



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Hansard Verbatim Report

No. 2 – March 17, 2008



Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

Twenty-sixth Legislature

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
2008**

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Last Mountain-Touchwood

Ms. Judy Junor, Deputy Chair
Saskatoon Eastview

Mr. Denis Allchurch
Rosthern-Shellbrook

Mr. Cam Broten
Saskatoon Massey Place

Ms. Doreen Eagles
Estevan

Mr. Serge LeClerc
Saskatoon Northwest

Mr. Greg Ottenbreit
Yorkton

[The committee met at 16:00.]

The Chair: — Well, committee members, it is 4 o'clock, our appointed hour. I will call the committee to order. Our order of business today, pursuant to rule 146(1) the supplementary estimates for the following ministries were deemed referred to the committee on March 10, 2008: vote 73, Corrections, Public Safety and Policing; vote 25, Education; and vote 32, Health. The first item on our agenda is vote 73, Corrections and Public Safety.

**General Revenue Fund
Supplementary Estimates — March
Corrections, Public Safety and Policing
Vote 73**

Subvote (CP06)

The Chair: — I see we have Minister Hickie here with us. Minister, welcome. And would you like to introduce your officials that you have here with you today?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Absolutely. If I can, I'd like to introduce: to my right, Terry Coleman, my deputy minister. Just in the back here to my left, Maureen Lloyd is my assistant deputy minister of Corrections. Barb Clarke, director of financial planning and operations to my left.

Marlys Tafelmeyer, executive director, human resources, in the second row. I've got: Murray Sawatsky, executive director of policing services division; Tom Young, executive director, protection and emergency services as well; Karen Lautsch, executive director, strategic planning in the second row. Chris Selinger, acting executive director, licensing and inspections branch; and Sandy Tufts, executive assistant to the deputy minister.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Minister, do you have an opening statement that you'd like to make at this time?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Yes I do. Thank you very much. If I can, I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide you with some information and to answer your questions on the 4.2 million being provided to local authorities of Fishing Lake and Waldsea Lake for protecting their properties to reduce the impact of future flooding.

This funding has already been announced. As residents of the affected areas are in a dire situation, we announced the funding to give hope to those in the area. As well, much of the work the funding is going towards must be completed before the spring thaw.

My ministry, Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, is responsible for supporting Saskatchewan communities in responding to emergencies and to recover from natural disasters.

Last spring five communities surrounding Fishing Lake and Waldsea Lake experienced widespread flooding where water levels remained at record levels and did not recede to more normal levels. I should point out that the flooding that occurred

at these lakes was unique as both lakes are part of dead-end basins and experience periods of very high and low water levels. Times of high waters can remain significantly longer than most areas, where a flooding condition is a rapid onslaught, followed shortly after with receding waters.

As well as coordinating the province's emergency response in support of local authorities, my ministry along with Saskatchewan Watershed Authority was also charged with managing the previous administration's direction to reduce water levels so properties could be stabilized, cleaned up . . . clean up could begin and longer-term measures could be considered to reduce the risk of future flooding.

CPSP [Corrections, Public Safety and Policing] officials began development of a flood protection program that will be partially funded by government. This was to be an incentive for residents and local authorities to take their own steps to reduce the impact of future high water levels by building to elevations where the risk of flooding would be reduced. By the end of October the water surrounding the cabins had been removed. Local authorities' attention had turned to assessing the next steps required by the communities for greater protection of their properties.

The communities' flood protection planning efforts were at a stage earlier this year where government needed to move to provide financial support. That way communities and property owners anxious to begin cleanup and restoration of their properties could make appropriate decisions knowing the province was there to provide some level of support. Evolving situations at Fishing and Waldsea lakes have continued to further deplete the communities' capacity to address the flood situation.

Their focus on cleanup and recovery from last year are merging with this spring's concerns and future flood protection planning. This is resulting in a considerable degree of concern and frustration. Therefore it was necessary to move forward to add some reassurance of provincial support at this time and announcing the provision of financial support for long-term flood protection plans. The announcement made by me and Minister Draude was an opportunity to address the communities' concerns, to restore confidence, to begin the recovery and restoration process, and to re-engage the communities.

The interim funding of 4.2 million will not only meet the public commitment to ensure the safety and the security of the five communities at Fishing and Waldsea lakes, it will reduce the risk to the communities, individuals, and government of future emergency disaster recovery costs, which potentially could be double or triple the costs of this program. I should also point out that the total figure of 4.2 million is comprised of 3.5 million in special warrant funding, with the remainder reallocated out of my ministry's '07-08 operating budget as a result of some found efficiencies.

There are several significant benefits to providing mitigative support to the five communities affected by the flooding at Fishing and Waldsea lakes. It enables the government to meet the public commitment made earlier to the Fishing and Waldsea

lake communities for the flood protection program. It reinforces the government's strong support for public safety and security of communities. It provides local authorities with a long-term, flood protection plan. It reduces risk to the communities, individuals, and government of future emergency disaster recovery costs, which potentially could be double or triple the cost of this program. And it provides maximum flexibility to cabinet to fund this program beginning in 2007 and 2008 out of current revenues.

And we will learn about choices on the second instalment within the next few days. Flooding season commences within the next few weeks, and local authorities and residents are anxious to receive funding for either flood protection that they have already started, or for flood protection that they want to commence. They are aware the government is providing a substantial amount of money to help them undertake works which they will need to formally adopt in their flood protection plans, and each community has received some indication of the total amount they might expect.

I should point out that at the same time the province is providing this funding for flood protection, local authorities and the residents will also be responsible for a significant portion of their own costs. Local authorities will be responsible to decide on how the funding will be best applied and managed to assist local property owners and the community in accordance with their plans. Communities will be notified immediately of financial support to enable them to proceed with their flood protection plans. Further delay will cause additional financial hardship and prolong decisions made by many property owners in reinvesting in their properties and their communities, as well add pressure for the government to respond more quickly.

Local authorities of the five communities are in the process of carrying out due diligence work in designing community plans to manage the current situations caused by the 2007 flood and future flooding issues. These groups look to the province to provide financial support in designing and implementing the measures agreed upon as part of the plan. The communities already understand the funding is conditional on the approval of an emergency community flood protection plan which must meet the criteria established by CPSP, Municipal Affairs, and the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority.

Flood protection plans are underway in each local authority in anticipation of the funding required for the program. Before funding is dispersed locally, the ministry and local authorities need to resolve some further details on program and process, including support required to assist the communities with their plans and administrative procedures.

There are many stakeholders to this issue, each with their own unique concerns.

Fishing Lake and Waldsea Lake residents. These stakeholders are anxious to know there will be funding to complete their flood protection initiatives. They will welcome news of the actual funding and will be anxious to understand the actual flood protection program criteria, accompanied by tangible dollar amounts they can expect to receive. Those who dislike the flood protection criteria will want other options.

Fishing Lake First Nations and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. Their concerns focus on treaty and fishing rights and how the berms impact on fish habitat. They will have a strong interest in the plans of the communities and local property owners as they relate to those concerns.

Landowners within Fishing Lake and Waldsea Lake drainage basins. Some landowners faced with a drainage moratorium and the possibility of having to close existing drainage ditches will feel their interests are being sacrificed in favour of cottage owners and the Fishing Lake First Nations. These are linked to the longer term effects on the water levels at the lake.

The public. Some members of the public will sympathize with the community residents who have been dealing with the situation for nearly a year. Others will be concerned with the province providing funding to summer cottagers when many other priorities also exist. Confirmation of flood protection criteria and accompanying interim funding will help reframe public perception and understanding that local authorities and property owners will still be bearing a large financial burden to restore their properties and communities.

Recently Minister Draude and I met with both the Fishing Lake First Nations and the communities affected by the floods. At those meetings we indicated our commitment to supporting their actions in developing and implementing emergency flood protection in the communities. The province has made every effort to communicate and inform all groups on a regular basis on the issues. In addition proposals and policies have been developed and prepared with consideration of the concerns and interests as a result of informal discussions with the First Nations community, the Fishing Lake Administrative Council, and the cabin owners at Fishing and Waldsea lakes.

There is no question that the situation at Fishing Lake and Waldsea Lake is complex and that it involves many different points of view. I am, however, confident that the 4.2 million in interim funding for flood protection will serve both the province and the residents of those areas well in the future by mitigating the potential for further expense and hardship from future high water levels and by underscoring government's commitment to helping Saskatchewan citizens protect themselves and their property from the effects of natural disasters. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister, for that information. I will now open the floor to committee members for questions. Mr. Yates.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. My first question has to do with . . . Both the department of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing and the Watershed Authority are getting an allocation of money dealing with the problem in Fishing Lake and Waldsea Lake. Could you explain to me the difference in the funding that's going to your department and that which is going to the Watershed Authority, exactly what the money is for in each case.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Certainly. In my ministry the money's going to mitigative efforts such as raising cabin lot levels to the required elevation as prescribed by Saskatchewan Watershed Authority. As well the funding will also go to helping assist the cabin owners to move their cabins off and backfill to that

elevation level and to move their cabins back once again.

Mr. Yates: — So the funding under Corrections and Public Safety, the \$3.58 million, is about raising lot levels and raising cabins, taking them up, taking them off if necessary and putting them back.

Now you'd indicated in your opening remarks that you're working with the communities. Is the investment going directly to the municipalities to administer? Or how is that process going to occur?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — I'll refer that to Tom Young. He'll have all the particulars regarding that, if you like, as to how we're going to do that actual formula.

Mr. Yates: — Yes. All our questions are probably along this line.

Mr. Young: — Yes. The funding will go directly to the local authorities and they will determine just exactly how they will disburse it within each jurisdiction.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, do you have any indication or are there parameters or rules in which the municipalities must adhere to in distribution of these funds?

Mr. Young: — Yes. We're working out some of the details still and some of the administrative processes. But basically the initiatives or the works that would be covered have to be in accordance with their flood protection plans. So the window of accessing the funds, first of all, is getting the plans approved and ensuring that the works are included in those plans. And from there it, basically you start to get into more detail. The flood protection initiatives have to address future mitigation and reducing the risk of future floods.

Mr. Yates: — Is there any provision to ensure fairness of distribution or that there is . . . the methodology in which the distribution is done is fair to cabin owners and to residents at the lakes?

Mr. Young: — As part of the process for approving the plans themselves, there will be public meetings with each local authority and the residents. And through that process, there should be some discussion with local residents in terms of those kinds of questions.

Mr. Yates: — If local residents are unhappy with the formulas which the municipalities come up with, and in this case there are several municipalities involved, they may come up with different criteria and there may be issues with those. Is the province acting as an appeal mechanism or do we have the right to go back in and reassess or put new criteria on the municipalities?

Mr. Young: — Our role will be to provide the best guidance possible to the local authorities in terms of the kinds of initiatives and the process there. The local authorities, if they do run into concerns expressed by local residents, they have the option or they will have the option of amending their plans. This is fairly standard in terms of community planning procedures.

So that once they have the public meetings, then they will determine whether to go forward with the kinds of plans that they initially wanted or to listen to the concerns of the residents and, if so, how to accommodate those concerns.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you. But if an individual resident, Mr. Chair, still feels aggrieved or he wasn't heard or not fairly dealt with, do they have the ability to in any way appeal to the province, in that this is provincial money being fed through municipalities to deal with the problem?

Mr. Young: — We haven't worked out that detail of maybe an appeal process as of yet. But certainly the plans that are approved by the local authorities will be the most critical piece there. There will be always some concerns that may be raised by individual local property owners. And those concerns, as with many other community plans, they're generally produced at the local authority. Local authorities will determine how to deal with those particular situations.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you. To the best of your knowledge, are full-time residents of the community and seasonal occupants of the community going to be treated the same in the plans developed by the municipalities?

Mr. Young: — Yes, they'll be treated more or less the same. The situation will be, as I mentioned, to mitigate future risks of flooding. And in that context, whether they're a permanent resident or in a transition between a cottage owner and a permanent residence or whether they're simply a cottage owner, they should be treated much the same in the sense of reducing the risk of future flooding.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, my next question is, could the minister or his officials outline for us the municipalities which are involved and the amount of funding going to each municipality?

Mr. Young: — Yes. The municipalities involved or the local authorities involved would be the RM [rural municipality] of Sasman, the RM of Foam Lake, the resort village of Chorney Beach, the resort village of Leslie Beach, and the regional park board of Waldsea Lake.

Mr. Yates: — Do we have a breakdown on the funding available to each of those?

Mr. Young: — For the RM of Sasman it will be 1.278 million; the RM of Foam Lake is 491,000; Chorney Beach will be 216,000; Leslie Beach is 1.064 million; and Waldsea Lake is 1.151 million.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. My next question would be, how were those figures determined?

Mr. Young: — They were determined largely on the basis of information provided from the local authorities. Each of the local authorities was asked to provide cost estimates for different kinds of works that they would include in their plans. And it was based largely on the degree of detail that was included in that information as well as a very . . . look at the plans themselves in terms of particular kinds of issues.

Certainly in terms of the urgency in question as it relates to the issues that are currently there, the urgency as it relates to moving cabins before spring thaw, and as it relates to the kinds of issues related to the berms and where the berms are located, certainly were factors involved in it as well.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, my next question for the minister is, what is the proportion of cost sharing between the municipalities and the province in this funding arrangement?

Mr. Young: — The local authorities have to come up with at least half of the costs. And those costs may be provided in any of a number of different ways. They can be provided as a result of community-wide initiatives, that the local authority itself would have to come up with the funding or in-kind services. It could be provided by individual property owners so they will have to come up with at least 50 per cent of the costs.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. My next question: do individual property owners, is this then cost shared with the portion of the province and the municipality? Is it then cost shared with the individual owner, or is this funding adequate to deal with the full cost of flood proofing?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Are you talking about this specific 4.2 million?

Mr. Yates: — Correct.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — This will be the amount that's been identified by local authorities to get their plans in place and be proactive, understanding that within a few short days there's a budget coming forward and they've been asking for additional funding. So we're going to wait for those days and we'll be talking to them after the budget's set forth.

Mr. Yates: — Okay. So this particular funding is just to put the plans in place and prepare for the eventuality of correcting their problem?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — It begins the process for them that they've allocated, that we'd spoke to them about. It gives them funding initially so they can actually address some of the concerns involving the flood protection plans in consort with the individual cabin owners.

Mr. Yates: — Okay. So can we then anticipate — and the cabin owners and residents in the municipalities — additional funding in the upcoming budget?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Minister Draude and I are actively working on that avenue as we proceed forward in the next couple of days. We'll wait until after Wednesday before we make that final determination.

Mr. Yates: — Well, Mr. Minister, we'd all know that the budget would now be printed.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — A few more sleeps, Mr. Yates. A few more sleeps.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. My next

question has to do with . . . There's been an indication that the golf course is a major consideration to the community. They really want to fix the golf course, put it back into operation. It doesn't qualify under normal disaster assistance programs. Is any of this money or is the province prepared to be of any assistance to refurbish and put the golf course back into the position of being operational?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — At this time there is no funding for economic development. We're lobbying on behalf of the federal government though to supply us, or support us in that initiative. The funding right now is for the mitigative support. That's our priority right now at this time.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you. The long-term plan — and I know this doesn't necessarily fall under your direct responsibility — but are the berms going to remain as part of the overall long-term protection of the communities?

Mr. Young: — We're working with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Fishing Lake First Nation and the local authorities to make that determination. At this point in time, the berms were built under permits that were for temporary measures. And to convert them into more permanent structures, those discussions will take place with those different agencies.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Mr. Chair, the Waldsea berms are going to be permanent because they don't affect fish habitat, according to DFO [Department of Fisheries and Oceans].

Mr. Yates: — So the Waldsea berms are permanent. Is there any money going forward through any of this money to make those berms, integrate them more into the community, make them more acceptable to the communities? It was an issue in communities, the acceptance of berms in the long run, in the long term.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — No. This money is strictly for mitigative support at this time. Those factors will be considered with Saskatchewan Watershed Authority.

