships, these things are hard to just sort of float while proposals are being considered.

So you know, I've obviously, I think this was a terribly wrong-headed move on the part of the federal government to bring that funding to a close, and not helpful to fighting gangs in Saskatchewan. But does the minister . . . So I'm doubly glad that the ministry is considering stepping into the breach and working with the Regina anti-gang strategy to see what can be done. But is there any sort of idea when this work will be determined?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — It does get a little bit complicated here, Mr. Chair. The RAGS are receiving funding from two other sources that they haven't advised us who they were. And that's why they've got some interim funding. And the North Central Community Association, the NCCA is, I gather, what they're working with. But I'll just give you a snapshot of what's happened, and again working with our people on a proposal.

So visualize they've got some funding from some sources that we don't know, and so we're working with them to see what kind of funding can continue. In the meantime, a new RAGS program manager has been hired with a mandate to reorganize and restructure the program in order to improve service delivery, enhance staff safety, and improve communications with stakeholders. And that responds to recommendations made by Dr. Mark Totten in his evaluation. So the specific answer is, on the funding side there's two sources that they have not told us where they're getting the money from, but we're working with them on the proposal to try and see where we're going to go in the future.

[16:15]

Mr. McCall: — Estimated time frame for the making of that decision, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — We're working to get it done as quick as we possibly can. Whenever the proposal comes forward, we'll have a look at it.

Mr. McCall: — I thank the minister and officials for that answer. Another I guess related question I would have is out of the fiscal year-end and out of the federal budget, are there any other sort of decisions that the federal government has made that have resulted in proposals coming to the, or being in the offing for coming to the Ministry of Corrections?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — There's none that we can think of that have an impact on us. And as you know, they're still, the federal budget, they're still going through all of the implications of their budget. But I know if you're referring back to the RAGS, that was identified a year ago or so, and then they funded it in the short term. So this particular budget, we don't know of anything that's going to have an impact on us. And again the impact on RAGS is specific to the crime in the

province; I mean it was their program, and it's just what we can do with the program now. But as far as other ones, we don't know of any.

Mr. McCall: — Okay. I thank the minister and officials for that response. The P.A. or the Prince Albert healing lodge located on Wahpeton, operated by the Prince Albert Grand Council, can the minister or officials update the committee as to the status of the P.A. healing lodge and its involvement with provincial programs?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — Yes. This has been ongoing for some time, Mr. Chair, this particular . . . And I'm going to do some reading here so I get the wording exactly correct. As you know, there's a partnership with the healing lodge with the correction . . . with us, with CPSP, and also with the Correctional Service Canada. And in 2010 the program was placed under review due to concerns about security, offender management, and human resources issues. The review was completed, recommendations accepted, and an action plan agreed to by all parties. Unfortunately there was little progress on the action plan, and serious concerns remained and continue to be identified.

PAGC [Prince Albert Grand Council] was advised that the ministry would not be renewing the contract in the '12-13 fiscal year, and served notice on December of 2011 that it would not be renewing the contract effective April 1. That being said, we continue to work with them on deficiencies. I, with senior staff, have met with them.

The problems, it seemed like there was not much movement on the recommendations. Some were being . . . There's some movement on some of them, but there's many, many that there is very little movement. We took the numbers of people that we had in there, we removed them, took them out because of these issues. And Correctional Service Canada I think did the same just not all that long ago.

We have stated and we have complied with working . . . We said we'd work with the PAGC but, as time progressed, they did not have a proposal in to us before budget time. So they knew that as of the 31st of March, that the contract was going to be done. And we didn't have anybody in their facility at the time anyway. Again our concern was so much with the deliverables at the lodge and some of the other concerns that I mentioned.

I know officials have met with them since, phone calls. And the situation right now is they can put a proposal. And we're working with them on a proposal to put back to us, and it'll be reviewed and looked at as any proposal would be that's put forward. I think it would be very fair to say that the deficiencies that were there were of pretty serious concern, and so before the . . . Again that's why officials are working with the healing lodge and the PAGC to make sure that those deficiencies would be rectified before the proposal is put in. Like just because a proposal is put in without rectifying, we don't want to go back to what was the problem before. So that's the status of it right now. We're waiting for a proposal from PAGC with reference to the healing lodge. And when we receive that proposal, then it would be looked at.

