



STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL
AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE**

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Regina Qu'Appelle Valley

Mr. Doyle Vermette, Deputy Chair
Cumberland

Ms. Doreen Eagles
Estevan

Mr. D.F. (Yogi) Huyghebaert
Wood River

Mr. Paul Merriman
Saskatoon Sutherland

Mr. Warren Michelson
Moose Jaw North

Mr. Warren Steinley
Regina Walsh Acres

[The committee met at 15:00.]

The Chair: — Thank you very much, everyone. The time is 3 o'clock. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice meeting, April 27th, 2015. Today we have with us Doyle Vermette, Deputy Chair; Paul Merriman; Warren Michelson; Warren Steinley; and myself, Laura Ross, Chair. If everyone is in agreement, we will proceed with the agenda as planned.

A Member: — So moved.

**General Revenue Fund
Government Relations
Vote 30**

Subvote (GR01)

The Chair: — Thank you. We will begin today's meeting by considering the estimates and supplementary estimates — March for Ministry of Government Relations. We will now begin our consideration of vote 30, Government Relations, central management and services, subvote (GR01). Minister Reiter is here with his officials. Please introduce your officials as you make your opening comments, and I would remind all the members that we are dealing with the estimates for this year. So thank you very much.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll introduce the officials before I make some opening comments. With me at the front table is my deputy minister, Al Hilton; and also Jeff Markewich, executive director of corporate services. And at the table immediately behind us is my chief of staff, Angela Currie; James Froh who is the interlocutor for First Nations and Métis Relations; Sheldon Green who is the acting assistant deputy minister for municipal relations and northern engagement and the executive director for advisory services and municipal relations; and Trisha Delormier-Hill who is the executive director of lands and consultation.

I also have a number of other officials with me today, Madam Chair, that can be called upon if we need any more technical advice, depending on the questions that are asked. And now some comments I'd like to read into the record, and then we'd be prepared to answer any questions.

I'd like to begin by providing a few general comments and details of the ministry's budget. I'd then be happy to address any questions the committee members may have after these remarks. The Ministry of Government Relations budget is of course set within the context of the Government of Saskatchewan's 2015-2016 budget, a balanced budget that continues to keep Saskatchewan and its economy strong. It continues our commitment to the principles articulated in the Saskatchewan plan for growth.

This year we've had to make some difficult decisions across government due to a drop in oil revenues. Despite this challenge and thanks to our strong and diversified economy, we were able to present a budget that keeps Saskatchewan strong. Within this context, I'll make some comments on specific areas of the ministry. This budget clearly demonstrates our government's

commitment to Saskatchewan's municipalities and residents. It's a budget that continues our government's record of needed investments in infrastructure and needed investments in people and contains no tax increases.

Despite the drop in revenue, the Government of Saskatchewan is once again maintaining the education property tax mill rates at status quo. The rates for the 2015 taxation year will be the same as the rates for last year. The funds raised from these mill rates will continue to be used for education purposes. This decision respects our government's education property tax relief commitments when we came into office and also maintains mill rates at the same level as the revenue-neutral decision made when the 2013 re-evaluation was implemented. Since 2008 our government has achieved cumulative education property tax savings for property tax payers in excess of \$1 billion.

This is also a budget that supports municipalities to continue building our communities and enhance the quality of life for our residents. The 2015-16 Government Relations budget provides 372.5 million in support of municipalities and northern engagement. This includes a record \$265.3 million in municipal revenue sharing in 2015-16. That's an increase of 8.3 million or 3.2 per cent from last year's budget and is an increase of 138 million or 108.4 per cent in revenue sharing from the 2007-2008 budget. It's a program that's fundamental to the operations and budgets of our municipal partners.

I'm gratified that during a very difficult budget year, we've been able to maintain our revenue-sharing commitment to Saskatchewan municipalities and in fact deliver the largest grant ever. In 2015-16 urban revenue sharing for all cities, towns, villages, and resort villages will amount to \$170.5 million. Revenue sharing for rural municipalities, which includes organized hamlets, will total \$75 million, and northern municipalities will receive \$19.8 million in revenue sharing in the coming fiscal year.

On infrastructure, our direct support to municipalities includes some significant infrastructure investment in the coming fiscal year: a total of 73.2 million for infrastructure programs, including 7.9 million provincial and 65.3 million federal. This funding allows us to continue meeting our commitments for the current suite of infrastructure programs. This includes \$2.3 million for the Saskatchewan infrastructure growth initiative, which is being renewed this year. Our ministry's budget also provides for the gas tax program. Saskatchewan's allocation is \$57.1 million for 2015-16. There is also a total of \$10 million for the federal-provincial new Building Canada Fund with 5.6 million of that being provincial funding.

The federal government has committed 436.7 million to Saskatchewan under the provincial-territorial infrastructure component, which the province will match. The funding is further broken down between national and regional projects in the small communities fund. Project rating and approval processes are currently under way and it's expected that \$10 million in funding will be expensed in 2015-16.

Additional funding highlights for municipal and northern engagement programs include \$12.2 million for grants in lieu of property taxes, 3.5 million for the transit assistance for people

with disabilities program, and \$250,000 for regional planning authorities. These programs are seeing no change in their funding levels.

SAMA, the Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency, will be receiving a budget increase of \$760,000, including \$612,000 toward a new technology development project to improve property re-inspections and \$151,000 for operating. The Saskatchewan Municipal Board is receiving \$1.8 million, an increase of \$72,000, to cover operational expenses.

On First Nation and Métis funding, an integral part of the mandate of the Ministry of Government Relations is supporting programs and partnership initiatives that improve the quality of life for First Nation and Métis people. Our 2015-16 ministry budget includes \$77.1 million for First Nations and Métis initiatives within our ministry. This represents a slight decrease of 3.1 million or 3.9 per cent. Highlights include \$74 million in funding for gaming agreement commitments. The change in funding represents a decrease in the estimated profit calculations for the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority and the Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation; \$435,000 for treaty land entitlement, which reflects no change; and \$200,000 for the First Nations and Métis Consultation Participation Fund. This reflects a decrease of \$400,000 to align the budget with actual spending. Four hundred thousand dollars to support innovative community engagement projects and sponsorships to help generate better outcomes for First Nation and Métis people.

On public safety funding in 2015-16, the public safety initiatives of the ministry will receive 11.1 million in funding, an increase of \$946,000 or 9.3 per cent. The budget provides an additional 1.7 million to our emergency management and fire safety area to address operational needs. Building standards and licensing will see a decrease of \$423,000 in funding next year primarily due to the end of the seniors' home security program. Funding commitments will be maintained at the status quo level for the provincial disaster assistance program. The provincial public safety telecommunication network will see a decrease of \$380,000 for reduced capital funding requirements.

Overall our 2014-15 Ministry of Government Relations appropriation budget is just over \$472.4 million, an increase of 1.3 million, or 6.2 million from last year. This is primarily due to a rise in revenue sharing. A total of 93 per cent is devoted to third party transfer payments. The majority, 77 per cent of that, is provided to municipalities through revenue sharing and infrastructure grants, and a further 23 per cent of that is provided mainly to First Nation and Métis organization through gaming agreements. Six per cent is required to deliver the ministry's programs, including community planning; subdivision approvals; First Nation, Métis, and northern portfolios; emergency management and fire safety; building standards; licensing; and the provincial disaster assistance program. One per cent is provided for capital upgrades to the provincial public safety telecommunication network.

This concludes my overview of the Ministry of Government Relations 2015-16 budget. This is a budget that is keeping Saskatchewan strong, and it's a budget that, while being forged in a time of incredibly volatile resource revenue, still delivers on our commitments to the communities and the people of

Saskatchewan. Thank you. I would now be happy to respond to any questions.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Minister. I'm going to also remind members to, in order to ensure that we have a fulsome and fruitful discussion, that the questions remain fairly pointed and that they are related to the current estimates that we are looking at. So I would just remind members because I think in order to ensure that we get the most out of these meetings, that the questions are pointed in that direction. Are there any questions? Doyle Vermette.

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. To the minister and your officials, again, you know, thank you for being here, giving the opportunity to talk about some of the numbers in the budget.

And I'm curious if you could just for Northern Affairs, and we'll talk about, I'm thinking about job opportunities in northern Saskatchewan within the Ministry of Northern Affairs. Can you tell me how many positions currently are in northern Saskatchewan? And I don't mean that are 100 per cent committed to northern Saskatchewan, the individuals work 100 per cent of their time. I know they have to go out to deal with the business. But I'd like to see that they're not somebody who's working part-time up there and then part-time in Regina. So if you could give me those numbers it would be helpful, within your budget.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Okay, just to clarify, so the number of positions that we have in northern Saskatchewan in the Ministry of Government Relations?

Mr. Vermette: — Northern Affairs. I'm talking about Northern Affairs. If you could . . .

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — There's been no changes to the number of FTEs from last year's budget. There's 18 full-time equivalent positions in the North today, plus one position in . . . this would speak to the second part of your question, I guess.

There is one position that's in a Regina office that's assigned to Northern municipal services. That person splits their time between Regina and La Ronge. The other 18 FTEs are in the North. Six of those are with the northern engagement branch, and 13 of those are with the northern municipal services branch. And again that would be no change from last year.

Mr. Vermette: — And you say the 13, is that with the . . . I guess would it be an employee or a senior staff like Brad Henry? His office would be the 13 you're referring to?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — The two areas would be . . . You're familiar with the gentlemen, Brad Henry and Richard Turkheim, their areas.

Mr. Vermette: — Okay. I want to go into . . . I was trying to understand, and you say and I realize with the current budget, there's no changes. And I know we've seen changes over the years. We've seen cuts to positions in the North and they've been transferred or phased out, however, retired. And we know that; I don't want to get back and forth into that.

But having said that, is there any opportunity or do you see Northern Affairs within your ministry — and being responsible for Northern Affairs, I understand — do you see there any opportunity to look at expanding roles, jobs for your ministry when it comes to Northern Affairs at all? Do you see any growth in there with employees in that area?

And I'm going to get into more programs and stuff too later on, but just seeing if there's any opportunity to northern Saskatchewan. We've seen the needs in the North when it comes to areas of employment, training, and all that stuff. And I know that your ministry works with the other ministries, so I'm just curious to see if you can give me any idea. We're hoping it's good news that there would be opportunity seeing, you know, we look at the number of our youth and First Nations in northern Saskatchewan that are unemployed, when we looking at young adults and the youth.

So I'm just . . . I know it's . . . [inaudible] . . . but I'll get into that area. It just gives you an idea where I'd like to go to try to get some information. It would be helpful if you could help us with that.

[15:15]

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Sure. You know, I'll speak to your last part of the question first. When you talk about training and unemployment, and clearly that crosses a number of different ministries, but you know, just generally speaking, I think the training side . . . And there's areas . . . For instance you and I have spoken before about adult basic education and the onus that our government has put on that. I think that sort of thing, the training and education, is just very, very key to continue to work towards addressing the unemployment issue in the North.

To the first part of your question, specific to our ministry, as far as positions in the North, you know, it's difficult to kind of look ahead to future years budgets and what might hold at that time. But I think what you're seeing right now is probably, you know . . . Generally speaking, there will always be some adjustments in the budget process, but I think it probably speaks volumes that the number of positions that you see in the North right now are the same number as last year, you know. I think we're kind of at a spot where, you know, we think we're running pretty efficiently. And this speaks to all areas of the province, right.

You know, we want to be sensitive to . . . Obviously, you know, what you're driving at is northern communities would like to see those sorts of positions there, just as any community in the province would. At the same time, it's incumbent on us as government to run as efficiently as we can. You know, I think we run a pretty efficient shop right now and I think, like I said, it probably says a lot when you see the same number of FTEs this year in the North as you did last year.

Mr. Vermette: — Yes, I guess it would depend on which way one would look at it in the way you present that. But having said that, do you see any opportunity? And I know we hear the issues facing northern Saskatchewan and many of the challenges. And I know that leaders have talked about it, whether they're mayors, you know, chief and council, Métis leaders. When they're looking at our youth, our young adults, there's such opportunity and could be such potential for your

ministry to be working and advocating hard. And I'm hoping, you know, you are doing that and I think it's important that your ministry . . . And you're responsible for Northern Affairs. And I know the challenges that are facing northern Saskatchewan when it comes to housing and all the other areas that we're seeing cost of living impacting northern families.

But I go back to this and to the youth, and we'll talk about the opportunities that are not there for northern Saskatchewan. And I know there is opportunity for some that get the training and I realize that, but also when you talk about training and employment for those youth and young adults, what is your office and can you . . . Is there any plan? How do you guys work with the ministries of Advanced Education and how are you advocating for . . . And I'd like to hear some of the numbers and the ways you guys are advocating as, you know, as your ministry is responsible for Northern Affairs.

If you could just give me some background, if there's any plans that you guys are moving forward in a positive way that would help alleviate some of the employment for youth, young adults, when it comes to training. I think that would be helpful if you could share some ideas around that. I guess I'd let you look at areas where you want to . . . and how you can address this. If you could, I'd appreciate that.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Sure, absolutely. Thanks for the questions. You know, the discussions you're asking about, sort of communications between the different ministries, happens at many levels, not just at the ministerial level. I speak to my colleagues. We're responsible for different areas, for instance Advanced Education or the Minister of the Economy on the different programs that are offered under those different files. But it also happens at the deputy minister level. I know Al speaks with his colleagues frequently about the various programs and at many levels throughout the ministry.

Just to give you an idea of some of the things I was speaking about, you know, for instance in the Department of Education, we're debating a little bit here but, you know, it speaks to issues in the North that you are asking about. In the ministries of Education and Advanced Education, there was \$51 million in funding for First Nation and Métis education and training. There's the 5.1 million you'd be familiar with on the joint task force on improving education and employment outcomes. There's a number of different ones.

You know, one I would point to because I think it's an institution that does a phenomenal job on education, advanced education, is SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies]. We've increased funding there substantially — 121 per cent since 2007-2008. Increases in the Gabriel Dumont Institute. I mentioned earlier about adult basic education and I think the success story we've had there, we've got 10.7 targeted specifically for First Nation and Métis adult basic education, and the list just kind of goes on. So you know, I think the numbers are sort of bearing out what I had said before, is the fact that, you know, it's important that we target precious dollars to the right areas. And I think, you know, with the end goal being to get the unemployment rate as low as possible, I think that training and education is certainly definitely the way to go.

Mr. Vermette: — Would it be an opportunity, and could you for the committee, to provide for us some of the numbers, when you work with the ministries of Advanced Education . . . And you're referring to different programs provincial wide that are helping and trying to alleviate, you know, the training spots that are available to First Nations, Métis, and to Saskatchewan residents.

But when I think about it, I look at all those different dollars. And you've talked about different programs and that government has allocated dollars. Is it an opportunity for you, and could you for the committee provide a breakdown of northern Saskatchewan? How many dollars are really going into the northern Saskatchewan, just to the programs? And I know, hard to get you to provide that today, but could you, would you agree to provide that at a later date for the committee?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — You know, I'll get you just to hang on one second. If we can't today, I certainly will do that. But we may be able to provide some of that information right now as well.

Just to give you an idea, in one ministry for instance, support for northern communities that's happened on the sort of the education and training component of that, in this budget, 2015-16, there'd be 1.733 million spent on northern skills training; 1.763 million spent on adult basic education programs, primarily through Northlands College. There would be another \$390,000 spent on on-reserve adult basic education. There's \$2.055 million on skills training allocation. There's a \$2.2 million on a provincial training allowance. There's a number of different essential skills projects, \$709,000. There'd be \$2 million spent for different agencies for employment development activities, be \$2 million spent in the North on, specifically in the North on SIIT and the Gabriel Dumont Institute programs. That speaks to the overall funding for those two institutions I spoke about earlier and the half million dollars for a Canada-Saskatchewan job grant.