Mr. Yates: — Do you have any idea how much individuals will receive for flood-proofing through PDAP [provincial disaster assistance program] and through this program?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — I'm sorry, could you repeat the question?

Mr. Yates: — Do you have any idea how much money individuals can expect to receive through either PDAP and/or this money that we've just put forward?

Mr. Young: — I believe we spent about \$1.18 million as of the end of I believe it was January for PDAP, for both individual property owners and local authorities at Fishing and Waldsea Lake. This program as announced will be \$4.2 million and we've got projections that suggest that the costs will be significantly higher I guess as it relates to the overall damage and costs at the two lakes.

Mr. Yates: — How many claims have been received so far and processed under the PDAP program for these particular flood issues?

Mr. Young: — For the Fishing Lake and Waldsea Lake?

Mr. Yates: — Yes, Fishing Lake and Waldsea Lake.

Mr. Young: — I don't have that number just off the top of my head.

Mr. Yates: — Approximately.

Mr. Young: — I know that there is . . . I can't give you a close estimate. Sorry.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. We'll ask those questions obviously in estimates later on in the next month or so. At this point do we have an exact plan in place to deal with the flooding in Waldsea Lake and Fishing Lake? And if there is one, could you articulate for us exactly where that plan is?

Mr. Young: — Are you referring to emergency response to possible flooding for this spring?

Mr. Yates: — Yes. Both for this spring but also in the long term. Obviously it's in all our interest and the province's interest to get to a point where we are no longer concerned about flooding in both Waldsea Lake and Fishing Lake. So do we have a long-term plan? Do we know where we're going to — what our endgame is and what our end goal is at this point?

Mr. Young: — There's two aspects to the question then. One is as it relates to this spring. We are engaged in a number of sessions with local authorities to do emergency response — to establish the emergency response plans for this spring. We know as an example that Chorney Beach did not vote for the berms and we've had staff out there already this year talking with . . . First of all they assessed the situation out there. They're speaking with the Watershed Authority in terms of their latest projections at both lakes and they also spoke with local authorities in terms of any areas of vulnerability. So we're treating the situation for this spring in the context of the latest projections of the Watershed Authority. And in terms of the long-term plan, basically it should fall out of each local authority's specific community plans.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. My next question has to do . . . Could you lay out for us what you anticipate doing at Chorney Beach, please?

Mr. Young: — At this point in time the Chorney Beach has made some makeshift provisions that carried them through last year. The latest projections from the Watershed Authority indicate that the water levels this year may not be as quite as high as last year. So with that information what we're looking at is working with the local authorities to . . . They've indicated that they have a number of sandbags and a resource of sand to be able to use and put in place. We're looking at what kind of resources they may need to fill those bags and things, and what kind of protocols they need to take in order to put those kinds of plans into operation.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. In the past my recollection is that the disaster assistance programs did not cover preventative work; they only covered the actual outcome of a disaster. And there were discussions going on with the

federal government to expand coverage to also have the federal government share in preventative work that would save significant money on the back end by avoiding of potential disasters. Could you give us an update on where those discussions have gone and whether we've made any progress as a province?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you. At Halifax in January I met, along with my deputy minister and Mr. Young, with counterparts across Canada, with the federal government. And the talks are ongoing. We all raised the same concerns there. They understood us, that we all require work to be done in that area, and so those talks will be continuing at the deputy minister level as well, for mitigative support.

Mr. Yates: — Do you have any idea when we may have an answer from the federal government on that? My understanding was that this was an issue that was of concern to all of the Western provinces and Newfoundland, for sure, and maybe all the provinces of Canada. And are we anticipating the federal government getting back to the provinces at some point in the near future?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Right now the federal government is saying to us that that money is within the current Building Canada Fund. And we've asked Stockwell Day, Minister Day, to remove that mitigative money to a separate fund for it — as, I think, all three of you have in the past. And he's still listening to all of us and asking, and he's taking it to his cabinet colleagues. So I mean that work will be still be forwarded from the deputy minister level as we push forward up to next year's planning. On Friday I met with Minister Day and we talked about it, but it was still ongoing discussions.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. As you can imagine, we do appreciate the work continuing. We all had some desire to see that happen. And do we have any anticipated date or time frame in which we're going to see the peak at Chorney Beach or at other locations, and are we able to provide that type of information to the municipalities and individuals to help them, you know, prepare for what may or may not happen depending on the spring runoff this year?

Mr. Young: — I don't have a specific date. Saskatchewan Watershed Authority makes those kinds of forecasts and predictions and we work closely with them. We have had some sessions out there and we will continue to have sessions probably once every few weeks. As they update their projections, we will have a look at what those projections really mean in terms of the possible threat for flooding this spring. We are ahead of last year's timelines though. We have been out there and we've spoken with a number of the local authorities at Chorney Beach and elsewhere. Each area has a particular kind of issue or concern and we continue to speak to them on those particular items.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. And, you know, the root of this is, are we ahead of the curve in trying to help cabin owners this particular coming year? There were a number of cabins that were on land that was below the flood plain that would in fact in any year of excessive runoff be likely to have some danger of flooding. Is there going to be assistance for any of the cabins to be moved from their existing lots to parcels of

land perhaps higher up on the flood plain as part of the undertaking at either Waldsea Lake or Fishing Lake?

Mr. Young: — That particular scenario is included in the kind of assistance that we would provide. The decision on whether particular property owners do move or do not move will be left to the local authorities to make that determination. We certainly would encourage situations — where the costs for adding fill into those situations, where there is considerable amount of fill — we would encourage the local authorities to look at other options such as moving property owners and anything else that could be included.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. My next question goes to . . . There were a number of cabins obviously that weren't repairable, that would be in the best interest to be written off or destroyed. How is this money going to assist those individuals, and is it? And what would happen if an individual preferred to repair their property when in fact insurance companies and others had recommended it be written off, so you may be in fact repairing a property that's substandard then or may have ongoing issues or problems?

Mr. Young: — The funding that we're talking about does not go for repairs. It goes for protection for future flooding. So it would go into filling in lots, if you wish. It would be something, if I could maybe make a bit of an analogy or an example, the building the property back up to perhaps the foundation and floor joist level.

You identified that there were a number of cabins and cottages that were deemed or in an assessment that the ministry had undertaken to be, suffered significant damage so that they should be considered for demolition. A fair number of those cottages have been demolished already.

The local authorities at Fishing Lake entered into agreements where they would look at those particular cabins, and they set up a temporary transfer site. And some of them were chipped and later moved into the permanent landfill site. So there's been a fair bit of cleanup already undertaken. And some of the property owners have expressed some concern about whether they want to demolish their cottages and cabins, and they've been given the opportunity to have a look at the cabins after they have been dewatered, to assess the damages and will be making their decisions accordingly.

Mr. Yates: — Okay. Thank you very much. I just have a couple more questions before I'll turn it over to my colleagues to ask a few questions. There originally has been a fair amount of controversy around raising cabins, building the berms, different options. Have the First Nations communities been consulted around the issue of raising cabins and raising the land levels, and if they have, are they in favour?

Mr. Young: — We've had at least four discussions in January and February with the Fishing Lake First Nation, and I'm not sure that they are of one thought as well. Certainly some of the input that we've received has indicated that they would like to see a fair number of the cottages removed from the locations. There were other views that indicated that the cottages and the lake needed to be considered in consort with one another. So you get a fair bit of divergence of views.

And we are, pardon me, we will continue to work with them, as will the local authorities when they finalize their flood protection plans. Before any decisions are made, Fishing Lake First Nation will be invited to view those plans, and to give some further consideration to them.

Mr. Yates: — Thanks very much. My final question has to do with water quality. Last year's events and flooding resulted in the deterioration of water quality in the lake. And I'm wondering if you could give us an updated status of the water quality, and whether or not regular testing's being done in both communities, and the First Nations are being afforded the outcomes of those tests.

Mr. Young: — I'm not sure of the total status of that process, but it's something that the Watershed Authority is involved with. I know that they were monitoring the water quality, and their results and so forth is probably something that they could best answer.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. With that, I'll turn it over my colleague, Mr. Harper.

The Chair: — Mr. Harper.

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, how many cabins were damaged by the flood waters at Fishing Lake?

Mr. Young: — There were 417, I believe. Now I'm not quite sure whether that included the ones at Waldsea Lake or not, but.

Mr. Harper: — Okay. We can include both lakes, if that makes it easier for you. There's 417 cabins were damaged by the flood waters?

Mr. Young: — That's cabins and homeowners, yes.

Mr. Harper: — Cabins and homeowners. And of that number, how many would be taking advantage of the flood-proofing program?

Mr. Young: — I would say pretty well all of them would be.

Mr. Harper: — Okay. Now I believe there was only one beach that did not enter into the berm program, am I correct there? And you'd said earlier that your officials are working with Chorney Beach to identify methods to support flood-proofing in their own way. My question is, if the cost of flood-proofing at Chorney Beach should happen to be considerably more than the other beaches that used a berm process, would you consider supporting Chorney Beach still at the 50/50 cost sharing, or would there be some adjustments to reflect the increased costs?

Mr. Young: — At this point in time, there's nothing that would indicate that we would provide additional support. The program that was based on a 50 per cent basis would assist Chorney Beach. We've got some preliminary costs — I don't know the exact figures on those, but some preliminary costs as it relates to a retaining wall that they were considering as part of their flood protection program. And I believe that the costs are comparable to the kinds of costs that we would consider in terms of other options.

Mr. Harper: — Okay. You say a transfer site was established. What was the cost of securing that transfer site as part of the cleanup?

Mr. Young: — I'm sorry, I don't have that information with me right now.

Mr. Harper: — Okay. You said 417 cabins were affected. So we can suspect that 417 cabins would be involved in a process of being raised or removed and then brought . . . and the lot backfilled and then the cabin relocated. Or are some of these cabins simply going to be moved out to higher ground and re-established?

Mr. Young: — Yes. We don't know the exact number regarding the two options that you've outlined. Certainly most of what we've seen in the plans, the draft plans that have come forward from the local authorities, indicate that the vast majority of them would be looking at doing some kind of flood protection on site.

Mr. Harper: — Okay. Is there other flood-proofing techniques being used other than the lifting of cabins and the backfilling of lots?

Mr. Young: — There are other options under the guidelines of the program that could be used. There's several different kinds of things that you can do to protect against future flooding. And some of them are wet flood protection, some of them are dry flood protection. And under those two general options, you've got a number of different kinds of pieces or initiatives that you could apply.

The wet flood protection is basically something that would assist a property owner with perhaps, as an example, a perimeter berm right around it. But they would still be somewhat at risk. Should that berm get breached at some point in time, they could still get flooded because they might be at a lower elevation than what the forecast for the water would be. So in those situations we'd be looking at things where the electrical, mechanical, and other critical components of the building would be above the elevation. So in that kind of situation you would get what is termed wet flood protection.

In the dry flood protection — which we are encouraging for the most part and it seems to be what is coming in from each of the local authorities; they want to apply dry flood protection — it involves raising the lots and the foundations so that they would be secured against the forecast of flood risk.

Mr. Harper: — Of the 417 cabins, how many of them were deemed either by the community or by their owners to be unfit to salvage and simply were destroyed, and I assume cleaned up?

Mr. Young: — I'm sorry, I don't have that number in terms of the ones that were demolished, but I can get that number for you.

Mr. Harper: — I'd personally be interested in knowing that number. In those instances where the owners have decided and the community decided that the cabin is not worth salvage and they've destroyed it, the cost of rendering that then cleared lot to flood-proof level would be cost shared. But any additional

replacement of the cabin, either through a new building or building brought in or whatever the case is, would any of that be covered by the provincial program?

Mr. Young: — No it wouldn't, other than if it was a primary residence and it was covered under the provincial disaster assistance program. Under that program is where primary residences can obtain funding to either restore what they had originally to a certain value through renovations and changes, or rebuilding.

Mr. Harper: — So were there any permanent residents that were deemed unsalvageable and were destroyed and being replaced?

Mr. Young: — Yes I believe so, but I don't have that number with me.

Mr. Harper: — Okay. I think that concludes my questions. Warren?

The Chair: — Mr. McCall.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Hart. Welcome to the minister and your officials. I guess the first question I'd have would be to get some clarity around the Fishing Lake advisory council and the five component bodies therein. Why is the Fishing Lake First Nation not part of the advisory council?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — When I took over the ministry, I asked that same question. What had happened is that because they were not directly involved with the flood, and in result that there was no damage to their First Nation community, they weren't part of the committee, I was told.

It was December 16. I went to the site for the first time. I found that out. I said 30 days later I'd be back, and I was. And that day we met with Fishing Lake First Nations first because I wanted to get their . . . to consult, I wanted to understand what was their take on the whole flood.

Later that day we talked with the FLAC [Fishing Lake Administrative Council] committee. And we talked about having them brought back in. And they were quite receptive to that as well. We've talked to Municipal Affairs about possibly looking at a different structure in regional, municipal kind of a functioning board out there to ensure that they all have a stake and the say in what happens to the lake.

Mr. McCall: — And you've hit on precisely the reason why I raised this question, is that if you're going to have a lasting solution to the situation at Fishing Lake, it's going to take participation by all affected stakeholders that are around the lake. And maybe they're not flooded but certainly are affected by the water levels therein.

So is it a regional-use body, and are there additional funds being earmarked to help this work along? Or do you have a projected, sort of, timeline for this? Because of course we're getting back into flooding season when these specific relationships are most critical. So do you have a ballpark in terms of the time and any additional funds being allocated to facilitate that work?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Ballpark time no. And other funds no. Under the duty to consult, we've taken the concept of, as opposed to what's happening during the flood, is to bring them together and then work separately.

However we right now meet with Fishing Lake First Nations, meet with FLAC. I've asked the Municipal Affairs minister and their ministry officials to help us out with this. They have the expertise in that area, how to develop their regional kind of a water-body idea governance. And they will be consulting with us as we go forward on this. As we take care of this project first, then we'll start consulting on the issue of regional governance.

Mr. McCall: — Nothing conclusive in advance of the expected flooding season.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — No.

Mr. McCall: — Okay. I guess to get back to a question that one of my colleagues, Mr. Yates, had asked of Mr. Young. I appreciate that it's very hard to pinpoint these things and that's there are any number of variables that can affect the peak, sort of, runoff. But do you have a ballpark on what that might be? Do you have a, sort of, set period in mind in terms of when it's going to be at its most critical?

Mr. Young: — In terms of potential water level?

Mr. McCall: — Yes.

Mr. Young: — Well what we're hearing right now is, first of all, that the water levels, the latest projections . . . Of course there's a lot of factors still to consider into that, which is the timing of the melt and the cycle of the melt and water in terms of spring rains and if we get any more additional snow. But latest projections are that water levels should be about a foot lower at Fishing Lake than the peak last year. And in terms of timing, last year I think it was in mid-April or in mid-May is when I think the actual peak occurred, but the melt and the flooding was precipitated primarily in around April, later part of April.

Mr. McCall: — So with a forecast of a foot lower, are you anticipating any problems? What's your crystal ball have to say?

Mr. Young: — My crystal ball? What we're anticipating is that, first of all, the berms should be in pretty good stance in terms of being able to handle the kind of water that is being forecast or projected at this point in time.

With regard to Chorney Beach, there is that concern still there that we spoke about earlier. And we are engaged in discussions with them, and we'll continue to do that in terms of what kinds of actions and protocols and things that need to be put in place to assist them in that regard. We know that there are some properties that have done some things to protect themselves, but they're not interlinked, and those would be the areas that we'd be looking at closely.

Mr. McCall: — Do you have, do you have anything approaching a command post set up out in the field, or it's not

at that stage of yet?