Mr. McCall: — I thank the minister for that answer. Is the minister able to provide to the committee the review that was undertaken in 2010, just so that the committee has a precise idea of the problems that were identified with the operations of the P.A. healing lodge?

Ms. Kirkland: — Thank you. I guess the point we would need to make is the review that was done was done as a partnership between the three parties: the PAGC, ourselves, and the Correctional Service of Canada. And it was a report or an evaluation of the performance and program of PAGC. So I think in order to share that evaluation, we would need to have the permission of that agency to provide that, since it speaks to their operations and their performance.

Because one of the concerns that came out in some of the recommendations was around security and safety that was provided in the facility, that would also probably be something we wouldn't want too broadly out in the public domain, as far as security risks that we obviously took the steps to end when we became aware of them, but they were present.

Mr. McCall: — Yes. I'm not looking for a file in the cake or anything like that, Ms. Kirkland, or any sort of specific tips on how to game the P.A. healing lodge. But certainly if there is some kind of, if the ministry can undertake to seek that permission from the partners as to the release of that information — again it goes to accountability and transparency and improving the public's understanding of why this decision was made — if the ministry could undertake to do that, it'd be much appreciated. And with allowances for, you know, whatever sort of sensitive information being redacted or blacked out — I'm sure the officials know what I'm talking about — that would be great. Thank you, Mr. Minister, for giving that undertaking. Thank you.

Certainly I guess, on a broader sort of . . . And again it's our hope that initiatives like the P.A. healing lodge can at some point get back on track because certainly that kind of partnership was something that featured fairly heavily in the commission of review that was undertaken of the justice system for First Nations and Métis people in Saskatchewan. And certainly, you know, surveying the minister's mandate letter, that his marching orders from the Premier are to "Work with Ministry of Justice and Attorney General to enhance the role of First Nations and Métis people in the development and implementation of correctional programs, community-based justice programming, and the delivery of services."

We think that's as it should be, and we want to see what we can do to, or we want to make sure that that is still on the radar and still a priority for the ministry. And we appreciate that partnerships are complex animals and that, you know, oftentimes the ministry, to hold up their own end in these things is certainly demanding enough. But in terms of if we're ever going to get ahead of a system that keeps having roughly three-quarters of the inmates being of First Nations and Métis background, that's obviously a huge problem. And this is one thing that we can do to try and fight that. It's not the only thing; far from it. But that better partnership, that better sort of involvement of First Nations and Métis people in the system itself is obviously something that needs to be worked on.

In that regard, is there anything that the ministry's anticipating in terms of partnerships that are just getting started with a particular First Nations or tribal councils to enhance that, or even with the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, to enhance that involvement of First Nations and Métis people in terms of taking that control and developing that capacity of their own lives?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — Yes, we're working with the First Nations on some initiatives. We've talked about some initiatives. There's some that are maybe way out there but still in the talking stages. I know when Chief Lonechild was chief of the FSIN, we had discussions about some initiatives that could be looked at and again looking at possible proposals coming from them and working in a partnership.

The one that's moving, what I would advise the committee, the one that is to me is moving along right now is the youth facility in Echo Valley. I was approached, we were approached as a ministry that File Hills would like to be very much involved in that facility to the point of taking it over and actually running the facility. I've met on more than one occasion with officials and with members from File Hills to discuss that. We're very open to the idea. It's in the very early stages, but the discussions have been going on.

One of my, as you mentioned, in my mandate letter is to work with First Nations. And this to me is a prime example of how and what we're doing right now is at least at the talking point and saying, yes, we're looking at it. You know one of my thoughts on this is that if it can be done within the budget that we operate in, why not? Like let's have a look at what the proposal is, and we could, I think all of us could see some value.

But I know my point when I spoke to the chief was we've got to be doing this for the betterment of our offenders that are there. That to me was a priority, and it should be something that we along with File Hills can say, yes, this is going to be better for our young offenders that are in this facility. So the, I guess, the bottom line to your question is yes, we are working with some of the tribal councils to see what we can do to work together on some of these initiatives.

[16:30]

Mr. McCall: — Well I'm glad to hear that, Mr. Minister, and I appreciate the answer. Is there any anticipated timeline on the work as specifically relates to Echo Valley Youth Centre?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — We're in the real early stages of this right now. So you know, I really can't give you a timeline because it's got to work out on the proposal, and we have to work it . . . [inaudible] . . . I can't give you a timeline.

