



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Dakota-Arm River

[The committee met at 15:34.]

Chair Keisig: — Well welcome, everyone, to the Standing Committee on Human Services. My name is Travis Keisig. I am the Chair of the Human Services Committee.

We are joined this afternoon by MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Chan, MLA Bromm, MLA Kropf, and MLA Blakley with MLA Grewal chitting in for him, and MLA ChiefCalf with MLA Mowat chitting in for her.

Our first order of business today is the consideration of the '26-27 estimates and the 2025-26 supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Advanced Education.

**General Revenue Fund
Advanced Education
Vote 37**

Subvote (AE01)

Chair Keisig: — We will begin with consideration of vote 37, Advanced Education, central management and services, subvote (AE01). Minister Cheveldayoff is here with his officials.

I would ask that officials state their names before speaking for the first time. And please do not touch the microphones. *Hansard* operator will turn your microphone on when you are speaking to the committee.

Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening remarks.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is indeed a pleasure to be here before the committee today. Good afternoon to colleagues, all legislative colleagues. I'm pleased to be here to speak about the Ministry of Advanced Education 2026-27 budget.

I am joined by several individuals from our professional public service. I'll introduce them by name to begin with. I'm joined by Deputy Minister Louise Michaud, and my chief of staff, Ken Cotterill, is also here.

From the ministry we have Mark Wyatt and Lindell Veitch, both assistant deputy ministers; Jon Altwasser, executive director of corporate finance; Dana Schmalz, executive director of strategic capital planning; Kirk Wosminity, executive director of student and support services; Jill Tzupa, executive director of strategy, planning and sector engagement; Mike Pestill is the executive director of sector management and relations; Anna Robinson, executive director of international education and jurisdictional initiatives; Duane Rieger, executive director of business systems and information management. I want to thank each of them for being here to assist all of us with providing information this afternoon and early into the evening.

Post-secondary education plays a crucial role in shaping and protecting Saskatchewan's future. A strong post-secondary education system is essential for preparing individuals for meaningful careers. Our universities, colleges, and technical institutions equip learners with the advanced skills and

knowledge they need to succeed in a changing workforce.

The Ministry of Advanced Education's budget protects affordability, health care, communities, and residents. It protects affordability through more funding for students and institutions. It protects health care through continued support for expanded training seats, adding new seats, and launching new programs in Saskatchewan. And the sector and the economy are protected through stable funding increases that will help institutions produce skilled graduates who will meet our labour market needs.

In '26-27 the Ministry of Advanced Education will invest \$847.1 million to support post-secondary education through funding to institutions and students. This represents a 7.5 per cent increase over last year, which is truly significant. Our largest and most impactful budget commitment is a new multi-year funding agreement with our post-secondary education institutions. The new agreement took effect on April the 1st, offering stable, annual funding increases that allow Saskatchewan's institutions to plan more strategically. It provides approximately \$250 million in additional funding to institutions over the next four years.

In '26-27 operating funding will increase by \$33.6 million. Institutions will continue to receive 3 per cent increases to operating funding each year of the agreement — a strong commitment to their long-term financial stability. The new agreement also limits annual tuition increases to a lower range of zero to 3 per cent, reducing financial pressure for students.

In '26-27 approximately \$776.4 million is dedicated to operating and capital grants for post-secondary institutions, which represents 92 per cent of our total budget. 513.4 million will go to the University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina, federated and affiliated colleges. It also provides \$222.4 million to Saskatchewan Polytechnic, the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, and the Gabriel Dumont Institute. And regional colleges will receive some \$40.6 million.

Capital funding is seeing a significant increase of 40 per cent for a total investment of \$56.8 million. Of that, 24.6 million will go towards preventative maintenance and renewal funding. Saskatchewan Polytechnic will receive \$10 million for the Joseph A. Remai Saskatoon campus, as well as 2.2 million to expand several trades programs in Regina. North West College and Carlton Trail College will continue receiving funding to support ongoing capital planning in North Battleford and renovations to the Humboldt campus. The University of Regina will receive \$3 million to support the relocation of its facilities of nursing and social work into Saskatoon. And several institutions will receive capital funding to support new and expanded health care training seats.

On that note, let's talk about our health care training investments. High-quality training is essential to advancing the goals of the health human resources action plan and the new patients-first health care plan. The post-secondary sector supports a strong, adaptable health care workforce that serves Saskatchewan people. That's why we are continuing to expand and create new health care training opportunities right across the province. Approximately 78.5 million will support the addition of nearly

190 seats this year as well as ongoing expansions. That means the Government of Saskatchewan will soon have added over 1,000 new health care training seats since 2022.

It also brings our total operating and capital investment for health training programs to nearly \$245 million over that same period of time. 36.5 million in operating funding will support previously announced seat expansions in programs such as nursing, primary care paramedics, and medical radiologic technology. We also continue to invest in new health care training programs, ensuring students have more opportunities to study and build their careers right here in Saskatchewan.

In '26-27 we are providing approximately \$9.9 million in operating funding to support 105 new seats in three new domestic training programs. Beginning this fall, Saskatchewan students will be able to study occupational therapy, speech language pathology programs at the University of Saskatchewan, and respiratory therapy at Saskatchewan Polytechnic. These programs have been intentionally designed to respond to the needs of our evolving and growing health system.

To be able to offer three brand new programs in the same year takes a substantial amount of coordination and commitment. We are grateful to our institutions for their partnership, and we are very proud that students can now pursue these high-demand professions without leaving the province.