Mr. Young: — We don't have anything set up as of yet. We're monitoring the flooding conditions and the forecasts right across that whole sector. So we will make a determination on whether we set up a command post at Fishing Lake or not, or where else in the region, as we approach closer to the situations that we could be faced with.

Mr. McCall: — Okay. Just to be very clear, it's a \$4.2 million package, this instalment, thereof.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Yes.

Mr. McCall: — You'd made reference to — I'm ballparking — 700,000 found efficiencies. Where'd you find those efficiencies? What does that constitute?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — There was actually a couple of different things: delays in recruitment of all personnel in the process within the ministry as you move forward; a late start-up of programs initiatives. Those are the two majors ones that we looked at where we found efficiencies within this fiscal year.

Mr. McCall: — Okay. Of the 4.2 . . . and again there'd be sort of painfully maybe, you know . . . [inaudible] . . . on this. Of the 4.2, and I appreciate that talks are ongoing with the federal government and that that's, you know, no end of perseverance, shall we say. The flood proofing aspect of this, do you anticipate any of this coming back in terms of — as it stands right now — any of this being claimable with the feds, or is the entire amount dependent on a decision to be made at some indeterminate date with Minister Day?

Mr. Young: — At this point in time we can't really say. We're certainly continuing to work both at a federal, provincial, territorial level with trying to address the issue of mitigation for future situations, and those discussions are continuing as they were started last year. With regard to this particular situation, we have looked at, and we will assess whether some of the funding can be used with regard to the new guidelines that the federal government has put forward in terms of dealing with natural disasters, but we haven't got any detail on that.

Mr. McCall: — Okay. Highway 310, this may fall under the questions to be asked post-budget. You know, obviously this has been mainly affected by the disaster that occurred in the Fishing Lake area. How does this affect the plans of the department? And is there any specific recognition made of that in the both the planning and the funds being requested of Treasury Board and in the budget process?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Well in regards to 310 Highway, the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure will be dealing with that. I'll defer that question to them.

Discussions have been ongoing as we've been moving forward in this process. And at this time, they'll have an action plan, after consulting with my officials as well. So they are moving forward on that once the budget comes out in two days, I understand.

Mr. McCall: — Last question. Waldsea, what's the sort of

make or break period for them? Along the same as what you've outlined for Fishing Lake or . . .

Mr. Young: — With regard to Waldsea Lake, we're hearing from the Watershed Authority that the water situation in that part of the province could be actually a bit higher than normal. And we are working closely with the board at Waldsea Lake and the Watershed Authority to determine whether or not any additional protection is needed. At this point in time, it's still too early to tell.

But we will be including as some of the sessions for local authorities, sessions in Humboldt, where the board and some of the RMs and communities around there will be talking to them about latest forecasts and what they can do to put together emergency response plans.

Mr. McCall: — And again, in terms of your plans, what sort of recognition have you made of the situation around ditching and the sort of unchecked drainage that's gone on with Waldsea and the fact that you've got any number of ditches pointed right into that particular basin and then the effect that that's had? And again I know the relationship's very close with the Watershed Authority, but have you moved to a moratorium or a partial moratorium, or what's the status on that part of the file?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — That particular file is held by Saskatchewan Watershed Authority. I've talked to Minister Heppner about that, and they hold the determining factor on how they can proceed. We'll be there to in fact deal with the disaster if it arises, and we've brought that to their attention. So we're hopeful that they're going to take their actions forward and take on added responsibility.

I said that when I was at the press release, that Saskatchewan Watershed Authority has the ultimate responsibility for that. We'll just have to hope. And with Minister Heppner, I'll be asking her, as we proceed forward, what's going on.

Mr. McCall: — But as long as they're willing to make you work, you're happy to do that or is that the . . . Okay. Anyway thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you, committee members. I believe we have covered a lot of ground here this afternoon. Are there any more questions?

If not, committee members, we have before us vote 73, Corrections, Public Safety and Policing. Public safety (CP06) in the amount of \$3,585,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — It's agreed. I would now ask a member to move the following motion:

That it be resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ended March 31, 2008, the following sums, \$3,585,000.

Mr. Allchurch. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. Mr. Yates.

[Vote 73 agreed to.]

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This time, I'd like to thank the minister and his officials for coming today and providing the answers to the questions we asked. It's always a privilege to have you come before us, and we do appreciate your time and your effort. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister and your officials. I believe there's no other business for the committee this afternoon, so we will recess until 7 o'clock this evening.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

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

Subvote (HE04)

The Chair: — Committee members, I'll call the committee back to order. The second item on our agenda is vote 32, Health. Minister, would you care to introduce your officials.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It'd be a pleasure to introduce the officials that I have with me today. On my left is Gren Smith-Windsor, the acting deputy minister. To my right is Lauren Donnelly, the assistant deputy minister. Over my left shoulder is Max Hendricks, the assistant deputy minister, and to his right would be Louise Greenberg, associate deputy minister. And over my right shoulder is Ted Warawa, the executive director for finance and administration.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. Do you have an opening statement this evening?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes, I would like to say just a few remarks on I guess what has transpired over the last couple of months and mostly of course pertaining to the subvote today of the \$60 million as well as the \$5 million for the Health Quality Council.

I do want to talk about our new government and a little about the platform that we were elected on that emphasizes a number of important changes to the health care management in this province. The ministry has moved quickly to find ways to fulfill our mandate. It was just November 21 that I was named the minister, and it's been three and a half months that we've been able to work on a number, a very aggressive platform that we put forward in front of the people back on November 7 and they decided.

And it has a number of areas that we're going to talk about today, or this evening, and some on quality control, but certainly an awful lot . . . The emphasis, I think, the questioning tonight will probably be around the human resources piece. And that was an important issue over the last number of years that we have debated in this room as well as in the chambers regarding human resources and what was needed in the province.

I guess I can speak for three years of experience as being the Health critic, and prior to that listening to the member from Melfort as he was the Health critic, bringing up issues around human resources and the need to increase — whether it was our staffing levels, whether it was X-ray techs to registered nurses to LPNs [licensed practical nurse] to doctors. It was certainly the debate over the last, I can honestly say, eight years that I have been in elected life. And that was certainly a main thrust of the last election campaign, was all the issues around health care and the issues around setting targets and how many, what was the correct number of nurses and doctors that we needed to attract to our province.

We set a very ambitious goal that was followed by the . . . and now the opposition shortly after we set the goal of increasing the number of, for example, registered nurses, increasing that and setting a target of 800 . . . We had cited that 600 vacancies needed to be filled and then another 200 nurses on top of that needed to be hired. We felt that was, you know, an ambitious goal but a goal that we could reach. I was glad to hear the opposition now, shortly after we announced those numbers, following up with that as they started with a target of . . . First they didn't start with a target, but then moved to a target of 400 and then eventually to 800, the number that we put forward.

Since that time, since the election and the people of the province decided that our platform, I think, was a very strong platform that would certainly work hard to rebuild the health care system, especially around the human resources piece, and chose our party to follow through with that, we've been working hard in that area ever since. And we've taken a number of initiatives that have moved us to that goal. The goal is 800 over the next four years. And we've, as I've said, taken a number of initiatives to meet that goal, and some of which I think we will certainly be talking about tonight — the partnership agreement that was signed with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and the money that was put forward as seed money.

But there is certainly a lot of other initiatives that have been undertaken in the short time as well as, you know, certainly following through with some of the initiatives that was put forward by the former government or the opposition now, in the last probably year and a half or so, whether it was hard-to-recruit grants or initiatives like that. We've been following through with that.

Equipment . . . certainly we had the pleasure of announcing around the province a number of dollars that were going to the health authorities that would work towards buying, whether it was surgical care equipment or lifts in long-term care or extended care facilities. That's all part of recruitment and retention because, if you don't have the proper equipment, you're not going to retain the health care professionals that we have today in the province.

So there have been a number of initiatives taken and not the least of which, as I said, was certainly the partnership with SUN [Saskatchewan Union of Nurses] and the seed money that we're going to be talking about tonight that goes towards recruitment and retention to ensure we have the proper number of nurses in our province.

I think I need to kind of recap a little bit on where the budget was, what the initial health care budget was for 2007-2008. The two supplementary estimates that have gone through this committee . . . Well one has gone through; the other is being proposed tonight and will hopefully see its way through. But the budget for 2007 and 2008 was a \$3.46 billion budget.

In December the ministry was also provided supplementary estimates of \$28.1 million to provide patient lifts, as I talked about, and occupational safety equipment and related training; equipment to support further reductions in surgical wait times such as cardiac and critical care equipment and operating room upgrades; nursing recruitment and retention initiatives such as funding to provide jobs for nurse graduates or supernumerary positions. So that was an extra \$28 million to go towards the already 3.46 billion that was estimated.

Tonight the supplementary estimates are asking for \$65 million. In total the Ministry of Health new appropriation for 2007-2008 will be a total of \$3.56 billion or a \$93 million increase over the original estimates that we discussed last spring.

The extra \$65 million, I'll just briefly talk a little bit about that, and then I guess we can open it up for questions. But what we're looking at is about a \$60 million recruitment and retention fund to be managed through SAHO [Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations], also with SUN, and the Ministry of Health, also a \$5 million quality improvement investment to the Health Quality Council. That would add up to the \$65 million that we're talking about today.

I just want to talk a little bit about each one of those initiatives before we move towards the questions. And I mentioned before that certainly a shortage of nurses in our province over the last number of years . . . and I think every province is certainly grappling with shortages. I had the opportunity of spending some time yesterday in Calgary at a nurse recruitment and retention . . . I shouldn't say nurse. It was a health care recruitment and retention fair. I was amazed at the competition for the health care providers.

I was very proud of, first of all, the ministry's display and the people that we had there as well as the number of the regional health authorities from Saskatchewan. I believe there were four or five represented there. In fact the media was talking about it being a Saskatchewan alley because they were all kind of lined up down one side of the hall. But on the other side of the hall and in various locations, there were recruiters from South Carolina, and there were recruiters from California, Texas, British Columbia, Manitoba. It is a very, very competitive market out there for human resources, and we have to have a real concerted effort in our province to make sure that we have the human resources we need.

And that starts with what we class as very, very important: a partnership with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses. We feel it's very important to work with all the health care stakeholders. In fact in our election platform, it states on page number 9 that the:

. . . government will work in partnership with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and other nursing stakeholders to create a recruitment and retention program

that works for nurses and benefits patients, while investing an additional \$200-million over four years . . .

That was in our platform, and we're seeing part of our platform being played out with the partnership signing and now the money going towards the initiative.

We share this objective with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and SAHO to establish specific health region targets and require funding for hiring nurses tied to those targets. And I think that's extremely important. This really becomes targeted money towards human resources as opposed to money that would just go into the general . . . I guess it's not really called the General Revenue Fund, but to the general operating expenses of a health region that isn't targeted. We could certainly work with health regions and give them more money, but would it be targeted to the exact priorities that we have set out in our platform that the people of Saskatchewan voted on? And I don't think . . . We think this is a very logical way of going about recruiting and retaining the nurses that we need by having targeted funding going to the RHAs [regional health authority] through SAHO to ensure that we meet the targets we have set out.

As I said, it's 800 nurses over four years: 600 to fill the vacancies and 200 to top that off. We need all the parties working together — which will be the regional health authorities, along with the Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses—to reach that goal. That's in combination with some of the programs that have been set up before. This new fund will complement existing recruitment and retention programs such as relocation and recruitment grants that were started by the previous government that has been quite successful, bursaries that have been around for a very long time, mentorship and professional development programs, and quality workplace and safety initiatives.

Stabilizing the workforce is a long-term job that requires a great deal of effort. The creation of this fund is an important step towards our goal to improve accessibility and quality of health care services.

So I think that's what I want to say for now as far as the partnership is concerned. We do also have a \$5 million ask that would go to the Health Quality Council for quality improvement investments, and I think it's a good expenditure of money. It was certainly . . . the Health Quality Council, when it was established, I believe in 2002 . . . at that time as in opposition, I remember speaking in favour of the Health Quality Council and the great work that it would do. And it has certainly put forward a number of reports and undertaken a number of initiatives that have, I think, improved the quality of health care in our province.

The one that they're working on right now is the chronic disease management collaborative and how effective that has been and certainly reaping the results of that.

The other one is the one that they put, the Health Quality Council put forward on wait times around breast cancer and the process that was followed. And certainly, did we see necessarily savings monetarily? I don't know if we saw any savings monetarily. But after being to the Health Quality Council and seeing the work that they've done and how they've shortened

the timeline, it's not necessarily savings, but it's shortening the timelines that people were waiting as they went through the steps. And it was certainly great work.

This \$5 million is to go to the Health Quality Council to further look at quality improvements. And it's going to be targeted more than likely to maybe two to three health regions, or three to five health regions, that will look at kind of drilling down deep into the organization and finding quality improvements. It's estimated that by the year 2012 that, you know, in the next four to five years we could see as much as 20 to \$30 million savings if they drill down and find enough efficiencies within the system.

There is one health authority right now that has been working towards this end and finding efficiencies, making . . . You don't necessarily see the dollar savings but you see a more efficient workplace. More gets done with the same money that we spend because I think everyone in the health system . . . And it doesn't seem to matter which province you're in. I had the opportunity of informally talking to the Minister of Health yesterday in Calgary for about an hour. And, you know, Alberta's certainly been on a boom for a very long time. Its first concern is sustainability in the health care system. Can you continue to throw more and more money at it? And that's certainly an issue here in Saskatchewan.

Well I think like by taking initiatives like this, moving \$5 million towards the Health Quality Council to look at efficiencies within the system that can be then spread out across other health authorities, is certainly a wise investment because I think all of us are a little worried about the sustainability 5 and 10 years down the road. We're at 45 per cent, 43 per cent of the budget, of the whole provincial budget is spent on health care. And can that number continue to increase?

You know in the last . . . I don't have the exact numbers in front of me, but our health care budget has probably doubled in the last 10 years easily. And can we double it again in the next 10 years? So unless we make investments into improving quality and improving efficiency within the system, which this \$5 million certainly does, I think we'll be asking that question for a very long time. So I think both the 60 million for increasing the number of nurses, which certainly will go towards that or the \$5 million as far as quality are both very good investments moving forward. With that I would be glad to answer any questions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister, for those comments. Members, do we have questions for the minister and his officials? I recognize Ms Junor.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to the minister and his officials. I'm really quite pleased to be able to discuss particularly the MOU but I do have some other questions about the Health Quality Council, and some of my colleagues have other questions about other areas. My questions are going to be pretty specific, I think.

My first question . . . And I'm not going to really have them in any really logical order, I don't think, but I may get more logical as I go along. But my first question is, how many RN [registered nurse] and RPN [registered psychiatric nurse] vacancies were there in Saskatchewan on November 1, 2007?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Just while we're getting some of the numbers that certainly were on the website, that's an interesting question, and a question that won't have a specific one answer because it depends on who you talk to as far as vacancies. Certainly the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses have done a poll through their members as to the number of vacancies that were in the province as of 2007. The ministry has been tracking vacancies, as I am sure she would know, and that's a number that we'll certainly get to.

But there is also very many different ways of looking at those vacancies and whether it's a full-time equivalent. You know each health region — I wouldn't say each health region but a number of the health regions — calculate those vacancies differently. Some will look at a vacancy as a position — there could be four open positions in that one vacancy — whereas other health authorities may look at those four positions as four vacancies. That's certainly the basis for the partnership, is working off of vacancies. But that's why we need to have and we're looking forward to the work between the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, the Ministry of Health, and SAHO to come up with a baseline of where we're at in the province.

That hasn't been . . . I mean we as a government and as a party campaigned on 600 vacancies. Was there exactly 600 vacancies during the election? Well that will fluctuate from health region to health region and period of time to period of time. But also, you know, when you look at whether it's Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, the Ministry of Health, or even regional health authorities, those numbers are going to fluctuate. And that's why we're looking forward to the three getting together, the three organizations getting together and working on a baseline. That's why it's so important that when the partnership agreement was signed, the facilitator, the MC [master of ceremonies] at that event but also the facilitator moving forward, is Dr. Marlene Smadu, who will be working with those groups to determine that baseline as of November 7, 2007. But right now I can . . . Just give me one second and I'll certainly talk about the vacancies that the health authorities have.