Mr. McCall: — Okay. Well if the ministry and the minister could keep us posted, that would be great.

I guess just one last sort of general question of the corrections system and then some specific questions on youth corrections. I wouldn't want your officials to feel left out or anything like that. But I guess corrections generally, how many legal actions is the ministry party to right now? And I guess, is anybody

suing the ministry, and is the ministry suing anybody back? If the minister could just give us a sort of survey on that front.

Mr. Hilton: — Alan Hilton. To my knowledge the ministry is involved in one lawsuit at the moment. It's in the mediation phase, and it's with respect to a former employee, and it's before the courts. So there's really very little we can say.

Mr. McCall: — I thank the minister and the deputy for that response. As regards the youth corrections system, is there any . . . I guess I'm just interested in the whole question of, I guess, the counts, the adequacy of the system in terms of the youth inmates going into the system, where we're at in terms of again the different sort of programming options that are on offer, and what . . . Do you see recidivism or sort of progressing . . . young people getting involved in the system and then are we able to get them on the off-ramp earlier or at all? Or are we still seeing a dynamic where once youth get into, say, Dojack they have a hard time getting off the rails and getting out of the system and go on to bigger and worse crimes? I'd welcome the minister or officials' observations on that score.

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — I'll have Mr. Kary give you the numbers, Mr. Chair.

What I have seen, and hopefully the numbers today will reflect what I'm going to say, but in the last couple of years in visiting our youth institutions, I've seen a substantial decline in the numbers of people that we have incarcerated, which is very, very positive for me. And, Mr. McCall, as you know, there's been historically a number that graduate from the youth into the adult. And so my view, in talking to everybody that wanted to listen, basically is if we're reducing the numbers in our youth facilities, hopefully that carries on to a number of reductions in the adult facilities. This is why it's very difficult to predict numbers, but I'll have Mr. Kary give you some of the numbers.

I do know, again from my visits, places like Dojack, we've had some of the pods that we actually shut down. And that's very, very positive for me. Now what has caused that? I think it's an awful lot of the initiatives that have been carried out. There's a lot more, I think, availability of jobs even, which is indicative I think as . . . If people can get into the workforce rather than get into trouble, I think that's a positive. But anyway I'm going to have Mr. Kary give you the numbers.

Mr. Kary: — Bob Kary. I'll give you the numbers for years 2007-08 through to 2010-11 and with the total custody counts. In 2007-08, the average daily count in young offenders custody, that's remand, open and secure, was 225; in '08-09, it was 233; in '09-10, it was 192; and in '10-11, it was 183. So there's a general pattern of decline in custody numbers over the past few years. And that pattern of decline began in about '01-02, so it's been for more than a decade.

Mr. McCall: — Glad to hear it. I knew that's where the trajectory had been going once upon a time. Glad to hear it's still moving in that direction. So I thank the minister and the official for that response.

I guess at this stage of the game I will hold off on asking any further corrections-related questions and perhaps allow for . . . You've got your fire commissioner has been ranging the

province fighting floods and fires and God knows what else. So we wouldn't want to, we wouldn't want to keep him back there cooling his heels. Maybe we can call up some . . . We'll ask some public safety-related questions now, Mr. Minister.

But I guess the first question I'd ask in that series or in that regard is with regards to the provincial disaster assistance program, I guess. What's the situation around outstanding claims, the time of processing, getting the cost sharing from Ottawa? Where are we at with the provincial disaster assistance program at present?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — I'll have Karen . . . She's got all the numbers handy there.

Ms. Lautsch: — Karen Lautsch for the ministry. Right now we have active claims from 2010 and 2011 for the program. In 2010 we have 1,401 claims that are active right now. In 2011 we have 4,469 claims that are active at this moment. Over the last year, we've processed about 7,200 payments.

Mr. McCall: — And now the length of processing, and I know that there've been additional resources allocated in this regard to aid the clearance rates. Can the minister or officials update the committee as to any progress being made on that front.

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — Yes, I'd like to comment first and then maybe some more specifics from Ms. Lautsch. But I think understanding the whole PDAP program, and I think members are aware of all the changes we've made, but the severity of the storms that we have had . . . And some of it sounds like it's a longer period of time to have the claims finalized. But when we're looking at flooding and homes, businesses that have been flooded, structural engineering assessments need to be done. And I think that you're aware that that has to be done.