That gives you some indication, some of the programs there. But certainly, you know, to your previous question, we'd be happy to do a follow-up, more of a kind of a sort of broad across-government list. We'll try and be as comprehensive as we can and be happy to follow up with you on that.

Mr. Vermette: — Okay, I thank you for that, and that'd be good for you to provide that to the committee at a later date. And I understand it's a lot of numbers to go through but yes, that would be helpful to see exactly . . . And I guess as critic for Northern Affairs, that's where I would like to talk about. Because I've had, you know, that side of it raised to me with concerns and issues about northern Saskatchewan and making sure the Far North is not forgotten about, and sometimes that has been a challenge when it comes to employment and training dollars being allocated, the cost of living for the Far North. And you know, we've seen different organizations refer to government needs to spend more and pay more attention to the Far North, to some of the communities up there, and such a high rate of unemployment.

We have such a large youth, young adults that there's such an opportunity if we can provide the training and the jobs for those individuals. You know, there's a commitment there. So when I think about the Far North, and I know I've had community

members talk to me about that, and that's their concerns, that more needs to be done. And I realize, you know, there are certain numbers that are being done and government is committing certain dollars, but I think sometimes it has to be targeted dollars when you have the Far North and the North with the challenges that many of the communities are facing, and employment. So hopefully, you know, we'll have some . . . Those numbers will show the Far North too as well what they're getting.

Do you know, is there any plans with any of the ministries to target the Far North when it comes to training and employment programs that would affect the Far North? Are you aware, have you been in any conversations with the ministries when you're advocating and your officials and yourself are talking about the Far North and some of the challenges? And I'm sure you're hearing from the leaders, whether they're First Nations, Métis, municipal leaders, about the challenges facing northern Saskatchewan when it comes to unemployment. So I'm just curious if you could give me a little bit of background on that, if there's things moving in a positive way.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Sure, absolutely. You know specifically to the North there's the programs that I just listed. I believe, you know, when our staff gets a chance to sort of look at some of the other ministries for programs for there that I told you we'd follow up in writing, I think there'll be some others.

You know, I think in our own ministry, in Government Relations, there's been a recognition for a long time of some of the unique challenges in the North. I look at municipal revenue sharing, for instance, that program a couple of years in the '13-14 budget when there had been a review done of the formula that's used for municipal revenue sharing. And as you know, under this government, municipal revenue sharing has increased dramatically, but we also recognize the issues that communities in the North do face that some communities in the rest of the province don't.

It's primarily two issues I think that communities in the North face that much of the rest of the province doesn't have, and number one is, just as you know, you're aware it's just sort of the distance from market for so many things. It tends to be a long way for instance to haul goods and services or, sorry, to haul goods and in some cases provide some services to some of the communities in the North.

[15:30]

The second part that from a municipal perspective we see is probably for that very reason. A lot of the communities in the North don't have as large an assessment base as far as commercial industrial that many of the municipalities in the rest of the province do have. So with that in mind at that time, I think this is a perfect example of what you are asking about, you know: recognition of some of the unique challenges. At that time, when we redid the revenue-sharing formula, what we did is we took \$2 million off the top and allocated it to the North on top of, you know, their existing formula, and then did the rest of the breakdown of the formula on the agreed-upon basis.

I think one of the things I found very gratifying in that whole process is, you know, we worked closely with SARM

[Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] and SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] and the New North as we did that work on the formula. When I approached both SARM and SUMA, telling them what we wanted to do sort of in recognition of the challenges in the North with revenue sharing, both organizations — although it was not a benefit to their members; it was money out of the total pool — both of them agreed.

You know, I think there's very much a recognition, not just in our government but in a number of organizations across the province, and I think SARM and SUMA are a perfect example of that. Certainly they recognize the challenges that northern communities face, and we're certainly doing our best to support them.

Mr. Vermette: — Exactly where, I guess, hearing the frustration, whether it's New North, from the CEO [chief executive officer], the executive . . . I've been to the meetings. I've heard the frustration. More needs to be done when it comes to highways, many of the issues, housing. There are many issues that northern people and leaders have voiced, whether it's New North, and I mean I've been at their annual general meetings where the dialogue's there and the frustration.

Yes. You know, who's going to say . . . If they're getting an increase, hard to criticize. Thank you for the increase. I understand that. But at the end of the day, there are so many other areas that they see need to be addressed and, you know, hopefully with the way you can work and manoeuvre, I hope you would work with the ministries when it comes to, whether it's highways and all the different ones I talk about, as you advocate for northern people.

That office used to have, you know, a dedicated minister. And we know that it worked well representing, and it focused on northern issues, and that was an opportunity. Sometimes I know some people, you know, in their frustration realize the minister has a lot of responsibilities. It's one portfolio. He's responsible for Northern Affairs. And we hear that, a frustration. You know, when we look at the challenges facing northern people sometimes it is frustration.

Yes, they would like to see safety about the roads. It's about housing. It's about affordability. It's about our trappers, our fishermen. Although challenges, it's about being consulted when decisions are being made by government. There's a lot of frustration that individuals . . . you know, hoping that your office can advocate for those individuals. And I guess as well as myself, as well as northern leaders, individuals back home are asking your office to advocate for the issues facing many northern people.

At the end of the day, government has the opportunity. We know the resources are there. We've seen record revenue. We see so much coming out of northern Saskatchewan that, you know, go into the government coffers. So anything you could do, again all we can do on behalf of the northern people, the leaders who have shared their frustration . . .

Yes, I realize some of them give credit when credit is due. They've done that. But also some of them see and are faced with many of the challenges in their communities that are

isolated: whether it's road, airports, you know, when you look at air ambulance, when you look at just the condition of the roads, when you see the industry, the way they're moving.

And I think about the trappers. And I'll share this, and this is probably where I want to get your commitment and hopefully . . . I know the Northern Trappers Association have a lot of challenges, and they're asking for some support. I don't know how you're consulting or how your ministry works with industry to make sure that they're consulting when it comes to agreements, the duty to consult and accommodate our First Nations, our Métis, but our traditional land users is vital. Your ministry can play a huge role in that, and I hope your ministry will play that role and will see some of the challenges and frustration people are saying out there. They're not feeling, traditional land users, like they're being . . .

So having said that, do you have any ideas or any new programs with Northern Affairs or any plans on working with any of the ministries to help our northern trappers? I know they've applied for different funds different times and have been told no. There's been proposals in, and then they get told to come here. And they've met with different ministers and ministries, and the answer always is, well no, it's not . . . They don't walk away with a . . .

So I'm trying to see if there's any way you could work with them and how you could work and in a positive way for our northern trappers. They need some supports, also our fishermen when they're out there and they're trying to make a living. And I'll just give you this last . . . I know that subsidies have been gone. I don't know if you have any new programs that you're going to help with our fishermen, and programs for Northern Affairs, whether it's loans, grants, different programs, if you see a dialogue. Or is there any plans to work with our northern trappers and fishermen that are out there trying to make a living and struggling with different challenges? Do you see any new programs?

I know there used to be a freight subsidy program for the fishermen, but that was totally collapsed. And government I don't believe and I was told did not consult with the industry. They just decided to scrap it, saying it was underutilized. So is there any plans for you to work with our northern trappers, our fishermen, and any of the northern people when it comes to opportunities?

I'll leave that with you. I know it's kind of a thing, but it gives you an opportunity to think about some of the good things you could be doing. And we hope your ministry will be advocating for our northern people.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Just a number of comments I'd have in regards to that, you know, and including more broadly I guess . . . I'm going to get, when I'm done, I'm going to get my deputy, Al, to comment about a couple of projects that are going on in Northlands College.

But first I guess in response to your comments about the ministry and working with the other ministries, I think a perfect example of that is officials from our ministry, also from Environment, from Economy, from Highways have formed a working group, and they're doing some work on industry

interests there. They've had discussions with the Northern Saskatchewan Trappers Association on a number of different things, some firearm safety stuff, some education programming, some ways to help the association with communication. So they've been doing some work on that.

I do know we had had a discussion about this last year during estimates as well. And at that time you had asked me about sort of, for ease of communications I think with the trappers association, to have some specific people in the ministries that they can communicate with so there's more regular flows of communication I guess. We have, so you're aware, we have followed up and have done that. The contact from our ministry is Jim Andrews. He'll be the lead contact for the trappers' association. Overall the lead contact is from the Ministry of Environment, and that's a gentleman by the name of Mike Gollop. They'll continue to be the lead contacts there, as you requested.

There's also been, I mention, the working group. There's also been a significant amount of work that they've done. There's been 14 trapping industry interests that they've identified through discussions with the trappers association in the past year and that they've been working on. And I'll just quickly run through those so you're aware of what's going there: (1) improve communications, as I mentioned, amongst the executive; (2) is to strengthen their organizational capacity; (3) is to support them in developing education programs; (4) is to pursue opportunities to add value to raw fur products; (5) is increase the availability of firearm safety instructors and courses; (6) is to assess long-term funding options for the annual convention; (7) is increase trappers' understanding of forest fire management practices; (8) explore options for insurance coverage for cabins lost in forest fires; (9) clarify provincial policy in the use of a number of different types of traps; (10) clarify the government's duty-to-consult process; (11) explore options to offer firefighting courses for front-line community members; (12) is to review with the trappers provincial policy on the size and the number of trappers' cabins permitted under the traditional land use leases; (13) review provincial policy on forestry buffer zones around trapper cabins; and the last one, (14) — I mentioned there was 14 — establish contact information for other ministries for trappers whose lines are adjacent to highway routes.

So you can see a significant amount of work I think is being done there. Our officials will certainly be pleased to continue to work with the association on that. And I'll ask Al now to speak about the issues around Northlands College that I mentioned.

Mr. Hilton: — Thank you. I'm familiar with two recent initiatives coming out of Northlands College targeted to the North. One is the establishment of a mining college. The second is our plans to provide long-distance education/training opportunities in the area of nursing.

Mr. Vermette: — Do you have a dollar figure that you're allocating to Northlands College for the mining?

Mr. Hilton: — I don't have it with me. No. Sorry. I can try and find it in all my papers.

Mr. Vermette: — Can you please for the committee provide

that at a later date? I understand you couldn't find that. I'd like the actual dollar amount that you've allocated to that mining, your commitment, government's commitment to that. That would be helpful.

I guess I have one more question, and then I'm going to turn it over to my colleague here. You know, back home we talk about a lot of challenges. I don't know if you're aware of it and how much research, you know . . . And I realize that I've said this earlier: your ministry is probably pretty busy. When I look at Northern Affairs — and you know, being that you're responsible, your ministry is responsible for Northern Affairs — are you aware of any of the rates when we look at poverty when it comes to northern administrative district boundary, are you aware of the numbers and how bad they are? You know, I'm just curious to see how you guys are addressing that with this budget. Will you be addressing any of those issues when it comes to poverty?

[15:45]

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Certainly we follow, you know, you're talking about poverty in the North and indicators. Our folks, you know, follow closely the socio-economic indicators. That helps drive policy. That helps drive decisions that we make as government, certainly much of what is spoken to earlier, you know, the increased onus on adult basic education and increased training opportunities, those sorts of things.

Just as an example of some of the things that are happening, and again, you know, we spoke before about the fact that much of this is cross-ministry. But absolutely I take an interest. My ministry takes an interest, and is frequently involved, depending which ministry is delivering a service when it has direct impact on the North. Just an example of that's under . . . You're familiar with the joint task force on education and employment, and there's an initiative under there called the invitational shared services partnerships. There's a couple of them in place right now; one is with English River and one is with Clearwater. Certainly they're doing some good work on that on the education front.

So I think, you know, to get to the crux of your question, those sorts of indicators, absolutely we pay attention to that, and we're concerned. And I think the short answer, I guess to your question, is it's those sorts of factors that help us to drive policy and programming when we are making decisions.

Mr. Vermette: — Okay, thank you. I'm going to make my last comments here and then turn it over. I'll be done for now, and if there is opportunity later I'll ask. And I guess you mentioned, you listed off a number of probably 13, 14 different items that your officials have been working with the Northern Trappers Association. And I'm excited to get back to them to go over that list to see how positive it is for them. And you know, like I say, thank you for that information. I will get back to them as soon as I can with that list because it's good. And if it's areas where we can improve on that, that'll be great too. You know, there is opportunity to have a dialogue and to continue to advocate for northern trappers.

So at this point, thank you to your officials and yourself for giving the information that I've requested. And the ones that

you will provide later on, we'll wait for the response. Thank you.

The Chair: — Well thank you very much for joining us. Mr. Broten, if you have any further questions.

Mr. Broten: — Yes, thank you. Good afternoon, and I look forward to asking some questions here in the area of First Nations and Métis Relations. First question off the top, looking at some of the budget information, First Nations and Métis funding was 3.219 million in 2012. It was 2.994 million in 2013, 2.55 million in 2014, and down to 2.466 million this year. So that's a 23 per cent drop since 2012. So could you please provide a bit of an explanation for this drop in funding and some clarity in information on what services have been narrowed or withdrawn and how this reduction has been accomplished, please?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — There's I think two primary areas where you're seeing those numbers drop that you mentioned. First of all in 2012 when the work was completed on the reorganization of the ministry, as you know, it used to be a different ministry. Now it's part of Government Relations, so I think that's part of it. In a number of those cases, it wasn't necessarily programming cuts. There's been some programs and some FTEs that went to other ministries, most notably Economy, that deal with programs in the North.

And the second part of it, I think, which in some instances is a substantial amount of money, is there was money in some of those budgets to deal with TLE [treaty land entitlement] agreements. And as those agreements were concluded, you know, we base . . . Our ministry does their best to monitor what's going on with discussions on TLE and to budget accordingly. So in some of the years you referred to, there was a significant number of agreements and, just as a matter of interest on that, officials tell me that there's now TLE agreements with 33 First Nations. You may have seen recently there was some media coverage around the fact that the 1 millionth acre under TLE, under treaty land entitlement, was just recently announced.

Mr. Broten: — So for the 23 per cent drop that we've seen for 2012, does that affect any of the programs that the ministry offered at one time? Or is it the minister's view that it's simply changes or completion in the TLE process, as well as a different internal ministry cost based on staffing levels?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I just discussed with my deputy here. Just the first point I should clarify to your question about ministry costs, it's not specifically ministry costs; it's the program, which program the ministry is operated from, whether it's Economy or Government Relations.

But we just had a discussion here. Front of mind, there's been no significant program cuts or reductions that either of us can think of over that period of years at the top of our head. Primarily it's the two reasons I said, and I'd come back to the treaty land entitlement costs again. As those agreements are concluded, you know, the money is spent. If there's no follow-up agreements being negotiated that would require a budgeted amount, those amounts aren't allocated in the budget. They're allocated as they're needed.

Mr. Broten: — So on the staffing side for First Nations and Métis Relations specifically, was there a change in the number of FTEs year over year? And how has that number changed over the last several years, please?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — From last year there's 19 FTEs; two different units of the ministry, 6 in one, 13 in the other. One of the FTEs was, is sort of, I guess not primarily in the North but partially in the North, partially in Regina, so it would be 18 plus that one. I knew those numbers of the top of my head because your colleague had just asked that same question.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. Would you be able to provide a little bit of historical perspective over the last several years how that number has changed?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Sure. I'm just going to get AI to delve a little deeper into numbers for you. But before I do that, I should just clarify the numbers I had just given you. When your colleague Mr. Vermette had asked the question, it was specific to positions that are located in the North as well. So I just want to be clear on those positions. Now with a little bit broader context, I'll get AI to give you that.