As I had mentioned before, it does fluctuate and just some of the numbers that we have right now: in October of '07, there was 545 vacancies; in December there was around 518 vacancies, which were made up of 276 permanent, 155 temporary, and 71 casual. So you can see that, you know, those numbers will fluctuate. And as of right now, we have about 562 vacancies. As I say, they're not all full-time, permanent positions. That will vary. But that gives you kind of a bit of an example. I think it would be safe to say that anywhere from 500 to 600 — 575 would be a kind of a bit of a moving target — depend on exactly when you looked at it.

These numbers would come through the posted vacancies on the website, so that's the number that we have. That's one number of probably a couple of different ones, because certainly again the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses would come up with a different number than that, and that's what certainly has to be worked through, through the good work of our facilitator. And I think you would probably have certainly no argument to have somebody like Marlene Smadu work with the organizations to come up with a baseline. It's work that needs to be done and will be done in the future and hopefully the near future.

Ms. Junor: — I would also like to, since the vacancy rate is going to be a moving target . . . And as you've said, SUN has a different view of the number than you do. The last correspondence I saw from SUN, the letter to you, mentions 1,000. So it is going to be interesting how you reconcile your MOU to those two different numbers — or three, depending on who you're looking at.

While you're giving me information, I would also like to have — I don't know if you can get it for me now but I would like to have it — the number of funded FTEs [full-time equivalent] in the system by district. And then my supplementary question to you if you can is, how many positions are in an FTE? How many actual, you know, bodies as we say.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Well I think instead of Lauren Donnelly relating the information through me and hoping it comes out properly, it'd be better off if she mentioned that or talked about it.

Ms. Donnelly: — We have data, I have it here for the first two quarters of '07-08. I don't have it for the third and fourth quarter. The number was 5,896 FTEs in '07-08 for the first two quarters. An FTE is based on the number, is a full-time equivalent position. It's based on a certain number of hours. It's based on the total paid hours divided by so many hours per FTE. I believe the FTE number is 1,945, roughly 1,945 hours per FTE but I'd have to actually get the most current number for that. I'm going from memory on that. So the FTEs are calculated based on the payroll system, based on total paid hours for SUN membership is what I've just given you.

Ms. Junor: — If my memory serves me right — since, as the minister continues to point out, I used to be president of SUN so I do have some interesting knowledge of this — if my memory serves me right, an FTE was 1.5 positions. Does that still hold?

Ms. Donnelly: — You're probably talking about how many positions do you need to cover sort of one nursing, one nursing shift. It's more than 1.5 FTE.

Ms. Junor: — What number are you going to be using?

Ms. Donnelly: — I would have to get you that number.

Ms. Junor: — That's what I want to know.

Ms. Donnelly: — Okay.

Ms. Junor: — So how many funded FTEs are in the system? You said 5,896 . . .

Ms. Donnelly: — For the first two quarters of '07-08.

Ms. Junor: — And I'd like to know those by — what is it now — regional health authorities.

Ms. Donnelly: — Yes, we can get that.

Ms. Junor: — And then I'd like to know what an FTE, how many actual positions are in an FTE.

My next question is, what is the cost of monthly salary and

benefits for one RN or RPN? Since I'm assuming they are both the same; they are in the SUN contract. There's no differentiation, from what I can remember, between an RN and an RPN. So I'm going to say what's the salary and benefit costs of one RN? We can do it yearly.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — After consulting with the officials, 75,000 is the number that's used, and that's salary and benefits. Both the . . . Yes, I guess all in for one full-time equivalency per year.

Ms. Junor: — One full-time equivalent or one position? One nurse is going to make 75. If you've got 1.75 nurses in an FTE, it's going to cost more than that for an FTE. Right?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes. The number is 75,000 for a full-time equivalency, full-time equivalency of hours. And that would be the number, the 1.5 or however many nurses it would take to fill that position. That doesn't compare to one full-time equivalency at 75,000.

Ms. Junor: — So the number 75,000 is what number you'll be using to calculate how much the health districts will have, regions will have to put into the fund per vacancy.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — That again, yes, that will certainly be worked on, but that's certainly a number that I think is pretty common. That hasn't been set and fully agreed on by all the parties, but that certainly is a common number that is used.

Ms. Junor: — Okay. Now can you tell me what's the main source of funding for the health regions?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — That's pretty straight. Main source is through the Government of Saskatchewan.

Ms. Junor: — That's what I thought. So now you've got an MOU that contemplates 40 per cent of the districts' or the regions' money coming from their budget, which is your money, and 60 per cent coming from your budget, which is your money too. So basically the department will be funding this fund 100 per cent.

Even though you're asking the regions to put in 40, it's still the money that's sent by the government. There is no different source of revenue for the districts to make up that 40 per cent. They're going to have to take it out of the money you give them for operations.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes, the money that we're talking about today — the \$60 million — certainly goes towards the commitment that we made in the platform of \$200 million over four years. It goes to filling the commitment that we made of increasing the number of nurses by filling the 600 vacancies and adding 200 on top of that; that's where this money goes to.

It's no secret the RHAs receive their money from the provincial government of course. And they are asked with that money to supply a multitude of services. Whether it's acute care service, whether it's long-term care, whether it's home care, that's what they're asked to do with that money, as well as education and, as I said, a multitude of services. And they do the best that they can with the money that they certainly have allotted to them.

And what we have said, as a commitment to our platform, was to put \$60 million towards this partnership that would see the health authorities being able to draw on that to fill positions certainly. But the point of this money that isn't necessarily the case with money that the RHAs receive on an annual basis is how it is targeted to a specific area.

For the most part — and I know there's accountability agreements that are, you know, put forward by regional health authorities — but there isn't necessarily, as far as I am of the understanding, you know, a block of money that is put towards, this is for nursing, this is for facilities, this is for whatever other multitude of services that health authorities provide.

The difference between the money that is given to the health authorities, as I said, it's more or less a block funding to supply services in many different areas. What we're talking about tonight is seed money that will go to an agreement that will see the number of registered nurses increase, that is targeted towards increasing the number of health care professionals — in this case registered nurses — that the health authorities can draw on.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. Have the health authorities asked for extra money? Because you've made this retroactive to November. So they have spent the money that they saved by having vacancies. Because, as most people know, the health districts or regions have vacancy-managed their budgets. So they've spent that money. So now they're going to have to come up with it retroactively to put into your fund April 1, which is very shortly. Have they asked for money to backfill that commitment?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — As I said at the start — and I'll be answering this an awful lot throughout the time allowed — is that a number of those details will have to be worked out. Have the RHAs to my knowledge come and asked, you know, for more money? No they haven't. Because they also realize that all the details haven't been worked out on this partnership, on how the funding is going to be working. Because I mean there's a huge . . . There's lots and lots of variables to this thing.

You know, I want to again compliment through the ministry and the RHAs for going over to the Philippines and attracting 300 nurses. That has a bearing on going forward. And we need to work all those variables out. Yes it was based on the number of vacancies. Number one, we've got to determine what that baseline is and as we move forward how many of those are being filled. I mean if we keep attracting the number of nurses that we have in the first four months through the rest of the year it could — maybe being a little optimistic — but it could certainly go a long ways to filling the number that we have targeted.

So have the RHAs come to the ministry and asked for more dollars on this? No they haven't, because they also realize that many of the details will be worked out in the future. What I can say is that they're quite happy to see that we as a ministry and as a new government are putting the money behind what we said is important to do, and that's recruiting and retaining nurses. They're very happy to see this money going towards that.

Ms. Junor: — I'm sure they're quite happy about that, but I think they're a bit concerned about the 40 per cent that they have to put up, because as I said, retroactively, they're going to have to come up with money in two weeks. So I'm not sure if you're going to give them an extension while you work out the details. But you have put April 1 of '08 in place, so that's what I'm asking. How are they expected to pay that money when most of them have spent their money? It's coming up to the end of the fiscal year. Where are they going to get it from?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Well you know, that will certainly be worked out with the regional health authorities. I guess I'm interested in the line of questioning in that you're saying that what the regional health authorities are doing right now is balancing their budgets on the vacancies, and that's satisfactory. I don't know if that's what you're saying. Because certainly, you know, the shortage of human resources is a major, major factor. And regional health authorities are managing to the best of their ability, but I don't know if it's, if what you're saying is that it's perfectly fine, they're balancing their budgets on vacancy management, which is really in a lot of cases leaving people short on the floor.

Ms. Junor: — No, I never said it was satisfactory. I just said that it's a reality, and you're going to have to deal with how they come up with extra money, because that is the reality of what's happened. And it is not satisfactory, and that's why we're where we are right now. So that's still my question, is I don't know how they're going to come up with that money. Now I'm going to move on to . . .

A Member: — Mr. Chair, for one minute . . .

The Chair: — Mr. LeClerc, we'll let Ms. Junor ask her question, then I'll come to you.

Ms. Junor: — Now I want to ask a couple of questions about the LPNs in vacant positions, because I understand that that's now going to stop, as the MOU has said there will be no hiring of LPNs into vacant RN positions if an RN or RPN can't be found. So I'm wondering if you have any numbers of how many LPNs have actually filled an RN vacancy since November '07.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I think what you've seen over the last couple of years is certainly the number of LPNs increase and I think you'll see that as we move forward with primary health care teams and the amount of work that is available. You're going to see RNs certainly utilized to their full extent and scope, and I hope LPNs to their full scope, moving forward. There is nothing in any partnership agreement that says we're going to limit the use of LPNs, absolutely not. The workplace right now in mainly our acute care settings, but long term care, we are short of professionals in almost every discipline, whether it's LPNs, whether it's RNs, whether it's physicians. And certainly as we move forward we're going to be looking and relying on LPNs to do every bit as much as they're doing now, plus more.

The Chair: — Mr. LeClerc, you had a short comment?

Mr. LeClerc: — I'm objecting to some of the line of questioning and I'm failing to understand where the hon.

member is going with this. This is targeted money in \$60 million for recruitment of nurses. And I feel that we're getting into items that need to be discussed after the budget that will be released on Wednesday. These are questions about nurses shortages or positions or other things that I'm not sure apply to the supplementary estimates that we're dealing with. And they seem to be questions that I'm not sure that the minister was prepared for because they don't seem to me to be related to the supplementary estimates that we're talking about.

This is only a supplementary estimate; it's not a budget. And we're not talking about fulfilling the whole budget for the health care needs or how many nurses were going, and it seems to me to be somewhat political and a little bit of a witch hunt and where we're going with this.

The Chair: — Mr. Taylor, you had a comment.

Mr. Taylor: — Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And I just want to acknowledge for the record that the member opposite, Mr. LeClerc, is entitled to his comments and as such we listen politely to those comments.

Every question that has been asked is direct to these supplementary estimates. The minister has been answering those questions fully. There are other questions that the minister has indicated he is prepared to answer that go beyond the supplementary estimates in front of us. And we are quite prepared to take that route as the time allotted to us proceeds. If the member opposite has questions that he wishes to ask, well of course he's entitled to seek the floor and ask those questions.

But this is supplementary estimates. It's accountability for monies that are being spent. The 60 million is specifically directed towards the MOU that was signed by the government. And as such, anything in that MOU, the way in which it is going to be developed, is pertinent and specific to the supplementary estimates in front of us. So I think the member opposite should be pleased that the opposition is prepared to hold the government accountable and he should trust his minister to answer the questions in a way that would be useful to the department.

I think there's a lot that the department can be proud of in the work that it's done. And we simply want to address those questions on work that's been done, that is good, and prepare ourselves for some of the tougher questions that may come out during the budget or in the course of the next year. So I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words here, but we do have quite a number of questions and we intend to put them.

The Chair: — I thank you, Mr. Taylor and Mr. LeClerc, for your concerns. I would remind committee members that we are dealing with the \$60 million to establish a nursing recruitment fund and 5 million for the Health Quality Council, and if we could keep our questions as targeted as possible. I'm prepared to allow some leeway. And as long as the minister has a comfort level with the questions that are somewhat outside the scope, we will continue. But I think we need to target on those two main areas. And I certainly will open the floor again for questions from committee members. Ms. Junor, would you like to continue?

Ms. Junor: — I would. And I thank my colleague, the member from The Battlefords, for saying what I was going to say. This is a supplementary estimates on seed money for an MOU. So the MOU is open for discussion. As far as I was concerned, that is exactly what we're doing, and I appreciate the minister being candid in his answers.

So I'll pick up where I left off because I was going to . . . If we're talking about engaging LPNs — and I fully understand the scope of practice and all of that — that you're committed to, as I am, using everyone to their capacity and maximizing everyone's scope of practice.

But my question is, because of the MOU stating that as of November 1 there will be no LPNs or other provider — I think it's written — hired into an existing position for an RN, that raises the question that there are LPNs being hired into those vacant lines. And I want to know how many have been hired since November, because I assume then they will have to be fired. My question is also — because there are not only LPNs that I know of being hired into vacant lines on a schedule, there are also paramedics being used in emergency departments — and that also this MOU will preclude that as well. And if those paramedics have been hired and in use, and I understand they are at RUH [Royal University Hospital], then they will also have to be fired. So the MOU has a fairly wide-reaching effect, so I'd like to know if you have some comments on that please.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes, I do thank you for the question. I think the intent . . . And certainly it's going to be worked on again, that exact baseline number through the work of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, SAHO, representatives from the regional health authorities, and the ministry, will be worked on to get that baseline. I think what . . . you know and I won't put words in the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, their organization, put words in their mouth. But what I will say is that what we didn't want to see happen is that if we have X amount of vacancies, and let's say it was 600, that regional health authority would fill them with paramedics or LPNs and say really the vacancies are only 200 or 300. We realize that we need to increase the number of registered nurses by 600 and top it off by another 200.

And that's what the intent of that clause in there was. It wasn't to say that we would be, any one LPN or paramedic that was hired would be fired. What we're saying is there's a baseline of this many vacancies; we need to increase our numbers of RNs by the number that we have set forward. It certainly was never the intent, at least from our perspective, of if there was an LPN hired into a position or a paramedic hired into a position, that they would be fired. What we're trying to do is get a baseline of how many RNs, where we're at, and what we need into the future. I think that's probably reading, certainly reading into a clause that, you know, from our prospective was never certainly, that was not ever the intent.

I will say though that it is amazing over the last . . . and I don't know how long it's been going on. But talking to whether it's MD Ambulance or I guess in Moose Jaw, I think there's a little bit of that, where paramedics are being used in a hospital setting more than ever before. And I certainly congratulate and, you know, they've done great work. Paramedics do great work. And there's I think if you talk to . . . This is what I've heard from a

few of the nurses, whether it might be in the emergency room or wherever they're working in conjunction with the paramedic — they wouldn't want to give up that help that they receive, simply whether it's for lifting or whatever the scope of practice the paramedic is working to. They would hate to see that be taken away from them because I think everybody is realizing that there's more than enough work for everybody, whether it's an LPN, whether it's a paramedic, or whether it's a RN. They all need to work in conjunction to supply the services that we need.

I do find it interesting, you know, with every year that I've . . . I shouldn't say every year, but the three campaigns that I've run in, there's always been the issue around, you know, privatization of the health care system, and it's certainly been thrown back at us. And it's interesting because talking to MD Ambulance, which is a private company supplying as many workers into the health care system, paid for, paid directly to a private contractor, is really quite precedent setting.