The structural engineers, getting enough of them to be able to do it was a slow process. We had to go outside the province actually to hire contracts from structural engineers. So we look at some of the claims, and one on an initial shot might say that 2010 claims, some of them aren't finalized yet. But I think one can understand that by the time that you get a structural engineer assessment, and then there's getting the work done, and it's difficult at times right now to get contractors. We know they're pretty busy, and so some of them do take a bit longer.

But on the point of addressing the claims and working with it, we have been up, and it will fluctuate, but we've been up in excess of 100 people working on our PDAP files in the last while. So we've put a very, very strong emphasis on dealing with this in a timely manner. The specifics about dealing with Ottawa and our funding from Ottawa, as I'm sure, Mr. McCall, you know, that you have to finalize your year before you get it from Ottawa. So we're not finalized the year 2010 yet, so we can, as you may be aware of, you can ask Ottawa for an advance, and we have gone forward with asking them for an advance. And that's one of those ones, it'll take some time, but we don't have an answer back from them yet. You know, you're talking some pretty good dollars here.

Mr. McCall: — Yes, absolutely. Well we wish the minister and officials well with getting timely and adequate resources out of Ottawa for these very important files.

Of course one thing that adds to the complexity on an already, as we agree, complex arrangement concerns First Nations and be it the plow wind that went through Kawacatoose or some of the flooding that was experienced last year, Sakimay, Cowessess, that sort of terrain. Does the minister have any comment on where things are at in terms of those First Nations and the recovery work involved in responding to those critical incidents out in those communities? And again given the mix of jurisdictions, admittedly an even more complex challenge, shall we say, but can the minister update the committee as to addressing those situations.

Mr. Hilton: — In terms of our response and recovery operations for First Nations, we made a very deliberate decision to be constitutionally blind. So in responding to the emergent situation in the spring of 2011, we deployed resources to First Nations as we would any other community. And similarly we have treated them the same way with respect to recovery in the PDAP program. The only real difference, in a First Nations sense, is that the amount of money that we recover from Ottawa is treated differently if it's on a First Nation, and our expectation is that the federal government will cover the full costs of both response and recovery.

And I might also add that we had some really good, we developed some really good partnerships, frankly, in some very challenging times with the members of, lots of members of First Nations, and certainly my staff could comment on that in a much richer and more hands-on way than I could. But I spent enough time out there myself personally to see what was going on, and I was really quite impressed.

And you know, the situation this year, although it's not flooding, we've had wildfires to deal with, and again we have been very responsive to the wildfire situation in the southern part of the province on-reserve, and again dealing with that in a constitutionally blind way.

[16:45]

Mr. McCall: — No, I'd certainly attest to that. One of the last times I'd a chance to break bread with your fire commissioner was out on Cowessess in the midst of the flooding that they were experiencing at their emergency headquarters there. But I'd certainly concur with the deputy minister's observation. And again I think it points the direction that somehow we need to go in this province is address the emergency first and figure out the jurisdictional wrangling after. That being said, what is outstanding as regards the different First Nations that were involved in flooding and as regards compensation and as regards things that we're waiting on Ottawa to sort out?

Mr. Hilton: — Al Hilton. Certainly I don't have information in front of me on a claim-by-claim basis, but I can say generally that we've established within the PDAP program a central point of contact for both municipal claims and First Nations claims. We're managing those claims in the same way as you would manage other claims, and when the claims are at a stage where they can be completed and all the proper paperwork done, then we'll be submitting that to the federal ministry responsible.

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — If I might just add also to the committee that I don't know of any outstanding real issues. I

know that the chief of Cowessess has spoken to me and I had a meeting with him. It was more on mitigation than it was on actual disaster assistance. And we had stated that we would help out where we could from the province on mitigation. And it's quite complicated in this particular file because it involves different municipalities and whatnot. But I have met, and officials we've met with them, and that's the only one I can think of, that again it's not from PDAP. It's from the mitigation file.

Mr. McCall: — All right. And thanks to the deputy minister and minister for that response.

Given that I guess if the minister or deputy minister, officials, could give us the sort of status report on . . . Last year of course was a heavy flooding season, as was the year before. Now of course, as has been referenced by the deputy minister, not having so much flooding to deal with, you've got wildfires to deal with. It's always something or another.