[16:00]

Mr. Hilton: — Yes, there has not been any reductions in the FTEs for First Nations and Métis specific programming, either in Government Relations or in those areas where we may have transferred FTEs to other ministries after the reorg. The only exception that I'm aware of in that case would be this year. We had one vacancy in the interlocutor's office for the last three years, and that position and funding were transferred to emergency management and fire safety. But other than that, the FTE complements have been stable.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. I have some questions on the tripartite processes that I'd like to get into a bit now. I have an email from an individual who sent it to my office who is heavily involved in this. And I'll read a portion of the message that I received. It says:

We understand that three years ago, Saskatchewan government officials from First Nations and Métis Relations withdrew from self-government negotiations with the Meadow Lake Tribal Council and the Government of Canada, as well as from the exploratory treaty table discussions with Canada and First Nations under the Saskatchewan Treaty Commissioner's Office, on the basis that provincial cabinet needed to reconsider the government policy on participating in tripartite processes.

Has cabinet reconsidered its policies? And is there a clear policy in place on Saskatchewan government participation with First Nations and Canada in self-government negotiations, treaty table discussions, and similar tripartite processes?

So some questions posed there about the current policy, and if you could please answer those, that would be great.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — You know, as you alluded to, there is a bit of background on that and I'm going to get AI to speak to that.

Mr. Hilton: — So going back probably 15 years — and don't quote me on the 15: it might be 14; it might be 16 — the province of Saskatchewan had participated in self-government negotiations with the federal government and with Meadow Lake Tribal Council under the federal government's inherent right policy.

After many years, and I do mean in excess of 10 years, no progress was made and as a consequence of that, Saskatchewan withdrew from those negotiations. The focus instead has been on working with First Nations and the federal government where we can, in dealing with other policy challenges and more immediate issues, be it education, training, child welfare transformation and things like that. With respect to the treaty table, the province never sat at the treaty table except as an observer, and we continue to do that.

Mr. Broten: — So has there been no change in policy that cabinet considered with respect to a role in this? Has that been steady? And is that the minister's view?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — You know, Al spoke to where we've sort of switched the focus to. That continues to be the case right now.

Mr. Broten: — So is there an actual policy or is it sort of more ad hoc? What determines how the Government of Saskatchewan acts in such processes?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — You know, Al spoke to sort of why the change in focus, because of an extensive history I guess of lack of success. As of right now, that continues.

Mr. Broten: — What is happening with the negotiations with the Meadow Lake Tribal Council? What's the current status?

Mr. Hilton: — We haven't been party to the discussions since 2010. I don't have any new or updated information from the federal government or from the tribal council on whether or not any progress has been made since that time or not.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. Is the government open to tripartite processes? Is that something that would be considered?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — You know, I think the general answer to that is certainly we're always open to tripartite discussions with First Nations and the federal government, depending what the issue is. Over the last while there's been, you know, again depending on the issue, there's been a number of discussions that have evolved that way but the short answer is we're certainly, generally speaking, we're always willing to talk to the federal government and to First Nations.

Mr. Broten: — What's happening with the exploratory treaty table discussions? Are they going on?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I'm just going to get you to clarify for me. Our officials tell me there isn't anything that they refer to as an exploratory treaty table. Would you be referring to . . . There's a treaty table. There's some other work going on too. I just want to make sure we're addressing the same thing. There's a treaty table, they're saying. Are you talking about a bilateral forum between the feds and individual First Nations, FSIN [Federation

of Saskatchewan Indian Nations]?

Mr. Broten: — I've heard of treaty table discussions. So is this something that's occurring? Is this on the radar of the ministry, or is this not familiar language?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — On that table, you know, my understanding is that the work does continue, but the province is an observer at that one. We continue in that role.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. What's the frequency of discussions on that? Like how often do such tables meet?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Our officials tell me that generally speaking they meet about four times a year, roughly quarterly, but that can change. Again, we're an observer, so we don't drive that. We don't drive the agenda. But we understand that there's a meeting scheduled right now for the middle of May, and we will be represented as an observer there.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. I have some questions on the issue of consultation and specifically around the implementation of the First Nations and Métis consultation policy framework. My question is, how are you monitoring the implementation of this?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I'll ask Al to get into some detail on that.

Mr. Hilton: — And if I mislead the committee by mistake I'll make sure Trisha corrects me.

We have a group of officials that lead the implementation of the duty-to-consult policy framework, primarily led by Environment, ourselves, and Justice. We also have a network, a consultation network that involves all the ministries that might be impacted, as well as Crown agencies.

And most recently we've just developed and are implementing a standardized process that all officials across all agencies and ministries will use as an internal guide for how the policy actually gets operationalized. And it's something officials find pretty interesting because it has really cool technology and it standardizes a lot of processes. So there's been just a lot of work done on that whole monitoring front and the implementation front.

Mr. Broten: — So once this policy is fully implemented, how does your ministry plan on ensuring that other ministries, Crowns, and agencies are accountable and following the policy? What is the means to ensure that there's adherence to it?

Mr. Hilton: — Well again it would be through the committee structure I just talked about. Also it would be . . . Issues would come to the deputy minister level if necessary. And the standardized processes that I talked about earlier that we're implementing, they will be the responsibility of each agency and each ministry to implement, and the oversight for that, you know, ultimately sort of rests at the senior management level within the ministry. And if there's issues that are flagged and identified to senior officials, then senior officials would take whatever action was necessary in order to ensure that the approved guidelines are followed.

[16:15]

Mr. Broten: — On the issue of duty to consult, is there any funding allotted to accommodate the legal duty to consult? Or is this duty to consult fully encapsulated in the First Nations and Métis Consultation Participation Fund?

Mr. Hilton: — Line ministries may cover some of the costs associated with the actual meeting and the consultation itself, but if a First Nation or a Métis organization wants to apply for money to seek technical assistance or help in terms of participating in the duty-to-consult process, that would be the exclusive domain of the program that we administer through our ministry.

Mr. Broten: — So for the Consultation Participation Fund, this year's budget, the First Nations and Métis Consultation Participation Fund dropped from 600,000 to 200,000. Can you please provide some insight into these cuts?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Sure. That was purely a case of helping it to align with what's been happening in expenditures in the past just to more accurately reflect what the budget requirements are. Certainly we're committed to fulfilling our responsibilities on that. If for some reason something occurred that would require more funding, we would certainly ensure that that funding is in place.

Mr. Broten: — So there have been concerns in previous years that the consultation fund wasn't generating substantial, healthy dialogues, or meaningful consultation processes. And I've heard those concerns, and I think the minister's suggestion there that was not a great utilization of the fund in the past, I'd be curious for more information on that. But I mean this cut certainly implies that there will be even less for consultation, when you're dropping from 600 down to 200. So are you pursuing these important discussions and processes through any other avenues, or is this the primary fund that would be available to support such initiatives?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I think there might be some misunderstanding here of what that particular line item is for. That's not the fund that's used, for instance, if the ministry decides to have some sort of meeting with First Nations to discuss general issues around duty to consult. That fund is used when duty to consult is triggered, and then an application can be made by the applicable First Nation for access to those funds.

You know, our officials are just telling me they've done a great deal of work in the past little while as well to make that process easier for the First Nation to apply for that fund, but that's what that fund is for. So my point is that when duty to consult is triggered, we'll certainly live up to our commitments.

Mr. Broten: — How many applications were received to access the fund, and how many agreements were finalized for the fund?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — In 2014-15 there were 16 grants awarded for a total of \$110,000. In '13-14 there was five for a total of \$30,000. In 2012-13 there was eight for a total of \$100,000. I can keep going but you can see sort of my point about where the budget amount came from.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Minister, for that response. In previous estimates the minister has provided an update on how the SIGA [Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority Inc.]-run casinos are doing in the province. So turning a bit towards the gaming framework agreements now, could the minister please provide an update on that, please?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I'm sorry. On the dollar amounts for the gaming framework agreements?

Mr. Broten: — Well I'll get to that in a second, but an update on how the SIGA-run casinos are doing in the province. Any general comments?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — We have some detail we can provide to you on that, specific numbers on the casinos. I'll get Jeff to quickly run through that for you.

Mr. Markewich: — Hi. Jeff Markewich. So what I'll provide you today is just a breakdown of the estimated profits for the SIGA casinos. So for Northern Lights, it's estimated at 30.1 million. Gold Eagle Casino is 14 million. Painted Hand, 8 million. Bear Claw is estimating a loss of 500,000. And Dakota Dunes, 25.2 million and Living Sky, a profit of 200,000.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you for that information. To the minister, I know in previous estimates we had a discussion around the gaming framework agreement. That was back in December when we considered the supplementary estimates for the ministry. And I appreciate that the GFA [gaming framework agreement] is negotiated between SLGA [Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority] and the FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations].

But as the minister will know, his ministry is responsible for administering the crossover. And I know subsequent to that meeting, you tabled a letter outlining the amount of the crossover for the past several years, and I appreciate that information. Thank you very much. But if I could trouble the minister please and ask that he read into the record those numbers that were provided in the letter so that they're in the public record, going back as far as possible that's available at this time, please.

[16:30]

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Our staff did have a copy of the letter you're referring to. I'd be happy to table it. Did you say you wanted me to read it into the record? I'm not clear on what you'd like.

Mr. Broten: — If you could read it into the record. I know for a lot of people who follow this, having that information available in *Hansard* is a helpful and easy way for them to access that information. Please.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Okay. Did you want the letter in its entirety or just the amount dealing with gaming framework?

Mr. Broten: — Sure.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Sure. This letter is dated January the 7th, 2015:

During the Ministry of Government Relations' appearance before the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice on December 1, 2014, I agreed to provide additional information regarding the Provincial Disaster Assistance Program (PDAP) and First Nations Gaming Agreements. The purpose of this correspondence is to address my commitments in that respect.

Firstly, on:

PDAP — Map of Eligible Municipalities

The geographical distribution of eligible municipalities under PDAP for the 2014 disaster events was requested. Please see Appendix 1 for the geographical distribution.

And under:

Historical Gaming Agreements Information

Historical data was requested regarding the “crossover” in Gaming Agreements payments. The “crossover” pertains to the revenue provided to the First Nations Trust (FNT) from the Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation (SGC) casinos, and the amounts provided to the General Revenue Fund (GRF) from the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority (SIGA) casinos. The table on the following page reflects information from 2007-08 onward, since the formula changed in 2007.

In June 2007, the 2002 Gaming Framework Agreement (GFA) was amended to increase the net profits distribution to the FNT from 37.5% to 50%, and decrease the net profits distribution to the GRF from 37.5% to 25%. The distribution of the SGC casino net profits to the FNT remained unchanged at 25%.

The charts there, would you like me to run through that as well?

Mr. Broten: — Just the numbers specifically for the crossover amounts, please, with the years.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — For fiscal year 2007-08, the revenue to FNT from SGC was 9.2 million. The revenue to GRF from SIGA was 11.9.

In '08-09 the revenue to FNT from SGC was 13.7 million. The revenue to GRF from SIGA was 17.6.

In 2009-10 revenue to FNT from SGC was 13.7 million, to GRF from SIGA was 17.9.

In 2010-11 it was 11 million, the revenue to FNT from SGC. The revenue to GRF from SIGA was 13.3.

In '11-12 it was, revenue to FNT from SGC, was 12.1 million. The revenue to GRF from SIGA was 15.4.

In '12-13 revenue to FNT from SGC was 13.1, and revenue to GRF from SIGA was 22.4.

In '13-14 revenue to FNT from SGC was 10 million. Revenue to GRF from SIGA was 21.4 million.

And for '14-15, it was an estimate, and I think we may have some follow-up numbers we can provide to you, but in the letter it was 12.6, FNT from SGC, and 20.8 from GRF to SIGA.

And the letter concludes with:

During the discussion regarding the “crossover”, it was stated that the amount of 2014-15 funding estimated to flow from SIGA to the GRF was \$21.9 million. I would like to clarify that the correct number is \$20.8 million.

And that was the end of the letter.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I appreciate that, so thank you for that information.

Going to another issue at this time, specifically the issue of equitable funding for students who are on-reserve. My question is, has the ministry done anything to address funding disparities in terms of on-reserve education, recognizing that the amount received on-reserve is considerably less than those of provincial schools?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Sorry, the kind of lengthy discussion we had back there. As you're aware, much of this is focused in the Ministry of Education, but trying to provide as much information for you as I can, although probably this question better would be put to them.

But you know, I can speak generally to, for instance, the work that was done on the joint task force on education and employment opportunities. A great deal of work's been done, primarily in the Ministry of Education on that, but it hasn't been exclusively there. I know that issue, just as an example — and forgive me, I don't remember when this was; it was some time ago — but when the federal minister, Minister Valcourt was here, I know I had met with him and along with the Education minister, and this issue, led by the Education minister, was one of the issues on the agenda. So there's been some good work, I believe, done under the joint task force.

But specifics probably would be better . . . Well I'll certainly attempt to answer any questions you'd have, but it would probably be better put to Education.

Mr. Broten: — So the issue, you mentioned that it was on the agenda for one meeting. Would that be the extent of the lobbying effort that you've engaged in as a minister to draw attention to this issue and push for it? Has there been any formal correspondence between you and the feds on this, or is that one meeting the extent of it?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — No. I guess the quick answer to that one is, no that's not the case. It's certainly been front of mind in a number of discussions we've had. Again I don't remember exact dates and we'd have to do some checking, but if my memory serves correct, I believe that at one point in time the Education minister and I did a joint letter to the federal minister on the issue. I know it's been, in a number of meetings I've been at, it's been discussed. I guess my point is that it certainly is front of mind, but the lead on it would be Education.

Mr. Broten: — Would the minister be willing to table that

letter that was given to the feds on this issue, please?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — If you'd bear with me on that, I'll follow up with you. I'm advised that . . . First of all, I want to have a look at the letter again, but I'm advised that under FOIP [*The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*], that if we did release it, that we'd have to get the federal government's agreement with it as well. So if you could just leave that with me, we'll look at the letter again, have a discussion about it. And I'll get back to you on it.

Mr. Broten: — Well thank you. If it, I mean, if it's a position of the minister, I imagine it has information that should be released, I mean especially if it's a letter to the federal government. So anyway thank you for your follow-up on that, and I look forward to seeing the letter.

I'd like to ask a question on the issue with respect to what work may have been done by the minister concerning the elimination of discrimination regarding ambulance caps provided to all Saskatchewan seniors except status First Nations seniors. So I'm thinking in particular the concern that status First Nations do not have the return ambulance transfers covered. So what work has the minister done to address this issue and solve the issue of the discrimination faced by status First Nations?

[16:45]

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Our officials are telling me, for example, of a meeting that was held sometime around the end of March involving officials from our ministry, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Services and federal officials, that it had discussion at that. But this is primarily being dealt with in the Health ministry. So I don't want to mislead you; it hasn't had extensive discussion in our ministry. I would suggest it's been primarily in Health.

Mr. Broten: — Well thank you for that information. It's certainly a glaring hole and an inequity that needs to be addressed. And I would encourage the ministry to play a constructive role in finding a solution, and provincially also ensuring that the coverage is provided as other seniors in the province have access to it.

A different topic on the issue of emergency services on reserve: I'm thinking of fire services and water infrastructure. We've obviously heard a lot of concerns about this here in the province. So my question to the minister is, what steps has he taken to support communities in terms of emergency services?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Sorry. Just to clarify, you were speaking specific to fire or emergency services in general?