You know, it hadn't been done a number of years before. All the people working in . . . Well I shouldn't say all, but the vast majority of the people working in, specially service delivery in the health care system were employed directly through the health authority. This is kind of a different avenue that, you know, that the former government, the former government went down, is really supplying services into the health care system through a private contractor. You know, that is I think is getting close to private health care as you're going to get. And I find that's very interesting and I, you know, I certainly applaud the use of them because they are needed. But it is certainly precedent setting to use a private contractor in direct delivery of a health care in our emergency rooms.

Ms. Junor: — So just to clarify that, the paramedics that are hired, are they hired on a contract through an ambulance firm, or are they hired directly as employees?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes. I guess, you know, I guess the answer, it's not a yes or a no. It's not a black or a white. It varies because it depends on what the health authority is doing, in this case regarding its ambulance services.

Some health authorities, as you know, run their own ambulance services, such as here in Regina Qu'Appelle would be an example, that if a paramedic was working in the emergency room at the Regina General Hospital, it would be through the health authority. In Saskatoon for example, the ambulance services are contracted through MD Ambulance as well as in Moose Jaw, for example, contracted through . . . I'm not exactly sure of the service. But Ron Dufresne, those individuals work for the private contractor, and the health authority contracts them, brings them in to their work site through a private contractor.

Ms. Junor: — Thanks, that was just a curious aside. And I'm happy to hear you say that you hadn't contemplated that any LPN or paramedic or other health provider that has been hired into an RN vacancy or line will not be fired. It will be something that you will be looking at perhaps red circling them or adding another position on top of that. And I'm sure that anyone who is listening will be happy to know that, and we can tell them, you know — all the three people that are listening.

I do have some questions about . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Four? Oh your mom too? I know that the MOU has raised some concerns with other health providers, and I'm just curious if you are contemplating some such MOUs with other health providers.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — That has certainly, it certainly has been an issue. I guess some of the other service provider unions, for example, have said that they would like to work with the government and whether it was in partnership, if that's the words they used. Again I don't want to put words in their mouth. But we have said all the way along that we are more than willing to work in partnership with every organization to improve their numbers, to improve the health care system. I mean that's the whole goal.

We do know that over the last number of years, and maybe the members in the opposition can probably cite them better than I can, but I can certainly say over the last number of years there's been an awful lot of money and an awful lot of energy spent out of frustration by, for example, the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses feeling that the government just wasn't listening. And, you know, the amount of money that was spent on advertising going into the last election, the amount of money that was spent even well before — two or three years before on billboards — certainly railing against the previous government for perhaps not listening as closely as they wanted to anyway.

And what we felt is it's really important to work with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses to find a goal just as we are more than willing to work with . . . whether it's SALPN [Saskatchewan Association of Licensed Practical Nurses] for the licensed practical nurses, whether it's SMA [Saskatchewan Medical Association] which we signed agreements with, whether it's ambulance contractors. It's any number of health care professionals. We're more than willing to work with all absolutely because we also realize the very important need that they all play to deliver, you know, the best system that we can, the best health care system that we can provide.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. What is the mandate for the SUN recruitment and retention fund? Do you have any idea of what your terms of reference will be?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — You know that's certainly something that we'll be working on going forward. As I said that, you know there's a lot of questions absolutely that I don't have the exact answer for, and you know I'll apologize for that. But what I will say is that this agreement has been in place for less than a month. We are working towards those talks between all the players as well as, you know, trying to . . . well I shouldn't say as well as, but in conjunction with the leadership under Dr. Marlene Smadu.

All those terms and conditions are going to be worked on. They need to be worked on as we move forward. But I think it was and I think this is why we put these estimates forward is that it's extremely important not to just talk about a partnership but also fund a partnership because it will cost some money. And as the previous government put some money towards recruitment and retention in the last year or so, that's certainly where we're moving towards. It's a larger number absolutely, and a lot of the details have to be worked out. Those will be worked out in the

future, but it is money to go behind the words, to back up the words regarding recruitment and retention.

Ms. Junor: — Just further to this fund, since money will start flowing April 1st, which is two weeks from now, where will the fund be? Where's the money going to go, and where's it going to be shown?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — It will go towards . . . it will go to SAHO, but again all the terms and references around the fund and all of that are still remaining to be worked out. But as I say, the most important part is that there is money. We could have worked all the terms and references and stipulations and agreements out without any money. This is money that's going to be put in it, and certainly now we have to work on how that is going to be dispensed, but it will be through SAHO.

Ms. Junor: — Well I guess my concern comes from being in government, being on Treasury Board, and how you do have to account for the money and where it goes and who looks after it and how it's reported.

But you raised an interesting point as well. It makes me think of now SAHO going to be the administrator of this fund. They were not a signatory to the MOU and, as far as I understand, had no input into the crafting of the MOU with SUN. Is that the case?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The SUN partnership certainly was worked on between myself as the minister and the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses. I had talked to a couple of the chief executive officers, CEOs, of health authorities, informing them that we were going to be moving towards a, you know, an agreement with SUN. I certainly talked at the leadership forum that we set a very lofty goal of increasing the number of nurses by 800 over the next four years. And that wouldn't be done, especially very easily — and not that it's going to be done easily now — but it would be very difficult to accomplish that without having an agreement with SUN to work in conjunction to meet those goals.

So that certainly has been talked about a number of times. But, you know, the accountability mechanism of the fund certainly needs to be worked on. But I don't know if, you know . . . and I guess you can poll the CEOs yourself, but I've been very encouraged when you look at the co-operation of the regional health authorities when it comes to going to the Philippines and working to recruit nurses. Three hundred nurses or 297 nurses were offered jobs and accepted . . . so the work of the regional health authorities in conjunction with the ministry.

I was encouraged when I was at the recruitment fair here in Regina to see how the regional health authorities and the importance that they're putting towards recruitment and retention, and very impressed and encouraged when I was in Calgary yesterday at the recruitment and retention fair — not retention but recruitment fair — that was going on in Calgary, how the regional health authorities are putting this as a very, very high priority.

As I said, you can poll the CEOs and see if they're not happy with the fact that we're putting \$60 million towards a fund that will help them recruit nurses and retain nurses. But I would

think that, you know, for the most part that yes, a lot of the details have to be worked out, and as I said earlier, they haven't been worked out. They will be. There is some, I guess, I don't know if it's in trepidation, but it's some concern that, you know, all the details haven't been worked out right now, and I can understand that. But I also know that I think most of them would speak pretty highly that the government is putting money behind where their mouth is and moving in that direction because certainly regional health authorities are putting money behind it by sending people on these recruitment fairs. They realize how important it is.

When you have a regional health authority like Regina Qu'Appelle or the regional health authority of Saskatoon, regional health authority that is spending, you know, an awful lot of money on overtime and the problems that that brings . . . Number one, it's money being spent on overtime you're bringing . . . at definitely at a higher rate but the other problems that come from that, as I am sure the member will know, is that you've got nurses that are burning out. They're working long hours. I've told this story a few times but of a nurse that was away for five days and came home and there was 18 messages on the phone and 14 of them were for her to come to work, you know, and that was her time off.

Regional health authorities know this. People on the floor know this, that there's a huge pressure have been put on those front-line workers. Nurses are fed up and they need help. Regional health authorities realize that they are, you know, they are working hard to recruit nurses, and now the ministry is following certainly in behind with a \$60 million fund that will go towards this partnership between SUN, the regional health authorities, and the ministry.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. I just had to chuckle when you used the term, on the floor. I've had several people say to me, how come he's talking about nurses laying on the floor? I know it's an inside term, but I have had people wondering, what is he talking about?

I have lots more questions, but I think since you brought up the Philippines and your tour to the Philippines, my colleague Mr. Broten has some questions along that line. So I'll turn it over to him if that's okay with the Chair.

The Chair: — Mr. Broten.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister and his officials for coming this evening. As Ms. Junor said, I do have some questions about the trip to the Philippines and how that recruitment effort, the process around it, some of the numbers and timing and so on. So of the 297 nurses who you report signed contracts during the recent trip to the Philippines, how many are expected to be practising by the summer of 2008?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes, thanks for that question and I think . . . and we've seen through Regina Qu'Appelle that they were over and made the first contact in the Philippines and brought nurses forward. And they don't all come in a block; they come, you know, kind of however many at a time, but certainly not 90 at a time or 50 at a time. And I think that's what you're going to be seeing with this 297 that have recently

been recruited, that you'll see them come into the province over a number of months. The goal is certainly to have them here by the end of summer which could be, you know, defined as — what? — September.

But, you know, there is variables that are there. There is work commitments and family commitments certainly in the Philippines. There is issues around immigration. But the goal of the regional health authorities is to have them working, all 297 in the province, by the end of the summer, and we'll certainly be tracking that.

Again I will say, though, after talking to a number of the people that were at these recruitment fairs that had made the trip to the Philippines — there was a couple that I talked to yesterday — and how absolutely impressed they were with the whole process of that recruitment. And, you know, again talking not only to them, but to a couple of the people, you know, in Swift Current on Friday when I was there, how proud they were of their health authorities, how many they had recruited and, you know, they're going to certainly make every effort to make the transition of these new nurses as comfortable as possible.

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Chair, to the minister again, is there a return service agreement for these nurses coming to Canada, and what are the details of the service agreement, if there is one?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The recruits will be receiving the relocation grant, which is \$5,000, and return in service to receive that \$5,000 is one year. That money then will flow to the regional health authorities to be granted to the employee, but it is a return in service of one year.

Mr. Broten: — And that's the only contract tying them to a region or tying them to the province?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — So yes, the return in service is for one year for the relocation grant. They become of course employees of the regional health authority. You know, that's probably the only direct tie, unless they decided to go and apply for a hard-to-recruit area. In certain areas that was set up of course. And that's another again \$5000, but it would be another return of one year in service. So those are I guess the only direct ties that would force, and I hate to use . . . I don't really mean to use the word force, but to keep them here.

Mr. Broten: — Does the ministry have an idea or a goal of the . . . obviously the goal is to retain all of these nurses. But do you have an attrition rate that you expect to have with this 297? Do you have a target, say, at the end of the one year, how many you expect to stay put in the province based on past practices or past experiences with other internationally trained nurses?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Okay. Yes, thank you for the question. I guess first of all to know what the retention rate into the future will be is a little difficult because this hasn't been common practice. We haven't had a lot of nurses . . . even though there are a number of nurses from the Philippines working in the system. I know of three or four myself that have been here for years and years and years. But we really haven't tracked what the retention rate is. And for me to give you a target of, you know, there's 297 coming to Saskatchewan in the

next six to seven months; how many will be here in 24 months? We don't really have a target.

I think we're doing pretty good to set the first target of 800 nurses over the next four years, but we haven't targeted the target, I guess is what you're kind of asking me, and how many we'll retain into the future. But I can say that the regional health authorities are certainly doing, you know, a lot of work on making them feel as comfortable as possible. Regina Qu'Appelle would probably have the most experience in this area because they've attracted some Philippine nurses in the past, and they certainly realize that, you know, certainly working with the Open Door Society and working with quite a vibrant I believe Philippine community here in Regina, for example, making these new recruits comfortable.

I know of one Philippine nurse that I spent a fair amount of time with about a month ago when I was doing my community tour. She came to the small community of Lang and had been . . . Started to talk . . . she'd heard about this recruitment and thought it was wonderful. She had come from the Philippines about 12 years ago and had been working in the system for an awful long time, oh 12 years, and absolutely loving it. And she really felt that there would be, in her own words and I . . . you know, for what it's worth, but thought that our retention rate would be very good because her experience had been quite good here. And there isn't a big Philippine community in Lang, but there certainly is in a lot of our major centres, so I think, I'm really encouraged and optimistic that the retention rate will be very high as we move forward. But to give you an exact target on our target, I can't do that.

Mr. Broten: — Well it's certainly hard to predict the future, I recognize and grant you that, but perhaps we can look at the track record that has taken place already. What was the date that the existing recruitment grants came into effect and began being offered?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — What we have, I guess, is we know that the recruitment grant was first offered — would probably be the way to say it — in around the fall of '06. And we don't have the exact numbers of, you know, how successful. It has been successful. And certainly you know it helps to retain . . . that grant certainly helps to retain. This is I think maybe a little . . . I don't know if we can compare it exactly because the grant for the most part has been targeted to, and not intentionally, but I mean most of the people that have had uptake on the grant have been probably Canadian citizens — whether it's just Saskatchewan citizens or people coming from Alberta or Manitoba or wherever.

This one is a little different when you're talking about coming from a different country like the Philippines. I don't know even if we did have numbers whether we could extrapolate from those numbers how successful we will be on retaining these new recruits. It might give us a bit of an idea, but you know there are — definitely we realize that — there are challenges when you bring people in from other countries.

I don't know; we could stand to be corrected, but this is my own assumption — that I don't know if, when we bring in nurses, for example, whether they'll be as willing to relocate as some of our, for example, doctors. We've done a very good job

in recruiting doctors from other countries, but we haven't always done the best job in retaining them. I don't know if these new nurses . . . I really personally don't think that they'll be as willing to move as readily as certainly as a physician is because you know if that was the case, it would be a concern. But I think from the limited — and it's been very limited — experience that we've had on Philippine nurses coming to our province, that they mostly come here and they stay here. And we're looking forward to that experience.

So you know if you wanted to draw an analogy to the doctors, I don't think that would be fair either, or I don't think it's fair drawing it to the grants that have been given to Canadian citizens for the most part. You know I think this is certainly a new venture.

And the little bit of experience that I've had from the nurses that I've talked to from the Philippines that have come, have set up their life here, they love it here. In fact I was a little . . . I was just kind of soul-searching when I was talking to the one nurse from Lang when she was upset when she heard it was going to warm up because I couldn't wait until it warmed up, and she liked the cold weather and liked the snow. So they adapt very, very well.

Mr. Broten: — Well I appreciate that, that the physician question is a different one than the nursing question, and I also appreciate the fact that the retention of Canadian grads will be different from that of internationally trained grads. I do believe on the existing application form when applying for the relocation grants, the applicants indicate as to whether or not they're Saskatchewan-trained, out of province, or out of country. Is that correct or am I mistaken there?

Presumably if those categories were identified on the application where you probably would have to state where you've been working or where you went to school, one could take the number for the internationally trained component, even if it is American, because the Filipino-trained nurses are trained according to American standards from what I've read. So if you did have that number and if some of those grants have been awarded and if the service agreement has been met, one could also identify what the attrition rate is I think.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes. You know, because it is, it's an important question and it's an important issue to follow forward. I mean, because it would probably determine how much more of this we would do as far as recruiting out of country if we find that the retention rate isn't as high as what we wanted. But how do you know that until you track that? I think there's maybe a couple of avenues. I'm not really sure if it's on the form, but the SRNA [Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association] certainly tracks nurses as to, you know, how many, where they're from, and where they are in a year and two and three years time. So that would I think be the best way of tracking the attrition rate as you said.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you for that and I'll move away from numbers and ask some broader questions about the 297. Could you please describe to me . . . It's my understanding that there's an ethical agreement with the Philippines with respect to what type of nurses can be recruited, how they can be recruited, all these different things. Am I correct in my understanding that

that's part of the MOU that has been signed for some time?

Ms. Donnelly: — The team had some ethical principles that all regions agreed to before going to the Philippines. I do have them here. I can read them out if you want.

Mr. Broten: — Could you please read them and table them.

Ms. Donnelly: — Certainly.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you.

Ms. Donnelly: — I'll read first some of, just the background leading into this. The Saskatoon Health Region posted much of the recruitment trip on a website, as you know. And they do speak to ethical recruiting on the website:

During this meeting we shared our ethical recruitment statement. The embassy and Philippine government were seriously impressed with our commitment to ethical recruitment and to our intent to 'give back'.

It was said many times during this day that Saskatchewan was setting a new international standard by:

Coming in as a province with multiple regions working in collaboration to recruit nurses,
Bringing a clear ethical recruitment statement and living by it, and

Working with our training institutions and universities to try and establish a partnership with St. Paul's University, a rural nursing college in [I don't think I can pronounce it correctly] Iloilo [in the Philippines].