But if the minister and officials could give us sort of a, give us the lay of the land in terms of what we're facing in the province right now. And I know that there has been a definite spike in grass fires, wildfire activity in places where . . . such as the Southwest or west central. But it's a big province and I know that you can have drought in one corner and flooding in another. So I guess if you could give us the lay of the land, we'd appreciate it.

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — I would start out — and I'll ask Mr. McKay to comment on this also — but that's one of those ones I wish we could predict the forecast for the province and for the country. It would make things an awful lot easier. If you remember back in 2010, I don't believe there's anybody in the province that anticipated Maple Creek would flood, and that was from a freak storm. When I got a call that said North Battleford had flooded, and I said, North Battleford's on a hill; how can it flood? Well it did because I was there and it was iced in.

The lay of the land this year — who knows? We know it was dry in the West, but there's been, where I live, a couple of snowstorms. And so it's not near as dry as it was before. The west side of the province I believe has had some snow and rain so it's not as dry. But there has been, as you know, there's wildfires in Maple Creek. There's wildfires on Mosquito First Nation that we responded to, and our hotshot teams responded to that. So predicting what's going to happen next week, next month, or in the next couple of months is very, very difficult, but what I would say to the committee is, our fire commissioner has just done outstanding work in getting prepared for contingencies with equipment that we have acquired. And the mobility of what we have done in the last little while, in the last couple of years, we've really progressed with a lot more mobility, with proper equipment to handle whether it's fires or floods or disasters.

So I've been very, very impressed with the work that's been done by the fire commissioner in preparation for all contingencies. And Duane, if you want to carry on with anything more than that, please do.

Mr. McKay: — Duane McKay. So we've talked a little bit

about the natural disasters which is basically weather-related. And certainly the province is very big and there are multiple weather patterns that we're witnessing, especially over the last couple of years.

And we have seen significant snowfall in parts of the province — Tisdale, Kelvington, Hudson Bay area. So in actual fact we probably will see some localized flooding in those areas, especially if we see temperatures rising as they're predicted for early next week in excess of 20 degrees, and that will cause that snow accumulation to melt. So we're prepared for that, or at least aware of that, and we'll respond as required.

And as the minister has mentioned, we have seen parts of the province that are extremely dry. And up in the North Battleford area, there has been a lot of fire starts and of course many of them on First Nations. So we are working very closely with those communities, as well as Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada to look at a proactive way to reduce the risk. It's unlikely we'll be able to reduce those calls outright, but if we can respond quicker in conjunction with the local communities, that certainly will reduce the impacts.

Just as a way of information related to what we're seeing this year as opposed to last, up till April 8th of last year, there was zero incidents, grass fires reported in the province. And this year we've seen in excess of 120 and some of those being very, very large. We're contributing some of this obviously to the weather patterns, but we're also noticing that farming practices are changing. So chemfallow instead of summerfallow, straight-cut combining as opposed to swathing, leaves a lot more fuel and a lot less firebreaks or what we would see in agriculture firebreaks.

So fires tend to move very rapidly in dry conditions, and obviously the winds drive those, and they create their own weather patterns if they get big enough. So very quickly some of these are overwhelming the local resource, causing a request for mutual aid. And of course now the province is developing a provincial layer of response which can come in and assist once the local and the mutual aid areas have responded. So in addition to that we're seeing a significant increase in industrial and industry, and we have noticed that a lot of real traffic, including the movement of petroleum products, and those create an industrial risk that we probably didn't see in years past. And in fact we've had six train derailments since the beginning of the year as well. So there's a lot of activity, and we're basically adopting the Boy Scout philosophy of be prepared and doing the best we can. And we are, as the deputy minister had mentioned earlier, using these events to establish strong partnerships with industry, with local communities, with First Nations. Everybody's very much interested in safety, and so we're having some success in that area as well.

Mr. McCall: — One of the expenditures that I'm particularly glad to see in the plan for the year to come as regards the individuals participating in the emergency management training program. I think that's money that's very well spent, and I'm glad to see the continual sort of uptake in that opportunity because of course mother nature keeps finding different ways to keep your fire commissioner busy there, Mr. Minister. But again if you've got those, if we can move forward from a critical incident stronger, that's a hugely positive thing.

And I guess a couple other questions I would have. This is maybe a bit of an assumption, but under the allocations there's an increase on the order of about roughly 700, \$800,000 under the allocation for emergency management and fire safety. Is that largely related to continuing to ramp up the work of the emergency management training program? Or can the minister or commissioner tell us about that?