Mr. Broten: — Specifically fire, and if there are broader comments on emergency services, that would be helpful as well. So what steps has the minister taken on this?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I think specific to . . . To start with specific to fire, as you're well aware, and in fact I believe some months ago you raised this issue with me in the House, there's been a number of tragic instances on First Nations involving fire. And while, you know, it's important and certainly I respect jurisdiction and that fire response is a local responsibility and

on First Nations you have, you know, the additional situation with that's federal jurisdiction, but in instances like that, and I probably said something similar at the time in the House, is that some things are just too important to get hung up on jurisdiction. So our folks have I believe made great efforts to try and assist where they can with First Nations fire response, to the point that we've had a number of discussions with federal officials on that, including a number of discussions that I've had with the federal minister about it. We were to the point where there's, you know, a pending agreement right now providing some funding from the federal government.

Now I'm getting a little bit broader in this instance. This agreement wouldn't address just fire. It would address emergency services in general but certainly fire would be a huge component of that. That would I believe enable us to, and I think this would be a good way to go because we have expertise in our ministry, but enable us to help First Nations with, you know, training for fire response, possibly doing some facilitating with adjacent municipalities where in some instances it might make sense to have an agreement, rather than the First Nation having their own fire department, to have an agreement with an adjacent municipality to provide those services. I saw a huge amount of potential in that.

I think you're probably aware there was some media coverage of this at one point. And I had a discussion with the FSIN on this and the interim chief had voiced her objections to it. You know, I'm hopeful that that can be resolved. We're still in the process right now of trying to arrange for me to meet with her again in the next little while.

But as those discussions hopefully advance, I think it's important to recognize that what our folks in the ministry have been trying to do is sort of, beyond the initial emergency response, when there's I guess for want of a better term a gap in service, our folks have been attempting to help there. And I think far better than I can explain it, the experience I think of First Nations when there has been a tragedy or, you know, a need for some additional help from our ministry, I would just read a note that I had gotten from the chief of Sakimay and just a part of it I think sort of details . . . This goes beyond the fire part now. This goes to all emergency management because, as you know, there has been a number of incidents in recent years involving flooding and various things. But this is what the chief had to say about dealing with our ministry on this, and it says:

Sakimay First Nations declared a state of emergency in the years 2011, 2013, and 2014. We have relied upon Saskatchewan emergency management and fire safety for assistance during the floods that occurred in these years in addition to emergency response after the tornado in 2014.

The disaster assistance provided to our communities is deeply appreciated. The Saskatchewan emergency management organization has demonstrated excellence, compassion, and a high level of diligence in its dealings with our First Nation.

So I guess if I could kind of summarize, and again, you know, I would reiterate that always with respect to jurisdiction and again it's, you know, local responsibility and there's federal jurisdiction on reserve, but our ministry officials I think do an

excellent job and take pride in certainly trying to be, in many instances I think I'd say jurisdictional-blind to it and try to offer the same level of service they would to any part of the province.

Mr. Broten: — Well it is absolutely of . . . It's a life-or-death issue, and there's a role for all of us to play. And you know, I want to compliment Chief Jonathan and the FSIN for the role that they've played. I've heard from her. I don't think the right consultation has always occurred between the ministry and the FSIN on this issue, and so I want to compliment Chief Jonathan on her work on this. And this is an issue where the right discussions need to occur, and the incorporation of the chief needs to be there for finding the best solutions possible. So I'm sure we'll be talking a bit more about this in the weeks ahead. And this is a very important issue that warrants our attention in a big way.

I have many more questions but sadly short on time for the things that I want to keep talking. But I look forward to further discussions and opportunities for questions as well. I will at this time, Madam Chair, hand the floor to my colleague, Ms. Sproule, who has an issue to raise here before the supper hour. But as I'm doing that, I want to thank the minister and the officials for the responses provided. Thank you.

The Chair: — Ms. Sproule.

Ms. Sproule: — Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to my colleague for ceding the floor. This is a very large ministry with lots of irons in the fire.

I'm going to switch the topic of interest right now to community planning, and this is in particular relation to *The Statements of Provincial Interest Regulations* and the planning handbook that has been provided to municipalities for developing official community plans.

In particular, Mr. Minister, I want to refer to a series of letters that's been exchanged with yourself and a group from Lumsden valley, the Lumsden Valley Community Association, the most recent letter being sent to you in March of 2015. I think you're familiar with the file. And you know, I think the group is probably rightfully disappointed that you have not met with them, and I know they've asked you to meet with them on a number of occasions.

But in their most recent letter, I think they made some very important points that speaks to the meaningfulness, I guess, of the planning handbook and the way *The Statements of Provincial Interest Regulations* are being dealt with in the official community plans. And in their letter of March 13th, I just want to highlight some of these concerns and perhaps get yourself or some of your officials to provide a bit of a response. I know we don't have a lot of time left here, but in particular I think the letter of March 13th is talking about the need for a regional framework. That's a very large discussion that could probably take us about an hour to go into.

But one of the questions that's been raised is that the statements of provincial interest, particularly as they relate to conservation in the Qu'Appelle Valley system, appear to have been largely ignored by the RM [rural municipality] and their consultant in the preparation of the Lumsden revised OCP [official

community plan]. And the SPIs [statements of provincial interest] also appear to have been ignored in the province's review and approval of the RM's revised OCP. What is the reason for that?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — If I could, just to the first part, I'm going to ask Ralph, who's in charge of community planning, to get into the specifics on the statement of provincial interest.

But I just want to address your first part about the request to meet with me. Certainly I take pride in meeting with municipalities or those who are engaged in a municipal issue. But my response, there's been a series of letters exchanged, as you mentioned. I sent a letter in December where I had addressed, you know, the issues that were raised in the first letter. And right in the first paragraph, it says, I believe the issues you raised are fairly straightforward, and I can respond without the necessity to meet. Again I'm going to get Ralph to deal with the specifics of the provincial statement of interest.

[17:00]

But you know, what you generally have is, is there's a respect in government and by legislation of the processes that municipalities follow. And in an instance like this, if municipalities are meeting their requirements legislatively and under . . . to deal with an official community plan, if that is the case. If that's not the case — you're shaking your head, so I guess you disagree — but if that's not the case, I need specifics. Otherwise the ministry would be in a position where they do their due diligence, but otherwise if legislative requirements are made, that it's incumbent on them to recognize municipal autonomy. So I'll get Ralph to speak to your comment about the statement of provincial interest.

The Chair: — I'm just going to step in here for a minute because we've reached the time of 5 o'clock. We could have Mr. Leibel comment, or is this going to be a continuation of the conversation after 7 o'clock when we reconvene? Would you prefer that he answer this specific question right now, or would you prefer that he waited because you're coming back after at 7 to continue this line of questioning?

Ms. Sproule: — That is up to you, Madam Chair, because if we went for another five or ten minutes now, I could wrap up. But if you wish to adjourn now, then we would need to pick it up tonight.

The Chair: — Well we could probably, because you're not coming back then tonight, so we could continue on for another five minutes, if that's okay. But that becomes part of our time too.

Ms. Sproule: — Yes, I understand that. Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: — Okay. Thank you very much. Mr. Leibel, we'll probably go for another 10 minutes then.

Ms. Sproule: — That would be great. Thank you.

Mr. Leibel: — Yes, good evening. The statements of provincial interests are policy regulations of *The Planning and Development Act*, and they set out policy goals and objectives

for municipalities to incorporate within their municipal bylaws.

And in the case of the RM of Lumsden adopting their new official community plan and zoning bylaws, they actually incorporated — my understanding is — some of the ideas and thoughts that the committee, the community association had into their bylaws. And these are general. Their official community planning and zoning bylaws set out the policy framework for decision making at the municipal level.

Ms. Sproule: — Thanks, Mr. Leibel. Mr. Minister, I think that's exactly the issue. In your letter of December 4th, you stated that the OCP identifies environmentally sensitive areas and includes appropriate policies for natural environment heritage conversation. Actually they don't properly identify those environmentally sensitive areas, and I think if you took time to meet with the hard-working people at this community association, they do it on their own time, they would certainly explain to you how that statement is incorrect.

Secondly, in that paragraph you went on to say, further the RM incorporated many of the recommendations of the Lumsden Valley Community Association into the OCP. They've been very clear about this, Mr. Minister; those were incorporated incorrectly. And I think again, it would be . . . Rather than you and I engaging in a long conversation about this, I certainly would recommend that you consider actually sitting down for an hour with these folks and actually hearing from them how both the RM, I think, and their OCP has not fully implemented what's required under the regulations that Mr. Leibel referred to and, secondly, how your own ministry officials have not also taken the time to ensure that the OCP contains those recommendations.

If you look at the actual plan itself that was issued in, I think, in August of 2012, they make one reference to the statements of provincial interest. And just basically under their goals on page 2, they say they're going to support and complement it. But they give absolutely no indication in the rest of the document how they intend to meet the requirements in this planning handbook.

This is a discussion I think we could go back and forth on for a considerable amount of time, but I think in the interest of time, perhaps the minister just might comment whether he'd be willing to actually sit down and hear the very valid concerns that this particular group has put hundreds and hundreds of hours into. They're very devoted to this issue of conservation and community planning.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Sort of, I wanted to read into the record so you understood why, you mentioned, I hadn't met with them, sort of the views of myself and the ministry why I didn't. I'm going to want to address some of those comments you made in just a minute. But the short answer to the question is yes, absolutely I'll meet with them. But I still want to address some of the comments that you made.

I guess a short point that I just wanted to make is I'm just a little bit concerned about some of the comments you made about our officials not meeting with them. Our officials tell me that . . .

Ms. Sproule: — I didn't say that.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Then maybe I misunderstood you. If I did, I . . . Our officials have, our officials met with them on a number of occasions they tell me, have done their due diligence, they believe.

You know, I think to the specifics of the concerns you raised about the actual OCP and the bylaw, I think there's some differing of opinions on that. But to your point that you mentioned earlier, you and I can engage a long time about this, but that discussion's probably more appropriately to have with the group. So certainly I will commit to you that I will be at a meeting. I will bring the appropriate officials to the meeting, and we can certainly have a discussion with the folks in that organization.

Ms. Sproule: — Thank you very much for that, Mr. Minister. I think that would be really appreciated by this group. I know they have a lot to say.

I think the only other final comment for the committee is that we certainly understand the autonomy of RMs in this process, but I think what's missing . . . and the role of the government is in the sort of the regionalness of conservation development and planning. So certainly there is a big role for your ministry as well.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — There certainly is. And I guess my final comment in this would just simply be that, you know, these sorts of matters can become extremely technical. That's their nature. Our officials do a very good job in attempting to deal with those matters. I've seen some of the issues that they've dealt with. They generally do a very good, very professional job, Ralph and his staff. And I'm certainly of the opinion that that would be the case in this, and I look forward to having a discussion with the group about that.

Ms. Sproule: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister, and to your officials as well. Thank you, Madam Chair, for your kindness in allowing the extension of this conversation. That would be the end of my questions for now.

The Chair: — Okay, thank you very much. Now I do want to state that the letter that the minister read is in fact a tabled document. The letter that was being referred to was January 7th, 2015. Now this document was tabled on March the 16, 2015, IAJ, and it was 25/27. So we do have a copy of the tabled document. So thank you very much for reading it out, but it was tabled.

The time now being 5:10, we will recess until 7 p.m. this evening because this was the agreed-upon time, but we have extended the time to accommodate questions by Member Sproule until 5:10. So we'll see everyone back here at 7 o'clock this evening.

[The committee recessed from 17:10 until 19:00.]

The Chair: — The time now being 7 o'clock . . . Push that button. There we go. Thank you very much everyone. Welcome back. The time is 7 p.m. and this evening again we have the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice meeting April 27th, 2015. This evening we have with us Paul Merriman, Warren Michelson, Warren Steinley, myself Laura

Ross as Chair. And we will have a substitution coming in for the opposition, so when that appropriate paperwork comes in, we will read the member in.

So until that time starts, does someone have a question? Yes, Mr. Michelson.

Mr. Michelson: — Yes, welcome back, Mr. Minister and all your officials. Mr. Minister, just talking government relations, can you tell us what type of emergencies will the province's new SaskAlert program broadcast to the people of the province?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Sure, I'd be glad to. I'm going to get our commissioner Duane McKay to join me as well to elaborate a little bit. Thanks for the question, Mr. Michelson.

We made the announcement that after some testing on the west side of the province, that we're now going province wide. We're pretty excited about this. In just a minute I'm going to ask Duane to elaborate a little bit on one, everything that's covered by it, but generally speaking you'll see it covering things like when there's a blizzard for instance affecting an area of the province or, you know, some other type of storm warning — tornado, plow wind, those sorts of things — or something that we've seen in the province in the last number of years, more of than we ever have before, which is issues caused by flooding, for instance a highway washout. Those sorts of things, I think, are the key ones we're going to see, but I'm just going to ask Duane to elaborate a little bit on that as well.

Mr. McKay: — Thank you. Duane McKay, commissioner of emergency management and fire safety with Government Relations.

As the minister had indicated, this SaskAlert was just announced, although we have been working on it for the past several years. We have noticed within the province a significant increase in the number and also the severity of weather-related events and man-made events, and it was identified that at one point we needed to be able to notify the people of Saskatchewan in a more rapid fashion. Certainly the media is doing a good job, but to notify the media as well as the public would certainly be a benefit to the people here.

The SaskAlert program is a part of the national Alert Ready program, which is all the provinces and territories have been working along with the CRTC [Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission] as well as Pelmorex, who owns the weather channel, to develop a national alerting system. SaskAlert is our part of that and will serve as a way to alert both at a municipal level, provincial level, as well as a national level, any emergencies that may affect the people of Saskatchewan.

There are two levels of alert. Alert level 1 would be one where there is an immediate threat to life and property, where immediate action would need to take place in order for you to stay safe. Those would be issued by the province or through the province in the case of a municipality that needs to alert someone, and they'll be coordinated through our 911 system in Prince Albert and be alerted out to the public as well as mass media and through social media as well. Those through electronic connection will go into the media broadcasters and

will actually interrupt programming, regularly scheduled programming, and deliver out that alert to individuals.

Alert level 2 is one where there is an emergency but not necessarily a direct threat to life and property. And those will go out in the same fashion, but will be able to be issued by municipalities directly into the alerting system. And those will not interrupt the broadcast, regular broadcasting, but will go into their feed so that they can rebroadcast those at their discretion on the regular news broadcasts and so on.

The program has been tested over the last couple of months and is now rolling out across the province, and it is actually up and running. And we're currently training municipal leaders so that they can use the system as well.

Mr. Michelson: — Being a former broadcaster, I'm just kind of curious how this is put together because a lot of the radio stations now are pre-recorded. So is there some provisions in there to notify the management or the owners and make sure that these kinds of broadcasts are in fact interrupting program where they need to be?

Mr. McKay: — CRTC mandated the broadcasters to install regular . . . or electronic equipment that will actually monitor the system on a national basis and that will automatically feed into their system. And so it's all automated. The only time that that won't be the case is on the level 2 alert where it'll go in and then the regular news systems will pick it up and broadcast it. That's more manual in terms of when they broadcast. But all of the automated program interruption, that's all electronically done and automated.

Mr. Michelson: — Very good. Thank you very much.

The Chair: — Okay, I would like to again welcome everyone back. The committee will continue with the consideration of the estimates and supplementary estimates — March for the Ministry of Government Relations. This evening we have Buckley Belanger substituting in for Doyle Vermette. So Mr. Belanger will be asking the questions from the opposition.