So I'll just now speak to the actual ethical recruitment principles that the team adopted going in:

Saskatoon Health Region [and in essence all regions participating] focuses on ethical recruiting. This means that steps are taken not to disrupt or harm health systems in other countries.

The following is an ethical statement created by the Saskatoon Health Region team . . . [but adopted by all teams going in]

The Recruitment Team will . . .

conduct themselves in a manner respectful of the profession they belong to and the region they work in.

only interview those nurses provided to us by the recruitment agencies we have contracted with and will refrain from encouraging, persuading or actively recruiting outside of the interview site.

provide candidates with accurate information regarding our country, our province, our region and the communities in our region.

provide candidates with accurate information about the job they are being interviewed for, as well as the associated wages and benefits.

will only encourage candidates to accept jobs they have the appropriate qualifications, skills or experience for. And that's the recruitment team.

And that's the recruitment team. And then:

The region will . . .

not hire more than 10 nurses from a single site and not more than 3 nurses from a single unit.

accept all costs associated with having the candidate lists provided to the region by the recruitment agencies.

only contract with recruitment agencies who do not charge potential candidates any fees outside of what the employer has paid.

expect the candidates to pay for those things that verify they are a credentialed nurse in their respective country.

[and finally] assist the candidate in relocating and settling in our region — this will include, but not be limited to, paying for their processing fees, medical exam, airfare, temporary accommodation upon their arrival, and orientation to their new job.

Mr. Broten: — So thank you for reading that and thank you for tabling it. To the minister's knowledge, were those ethical guidelines adhered to?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes, as far as we are informed that those guidelines were adhered to. In fact you know, talking to many of the again recruiters that went on the trip to the Philippines, they were very proud of the fact of the recruitment and the ethical benchmark that they set. In fact it was said to many of them, and certainly through, I heard it through the Legislative Secretary for recruitment and retention, Laura Ross, on how the Canadian embassy and a number of the officials in the Philippines said, your delegation has been by far the most professional, has really set the benchmark much higher, set the bar much higher, than any other jurisdiction that has been to the Philippines.

In fact, I think what you'll find is that it probably most other groups that go to recruit now in the Philippines will be asked to follow along with the standards that our province had set in this process. I think it is something to be very proud of, and I think, you know, if we so choose in the future to go back to the Philippines, I think the standard and the benchmark that we set as a recruitment team will serve us in good stead into the future.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. In the response there was reference made to contracting with recruitment agencies to assist with the whole process. Could you please list those agencies that the ministry and/or the health regions entered into a contract with to do their recruitment effort?

Ms. Donnelly: — The recruitment agencies were Filipino recruitment agencies, so I'd actually have to get that from the regions. I can get that. I don't have it here tonight.

Mr. Broten: — That would be appreciated. Thank you.

Obviously the Philippines is a different place than Saskatchewan, and there's many different health systems, different cultures, different climates, all of these things. Could you please describe what sort of orientation efforts are undertaken once the new nurses arrive, and is this a centralized orientation process, or is this specific to each health region?

Ms. Donnelly: — Regina Qu'Appelle is developing the orientation and mentorship program for the Filipino nurses, since they have the first tranche coming into the province. The province is supporting them in developing that and evaluating it and then rolling it out to the other regions in the province. So the goal to complete that is in the very near future so that the regions not as experienced as Regina accepting Filipino nurses in later in the summer will have an orientation and mentorship sort of tool kit to assist them in bringing nurses into their facilities, Filipino nurses into their facilities. So it's being developed by one region and spread across the province to the other regions who have recruited as well on this trip.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. And I have a question on behalf of a constituent who approached me. And this individual is an RN working in the Saskatoon Health Region, and he was curious about what the orientation costs are, what the projected orientation costs are per head on the new nurses that come to Saskatchewan — how much is expected to spend, the orientation process, the staff to train those people, perhaps duplicate staff for a period of time during initial shifts, all of these things. Do you have a number that you're projecting that it will cost per head for the orientation process?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — We don't have an estimate of that. We can certainly work on that and provide it to you in the future. But we know there is going to be a cost, absolutely that there is going to be a cost to orientate them and get them up to speed to working in our facilities. But I will say that, and I understand that it's a cost, but it's a cost absolutely worth paying. I remember about two or three months ago when we were very short in the RUH in Saskatoon in the emergency room and the nurses at that time were pretty much at their wits' end and saying that that was it. They couldn't function any more under the conditions they were in, mainly because of staffing shortages. And I was asked at that time, well what are you going to do?

We talked a lot about increasing the number of training seats. Certainly, you know, under the previous government the number of training seats were increased but it's a time lag before you see the results of that. We've talked about increasing the number of training seats by another 300, getting up into the 700 range, but that is a time lag. There is four years down the road before we see the benefits of that and I was asked often, so what are you going to do though right now? How can you help right now? And I said at the time, I think help is on the way. Not that this is the be-all end-all because it's only one prong of many different pronged approach to deal with the nursing shortage. But this is at least one area where we've brought some nurses in that will be I think serving the people of Saskatchewan, you know, within six or seven months. Once they get here they go through the orientation. It's not like we're waiting four years for a grad to come through. These people will be able to start serving the people of Saskatchewan much sooner.

But it's not the answer. It's not the whole answer at all. It helps us along the way, certainly, retaining more of our graduating nurses, attracting from other provinces, people that have left our province, attracting them back. It's a many faceted approach.

The Philippine recruitment initiative is only one approach, but what it does do is I think it really, really reduces the time that we see the benefits. I mean we reduce it from, for example, a student starting in school this year to four years time and then having some orientation after that. After they come out of school, of course, they're not necessarily ready to work in ICU [intensive care unit] by themselves. There's an orientation period there. This is an orientation period absolutely for the new recruits from the Philippines, but it certainly gets them on to the floor and helping out in a much faster basis.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. As I close I would like, through the Chair I would like to thank you and your officials for your answers. And I look forward to receiving some information about the recruitment costs as well as some information around the number of people that have received recruitment grants and how many are around currently. So thank you very much.

The Chair: — The Chair recognizes Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much. Just along these lines with recruitment and retention and specific to the trip from the Philippines that you've been answering questions about, one of the key players in international recruitment is the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association. It is important for nurses who come here to be licensed. And in order to be licensed, the SRNA has to be involved. The SRNA was part of the trip to the Philippines. Can you give me some idea of what role the ministry played with the SRNA in this whole process?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes. Thanks for that question and yes, you're right that the SRNA certainly had a presence on the recruitment trip as did, you know, a number of other parties. I mean, the educational institutes, both SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] and the University of Saskatchewan made the trip along with the health authorities and a couple of members from the ministry and also the Legislative Secretary.

I remember when we were talking about it, it seemed like a pretty big number but, you know, when you look at the work that they did and the amount of interviews that they conducted as well as the relationships that they built, be it education through our training institutes, the University of Saskatchewan and SIAST with their training institutes, there certainly has become, I think, you'll see benefits from that. But the SRNA, you're right, it was very important because they are the licenser of course and maintain the standards for our nurses working in our province.

I've just been informed, and perhaps you knew this before I did, that the SRNA was given \$100,000 this past year and will be given 100,000 over the three years, \$300,000 to work on, I don't if its proper word is credential check but making sure that any internationally trained grad, or for example nurse, would meet the standards here in our province. Because we realize that as we move towards our goal of increasing the number of nurses by 800 and if some of those are going to be

foreign-trained grad, it certainly ups the workload, increases the workload I should say, for the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association. And so to compensate that would be correct which I believe was started probably under your watch.

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much. The SRNA has always been concerned about — supportive of, but concerned about — their ability to credential foreign-trained nurses. Very supported of foreign-trained nurses coming in and have always looked at as part of their normal process, the credentials of nurses applying here. They would've had an awareness of nurse applications from the Philippines for some period of time. Do you know when the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association first began work on credentials within the Philippines?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you. This maybe kind of leads back to one of the previous questions regarding when the recruitment agency was first initiated and when it started to do its work, which was probably about a year and a half ago I guess. And you'd be more familiar with it than I, but about a year and a half ago.

And at that time of course, if you're going to look at trying to recruit more, you're going to . . . There's a good possibility they might be foreign-trained grads. So the SRNA, I guess, would be looking at then looking at, you know, if there are more recruits coming in, being able to have the capacity to process those, to credential check. From our recollection — and maybe you'll correct me if I'm wrong — that I don't know if there was any specific initiatives to say just credential check for the Philippines, as much as it was to credential check for any foreign-trained grad. As the recruitment agency ramps up its efforts, hopefully we receive more foreign-trained grads and that they would be able to have the capacity to accommodate that.

Mr. Taylor: — Part of the reason I was asking these questions has to do with the . . . sort of the specific time frame in which regional health authorities became aware that they could actively recruit in the Philippines because all of the groundwork had been done. In other words, MOU has been signed with the Philippines by the government, the Department of Immigration had done its work, the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association had reviewed and recognized that there were applications that could be dealt with.

So the regional health authorities also have been . . . They're the employers. The government does not hire a nurse. The regional health authorities hire the nurses with the exception of . . . [inaudible] . . . but the regional health authorities hire.

Is the minister aware of any meetings that took place in the last year between Philippine recruiters and the regional health authorities, meetings that would have given, for example, the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Authority reason to believe that they could go to the Philippines and successfully recruit because the SRNA was prepared to work with them to process those applications?

Is the minister aware of meetings that took place within the last year between recruiters, the department — then the department — and the regional health authorities specific to the

Philippines?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The first recruitment trip was of course initiated and conducted by the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Authority. That took place in November 2007. They obviously recognized the need to recruit from more than just here in Saskatchewan and initiated the first trip. The ministry had some workings with the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Authority in supporting, but the initiative was really I think through the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Authority.

Mr. Taylor: — But in addition to that, as you are aware, the former department — now the minister — meets on occasion with the regional health authorities. You talked earlier about the leadership forum, for example. And is the minister aware of or can he tell us, in consultation with the officials that he has here, of any meeting that may have taken place between the department and the regional health authorities in which the Philippines was discussed as an area of the world in which recruiting could be successful?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — As far as we know that — and, you know, we can check on this further — but there was no, not that we know of, was there any meetings between the senior staff of the ministry now, department then, and the, you know, the CEO's [chief executive officer] of the regional health authorities as far as we know, but we can check on that. Where the meetings may have been conducted — and we can check on this as well — is through the human resources departments, you know, through the health careers Sask area and the regional health authorities HR [human resources] people. There may have been some work at that level but as far as we know it wasn't necessarily, and maybe I should be asking you this question — did you have a meeting with the regional health authorities prior to — but as far as the senior ministry officials, they're not aware of any but, you know, we can certainly check into it.

Mr. Taylor: — Okay. Let me ask one more question along this line and give the minister as much latitude as he wants to answer this question. Because indeed he has already acknowledged that really the . . . prior to November 7, an immigration MOU had been signed by the Government of Saskatchewan and the Philippines. It acknowledges that the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association was actively engaged in reviewing credentials with regards to activity in the Philippines, that the health authorities had begun their work with regards to preparing for Philippine applications and the recruitment agency was actively engaged in efforts with regards to this work and specifically the human resource departments were taking a serious look at the Philippines. So my question to the minister is basically quite simple and why I say I give him all the latitude in the world. Given that all of the background work was being done with regards to Philippine recruitment, does the minister take credit for — full credit for — the Philippine nurses that are currently being admitted to Saskatchewan under application?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you for that question and thank you for giving me the latitude to answer that. We are just, you know, kind of briefly chatting here. There might have been some meetings that we weren't aware of between Advanced Education and the regional health authorities but certainly not to

our understanding, maybe the Ministry of Health.

But furthermore to the question of whether I'm going to take full credit or whether the government should take full credit for this initiative. You talk about a memorandum of understanding that was signed prior to, and certainly you know if a regional health authority goes on November whatever the date was, and the election was November 7, should I take credit for that? No. Was there some work done by the previous government? Absolutely. And you know we would have given you credit, we would have certainly given credit, had you followed through with all the initiatives and further recruited nurses such as what's happened since we have been in government.

We also would have given you a lot of credit if a target had been set early and a priority would have been given towards recruitment and retention so that we could measure on how successful that recruitment and retention initiative was. We would have given you credit for that if you followed towards your target and worked towards your target.

Our frustration through those number of years is that a target was never set. And, you know, so there was a recruitment grant offered. And you know, it has been successful. How successful? Well it's hard to say because we didn't know what our expectations were. If we don't have any sort of expectation level, I guess you can say anything. One nurse would have been a success.

We as an opposition at the time said, we need to increase the number of human resources. We set a target at 800 and we've been moving towards that. I guess you could hypothetically say that had you, had the opposition party now been still in government, that recruitment initiative into the Philippines might have gone ahead. But then I don't know if it would have. What I do know, that when there is a change of government, the priority number one was — in health especially — was recruitment and retention and we made it happen. Can I take the full credit? No. There was groundwork laid before. But do I know that it happened since there was a change in government? Absolutely.

The Chair: — Ms. Junor.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. I know it's running close to when we had agreed to adjourn. But I have some wrap-up questions. We talked a great deal at the beginning when I was asking questions about the MOU and some of the details. And understandably you said that there's a need to have a lot of those details worked out.

But SAHO — and again I say they weren't a signatory but they're certainly going to be involved in this in many, many ways — has costed this out publicly at \$1.2 billion in three years because I'm . . . [inaudible] . . . in the cycle that your MOU is in. They've somehow got numbers to work on. So I would anticipate that the department, given that they have access to everything SAHO has and more, should have some projected cost of this MOU.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I guess I can start by saying that they're really two different agreements, you know. The agreement between the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and the

Government of Saskatchewan in conjunction with the RHAs is one agreement that this money that we're talking about tonight is going to go towards fulfilling. What you're talking about is the, I guess the first proposal in contract negotiations between the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and SAHO. They're two different agreements.

I mean what Saskatchewan Union of Nurses put in front of SAHO and how SAHO interpreted what SUN put in front of them is really, you know, a completely different partnership than what we have worked out with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses.

Does it deal with recruitment and retention, both of them? Yes it does, but there's so many variables that differ greatly. The Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and interpreted by SAHO used . . . There's a number in there of over 1,000 nurses that we're short. That isn't what is agreed upon between SUN and our ministry in the partnership.

The partnership that SUN put forward with us follows very, very closely to a document — that if you're not familiar with, a lot of people in Saskatchewan became familiar with — *Securing the Future*, our party platform that talked about increasing the number of registered nurses by 800, which talks about ensuring that new graduates have permanent, full-time employment. Our platform talks about bridging programs from LPNs to RNs. It talks about recruiting expatriate nurses back to Saskatchewan. It talks about recruiting more immigrant nurses. That's what the partnership between SUN and the Government of Saskatchewan talks about.

I am not familiar with all the terms and conditions that were put forward to SAHO by SUN. SAHO costed out at one point whatever billion dollars it was and maybe that's what it costed out.

But what I do know is it was two distinctly different agreements or partnerships. One is being worked on through the collective bargaining process between SAHO and the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses. And, you know, I'm hoping they'll find common ground soon and move in that direction. But let's not mistake that as not what was agreed upon between the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and the Government of Saskatchewan.

Ms. Junor: — I'm speechless, frankly, and that's hardly ever happened. I have read the, I've seen the PowerPoint that SUN presented to SAHO. I've seen the MOU. I've seen the letter that Ms. Longmoore sent to you. I cannot separate all of this into neat compartments. It is all intertwined.

The bargaining process is based on many, many of the articles or the requirements or the signed agreements in the MOU. And in fact the MOU says, "provide an enhanced collective bargaining mandate," which inserts you directly into the bargaining process. You can't separate them. I mean you might try, but that's not going to be possible.

And I know Ms. Longmoore is asking you directly in the letter she sent to you March 10 to immediately communicate — publicly and immediately — with the regional health authorities to advise them that they must comply with the MOU as direct,

in the strategic direction. And it is, those things have to be negotiated.