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — Yes. It's to continue training, to be prepared I guess, Mr. McCall. And just, you know I appreciate your comments that you mentioned, but I do want to add a couple of items. And I don't know whether you're fully familiar with it and I don't want to build up my fire chief, but the work that's been done and the stockpile of emergency equipment that we have now compared to what it was a mere couple or three years ago is just, just phenomenal.

I didn't even know what a HESCO [Hercules Engineering Solutions Consortium] barrier was until two years ago, and water-filled tubes that . . . I was at a meeting in Toronto and this fellow had told me about water-filled tubes that are very effective in preventing the flooding. And we came back here and we met and we found they actually can be produced in Saskatchewan, which is all the better. So with sand-bagging, sand-bagging machines that the fire commissioner now has in his inventory, with pumps and generators, and it's being prepared. It's cost us some dollars, but it's being prepared, and of course training goes along with that. So I'm just extremely pleased where we are today compared to even two years ago, or two and a half years ago. We've come an awful long way and I'm very, very proud of that.

Mr. McCall: — Well yes, I don't want to join you in a . . . You know, the next thing your fire commissioner will have to get a larger hat or something like that, but obviously he's too down-to-earth and too humble to, you know, get affected by our compliments. But the fire commissioner does a heck of a job for the people of Saskatchewan as do many of the good people in your department. And I'd go on record at this point saying to you, Mr. Minister, and to officials in your department, you're there in a lot of really tight spots and we're thankful for the work that is done and we appreciate the work that is done. Now you'll all have to get larger hats or something.

I guess one thing that I'd ask your fire commissioner or the minister or officials, certainly over the past decade we've seen an increase in the number of extreme weather incidents and the way that this has affected programs and number of claims and things like the provincial disaster assistance program or the need to bulk up on the emergency management and training side of the coin. And again there are, as the fire commissioner has pointed out, there are different sort of factors that play into that, such as changing agricultural practice as relates to wildfire conditions.

But does the minister agree that the trajectory in terms of extreme weather incidents has been going sort of steadily up over the years? And again it's, if it's not flooding one year, it's the wildfires the next. Is that a fair assessment of the terrain?

[17:00]

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well I wish I could predict the

weather. Like I said earlier I, you know, I don't see it as any specific trend. There's just so many variables. I've seen tornadoes back when I was a youngster in this province. You never even dreamed of tornadoes back then. I've seen thunderstorms as, you know, 10 years ago that were just mind-boggling with hail the size of small baseballs. My car was even wrote off in one. That was 10 years ago.

Is it any different today? Probably not. It's just totally unpredictable what the weather's going to do, so I personally don't see a trend in weather patterns. I mean we had five years of drought in my constituency in some areas, and now we're wet. So predictability of what the conditions are going to be is a real guessing game.

Mr. McCall: — I guess noting the hour on the clock, at this point I would I guess just wrap up the round of questioning for the minister and officials at this point, but again to say thanks for the work that is done for the people of Saskatchewan. But with that, Mr. Chair, we've reached the agreed-upon hour of adjournment and then some, and I'd leave it to you to take it from there.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. McCall. Mr. McCall, are you prepared to vote off the . . . at this time?

Mr. McCall: — By my clock, Mr. Speaker, we've reached 5. Or by my understanding of the proceedings, we've reached 5 o'clock, which was the agreed-upon hour of adjournment. We've got another half-hour. We hold these minutes of questioning for the government very dearly, so we're not voting the . . .

The Chair: — Not prepared to vote?

Mr. McCall: — No.

The Chair: — All right. Well appreciate that. Thank you that. Mr. Huyghebaert, Minister Huyghebaert, you had some comments.

Hon. Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well I'd like to thank Mr. McCall for the questions. And I'd really like to thank my officials for coming here and all the work that they do on a year-round basis, but specifically to be here to answer questions. This is an important aspect of our structure is asking questions about our budget, so I appreciate the questions. But I really appreciate the support that I have from my officials, and I'd would just like to publicly thank my officials.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I appreciate the response from you and the officials. I appreciate the attendance of the committee at this time. At this time I would ask a member of the committee for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Steinley. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — All agreed of adjourning, this motion to adjourn?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — The motion is carried. Thank you and good night.

[The committee adjourned at 17:05.]