One of the things I'd like every committee member to just be cognizant of, that we are discussing the current estimates and supplementary estimates. So let's be mindful of that and focus in on those questions. So, Mr. Belanger, I'm sure you have some questions for the minister and his officials.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thanks for your patience in forwarding tonight's committee hearings. I just want to point out to the minister there's four specific areas that I'm going to be focusing my questions on this evening. One of them is the northern administration training program. Another is the PSAB [Public Sector Accounting Board] tangible asset issue that is being referenced in some of the annual documents that your department tables. The other item I want to discuss, the third item is the northern planning for growth strategy and as well the capacity development through New North. Those are roughly the questions that I have.

Most of the questions revolve around the gas tax issue. And there are a number of people watching this this evening and, for

my sake as well as theirs, could you explain how the gas tax issue, kind of the context of how to set up, who pays it, how it's collected and how the northern municipalities actually receive a benefit from the gas tax? When you talk to some of the northern people about this gas tax program, there's a bit of confusion on their part and certainly on my part as well, just in terms of the history and what it was meant to do, and basically the context of why the gas tax is tied to so many of these initiatives when it impacts the northern communities if you can. Thanks.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Sure. I'll make some general comments. I've asked Kathy Rintoul who is executive director, municipal infrastructure and finance to join us at the front table. I'll ask her to elaborate a little bit in a minute.

Just broadly speaking, the gas tax is a federal initiative that flows through the province to municipalities. There is some criteria around what projects are eligible. It's been in place for a number of years now. There is sort of, kind of a second edition of it I guess now, if you will, but it has been in place for a number of years. And I'll just get Kathy to elaborate on that if she would.

Ms. Rintoul: — It's Kathy Rintoul, executive director with municipal infrastructure and finance branch in Government Relations. Just in terms of a bit of background and in terms of the types of purposes that the funding is for, it's a program that the federal government originally brought in in 2005, and the province acts as administrator on behalf of the federal government to provide funding out to municipalities. So all of our municipalities are eligible for funding under that program. And generally speaking that funding rolls out on a per capita basis.

So every year, the province receives an allocated amount of money, and then that funding is provided to municipalities. So that started in 2005. About a year ago the province entered into another new agreement with the federal government to administer those funds. And so generally speaking, like the funds are used by all of our municipalities for infrastructure projects, and in some cases those funds are also used for the municipal capacity development types of projects.

Mr. Belanger: — So I would assume that when you say gas tax, for a layperson like myself, if I were to pull up to a gas station, put gas in my car, I'm paying taxes on the gas. Is that part of the revenues that the federal government actually collects? Because one would assume that's kind of what this is. Or is it a different source of . . . Or is it from a different kind of revenue stream that the federal government taps into?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — You know, I think the intent initially was that sort of that was a source of revenue for the federal government, to use the gas tax as you described it. But the basis for the calculation has evolved from sort of, I believe, a base per municipality plus — I'm just looking in case I'm incorrect here; I'll be corrected — but a base plus a per capita allocation I think is where the calculation is.

Ms. Rintoul: — Just to expand on that, the federal government when they provide the funding to the provinces and municipalities, our four smallest provinces and territories receive what's called a minimum base amount, and then all the

remaining provinces and territories receive their funding on a per capita basis. And then within Saskatchewan those funds are distributed to municipalities on a per capita basis.

Mr. Belanger: — This is obviously a country-wide effort. So on an annual basis, I'm just wondering what would be some of the ballpark figures that Saskatchewan would receive on an annual basis? Is it increasing or is it basically staying the same? How would it work?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — We have the breakdown for last year, the current year, and for the outlying number of years as well. So I'll just get Kathy to go through those for you.

Ms. Rintoul: — So for '14-15 the province of Saskatchewan received 56.29 million, and that amount is the same for this current year, the 56.29 million as well. And then one of the things the federal government had decided to do was that they would index it. And so what we see happening in 2016-17 is Saskatchewan's share goes up to 59.104 and it stays there for '17-18, and then in the fifth year it goes up to 61.919 million. And that is the total then over those five years of 292.707 million.

Mr. Belanger: — So I'm assuming that the allocation would probably mimic or parallel the same fashion in which you do the revenue sharing now. Or is it kind of a separate process then, you know, how you distribute your revenue sharing for the urban and the rural and northern? Or is it just basically a separate, totally separate arrangement?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Yes, it's completely different. There's a separate formula. The formula was last changed for revenue sharing, was changed, I believe it was two years ago — was it not? — I think since we changed the formula. We re-evaluated it at the time.

Earlier this afternoon when we were discussing revenue sharing in the North we had, you know, I had mentioned how we had taken \$2 million extra off the top of the revenue-sharing pool to reflect the sort of increased challenges in the North. When I say that, I'm referring to sort of distance from market, that it tends to cost more to get commodities up there. And secondly, most northern communities don't have the advantage of large commercial industrial bases as some of the municipalities in the South do. So to reflect that, we made some changes to the revenue-sharing formula. But to get to the crux of your question, no, it's two very different formulas.

[19:15]

Mr. Belanger: — Yes, and that's a good segue into the discussion I want to have around the municipal administrator certification. And being a former mayor, I can tell you that the incredible challenge and the incredible responsibility and pretty much the onus that many of these northern municipalities — mayors and council and citizens — place on the administrators that administer our communities on a daily basis, they have an incredible, incredible challenge. And it's much more problematic in the North in the sense of dealing with higher costs and of course dealing with just, you know, the isolation factor. So repairs to different systems, negotiations of costs, and the list goes on as to what the administrators do in some of

these northern communities.

So I want to really recognize them, first of all. And I know that through some of the past, some of my past involvement that there was . . . I was quite lucky in a sense to have an administrator that was excellent at what she done, and we counted on her for a great number of years. And she mentored a few local ladies that joined the staff, and she taught them; they had basic knowledge before, but she taught them quite a bit then. The whole process of building administrative capacity within these northern communities, we knew at the time it was an incredible challenge because we were lucky in a sense of, as I mentioned at the outset, having a qualified administrator that was very committed to her job and worked very, very hard and long hours. And as a mayor, I was influenced profoundly by her and supported by her.

So I want to share that with you because of the value of having municipal administrators certified and recognized for some of the incredible weight that is placed upon them to carry out the functions of ensuring that many of these local governments operate as they should.

So that being said, I know that there's been this municipal administrator certification process going, and we've tracked over the years how many enrolled and how much, for example, how much money was spent and the different partners that were involved. I know in 2008 when the process began to certify some of the administrators, WD [Western Economic Diversification Canada] and the northern revenue-sharing trust account co-sponsored that particular process. This process went on from 2008, 2009 where Northlands was involved. And then the U of R [University of Regina] was also involved, and then Northlands College was involved. And then of course over time, we begin to see a pattern of many partners coming into the mix.

So I guess my question would be, on the northern municipal administrative certification process, where are we now? And was the gas tax, was that used for some of this? Is that an allowable expense? I don't know. But if you can give me an update from 2008, all the different players and how much was spent and where we are in the certification process.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Okay. At the front table, I've asked Brad Henry, executive director of northern services, to join me, and I'll get him to elaborate on this in a minute. First, the sort of programming and the educational background that you're speaking of is kind of near and dear to my heart. That was my career before politics, was municipal administration. Generally speaking, in the province, probably the program that most administrators have followed that were seeking a career in municipal administration was called the local government administration program or is, rather, is called the local government administration program offered through the University of Regina. I believe when you're speaking of the North, the Northlands College I believe offers that program as well. That's typically the education requirements, but there's provisions as well and, depending if it's rural, urban, or what the case may be, to recognize other educational or training backgrounds as well.

I believe our folks in municipal services in northern

Saskatchewan have been working on a new sort of program to help encourage, and I'll just get Brad to elaborate on that for you.

Mr. Henry: — Sure. So to touch on the one piece, the local government administration certification program, it's the same program that's being offered by the University of Regina is being offered through Northlands in the North as well. So there's that piece.

As far as the history from 2008 through 2012, I know that my office was very heavily involved in it. My manager of municipal administration was heavily involved in it. I wasn't there at the time so I don't know the details of that, although we can definitely get that for you. But I know that yes, currently the program is being offered through Northlands College.

As far as the current state of administrative compliance in the North, we are working on a program to monitor that. I don't have the results right at hand here, but I do know that for the vast majority of municipalities in the North, they do have certified administrators where they need to. There are a few instances where there aren't and we're working with those communities.

Now with respect to the development of capacity in existing administrators, we are working on . . . Well we just finished a request for proposal to look at building a program to assist with governance, finance, and administrative capacity in these municipalities. Those contracts haven't been signed or anything but the public procurement process has completed.

Mr. Belanger: — Since 2008, obviously the northern revenue-sharing trust account changed their name to the NMTA [northern municipal trust account]. And so whether it's the NMTA or the NRSTA [northern revenue-sharing trust account], since 2008 could you identify for me what was spent on this particular program from that source, the northern revenue-sharing trust account? And if you are able to as well identify 2008, 2009, '10, '11, '12, '13, '14 as to what the other partners also contributed. And where I'm going at this is that we know that the stress is on the administrators and we know we have to build capacity. And we see partners coming to the fold. And I'll have a bunch of other questions after that, but could you identify kind of where the money came from in those years?

[19:30]

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Just to sort of, kind of broadly to your question, just to clarify as far as administrative training, it's no different than any other area of the province. Right? The training is up to the individual person. If they're perhaps already working in a municipality, the municipality may agree to pay for part of it. And the program through Northlands, as I mentioned, is the LGA [Local Government Authority] program.

The program that I'm not very familiar with now and ministry officials were just explaining to me is, at the request of the northern management trust board, half a million dollars was held from the northern revenue-sharing pool for the administrative capacity-building program with the intent of that being it'll be offering sort of extra training to build

administrative capacity for administrators in the North, sort of extra training if you will.

Mr. Belanger: — How many years, in your history and your background, how many years would it take for you as a former administrator to be certified? And what would it cost you personally, if I can get your perspective on this?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — It would, you know, typically . . . I went through. I was a member of the Rural Municipal Administrators' Association. And generally speaking, what it was is the program through the University of Regina is a two-year program. And then there's a qualification requirement with rural municipal administrators that they have to train under a qualified administrator for a year, and then they're certified with what's considered a base-level certification which is a C certificate. After that, depending on experience and additional education, they can qualify for a higher level of certificate. As far as dollar amounts, I have to admit that was a long time ago and I can't recall. And I'm being heckled by the other side now as well, but I don't recall. And I'm sure that the dollar amounts would be significantly different right now.

Now that's in the rural field where I was. You know, other groups, you know, northern administrators, urban administrators, they're slightly different. You know, there's some variances, but generally speaking it's the same program.

Mr. Belanger: — Yes. And you obviously probably know where I'm going with this. The important note that I would make is that, you know, as a young mayor . . . And for the record, the other guy I ran against was a great guy. I just had a bigger family — no brilliance or hard work or visionary statements of that sort. I just had a bigger family.

But that being said, that being said, I think it's really important to note that with the sage advice of a qualified, certified, and committed administrator, she basically mentored myself as a young mayor. And about the only smart thing I'd done during those first few years was to listen to things that she explained to me, took advice. And as a young mayor, you can take advice from all over and select which advice you want to use. And for the record, I used probably 99.99 per cent of her advice on many things.

Now this situation occurs across the communities in northern Saskatchewan. And it's admirable to establish a goal to have every community with a certified administrator. Now since 2008, we've been undertaking this exercise. So from 2008 as you work your way through to 2014, let's say for last year or this year, whatever the case may be, when you look at the Urban Municipal Administrators' Association of Saskatchewan, UMAAS, it states on their website that there are only nine certified administrators going back to 2011-2012 Government Relations annual report. And then it shows since then only four administrators have been certified.

So how's our progress in getting these northern municipalities having access, from 2008, to qualified, certified administrators? Are we making good progress with all the money we're investing and all the patience and the process we're undertaking through this administrator certification program? How would you characterize the progress thus far?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Just a couple comments first. Your specific question on sort of progress that we're making, I'm going to get Brad to address that. But first of all your comment on the experienced administrator that helped you through the years, I appreciate those comments. You know, when I got into the field, I trained under an excellent experienced administrator. I had a number of mentors and they'd bring an administrator, my brothers in the field that were invaluable to me, and I hope that somewhere along the line I offered some sound advice to elected officials as well.

Before I turn to Brad though, if I could just clarify your comments you said on the urban administrator's website, which is a group I'm very familiar with. I know many of them. You mentioned about 11 qualified. I think, I'm assuming what you're probably referring to, 11 one year and then four the next, is probably the administrators who earned a specific certificate. So like it's not that there's a very small number of them that are qualified. That would be the new ones that would have been joining the field at that time. And Brad, I'll just get you to comment on, you know, the question on how you see we're progressing as far as people being certified.

Mr. Henry: — Sure. I was just looking up the number on my BlackBerry and I didn't get to it, but I can definitely provide that answer for you later. My understanding is that at least in some . . . since we've been here for the communities that are required to have a certified administrator, I believe there's only a small number, like just a couple, that aren't currently with certified administrators. For the vast majority of municipalities in northern Saskatchewan, those that need certified administrators, have them.

Mr. Belanger: — So the 500,000 that you made reference to earlier, that's a new program. Is that correct? That's a fairly new program that you're mentioning, the 500,000 that you've taken from the NMTA.

Mr. Henry: — That's a budget allocation that we've got set aside but it's . . . yes, it's to fund a new program that we're starting, yes.

Mr. Belanger: — Now how about the old program, the one previous to this? Like you obviously have to justify a half-million dollar investment moving forward. How would you characterize the investment in terms of the success of working with the group of administrators, nudging your way to certification? Because you know, as the minister appreciates and I appreciate, you've got to have these people on the ground. You want to talk about capacity building. They've got to be certified. They've got to know what they're doing, because the pressure's on them, and we all know that when the pressure's on individuals they'll rise to the occasion if they're properly trained, certified, and of course appreciated. So we're finding many administrators in some of these northern communities. The burden and the weight on them is incredible, because they are the go-between between the public and of course the local mayors and councils.

So how would you characterize the success rate or, you know, if you could, if you want to hazard a guess in terms of 1 out of 10, 1 being poor and 10 being fantastic? And as well if there isn't a favourable response, what are some of the hurdles or some of

the issues preventing us from getting these administrators certified?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — You know, if I could, that's a difficult question for officials to answer. You know, it's pretty subjective. But I think just to clarify, now my understanding of this new program which I'm just recently sort of learning about as well, it's not necessarily targeted to getting administrators certified. It can be including existing qualified administrators to sort of add to capacity, to add increased training, add more, you know, I guess learning from other experienced people, that sort of thing. It's like additional training, I guess, if you will, which is a bit different than your point, which clearly we agree on is the importance of having qualified personnel in the field.

Mr. Belanger: — Would you . . . How many municipalities would participate in this program from 2008? And how many today, 2014-2015, would be — which is a full seven years, eight years maybe — would be in the process of being certified from 2008 to where we're at now?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — You'd be referring to the LGA program through Northlands in this case. Correct?

Mr. Belanger: — Right.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Yes. Our officials say they don't have those numbers with them, but they should be able to provide them. We'll do a follow-up with you.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. And this is important, Mr. Minister, and the reason why this is important is because the success of the northern municipal governments really depends on the key player being the administrator. And looking back at 2008, 2009, the incredible investment that have been put into this particular process, we have got to track the success of this program. Why? Well (a) we're investing in it, and (b) is that we've got to make sure, where we're investing it in, that it'll beg for more support in the latter years. I'm talking about this year and moving forward. And the most important thing of course is that these administrators, like I said, they play a pivotal role, a really important role, and we have to evaluate how these programs are being delivered if the success rate is not there. I'm not suggesting it's not, but I can almost guarantee from some of the annual reports that we've gleaned over that it doesn't show movement in the right direction to the extent that I thought it would with the investment that's been put in place already.