So you've put yourself in the collective bargaining process. And SAHO has said what they've seen from the PowerPoint presentation that SUN presented to them early in February when they started bargaining, which pretty much mirrors the MOU, that's a \$1.2 billion cost. And that's not including any wage increases. So you must have some idea how much this is going to cost you and the taxpayers of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you for that question. And, you know, I guess it was to be expected that we try and get out, you know, the opposition would try and get off the discussion around the \$60 million that goes towards the partnership agreement with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses.

She said she was speechless, but then she certainly found some more words after that. But she also talked a little bit about, you know, trying to compare the two agreements and they're all confused. She talked about enhanced bargaining mandate that was in the partnership. And, you know I think all I can say to that is that we're going to let the bargaining process work — work the way it has under most governments. And that's where the employer and the employee work out an agreement without interference by government. Now it's been my understanding that in the past that it wasn't always the case under the former government and quite often there was interference in the bargaining process. But that isn't the way that I see myself working through this process.

An enhanced bargaining mandate can mean an awful lot of things. An enhanced bargaining mandate is a term that can be interpreted many, many different ways. And I think we're going to see whether that comes to fruition at the end of the bargaining agreement. I think we'll probably see that their mandate was enhanced. So I don't think that's a, you know, term that I have to worry about whether that follows through on the partnership or not.

But what I do know is that, what I do know is that the previous government worked very, very hard to get a partnership agreement with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and never could. What I do know that that agreement, just prior to the election, had a very, very large price tag attached to it a year. What I do know is that this partnership agreement was signed by the Government of Saskatchewan, will work to recruit and retain 800 more nurses at nowhere close to the price tag that the former government was working on with SUN. They certainly, you as a government tried hard to sign a partnership and I can certainly understand the frustration that I certainly think I'm hearing from the voice that within three months a new government signed an agreement that the former government couldn't get done in 16 years.

The Chair: — Ms. Junor, do you have some concluding comments?

Ms. Junor: — I don't think I ever used the word confused, but I do think that there is some confusion in how you're interpreting what you've done. I think that it's going . . . You're saying it's going, it can be interpreted in many ways. Well there's the confusion. Everybody is going to be confused.

There is much work to be done. I appreciate what you have done up to this date, building on many of the things that have been put in place by the previous government, the previous minister and ministers, and that work has . . . Because of that work many things can be done. Also because there is more money and there's money now that we never had to do some of the things we wished we could've done. We did the best we could with what we had.

Now I really would like to thank the minister for coming tonight and putting up with all the questions that may or may not have been targeted directly to the 60 million, but it's all about the MOU so these are questions that were pretty much all tied to that. And we have a lot more questions. I don't know if we'll have a venue to ask them, but I hope in budget estimates we do have that opportunity. But I appreciate your candour and your officials for being here tonight, and thank you.

The Chair: — Okay. Are there any more questions? If not, committee members, we have before us vote 32, the Ministry of Health, provincial health services subvote (HE04) in the amount of \$65,000,000. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — I would ask a member to move the following motion:

That it be resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ended March 31, 2008, the following sum, \$65,000,000.

Mr. Allchurch so moves. Committee members agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

[Vote 32 agreed to.]

The Chair: — Good. Thank you, committee members. Thank you, Minister, and your officials. Committee members, we'll take a seven-minute break, recess. We will reconvene at 9:05. That'll allow the Minister of Health and his officials to take their place and perhaps we get a chance to stretch our legs.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

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

Subvotes (ED03) and (ED09)

The Chair: — Okay. I'll call the committee to order. Our third item of business is Education, vote 5. We have with us the Minister of Education and his officials. Minister, would you care to introduce your officials.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Of course I'd like to introduce my officials, but also I'd like to thank the members for being present tonight on St. Patrick's Day and allowing me to bring forward the supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Education.

Seated to my right is Audrey Roadhouse, who is the deputy minister of Education. We have Helen Horsman, who is one of the assistant deputy ministers of Education. Behind me is Darren McKee, who is also an assistant deputy minister. Directly behind me is Dave Tulloch, who is the director of finance. And seated next to Dave is Val Lusk. Val is the executive director of education finance and facilities. Next to Val is Clint Repski. Clint is the director of financial services. And behind them are two ladies: Margaret Ball, who is the director of facilities, and Dawn Court, who is our senior financial manager.

Mr. Chair, if I might, I'm just going to make a couple of opening comments. I'll be very brief. Saskatchewan's economy is thriving and it is because of that growth that we are here to discuss an additional funding of \$6.3 million to be provided to the ministry.

At the higher level, basically there are, the funds are required for two initiatives: \$3.2 million reflects the education property tax credit, which was increased from 8 per cent to 10 per cent on residential and commercial properties and the 38 per cent on property tax credit on agricultural land. The remaining portion of the 16.3 million, which is 13.1 million, is for capital, and these funds will provide funding support to basically the city of Saskatoon to the two boards, or three boards there actually for three prior commitments from October 2003.

Property tax relief, combined with restructuring of school divisions in a more equitable and transparent system for distributing provincial K to 12 operating grants, will strengthen the education and financing system in Saskatchewan for the benefit of both students and taxpayers.

Many of you will know that the Premier has asked Jim Reiter to look further into this issue, and we expect his report later on this year.

With regard to the funding for school capital, the improvement and maintenance of our province's infrastructure is vital to creating sustainable development. From a forward-looking perspective, improving and maintaining our province's infrastructure goes well beyond repairing roads and developing subdivisions to support our economy, improving our quality of life, and taking pride in where we live. It includes investing in critical educational infrastructure that will have a long-lasting impact on our children and their children. I'm happy to report we're looking at a variety of options over the next number of years. More information, of course, will be available in this issue at budget time.

Our government is bringing forward new ideas to help our province reach its potential and to ensure our prosperity extends to all of our residents. With those remarks, Mr. Chair, I'd like to entertain any questions that may come.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. Ms. Higgins, I believe you have some questions.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Just a few quick questions, Mr. Minister. I'm very pleased to see you're here this evening, and I'd like to thank your officials for doing the night shift and being here so late.

Could you be more specific on the capital transfers for the schools in Saskatoon? What schools? What projects are we funding? Are they new projects, or are they completion of ongoing projects?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — There's three or four questions there, and I'll start by saying that the projects that we're providing additional monies to are ongoing. These were projects that were initially approved in, I believe, October of 2003. And the three projects are very specifically the Tommy Douglas Collegiate which is a Saskatoon Public initiative and the Bethlehem High School which is the St. Paul's initiative and of course the école canadienne-fransaskois, pardon my French, which is in the city of Saskatoon.

Now specifically for each of those projects there will be 4.5 million of the 13.1 will be provided to Saskatoon Public for Tommy Douglas Collegiate. The additional monies of 7.5 million will be provided to St. Paul's Catholic, or St. Paul's Separate for Bethlehem High School, and 1.1 million will be provided to the fransaskois school division.

Ms. Higgins: — So will this funding complete the projects that are on the go? It won't for the francophone school, will it? That's just prep money or planning?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — No it's . . . Well I'll start with the first one which of course is the Tommy Douglas Collegiate. Tommy Douglas Collegiate, the province's share was about \$13 million, and what this will do is this commitment will now fully meet the commitment of the provincial government to that funding. The project is, I think, well over 21 million. So this was the government's portion, the 13 million, and that will now complete it.

For the project that has been initiated by St. Paul's, that was a share that was going to be about 17 million, and today we are adding 7.5 to that of already 9.5 which has already been allocated. So it will mean that the entire allocation of \$17 million has now been met. For the francophone school, there was 4.4 million that was contributed before. Today in these supplementary estimates, we are contributing an additional 1.1 million. And that will still leave a balance of \$1 million to be funded from further capital funding in the year '08-09 or subsequent years. So the commitment of the government there is \$6.5 million, which today's 1.1 will take us up to 5.5.

Ms. Higgins: — I guess I'm sitting here thinking this is a little odd to be making these kind of investments at this point in time when we're just a few days away from budget, moving it to out of one-time resources — I would assume — out of the previous year instead of moving it into the '08-09. Is it one-time dollars that you're dedicating towards infrastructure in the schools? And will this . . . I guess my concern partly is also that this will take away from capital transfers and investment in the school system in budget year. Or will this be on top of what we're hoping for in the budget?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you for that question. Clearly as I think Minister of Finance, Mr. Gantfoer, ended when he spoke about the third quarter report, he indicated that there were some one-time dollars that are now there. And the decision was made because of the amount of money, you know, clearly we're

trying to catch up on the funding that was allocated in 2003. That's a long time ago. And there are many projects before the facilities department.

We have in the 1A category — I shouldn't say just the 1A — the one category which is 1A, 1B, and 1C, we have nearly \$160 million worth of requests. So if we as government are going to make any announcements about capital in the future, we need to start to catch up on what was promised for the past. So as a result of the resource revenue and a barrel sticking up there at \$100, the third quarter report had indicated that there were some additional dollars beyond what the budget had indicated, and we believe that this is a wise investment to try to meet some of that cost right now. And therefore \$13.1 million is being allocated to, additionally, to the capital expenditures from '03.

Ms. Higgins: — So as we're looking at oil being at \$100 a barrel plus, budgeted at what? Eighty? So we can count on this kind of a boost going towards — in the budget — going towards school capital?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Well I guess in a short two sleeps we'll know what Minister Gantefer will say. Clearly I have tried to indicate to cabinet and others that there is a deficiency in capital and that in order to address needs, needs that haven't even arrived before the facilities department . . . We're hearing about space requirements in communities like Martensville and Warman, and these are not the 1A or 1B or 1C projects that I've talked about. So I believe there's going to be a huge request for projects.

So we're looking forward. And that is why when these additional dollars arrived within the General Revenue Fund of the province, I was very glad to see the Premier and cabinet make a decision that we would allocate 13 million towards capital that was announced five years ago.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much for that. And could I just ask for a bit more detailed of an explanation on the education property tax relief, the additional 3.2 million.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — In the spring budget of a year ago, the budget contained an amount within the Education estimates of \$107.85 million, and that was for meeting the promise for both the agricultural component, the residential component, and the commercial component. At that time, the 107 million did not include the increase from 8 per cent to 10 per cent for residential and commercial properties. That was a decision that was made after the budget and was not included in that number. And that is why in the supplementary estimates in December we dealt with an additional amount of monies that were being asked for in supplementary estimates of 11.75 million, and that basically was for the 8 per cent to 10 per cent increase for commercial and residential.

So as a result of that, the estimates are just that. You never know what the final assessment will be at the school division level of the different properties. We don't know what the mill rates were that subsequently boards of education set. And as a result then, when you take a percentage of an unknown number, we now know that that number has become larger because assessments went up, mill rates went up, the tax amount that was collected was in fact higher.

So as a result of that, we're now allocating \$122.8 million in total for all of that. And that's the sum of 107.85, 11.75, and 3.2 million. Yes.

Ms. Higgins: — So this covers off residential, commercial, and agricultural land?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Yes, that's correct.

Ms. Higgins: — It covers off all.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I can give you an estimate at the moment that is going to be pretty close because again we're still fine-tuning some of those numbers. But basically the rebate of — and again I'm using the number of \$122.8 million and more or less 123 million — about 71 million is going to be given to agricultural owners or owners of agricultural land, so \$71 million rebate there; about \$35 million to residential owners; and about 17 million to commercial. And again that will add up to 123. And so it's going to be a little less in some of those cases or a little more, but that's the approximate. You're looking at about 70 million to 71 for ag [agriculture] land. You're looking at about 35 million-plus for residential. And you're looking around 17 million for the commercial rebate.

Ms. Higgins: — So then the 3.2 is basically a final calculation that really compensates for a higher tax base where more money was collected, and you would have a higher credit amount that would be reimbursed or refunded or credited to, whether residential, agriculture, or commercial.

Just a question then. There was an OC [order in council] that was passed on January 10, and it talks about grants that were allotted to 17 school divisions within Saskatchewan and to provide consistency and assistance to the agricultural industry by offsetting 38 per cent reduction in education property tax on agricultural land. And there's a schedule of grants that were allotted.

Now what would have that been for? If this is a final calculation — the 3.2 — and then there was an OC done, are you . . . I'm not sure why the multiple adjustments at the end of the year?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — During the course of the year . . . And I should get maybe one of my officials to answer this, you know, the technical part here. Twice a year, there is a reconciliation with the school division to ensure then that the amounts provided reflect what the rebate was. And you were right in your assessment of the reason for the additional dollars because assessments changed at the school division levels because mill rates change. Now there's a greater amount of tax that was collected. So if you take 10 per cent of a number that's slightly bigger, there's additional rebate dollars that have now been given to the various landowners.

So as a result of that, now the total amount — and again this hasn't been completely finalized because we're looking at the assessments and everything else that's coming in — we believe that about \$3.2 million more will have been provided in the way of rebates to those three different property class owners.

Ms. Higgins: — Rebates to property class owners or credits?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Those would have been on their tax notices. Those would have been credits, right? They wouldn't have paid that money. But now the government owes that money to the school division on behalf of those.

Ms. Higgins: — So then the OC that was passed on January 10, with the 17 school divisions listed on the schedule, that would be included in the 3.2 million?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Sure. Yes, definitely they would be part of . . . and again when I indicate to you that the amount of dollars is \$122.8 million, that has been allocated to all of the school divisions over a period of time, and there are various times when that money is delivered to the school division.

Ms. Higgins: — Would you have a schedule for the complete dollar value that was distributed to each of the divisions that we could access?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I'll ask Val Lusk to comment on that if I might, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Absolutely.

Ms. Lusk: — We certainly can prepare a schedule. We're still finalizing some of the numbers from the school divisions, but certainly by year-end we can provide a schedule.

Ms. Higgins: — By fiscal year-end, the end of this month, right? We're talking fiscal year-end?

Ms. Lusk: — Shortly after year-end.

Ms. Higgins: — Shortly after fiscal year-end, okay. Thank you very much.

And that's it for me Mr. Chair. Thank you very much for letting me go ahead, so I can get on the road.

The Chair: — Certainly. Mr. Wotherspoon I believe you indicated you have some questions for the minister and his officials.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the minister and to his officials or the ministry's officials for attending late tonight as well. And thank you, Ms. Higgins, for cherry-picking most of my questions here.

So just to make sure I understood things properly, these three schools in Saskatoon that funding's been provided that were ongoing, are there any other outstanding projects that are in a similar status of an ongoing, non-complete status right now as well?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Sorry for that but I want to do a bit lengthier explanation of the number of projects that have been announced before. And as I referred to the answer to Ms. Higgins, these were projects that were announced in 2003. And of the francophone school, \$1 million, even after the allocation of 1.1 million today, there still will be 1 million left for future years. There is a project that was announced in 2003 at Nutana school in Saskatoon as well that has an outstanding amount of money, and there is an amount at

E.D. Feehan school also in Saskatoon that was announced in 2003 as well. So those are the remaining schools from 2003.

From subsequent years since 2003 to this current fiscal year of '07-08, there are additional projects that were announced in Norquay, in Naicam, in Prince Albert Collegiate Institute, in Yorkton Regional High School, and in Collège Mathieu. So those amounts are still outstanding and that isn't as big.

I should give you the amounts as well. The amounts outstanding on the three projects — the three in Saskatoon — are \$14.26 million. And the amount outstanding for those five projects that I'm referring to as multi-year projects that were announced is 4.67 million.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you. Thank you, Minister. Could you shed any light to us here as far as how the funding decisions were made for these three particular projects then, that you have decided to go ahead with, I guess in exclusion to . . . Is it Nutana? We're looking at the 2003 projects that weren't completed. There are still some 2003 ongoing projects that were left behind. What criteria was used to decide which three would go forward?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Well in the case of both Tommy Douglas and Bethlehem, both are almost completed. They're nearing the final stages, so those two projects are getting the last bit of funding so that both the Saskatoon Public Board of Education and St. Paul's Separate School Board will conclude those projects. The remaining money — as I said, the 1.1 million — is not sufficient enough to finish the project involving the francophone school board, and there still will be 1 million that hopefully will come from another year.