You've got the U of R. You've got Northlands. You've got the federal government putting money in this. You've got the NRSTA putting money into this. You've got a good partnership base. We know we have the demand, and we know the pivotal importance of having certified administrators. I'm just saying, are we evaluating the program subjectively enough to ensure that all this investment, all this good, solid, hard-earned investment that we're putting towards this LGA program is valued and is meeting its objective of having the numbers of certified administrators working in these northern communities achieved?

So again, how many communities have you started off with, and how many have the certification today, a full eight years after we started this process? That's my final question on that

front.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — If I could just, on that, just to clarify now, the officials will follow up and get those numbers to the committee. But I just want to clarify that when you're talking about the investment that's been put into it, you know, the half million dollars that was budgeted for, I just want to be clear: that was that sort of new initiative, the extra training program that Brad had referred to.

The actual LGA program through Northlands, I don't believe the ministry or the . . . None of that funding was set aside for that. That is your sort of normal process I guess, if you will. The students would apply, be accepted, pay for the programming, get their education. That's sort of a separate thing from the program that we were talking about, but we can certainly get the numbers for you though and follow up because, as I mentioned earlier, you and I clearly agree on the importance of having administrators qualified. We'll certainly follow up with Northlands to see how successful that program's been.

Mr. Belanger: — Right. And it all ties in. When I talk about the . . . And the reason why we identified which issue we're talking about in sequence is it all ties in to the next two or three issues that we're talking about, and one of course is the PSAB tangible asset issue, that you've got to have proper certified administrators to do some of the work. I understand that some of the northern municipalities can't take advantage of the gas tax initiative because they're not in compliance 100 per cent with some of the issues. I want to get that clarified today if that's the case. Again, these are issues I've been hearing out and about and we want to make sure the northern planning for growth, where is that initiative at? The capacity development through New North, you know, where is that initiative at?

So the primary objective of why I led off with the administrative training aspect of that, Mr. Minister, is that as a northern MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly], and I'm glad that you concur with that, is that an administrator is invaluable and worth their weight in gold if we can have them at the disposal of these mayors and councillors. Everywhere you go, the single most important aspect of success of the community really is about the management at the local office, and if you have a good manager there, an administrator, things go well. In any community I've been to, if you have weakness on that front then the community begins to struggle.

[19:45]

So I guess I would make that point, is that we're really watching this aspect about the certification process. Because despite some of the money spent in the past, or if it's a new initiative with the \$500,000 that's being identified today, that there's got to be some ways to measure how this program is meeting its objective. Or if it isn't meeting its objective, how do we begin to correct the issues and the challenges better? Because I'm sure we don't want to waste administrators' time that are going through this process and we certainly don't want to waste taxpayers' investment into this process, and we certainly don't want to collar the municipalities in northern Saskatchewan with this challenge. So I really want to emphasize that as my final point on that issue.

But I understand recently — I'm jumping to another item here — that part of the process now in terms of the Public Sector Accounting Board has indicated, PSAB has indicated that its process of what they want to do now is to do an assessment on the tangible capital assets and also include water and sewer analysis in terms of what the infrastructure is worth in some of these northern communities and what some of their assets are worth in some of these communities. So could you concur with me and explain how the PSAB tangible capital asset in water and sewer analysis rules were put in place here because it's a new rule and how this impacts our northern municipalities.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — So if I could just clarify . . . Now sorry, your question then is whether or not a municipality doing tangible capital assets is a requirement for the federal gas tax grant?

Mr. Belanger: — Well I understood that they have to include the . . . do this new process to make it eligible for the gas tax.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I apologize. I just need one more clarification. Were you talking about the public sector accounting requirement for tangible capital assets, or were you talking about the capital asset management approach?

Mr. Belanger: — Well I was talking about the fact that PSAB put these new rules of accounting in order to be compliant for the audit, thereby making them eligible for the gas tax allocation.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Yes sorry, I'd misunderstood you. Yes, the answer to that, and that goes back a number of years now, basically that the municipalities would have to be in compliance with that in order to be eligible.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. And how many northern municipalities are not compliant right now, thereby making them not eligible for gas tax allocation and projects?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Our officials don't have that information with us, but they'll certainly be willing to provide it to you in a follow-up.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay because I understood that in meeting . . . while it's relatively new, I would say maybe two or three years, the PSAB certification process in terms of their tangible assets, while that's relatively new, we knew the capacity-building process needed to be addressed in terms of administrative qualification. So that work of course is moving along, but we also needed to make sure that the communities themselves undertook this PSAB process of all their tangible assets, including water and sewer. And am I safe to say that there was a consultant hired to assist these northern communities in doing the tangible asset inventory and evaluations? Am I safe to assume as well that the cost for that project was \$1 million?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — The requirements, the accounting changes that you're talking about, I'm told that was actually in 2009. And now as far as your follow-up question on the help that was provided on that, I'm just going to get John Edwards from the ministry to explain what was done.

Mr. Edwards: — John Edwards with policy and program services. Shortly after the requirements were introduced by PSAB to do tangible capital asset planning and accounting, the ministry worked with the New North and the Northern Municipal Trust Account Management Board, and the firm Associated Engineering was hired to undertake work to help ensure that the northern municipalities would be able to comply with the tangible capital asset requirements. Piggybacked on that, there was also an expectation that the consultants would do an analysis of the water and sewer systems in each of the northern municipalities. And thirdly, some additional software was developed in order to store all of that information.

The ballpark number that you threw out was approximately correct. I don't have the exact figure. It was cost shared: partly the ministry, partly northern municipalities contributed individually, and part of the costs came from the northern municipal trust account.

So basically the engineering firm, Associated Engineering fielded staff who went to each and every northern municipality and inventoried their capital assets, went through all the different requirements that were there for tangible capital asset accounting and also did an evaluation of the water and sewer systems in order to determine what further upgrading might be required. And subsequently all of that information was put on a software system that Associated Engineering developed and made available to both the ministry and to individual northern municipalities.

Mr. Belanger: — Is it fair to say that to characterize the PSAB [Public Sector Accounting Board] tangible capital assets including water and sewer analysis process that . . . From what I understand there's three northern villages and all the northern hamlets are currently not receiving gas tax funding because they're uncompliant with this process. Or is it other processes that they're not compliant with? Are you familiar with that?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — There's some detail around this, including the oversight committee, so I'm just going to ask Kathy to walk through that for you.

Ms. Rintoul: — Yes, I thought I'd provide a bit of background on the oversight that's done with regards to the gas tax program. So what we have established is what we call an oversight committee. It's made up of federal, provincial, and municipal representatives. There's two federal officials, two provincial representatives, and then there's two that represent urban, two that represent rural municipalities, and then New North is also one of the representatives on the oversight committee.

A few years back one of the things the committee had asked for was that a compliance strategy be put in place for the federal government funding that's provided to municipalities. And so that's what's led us to the particular requirement that speaks to compliance with the TCA [tangible capital asset], the PSAB section that you've referred to that requires municipalities to be compliant under PSAB and report their tangible capital assets in accordance with that national accounting body.

Mr. Belanger: — Now I would argue that some of the conditions on PSAB, to take advantage of the gas tax is another

hurdle that these northern communities have to go through. And a lot of times we find that some of these federal programs create a disadvantage by putting all these rules and regulations and hurdles, which everyone in the province will probably say, well that's good to do. It's important that you have accountability and transparency at the local municipal level and that you should have certified administrators. That's what the world views. And I share that view, but the problem is they don't have certified administrators despite the effort over the last seven or eight years that we've been tracking this through my office. It's really important that we identify those hurdles.

Now the net effect is where we're at today. We have a lot of northern communities that aren't compliant, not just with certified administrators in terms of getting them to the level that they need to be. And this is not about the administrators; they are working very hard. They're trying their darndest to make the best things happen at these local communities. I know a lot of them personally.

And the problem is that we've got to have the proper support mechanisms. And if we're going to spend the dollars in that area for these administrators to be certified, then we have to find the ways and means to ensure that progress is being made and that we're able to measure success. And we don't have no way of doing that, based on the annual reports that we've looked at that say, well where are we with the administrators' perspective?

And then you couple that with the PSAB certification process, and I go back to my earlier statement, Mr. Minister, is the fact that these northern communities have extra, additional challenges. And you recognized them in your opening statement by indicating an extra \$2 million is going to that, so then we undertake a process to hire Associated Engineering to help them with this PSAB process.

And we spent the \$1 million already, so I guess the second question I'm going to ask is, in 2011 and 2012, the contract with Associated Engineering, was that the first contract, and now we're into the second contract for this PSAB certification? I just want to clarify that.

[20:00]

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Officials tell me that that contract was a one-time thing over a couple of years. But there's just a discussion going on here. Just to help, I guess they're thinking that your years might not be right. They're thinking it's a little bit earlier than that.

Mr. Belanger: — So Associated Engineering, we've spent \$1 million with Associated Engineering. They help with the process called PSAB, tangible capital asset, and of course water and sewer analysis. We've spent that money to date, and I just want to confirm that and that this is a one-time contract.

And I guess the question I have, Mr. Minister, is that based on the \$1 million we've spent with Associated Engineering, are our northern communities, the hamlets and the villages that we are entrusted to assist in this process, are they fully compliant? Because I don't believe they are. And if they are not, could you give me the numbers of those that are or those that are not as a

result of this \$1 million?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — If I could, as I mentioned earlier, our officials will happily provide you with a list of the communities that aren't compliant. I would just draw you back to what Kathy had mentioned earlier though, is that it's not automatically that they're not compliant because of the tangible capital asset issue. There is another number of other reasons that could possibly be the case. We'll certainly provide that information to you as well.

I would just mention again that, you know, the governance committee, the oversight that they're doing, the municipal associations including New North are part of that committee and are fully supportive of this.

Mr. Belanger: — One of the things that's important, Minister, is the sense that in the North, our northern municipal structures need as much help as they can to bring about a level of support in terms of professional administrators, to bring in a level of support in terms of getting the additional resources, such as gas tax. And if there's issues that prevent these northern communities from taking advantage of that and they have not been structurally addressed, then that puts these communities at another disadvantage. And this is where I go back to my earlier point is we've got to pay attention to these files because it's creating a significant amount of angst amongst northern leaders.

Another particular area that I want to add to the process . . . And that's why we ask these questions in these committees is because we've got to get these communities on track and certainly a system, you know, in this regard.

But I want to go to my third component of my four-component presentation. And I've got another 15, 20 minutes here, but I just want to be very quick on this one. Another aspect that I find lacking in the sense of where we're at is this whole northern planning for growth program. As you probably are aware, there was an initiative province wide to do the planning for growth program. I think in the North there has been very little . . . There's been good progress in the South, but in the North we still have a long ways to go. And yet it's the same story again that we've spent money. We've hired people to do some of this work, and yet we've seen that some of the northern communities are still not where they should be, despite the dollars and the time.

Can you give us just a quick overview of what the northern planning for growth program looks like from your vantage point and how the progress has been going in ensuring that we position these northern communities for that growth?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Yes. I'm going to get Kathy to do that in just a minute. I just want to touch a bit on some of the comments you had made earlier though. You know, while I can certainly understand your concern about the communities in the North and administration, I should mention and officials tell me as well, that non-compliance issue isn't exclusively to the North. There's issues with some municipalities in the rest of the province as well. Now having said that, the other thing officials assure me is that all municipalities across the province, including those in the North, there is a very high level of compliance though, and I just wanted to assure you of that. On

that point now, I'll ask Kathy to give you the details on the northern planning for growth.

Ms. Rintoul: — With regards to the planning for growth program for northern municipalities, it is money that was originally established a number of years back, and what it's enabled us as a ministry to do is to provide assistance to municipalities in northern Saskatchewan with regards to working on their official community plans and their zoning bylaws. In our northern municipal services branch that's located in La Ronge, there's two staff there that are planners that help with those particular planning requirements with the northern municipalities. And the other piece of that program too is just simply to help with enhancing regional relationships that would then further support long-term planning within the municipality.

Mr. Belanger: — Time is of essence . . . [inaudible] . . . I thank my colleague for sharing his time with us. But on the northern planning for growth program, we have spent well over \$600-and-some thousand on that process. I'm not certain where the officials are housed or whether they are required to be in the North or who got the contract for doing this kind of work. But exactly how many communities have identified their planning-for-growth strategy? How many communities have done the capacity development planning? How many communities have properly done the zoning plan overall?

And this is all in the annual report, so we can share that information if you'd like, but my argument is that for three and a half years, two hired consultants and the northern municipal services community partner working on the project was a minimum of at least 636,000. So the question we're going to ask is, where are we now? And if there is not good progress, then why isn't there progress there?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — We were trying to see if we could get some numbers for you on the OCPs and zoning bylaws or even some sort of an estimate, but officials don't have those numbers with them tonight. So I apologize for that, but we'll certainly follow up and get those number for you.

Mr. Belanger: — Yes. And we are paying very, very close attention to how this process unfolds because I was disappointed to hear that the officials that we have hired to undertake some of this work are actually out of Saskatoon, and we need people with, you know, with boots on the ground in the northern part of Saskatchewan. We can't have consultants hired that live in Saskatoon and travel to the North on occasion to do some of the work.

We have to have people that are in these communities, understand how these communities operate, understand some of the parameters in which they have to follow all the rules and regulations that are placed upon them, understand that a lot of times they don't have the capacity in these northern communities for walking down the street and getting some municipal advice because there's a lot of people that are in need of this particular training, and the notion that we need to get some of this work done. And it doesn't seem important to a lot of different people that have the responsibility to make sure this happens.

Now I'm fairly passionate about this particular point because —

I go back to my earlier comment — having a certified, qualified administrator opens up so many opportunities for you as a northern leader. And for many of these northern communities, if they're inhibited by that particular challenge, then they can't really reach their full potential. And I'm sorry, Mr. Minister, but having two folks based out of Saskatoon doing some of the planning for growth, we can't have that compassion from a distance.

[20:15]

We need boots on the ground. We need to make sure that some of these programs are operating as effectively as we can. We need to make sure people that are being employed to make that difference, whether it's certification of administrators, achieve excellent results and strive for excellence. That's really, really important to us. We need to make sure that things of the sort of the PSAB tangible asset issue is dealt with accordingly to make these communities eligible for the gas tax. We need to know that the northern planning for growth is there with boots on the ground to make sure these things are happening. The capacity development through New North, how are we tracking that program?

So as you look at some of these initiatives specific for the North, we see there's some structural problems. There is some evaluation issues that have to be addressed. We have to make sure that we push and we strive for excellence on this front. Our northern leaders deserve that. Our northern people deserve that. Our northern communities deserve that. And I cannot stress to you enough the importance of getting some of this work done.

We watch this stuff very carefully. That's my home. That's where I'm from, and that's who I represent. Our people need that kind of assistance to make sure that we are not awarding contracts and tenders that aren't achieving the results that we all want for the northern communities. I think you want that and I want that, so we have to ensure that if this situation continues to occur where we're not tracking the progress, then people out there are watching. And if we can't get it done with one group, then we need to get it done with other groups. And there's tons of people out there that have great experience working in the North.

So I'm going to cut my time a bit short. I wish I had another two hours because I got tons of information here. I really do wish I had two more hours, but the time is something that's valuable to the committee process. And I want to thank my colleague here for giving me the opportunity to share some of his time because I know he's got a lot of things he wants to ask in front of us.

But I want to assure you, Mr. Minister, I appreciate the information that was presented to me. And the stuff that you promised me in terms of getting back to me I would, really do, truly would like to see it, and to assure you that we're tracking this stuff thoroughly and continually. We've got to have progress, especially with the money that we're investing, and more so if we're going to position the North to be a solid part of the province of Saskatchewan. These things have got to be addressed. Thank you.

The Chair: — Okay, the time now being 8:18, we will take a

five-minute recess.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

The Chair: — Thank you very much. The time being now 8:23, we will commence with the committee meeting. And before we start, I would like to submit that we have Trent Wotherspoon subbing in for Doyle Vermette. Okay so, Mr. Wotherspoon, if you would like to formulate your questions.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you very much. Thank you to the minister. Thank you to officials that are here tonight. Thank you to the officials that are here and that work in the ministry throughout the year as well, providing important work. We appreciate it.

I'll get down to . . . We don't have a whole lot of time, so I'll try to have a fairly brisk exchange on some of these matters. I know certainly the minister would be aware, certainly infrastructure is a real important need for municipalities across Saskatchewan, rural and urban. That includes renewal of infrastructure but also new infrastructure.

And I noticed that we were both critical, as in your government and the official opposition, with what the federal government brought forward for municipal infrastructure funding or for infrastructure funding in the budget last week. So I guess I'd just like to touch there. What would have been an appropriate amount of money allocated for Saskatchewan's municipalities when it comes to infrastructure by way of the federal government so that the province could partner with it and partner, of course, with our municipalities?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Well I think our position's been clear right from the start, is that I don't know if it's so much setting a specific dollar amount. Certainly, you know, you're referring to, with municipalities, the Building Canada Fund, no news there recently. It was announced some time ago and the process is unfolding.

I would categorize this as . . . We're certainly appreciative for any funding that will help the province and municipalities on infrastructure. Certainly we've got a huge infrastructure deficit as our economy grows, as our population grows. That adds strain to it, and certainly it's important that we keep up. We look at what's happened in other jurisdictions when they don't, and certainly it causes a great deal of problems.

But as I said, you know, any funding certainly helps, and when you do that in a tripartite way with the Building Canada Fund, you know, you're leveraging your money. The federal dollars certainly help. From the municipal perspective, both . . . the senior level government, their dollars help. But obviously this isn't going to be a panacea for all our problems. Municipalities I think recognize that, and we'll continue.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes, we were disappointed with the dollars that I guess weren't provided by the federal government. And we have, you know, the needs right across Saskatchewan, in communities across Saskatchewan that are imminent for communities, and they come at a big cost for communities and for ratepayers. And certainly I noticed a lot of concern from many of the municipal leaders with the lack of significant

investment on this front from the federal government.

I guess the question I might have is, have you quantified in some sort of way as to what sort of infrastructure, either deficit that we're dealing with on the side of municipalities across Saskatchewan?

[20:30]

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — To your question about quantifying, I understand that some time ago, you know, some work had been done at a very high level. But I think part of the problem with quantifying that is it becomes very subjective. I know from my past in municipal work that you may have a particular asset that, you know, in essence on a book value would be completely depreciated, and yet might still be valuable enough you might not be replacing it.

On the flip side, it's difficult as we grow, as our economy grows, as the population grows, there might very well be new infrastructure needed that's not reflected. You know, one of our officials was saying they were at, some of our people were at an infrastructure conference the other day in Nipawin and, you know, the general sort of consensus of municipal officials around the table there was almost . . . I'm paraphrasing now, but it's almost we don't need a specific dollar amount. We all know it's big, and we have to work to do what we can.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So recognizing that, because it is big and it's certainly infrastructure that's sort of aged out, so that's renewal that's needed. It's the water. It's the waste water, and then it's the growth. It's you know, it's disappointing I think, to not see a full partner in the federal government or a meaningful partner at a time where Saskatchewan's growing because otherwise there's a heavy burden placed upon municipalities and onto ratepayers. And the province plays an important role here as well, but of course that most effective response should be tripartite, should be the federal and the province coming at it directly in partnership with the municipalities.

Now in absence of that, the response right now is inadequate on this front, and it's falling heavily onto municipalities and onto property tax payers. And we're, you know, I'm hearing from so many communities that really that they're falling further behind on this front. What changes are you envisioning when it comes to the way the province may interact with infrastructure? Are you looking at bringing about a stronger response provincially, or what actions are you looking at on this front?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Well I think first of all, your comments on the Building Canada Fund, you know, is there enough money there that it's going to solve our problem? No it's not. But is it significant? Yes it is, and we're appreciative of that.

As far as what else can be done for municipal infrastructure, because obviously we have issues with, you know, provincial infrastructure as well, but on the municipal side, certainly we're going to take advantage of every dollar we can under the Building Canada Fund. We've had other programs over the years, a few years ago — you'll be familiar with the municipal economic enhancement program — to assist municipalities when revenue permitted for us. We're reintroducing SIGIs, the Saskatchewan infrastructure growth initiative. That'll be

valuable.

I think that's what you're going to see happening, is sort of, you know, a series of those programs to assist municipalities. I don't think it's going to be, as I said, Building Canada Fund for instance. It's not one big panacea to all our issues, but I think what you're seeing is sort of a series of tools that municipalities can use to help with their infrastructure issues.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. Well I would take stronger words as it relates to the inadequacy of the federal contribution on this front and, in the end, a joint inadequacy in responding, both federal and provincial, to the infrastructure needs of our growing municipalities. Without this, those communities are impacted in a big way, and so is quality of life.

Certainly we know the municipal infrastructure plays a direct and meaningful role in the quality of life of Saskatchewan residents, so it's an area that I think we have to be more strident in calling upon the federal government to be a better partner, and I think the current structure is a fraction of what's needed on the federal side. And on the provincial side the response is not sufficient, so certainly, you know, we need to see greater action from the province with our municipalities to support infrastructure renewal and the new infrastructure that's required across the province.

I noted the comments that came along with the budget around some transit dollars or dollars that might be dedicated to transit infrastructure. I'm not sure what that means necessarily for Saskatchewan, whether or not . . . I don't know which communities might be able to tap into those and to what extent. So I'm just looking to the minister as to what that program looks like for Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I guess before I speak to your questions about the federal announcement in transit, I would just have to vehemently disagree with your preface to that on, I believe you called it an inadequate response from the provincial government. We're full participants, and we will be full participants in the Building Canada Fund, as I mentioned, a couple of other programs: the municipal economic enhancement program; SIGI, the Saskatchewan infrastructure growth initiative. We've taken a number of steps to help municipalities in infrastructure.

I notice one of them is one which I realize you don't usually typically like to talk about, which is revenue sharing for municipalities, based on when you folks were in government, on your record on that, but a record number of dollars flowing to municipalities on municipal revenue sharing which is completely unconditional which they can use for anything, including infrastructure.

Now to your questions on the transit announcement recently by the federal government, our officials tell me it's going to be \$750 million over two years starting in '17-18, and thereafter \$1 billion per year, but we don't have a lot of details on that yet. Our officials will be talking to federal officials, and we hope we'll have more information on that in the coming weeks.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — We need more action on these fronts. And you know, municipalities, if you meet with them across

Saskatchewan, the realities they're facing are here and now. The costs are here and now. That's being passed along to ratepayers, and it's also limited some of the decisions of municipalities. So we need leadership from the province. Yes, we need leadership from the feds. We need better leadership from both.

As far as revenue sharing, certainly I've spoken about it often. It's an important measure of support for municipalities. We were greatly concerned when it was being threatened to not be followed through with this year. That's an important commitment to municipalities to plan with. But really, when I chat with municipalities and we work through the budgets that they're dealing with, those dollars are there for operating. It's the municipal operating grant, so I think it's not appropriate for the minister to suggest that this is somehow an infrastructure program as well. Certainly there's no strings attached to those dollars, but the fact of the matter is municipalities are in a tight spot right now with dealing both with operational demands and capacity but also on the infrastructure side of the equation.

I guess I want to just have the minister clarify because certainly revenue sharing is an important commitment to municipalities, but it certainly was never supposed to be the solution on infrastructure itself. This was all about operations and the needs for growing communities. So if the minister could just clarify if he feels that somehow revenue sharing is a . . . Is he suggesting that's his government's solution for infrastructure?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I'd be happy to clarify because your preface is completely wrong. Municipal revenue sharing for a brief period of time was referred to as MOG, or the municipal operating grant, which you had said. When the formula was redone for municipalities, at no time since then has this program ever been dictated to be for operating — not at all. It's completely unconditional. Many municipalities use it for infrastructure to help fund infrastructure. I think that's as clear as I can make it.

But I think the other thing that's important to recognize is the dollar figures that are in the revenue-sharing pool since we've taken office have increased enormously. And certainly we can continue on in this vein of questioning because I'd love to share some of those dollar figures with you.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well I think what municipal leaders deserve and certainly what taxpayers deserve that are seeing, you know, the impact of inadequate support, is that on the revenue-sharing side, this is an important commitment. Certainly it's grown. It's supposed to grow along with the economy. That was the point of that fund.

I'm disappointed in the minister to, you know, to sort of suggest somehow that this is an adequate response to the infrastructure needs of municipalities. Certainly if you sit down with the growing cities in this province, it's no adequate response to the infrastructure needs that they're facing.

So it just seems that there's a bit of a government that's a bit out of touch on that point with what municipalities are facing and the pressures that they're facing. And as far as the actual revenue increase, it's certainly revenue sharing. The municipal operating grant has grown as it should. But that being said, the

dollars to municipalities certainly haven't grown in proportion to the record revenues that this government has experienced, so there's significant disconnect between the two on that front.

I'd be interested in hearing a bit about where paratransit support is at. I know we've discussed it in this committee before. I think I can go back and review some of the comments from last year, but I believe there was an undertaking to have a committee and some sort of a review. I believe there's been some actions on that front. I'd be interested in hearing an update as to where the review and where actions are to better support paratransit.

The Chair: — I'm just going to make sure to remind all the members to pose it in a form of a question because we're getting into a bit of a debate here. I think that the whole point of estimates is to pose questions so that the minister can then respond to those questions, and I'm going to ask both the member and everyone here to do so in a very respectful manner. So thank you.

[20:45]

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I'm going to get Kathy to delve a little bit into the work that's being done by committee on the paratransit. But if I would — and I will be mindful, Madam Chair, of your recent instructions — but I would like to just touch on an issue that Mr. Wotherspoon raised during his preface, which was I believe he referred to as our government being out of touch with municipalities. I certainly take great exception to that.

My career, entire career before politics was in municipal work. Some of my closest friends are still in municipal work. I take great pride on the relationship our government has with municipalities across the province. And while I phrase it as not frequently, I do see you at some municipal association conventions, that sort of thing, including the recent dialogue session at SUMA, which I know you were there when a number, a number of delegates praised our government for the work that we've done with and for municipalities.

So having said that, I'll ask Kathy to update you on the paratransit.

Ms. Rintoul: — I'll just start with a bit of background on the disability strategy. It was something that was part of the Saskatchewan plan for growth, and it's something that's led by our Ministry of Social Services. The Ministry of Government Relations is one of the partner ministries on this particular initiative and it focuses on a number of priority areas: community inclusion, support for caregivers, transportation, employment, and education. And in particular, the Government Relations role has been lead on the transportation aspect of those priorities.

There was a citizen consultation team that was established and that consists of 15 members of the disability community. That was an appointment that was made about a year and a half ago, and that was really just to consult with Saskatchewan people about disability issues.

Those consultations, they were very extensive. They began in April of 2014 and were held for a number of months. In the fall we have what we call a group of officials, consisting of some

members from our ministry as well as other ministries that are leading some of the priority files. And from that point draft recommendations have come forward. That's really where the strategy is at right now, is that there are recommendations that have been drafted and are under consideration.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you for that information. When will the recommendations be able to be made public? Are you able to speak to the general content of those recommendations at this time?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I think it's anticipated . . . You know, I don't think there's specific dates yet, but I think sometime this summer.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And the recommendations, as minister have you had a chance to review these recommendations yet at this point in time?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Just a very broad update. Nothing specific yet.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Certainly I thank the work of all involved in the review in the committee, including ministry folks. It's an important undertaking. Timely responses is important as well. My question would be, when did submissions or recommendations come to the minister or ministry by way of time?

Ms. Rintoul: — So in terms of the feedback that we had gotten last spring, in June of 2014, since that time there's been analysis done on that. And in December of 2014 the citizen consultation team worked on their particular document that summarized the public consultation feedback.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. So were the recommendations able to inform some of the budgetary considerations for this year for your government?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — No. It's still in draft form. It wouldn't have.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. And have you been able to analyze what some of the budgetary impacts of the recommendations would be?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Yes, officials are still working on that. Al tells me it hasn't even been to the deputy level really except, you know, in a general way.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. And the recommendations, has there been consultation or have municipalities that are impacted, that are dealing with paratransit, have they had a chance to review those draft recommendations at this point in time?

Ms. Rintoul: — Just with regards to that citizen consultation team that I had mentioned, it's actually comprised of people from the disability community so they've been very involved in the process.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — No, and I really appreciate that contribution and that service they've provided. Have the

municipalities themselves been . . . Are they aware of the recommendations at this time and have they had a chance to share their perspective?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — As we indicated, our folks are not the lead on that. Social Services is, so we're going to have to do some follow-up for you as far as what consultation has happened and not, so we'll provide that to the committee. I would also just mention, specifically to the paratransit part of this, our ministry folks have pretty regular dialogue with municipalities on this issue so I think there's pretty regular feedback on that particular program. But I want to make sure I get to the heart of your question so we'll follow up with the committee in writing on that.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you very much. And if there is information to be provided back to us as committee members, I'd appreciate that as well. Certainly paratransit needs to be better supported and certainly some element of structural change to that is probably important, so I appreciate the work, certainly, of the ministry to take a look at this. Now I think just the key's going to be that . . . And I certainly appreciate the citizen consultation process and those that have been engaged. I don't know the process well but I know this is an important issue to municipalities in Saskatchewan so it's something that we'll certainly continue to follow up on and look for action in a timely way as well. So certainly we'll look forward to those recommendations and hopefully a timeline around actions and implementation from government.

[21:00]

Maybe moving along to a couple of the other areas that I want to make sure I touch on here, and I'm cognizant of time, I want to get a sense of what sort of places you're dealing with pressure right now on sort of the emergency response side of the equation, where infrastructure's been degraded or where there's challenges going on. I know certainly, I know first hand that region and I've heard from many folks as well and have toured it as well, but that region out certainly from Southey up through Silton and up north and from there, it's an area with extreme high water right now. And I know we've certainly had the debate and we don't need to do in this forum because it's not about highways, but 322 and 220 and No. 20 and the degradation that's occurred there.

But I'm interested when it comes to the rural grid roads. And if you look at across that region, basically you've got really high water and in many cases grid roads that are under water, in many cases almost every 4 miles, it seems. And so it seems a real challenge for producers to get equipment in to the fields for seeding here this spring and all sorts of other issues from a safety perspective for those that are living in the region. So I'd like to hear a little bit about that very specific region, what actions are being taken, and then also about other pressure points throughout the province.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — To start with, in that specific region you're talking about . . . Sorry, I don't remember exactly what day it was, but in the last few days I had a discussion with a reeve in that area and certainly he was expressing to me some of the issues that you're talking about, grid roads being flooded. You know, they had to do a lot of focus on particular farm sites,

houses that they were concerned about and, you know, doing work to help protect them. You know, it's certainly a stressful time for them.