So basically those are the projects that were initiated sooner. There are students already occupying both Tommy Douglas and Bethlehem in both the grades 9 and 10 level. And this will allow the boards of education in both of those instances to complete the projects.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. So when we're looking at the priority requests and we're looking at the 1A requests, the outstanding amount I've heard is 14.26 and 4.67, so roughly about \$19 million before we reach the 16 projects from the 1A. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Unfortunately, Mr. Wotherspoon, the answer is correct. There still is a significant amount of dollars to fund projects that were previously announced in years past before we can allocate any monies to new projects.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Was there any thought, Minister, with the increased revenues that we do see in our surplus here right now to basically taking care of the outstanding budgets and starting anew, as a new government, with a new budget on the 1A requests? By funding — sorry, to be more clear — by funding not just the 13 million but by funding this other outstanding \$19 million as well so . . .

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — The revenues that the Ministry of Education was able to secure, the \$16 million to cover those two initiatives of property tax rebates and the capital is significant dollars, as I heard from Ms. Higgins's question as to

whether or not that was proper.

And clearly I felt that and cabinet felt that when these additional dollars were available, as limited as they were, I'm very grateful to cabinet and caucus to determine that that additional \$13 million could be allocated to capital. I would've loved to have another, you know, \$20 million come from the third quarter report, but those dollars are not there in that respect. So the answer to your question is, it would have been great, but the monies that I was able to achieve for the capital will bring us closer to being able to meet the completion of those projects.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. As mentioned just before, there are 16 projects, I believe, right now in the 1A priority list. We've spoken a little bit about this, about the outstanding dollars, the roughly \$19 million before we get to that list. We do have a heck of a good state here, state of our province and our finances here right now. Can people expect to see your government begin funding these projects from the 1A requests?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — If we're able to completely pay off the projects that have been allocated in years past and ensure that those are completed, we'll move forward on some other projects — no question. There will be an interest around the province to move capital ahead. I have heard from many school divisions of course across the province that they felt that over the last number of years that there hasn't been significant interest paid to maintaining and developing the infrastructure, and they would love to see that.

So whatever monies will be provided by the budget, I'll gratefully accept. If it's in excess of the amounts of monies that I've indicated to you which are required to complete those two different years of allocations, then we are going to be looking at new projects. And they're all ranked through the facilities department, as I introduced Margaret Ball before. Margaret and her staff over at the facilities department have a very complex system of analyzing and assessing and evaluating every project, and they're ranked in order from, you know, first to last, I guess, if you look at 1 to 16.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. I think we are encouraged that your commitment on a go-forward basis would be to continue to invest, and it has been a short time within this province that we have, you know, \$1.5 billion available at year-end. And I know our funding requests, I believe, right now are in around the half billion dollar mark or slightly above that, and so I guess I would encourage you to take those steps.

You mentioned — as a bit of a segue here as well — you mentioned the funding criteria, the formula that, I agree, is slightly complex. I have kind of a briefing book just to help me understand it myself, but it has a purpose, and it has a history. Is that a process that you're going to continue carrying forward, or do you anticipate any changes to the funding formula?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — No, the only changes that I think we're going to be looking at is, you know, as we're discussing today which are the supplementary estimates for covering projects from 2003. We're going to try, as monies become available, we're going to try to deal with the project in a much more succinct time period rather than spreading it out over five or six

years.

There are . . . And the other thing I think that we have to pay attention to, Mr. Wotherspoon, is that the rate of inflation right now for construction of schools and facilities is about two per cent per month. So that's a staggering amount of additional costs that will be incurred. And so we want to move forward. If monies are made available, we want to move forward quickly so that a school division that has a project, that believes it to be of a specific amount of money aren't suddenly finding out that four years from now, it's out by millions.

So that's going to judge, you know, be one of the conditions that we consider. But as far as the overall funding formula and the determination of whether or not the project is ranked as number 3 or 4 or 5, the rules will stay in place as exist.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. Has your ministry solicited funding requests for the upcoming 2008-2009 budget year?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — The discussions around preparation of the budget have been ongoing for a long time, and there have been many discussions about funds, and the outcome of that will be on Wednesday.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. Sorry I think I was misunderstood there. Have you been accepting requests or funding requests ongoing? I assume that there's been new requests that have come into the queue or into the formula here since our government left office.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — My apologies, Mr. Wotherspoon. I thought that you were asking whether I had made an initiative to ask for more funds for the Education budget. No, you are right. Boards of education continuously evaluate their facilities within their school division, and they will determine whether or not a particular facility needs an upgrade or a complete construction or a renovation. And there are also two other sides, Mr. Wotherspoon, that I haven't spent a lot of time because the supplementary estimates don't cover that.

One of the significant amounts of money out of the capital budget is referred to as block funding, and block funding basically is reserved for projects from a school division that are \$500,000 or less. So this could be the replacement of a boiler in a school that suddenly goes down or a replacement of windows or a roof or something that happens. And, you know, traditionally that amount of money has been in the 12 to 14, 15 million dollars that is kept for that purpose. So there are many projects, I believe block funding . . . okay, Ms. Ball indicates that about \$10 million has already been allocated for those kinds of projects. So there are submissions coming in.

And I can tell you a bit of an anomaly here is that I've just mentioned that we're going to, you know, make the final instalment to St. Paul's for the final payment from the government for its portion on Bethlehem. We already have a B1 from St. Paul's for an expansion to Bethlehem because of the number of students that have arrived at Bethlehem is in excess of what the building was constructed for. So, you know, that B1 is not a 1A or B or C; it's very far down the list in terms of the projects.

One other bit of information, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, I think, have assessed the facilities in the province, as far as the need, and they estimate that to be between 1.1 and \$1.2 billion.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. I believe in about June of every year, and I'm not sure if that's the exact date, but late June, the previous government would release the list with the priority and all the priorities and the commitments in the order for which they were entered in the queue. Are we proceeding on that same basis? And if not, could you provide the date for which we'll have a funding priority capital list in hand.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — No, I'm happy to report to you, Mr. Wotherspoon, that that will be the continued process. And by the end of June, there will be a new list and a new evaluation of projects as to their ranking because a particular project that currently isn't within the 1A or B or C category may have joined because of a structural deficiency or some health-related or safety-related incidents. So yes, that's an ongoing process, and we will have that list probably by the end of June.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. If we can change channels just a bit maybe over to the property tax dollars, to not be overly political, but your party has suggested for some time that they had a plan, sort of a more long-term plan to address property tax, and we've now had a Legislative Secretary that's been appointed to undertake a study. Why is this necessary?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — As indicated within our platform and within, I think, communications from the Saskatchewan Party for a long period of time, we felt that there is a short-term solution to the amount of money that property owners pay in the way of tax to fund education. Saskatchewan is the highest . . . or relies the most on funding from property tax owners. So the rebates that we have continued with from the previous budget and in fact are enhancing over the period of time, we've made a commitment over the term of our government that the rebates will increase.

But at the same time, we feel that the rebate is not a final solution, that that's not going to put in place a permanent solution, and that permanent solution is what Mr. Reiter is working on at the moment. He has begun his process of consultation with all of the stakeholders. He will be putting in place a timeline of consulting around the province — not only within Saskatchewan but outside of Saskatchewan as well — and I expect a report. Mr. Reiter should have a report by probably the fall of this year in 2008 that will, I hope, propose a lot of options that will be able to be discussed over a period of time.

And hopefully before, you know, the fourth year of our mandate, which we are still promising rebates, that we will be able to impose some form of permanent tax relief as proposed by the information that Mr. Reiter shares with us.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So you're comfortable, Minister, with your short-term 2 per cent increases per year until such time that you have your long-term project in place. You mentioned a study coming in possibly at the end of 2008 and possible implementation, possibly 2011. You're comfortable with that

timeline as far as implementation for broader, long-term, more significant property tax relief?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — The promise that we made and the promise that we'll keep is that we have put in place rebates at the moment and we have indicated in the Throne Speech the indication was there that the rebates would continue to be met.

As I said, the process is a lengthy one and it's not something that we're going to be able to change overnight. So I think it will take us a little while. I don't believe that the permanent solution will take as long as the four years of our mandate. I hope it will be ready sooner and that it will bring a permanent solution to what many people see as a major concern.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — It'd be nice if you take that message of the length in that process and the delicacy of those processes back to some of your colleagues who may have maybe spoken out in the past as to sort of that being a rather simple process, which it certainly isn't. And it's certainly something very important to the people of Saskatchewan. And I guess I am encouraged to see action taken.

Who has the Legislative Secretary consulted with to date in regards to the long-term report?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I know Mr. Reiter is just putting in place the timeline and the consultation process that he will undertake. In fact he's having a meeting with me tomorrow morning at 9:30. We have met a number of times, where he's explored ideas as to what he feels needs to be done and we've reviewed some of those things.

I know he's met with different stakeholders, including SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] and SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] and the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association] and various officials. He's talked to some people who have been involved in consultative work for the Saskatchewan School Boards Association. So he's still putting together his ideas. He's still putting together his ideas on what he wants to do and then there will be a formal consultation process that he will initiate by way of communicating, I'm sure, with everyone that he is going to seek advice from.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. I'm wondering if . . . You talk about many actions which this Legislative Secretary's going to undertake in the near future. I wonder if . . . We're talking about establishing possibly terms of reference, who those stakeholders are, what procedure he's undertaking to make sure that it's a valuable process, one that's objective and offers the broadest benefits. So I guess it might be a little early to say then that much consultation has gone on within that if the terms of reference or the . . . I'm wondering if and when does he report back to you then. And I'm wondering when we might see some of these terms of reference time frame laid out and some broader actions laid out.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Clearly I want to put on record that the Legislative Secretary, Mr. Reiter, is responsible to the Minister of Education, to me. So we will be working co-operatively. I am not going to be injecting myself into the process. That is going to be Mr. Reiter's process but we will meet and we will

formalize his ideas and I will either agree or disagree with them and we'll try to develop what we see collectively, the two of us, as being the best method of trying to secure all of the information and all of the advice from around the province, from all of the stakeholders, from outside of the province. So that will be worked on with myself.

We also have, of course, a deputy minister here and her staff. They will be also assisting Mr. Reiter in allowing him to do his work and those are things that we're working on right now. So if I gave the impression that Mr. Reiter has consulted with a lot of people, what he's doing right now is not the consultation for what the report will contain, it's to say, okay if I'm going to do this, what's the best method to do this? That's the discussions, and I'll use the word discussions rather than consultations. He's had discussions with numerous groups, numerous individuals to try to get a feel for how he can do his job.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. You led me to my next question here, one that I'd like to get before we adjourn here tonight, leading into how many, what kind of a staff allocation you'll provide, your ministry will provide to the Legislative Secretary. And now we've talked, you've mentioned just now that I believe that would be some internal coverage there. I would assume then that there'd be some budgeted dollars and maybe we'll hear about those in two days. But I know that the Ministry of Education is likely fully engaged across the board and this would be an additional activity for which it would be undertaking and that it would likely require some significant budgetary dollars or at least budgetary dollars to meet the staffing complement needed for the activity.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Actually, Mr. Wotherspoon, we're going to be providing the staffing from within the Ministry of Education. We have a complement of people who will assist. They have a range of expertise in dealing with grant allocations and assessments and taxations. So we're not going to be providing any additional dollars to the ministry for that particular project. We're just going to ensure through Deputy Minister Roadhouse that the personnel that Mr. Reiter needs to do the job will be provided to him.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. And my concern I guess, my concern with that is that you have your internal individuals who are already engaged in a full capacity and full worth and there's many challenges which lie within the world of education here in Saskatchewan for which I know you're committed to and aware. We now see an additional activity which could be a rather extensive and a rather complicated process which is definitely going to pull resources from the ministry. And I guess I'm rather surprised that there wouldn't be additional resources to offset that. And I'm just wondering then, when you take something from one thing and put it into another, something goes missing. And I just hope it's not quality education for the people of our province.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — I know Mr. Reiter is going to be a busy person and that's what the Premier has asked him to do. And he will be travelling; he will be consulting. He will be working on this project with a tremendous amount of dedication. He's a committed individual that will do this.

You know, right at the moment within the ministry, the full-time equivalents are, I believe, 342 people. So there is a staffing component within the Ministry of Education that we believe this to be very important and therefore staffing will be provided from within the ministry, because those are the very same things that those individuals work on, on a daily basis. They're working with assessments. They're working with taxation. They're working with school boards setting mill rates. And those are the kinds of things that will be ongoing, so it's not like we're having to bring in some expertise from somewhere to, you know, assist Mr. Reiter. That expertise is within house. And we're just going to make sure that that's there, that he will, he will probably be able to meet with them, meet with individuals within the ministry to discuss, you know, what he's found out. And we'll provide that personnel for him.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Could you be more clear in exactly what roles or what outcomes the individuals that you will be seconding of sort for partial time, casual time, full-time, to work with Mr. Reiter would be? And what roles we're losing, what activities we're losing within the organization. Because I don't think it's completely fair to suggest that the activities of a regular ongoing year are going to be the same when you add a complementary activity. I commend you on taking on the study. I'm just, I am concerned to some degree of where these resources are coming from and the human resources.

The Chair: — Mr. Wotherspoon, I believe your question is getting a bit off base. However, if the minister cares to answer the question, I'll allow it. If the minister so wishes to answer, that's fine. And we can certainly pursue this line of questioning in the matter of a few days when we have the Education budget and that sort of thing. But if the minister cares to answer, I'll leave it at his discretion.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll expand on that by indicating this, Mr. Wotherspoon. Within the ministry, we have a complement of people. There are researchers there. There are policy people there. There are secretarial staff there. They provide different skill sets. So it's not like we're going to take one individual and say, you are assigned to Mr. Reiter. We're going to use different staffing complements from within the ministry.

That will be worked on, Mr. Wotherspoon, with Ms. Roadhouse, who will then work with Mr. Reiter to say okay, today we need to have someone in the policy area work with Mr. Reiter and determine whether or not there's a new initiative in the way of policy. So we're going to use the expertise of different individuals at the time when they best can help Mr. Reiter. The job is Mr. Reiter's. He is the Legislative Secretary that is responsible to the Minister of Education and it's going to be his job to get out there and determine that information that will be contained in a report.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I'd like to thank the minister for his, I guess, diligence and also his patience in asking our questions here tonight; and of course his officials again here tonight for taking the time. I apologize to the members opposite, particularly one who looks like he's ready to go home.

The Chair: — Minister, have you some concluding remarks?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to thank the members on the committee for their questions. We've tried to, I've tried to I think answer them from the perspective of education within the province. And I want to thank all of my officials. As you've indicated, you know, it's nearly 10 o'clock and I want to thank everyone for assisting with me in preparation for the supplementary estimates.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. Committee members, if we have no further questions — I see none — we have before us vote 5, Education, pre-K to 12 education (ED03), in the amount of \$13,100,000. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Agreed. We also have education property tax relief (ED09), in the amount of \$3,200,000. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — I would now ask a member to move the following motion:

That it be resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ended March 31, 2008, the following sum, \$16,300,000.

Mr. Ottenbreit. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Vote 5 agreed to.]

The Chair: — Committee members, we have one last item of business that we need to deal with and that is the consideration of a draft report that the Clerk is circulating. Okay. Committee members, I believe you have a copy of the Clerk's report. We need a member to move the following motion:

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

Do I have a mover for that? Mr. Allchurch. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Committee members, I believe we have now concluded our business. I'd like to thank all committee members for the work that we've done this afternoon and this evening and certainly appreciate all the efforts by all committee members. It is now 10 o'clock and we stand adjourned. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 21:59.]