I'm going to ask Duane in just a minute to give us, you know, sort of an overview of specifically what our ministry folks have done to assist there and then from there talk about any other areas that, you know, certainly we're concerned about. But I would just add the reeve that I spoke to also was highly complimentary of Duane and his staff and the great work that they've been doing to assist them. He certainly couldn't say enough about not only the response, but a timely response. So with that, Duane, if you could elaborate for us.

Mr. McKay: — Throughout the province we have not seen the level of flooding that we have in the past. Or that's not necessarily the case in the Southey and the RM of Cupar area. We have seen an increase in the amount of water that's accumulated in that area and, as you have described, it is impacting significantly in our infrastructure, particularly the grid roads that are in the area, which is restricting access into some particular areas.

It unfortunately is a particularly difficult situation because there's no natural drainage out of that area, so a lot of pumping has to take place in order to move the water and simply that takes a very long period of time. The water draining into the area certainly will drain in from all angles and, you know, an 8-inch pump will take a very long time to move that out. However that is what's occurring. And I think in some cases the pumping is over 6 miles to get over the elevation of land to have it flow back into a natural grade.

In addition to that, it is creating some difficulties with the infrastructure in around Southey and our people are in contact with them on almost a daily basis to ensure that whatever materials that are required to help them manage that, that they have access to that.

I might also say that both in the RM and in the town, the management of this particular incident is outstanding. They are looking after their citizens. They are taking appropriate steps. And there isn't a lot you can do. They're managing the best that they can, along with the Water Security Agency assisting them in technical data and long-term plans. But it is being managed the best that it is and we'll continue to support them with whatever materials that they require. And as I said before, we're in contact with them on a very regular basis to assist wherever we can.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — If I could I would just add to that as well, sort of as a follow-up. You know, Duane's folks handling the emergency response part, but also as you imagine there'd be a number of PDAP claims there as well and our PDAP folks will be having an information night, I believe it's next week, to provide information to folks and assist with applications and that sort of thing.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you. And certainly thank you to Mr. McKay and your team and your leadership. We really appreciate that.

You referenced one of the RMs. Are you working as well with

the RM of McKillop?

Mr. McKay: — All of the affected RMs. We're in close contact. As I said before, we don't have the widespread flooding that we've seen in the past, so it allows us to stay very focused in the affected areas.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And when it comes to issues around isolation or the lack of ability to get emergency services to residents, have you done an audit through that area as to how many households are impacted on that front?

Mr. McKay: — I don't have that information with me right now, but we have had a look at that. We work very closely with Health as well for their ambulance transports and of course we do have STARS [Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society] now that is available for those emergencies.

We are working with the municipalities to determine how best to access those. I think there's only a few homes that are actually where there is no access. In some of those, people have vacated those areas so the emergency levels would be a little bit lower.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — You talked about some of the measures to address the high water and it's recognizing that it's quite difficult by way of geography in some cases, and just with the volume of water that's there. What sort of timelines is the ministry putting on being able to remedy, I guess, the lack of access that exists throughout this region right now?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — To your question, first I would just mention, earlier in your question or the question before I guess, you mention the RM of McKillop. The PDAP officials were telling me that they met with the RM of McKillop last week to discuss some drainage options and that sort of thing, so to that point.

To your other question, you know, we're just discussing this here. It's almost impossible to predict because it actually comes down to predicting the weather, right? If over the next period of weeks and months we get some heavy rains and the weather's not co-operative, it could exacerbate the problem substantially. You know, evaporation can vary depending on the weather, on the heat, wind, those sorts of things, so unfortunately the timeline could be a long time. They can't rebuild roads that are under water, and we've seen in some other areas where that's been the case, flooding in past years and, you know, they're still unable to do it. So unfortunately it's not possible to predict.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — As far as the meeting this last Friday with the RM of McKillop, I'm just wondering what . . . Certainly I know the pressures there and the concerns. I'm just wondering what commitments your government was able to bring to the table and what timeline actions will flow.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — PDAP officials tell me that they brought some engineers with them to the meeting with the RM of McKillop and the discussion revolved around the engineers were going to look at the drainage systems and do a study and come back with some possible alternatives that can be considered. We'll be paying for the study and we're hoping that will be fairly soon. They're going to be starting it within a

couple of weeks, I guess, and a few weeks after that hopefully we'll be at the point where our officials can review it and then have a discussion with the municipality.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So the study will start in a couple of weeks, or more urgent than that?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — They tell me the study will start within two weeks.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well certainly I appreciate that there's been the meeting and I would urge sort of that urgent, focused attention on the region. It's an area where there's definite safety concerns that exist, but also just a real impact to quality of life and livelihood within the region. As I say, you know, it's difficult to find a passable grid road and it's going to be awfully difficult for anyone that's trying to get into the fields for seeding here any time soon. What about some of the other regions? Where else are you identifying concerns across the province? What's the status of the Quill Lakes?

Mr. McKay: — There are several areas in the province that have experienced high water and continue to. Quill Lakes is one of those. We have seen a significant increase in the amount of water in that particular area and, as you know, Highway 6 has been lifted in order to maintain an open highway at that particular area. That water continues to accumulate and we are looking at options with the Water Security Agency to make sure that it doesn't impact on farmers in that particular area, although it is a very flat area and so as long as it continues to accumulate, it will continue to spread out on land and that will have an impact on the agricultural capability there.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And certainly there's questions I know that we've taken forward to Agriculture about appropriate support. It really is swallowing up a lot of farm land out there, which is a real concern but it's also a concern that it potentially could breach banks. I guess, could you give us an understanding of where it was at last spring, where it was at in the fall, and where it's at now?

[21:15]

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Yes. That would probably be better directed to the Water Security Agency.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Are you engaged in having updates? Do you have an understanding of the trend anyways and how urgent a potential breach, you know, could be?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — You know, I'm certainly aware that there's a great deal of concern around there but again as far as sort of imminent concerns and where exactly we're at today, that would be better put to the Water Security Agency.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. It's continuing to increase though. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — That's my understanding.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Do you know roughly how much room, how much is left that as far as what it would take for it to breach?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I apologize again. Those questions should be for the Water Security Agency.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Do you know what measures have been taken if it did breach its banks to prevent broader damage to farm land and the immediate region or Last Mountain Lake — all the areas that could be impacted, of course?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — You know, to your question about the farm land, I think you mentioned you either did or were going to discuss that with the Agriculture minister. He'd have a better handle on farm land being impacted. And to the other lakes involved, again that would be Water Security Agency.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. So we can certainly spend some time with the Water Security Agency. It's an important item of course for potential response from your ministry. Hopefully it doesn't get there. Hopefully measures can be taken that will mitigate this and manage it, but it's a big concern with really large consequences as a saline water body. Are there other spots across the province that you'd like to note that are of specific concern and receiving your attention?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — In terms of flooding, you know, I think Duane has kind of covered the main areas of concern this year. But you know, what I would add is, last year probably about this time, you know, we didn't anticipate any problems and you saw what happened late June with just an immense amount of rain across a huge area, and we had some areas just devastated. So while as of right now, you know, the areas that Duane walked you through are kind of the primary areas of concern, we're also mindful of the fact that that could change at any time.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for that information. When it relates to the public safety budget (GR11), I notice some fairly significant reductions in a couple of areas, and I would like to get an understanding of what those changes represent and what the impacts will be. Specifically in public safety, the building standards and licensing has received a reduction of about 31 per cent. \$423,000 has been reduced in this budget year.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — That one was a case of the program winding up, the seniors' home security program. When it was announced and implemented, it was for a period of time and it's been wound down now. So that's why you see the reduction.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for the information. The seniors' home security program, just tell us a little more about when it was initiated and what it provided.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Sorry, I just had to check with officials to refresh my memory. It was a four-year program. It wrapped up last year, '14-15, at \$500,000 per year for a total of \$2 million.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And what was it that it was delivering specifically?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — We're just testing everybody's memory here. The program they're telling me was targeted for low-income seniors or seniors who had been victims of a break-in, and it covered a number of different things, notably things like deadbolts, the eyeholes or peepholes or whatever

you call them in a door for security reasons, and also smoke alarms. It covered those types of things.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And it was discontinued this year or the program . . .

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — It ran its course. When it was announced, it was a four-year program and the four years are up.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Was there a program evaluation run on it through Finance?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I don't believe so. The officials don't think so.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — From your perspective, did it meet its goals?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — You know, officials tell me there wasn't a huge uptake on it, but it did help, you know, a reasonable number of seniors around the province. You know, it was never intended to be an ongoing program so I would say it would be considered a success, yes.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Did it address the need or does the need continue to persist that it was aimed to address?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Our officials, as the program began and over the four-year term of it, I think did a good job of allowing groups . . . you know, Al just mentioned, for instance, they'd inform senior centres, groups like that, of the program. I think they did a pretty good job of making its availability known. And my understanding is, I think especially in the latter part of the program, I believe the uptake was sort of declining, which I think would speak to the fact that the people who, you know, wanted the program, and the pent-up demand, if you will, kind of was taken care of in the early years of the program. So like I said, I would consider it I think a success. It was a platform commitment we had made that we honoured and, you know, it ran its term and did okay.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Just moving along to some of the other cuts that have occurred within public safety, could you speak specifically to the \$380,000 cut to public safety telecommunications and speak to what the impact of that is?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — The reduction there isn't so much. You know, you portrayed it as a cut, but what it was, it was due to capital requirements and expansion of the system. So I'm just going to get Duane to elaborate on that.

Mr. McKay: — The public safety, or provincial public safety telecommunications network represents one of the largest land-based radio systems in Canada — well I guess it is the largest in Canada — and it was designed in order to provide radio communications for all of the affected areas where population is.

As we've continued to build that system over the last several years, we've reached a point now where we don't require as big an expansion to it in order to accommodate the public safety radio requirements. So in our particular part, which is some of the equipment and some of the site or equipment that goes into

a repeater site, the demand is beginning to reduce. And so we've cut the costs associated with that. We're reaching a maturity level with the radio system now.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And does the . . . I appreciate the rationalization. Does the change in funding impact the range or the effectiveness of what's been established?

[21:30]

Mr. McKay: — No, this money would have been for capital expansion. And as I had mentioned before, we've built a lot of sites in the last little while. There's still a few sites that need to be built, but we can only build so many in a particular year. So this will just allow us to continue with our build program, but it doesn't have to be quite as big as it was in the past, so it won't affect the radio system in any way.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for that information. And the sites that need to be built, the ones that currently aren't in place, where are the gaps?

Mr. McKay: — I don't have that list with me. But it's basically we've got the entire province covered. And we're going back in now based on requirements by public safety users to see where there is gaps, and then we'll go in and build into those gaps to make sure that there's appropriate radio coverage in those areas. We could provide you a list of the sites that are currently under development.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I'd appreciate if you're able to provide just those that are under development right now and then where the gaps are, so sort of where the next, you know, tranche of new development may occur. So that would be wonderful.

Moving along to PDAP, I know each year I like to get an understanding of where PDAP claims are at, PDAP files are at. And you know, certainly this is an important program to those that need it. And certainly in general, I think I'd like to say, you know, certainly put it on the record the appreciation for those that are making sure that those claims are dealt with. But I would like to get an understanding of how many claims have been filed so far just in the current year.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — So far from municipal there's three designations so far. There's 27 that are in process that are dealing with their staff, and there's no private claims yet.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. And what about 2014?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — 2014. First of all, overall I'm going to back up, if you don't mind, just a little bit before that. 2010-2013, we've got over 98 per cent of the claims are all done now.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So while you're doing that, I appreciate you going back like that. If you're able to, then are you able to share then how many outstanding claims in each of those years exist as opposed to just the percentage?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — We certainly will be able to. I'm going get . . . I'll run through the percentages right now, if you don't mind, and meanwhile I'll get the staff to get the actual numbers

ready for you. 2014, you had asked about that — 81 per cent of residential claims are closed from last year. That's 2014.

And while they're getting those numbers together, I think it's probably an appropriate time, if I'd beg your indulgence. Our PDAP staff and ministry staff going all the way up to the deputy — but you know, Margaret and Tamie are here with us tonight — have just done . . . You can imagine the stress that's put on our staff with all the claims from last year, and they've just done a tremendous job getting claims dealt with. I just want to acknowledge that. And now we should have some numbers for you.

You'd asked for the numbers from 2010 to 2013. The total claims received was 16,803. There's 16,528 are closed and 275 are still open. I'm sorry, did you get that? Did you . . .

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — You got that. Okay. And the residential claims for last year that I had referenced, there was, of the total of 3,230 residential claims received, there's 2,637 have been closed. That's a total of just under 82 per cent. I'd said 81. Okay, I'm sorry. I should just . . . Al's telling me I should split those out: 2,211 have been closed; 426 they refer to it as fast-tracked, where they still have a period of days I guess to do an appeal.

A Member: — 30.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thirty days to an appeal. So those combined would be the 2,637 for 81 per cent.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well thanks for that information. Certainly thanks to those officials and people that are dealing with those claims as well. It's really important that they're dealt with in a timely way. It's people's lives that have been impacted and certainly communities that have been impacted.

There was the reference to the residential claims. What about those that are impacting municipalities?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — That was included in the total claims I gave you from 2010-2013. The big bulk from last year would still be outstanding because the issues we had discussed: for instance, road rebuilding, that kind of thing can't be done right away. I will try to get those for you in just a minute.

Officials tell me there's 198 from last year, municipal claims. And then there are still some from previous years as well because there's some instances from some years where, you know, I always use roads as the example, but where they're still effectively under water. So there are some from previous years as well.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Certainly those responses are important as well, and you're going to be dealing with some of these municipalities and RMs [rural municipality] that are impacted right now that are definitely going to need a very timely response. And I know that in part, I hope is part of what those meetings are about here right now, making sure those flow of dollars and, where there's possible, to partner with equipment and make some things possible is going to be really important.

I wouldn't mind hearing a bit of a breakout on the funding for emergency management and fire safety. I see an increase there, and I'm just wanting to better understand what the components are of that allocation, and what's, I guess, what the impacts are of the funding changes?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Just going to get AI to elaborate on that.

Mr. Hilton: — So in light of the events over the last two or three years, the emergency management and fire safety operation budget had some real pressures to it, so we increased the operations budget by about \$700,000.

We had also negotiated a draft agreement with the federal government on emergency management on reserve, and that would've required an expenditure of \$1 million. So \$1 million was added to our budget in order to provide us the appropriation for that agreement if it gets signed and implemented.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well we'll track that forward. Certainly these are important measures, important protections, and certainly that coordination and partnership as well right across Saskatchewan, whether you're dealing with rural and municipal volunteer firefighters or those on reserve, this is an important area for some coordination. And certainly we'll track that moving forward.

I know the Chair mentioned to me that I should wind up my questions just with the time here tonight, and I know not to mess with Madam Chair. But I do at this point just simply want to say thanks to the minister for his time here this evening, and certainly to officials that are here this evening but also for the work that they do throughout the year, and all those other officials and civil servants within the respective ministries. Thank you very much.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. We will adjourn consideration of the estimates and supplementary . . . Yes?

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Can I make some comments as well?

The Chair: — I'm not done yet . . . estimates for the Ministry of Government Relations. I would like to now ask the minister for some closing comments.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to thank you for your time tonight. I'd like to thank Mr. Wotherspoon and his colleagues who had questions earlier. I'd like to thank all the committee members, and I would certainly like to thank all our officials for putting in what was quite a long day. I'd like to thank them for their support. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. And I would ask a member to move for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Merriman. Thank you very much. The committee stands adjourned to the call of the Chair.

[The committee adjourned at 21:45.]