In addition, \$15 million in capital funding will support essential health training program expansions in Saskatoon and Regina and continue the development of dedicated space for our new domestic programs. These programs will train individuals for high-demand positions within hospitals, schools, businesses, correctional facilities, long-term care and mental health centres, and more.

We are also training more continued care assistants in the province through a pilot project based in La Ronge. Northlands College and the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies will lead the training, giving students the chance to earn while they learn in a culturally inclusive setting.

Over \$6.5 million in operating funding will help train more nurse practitioners and doctors in the province as well as adding 26 nurse practitioner seats in this year's budget. Thirteen will be offered through the University of Regina and Saskatchewan Polytechnic's collaborative nurse practitioner program, and 13 will be offered through the University of Saskatchewan.

We are also adding 20 new training seats for physicians at the University of Saskatchewan's College of Medicine, bringing that total number of seats to 128.

[15:45]

As the Ministry of Health recently announced, the University of Saskatchewan will prioritize 95 per cent of those seats to Saskatchewan students. This approach will help strengthen the pipeline of Saskatchewan students who will go on to care for patients in their own communities.

Another exciting part of our College of Medicine's funding is the physician assistant program, which had a highly successful

launch last fall. We are building on that momentum by expanding funding to support a new cohort of students this coming fall.

Overall the Ministry of Advanced Education is providing \$61.5 million to the College of Medicine. When you take the combined funding from Advanced Education and Health, the College of Medicine will receive approximately \$225 million in '26-27.

Saskatchewan has made historical investments to expand health care training capacity across the province. At the same time, some high-demand health care careers require specialized training that is only offered in a select few Canadian institutions. That's why our government has interprovincial agreements to ensure our students have access to the expertise they need so they can bring those critical skills back to Saskatchewan communities.

In '26-27 we are investing \$7 million to reserve seats for Saskatchewan students in 13 IPA [interprovincial agreement] programs, three of which are winding down as we begin accepting students into the new domestic programs this fall. Of note, Saskatchewan students now have access to five new training seats in the radiation therapy program at the University of Alberta. This will help increase the number of radiation therapists in Saskatchewan, improving patient access to critical cancer treatment.

Seats are also reserved in programs like the MRI [magnetic resonance imaging] technologist, cardiovascular perfusion, and others that prepare students for specialized occupations that are indeed hard to fill. Students in these programs complete clinical placements in Saskatchewan, connecting them to our health care system. They also have access to bursaries, return-of-service financial incentives, and more, encouraging them to find opportunities and build their careers right here at home.

Funding for institutions is not the only thing that is increasing this year. The '26-27 budget prioritizes an ongoing investment in students to help empower them to succeed at Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions. Investing in students ensures Saskatchewan has the talent needed to strengthen existing sectors and expand emerging industries.

In this budget our government is protecting student affordability by increasing the Student Aid Fund by approximately \$5 million. We expect over 23,000 students to benefit from that fund.

Overall the '26-27 budget invests 119.3 million in repayable and non-repayable financial assistance for students. This includes tax credits and all student financial support.

Post-secondary students will receive more than \$51.3 million in direct financial support. 12.2 million of that is for scholarships and bursaries, including the Saskatchewan Innovation and Opportunity Scholarship and the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship, amongst others.

Student support account for 6 per cent of our total budget. Together with institution funding, that means 98 per cent of our total budget goes right where it matters the most — to Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions and students.

Saskatchewan continues to offer the graduate retention program, the envy of the country, which provides up to \$24,000 in tax

credits to graduates who stay and work in the province after finishing their program. It helps encourage our graduates to stay in Saskatchewan, to live, work, and raise their families. Almost 90,000 people have claimed these credits to date.

Indigenous students and programs will receive \$24.1 million to support Indigenous student learning, a 21 per cent increase over last year. To further break down that number, over \$122,000 will go towards Dene and Cree teacher education programs in northern Saskatchewan. 813,000 is directed to continued funding for expanded health care training seats at our Indigenous post-secondary institutions. 150,000 is dedicated to an Indigenous Pathways program as part of the Mitacs research internships for students. And we continue to provide annual funding of \$50,000 for Indigenous language scholarships at the First Nations University of Canada.

Notably the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies will receive a \$2.5 million funding increase to recognize and support its unique and important contributions to our training sector.

Saskatchewan supports French-language education through a partnership with Heritage Canada. We have a federal-provincial agreement that provides annual regular funding, and additional funding is available for project-based initiatives, student bursaries, and urgent needs. In '26-27, French-language education will receive \$4 million, which will support French-language education programs at La Cité and le Bac [Baccalauréat] at the University of Regina, as well as Collège Mathieu.

Saskatchewan continues to adjust to recent federal changes to the international student program. Federal policy changes have had significant implications for our province and for post-secondary institutions right across the country to be sure. Fewer international students are coming to Canada which is impacting tuition revenue and the labour market here and across Canada.

Our institutions have affirmed that in this climate of financial uncertainty, securing a multi-year funding agreement is and has been extremely beneficial. We are focused on attracting and retaining high-quality international talent that aligns with our labour market needs and supports long-term economic growth for the province.

We continue to work with our post-secondary institutions to promote Saskatchewan as a top study destination for international students. And we continue to engage with the federal government to foster greater collaboration on international education.

I'd like to highlight briefly just a few more areas. We will provide \$14.8 million to the Western College of Veterinary Medicine this year, and an additional 500,000 in capital funding for the planning and design of a potential facility expansion. Mitacs will receive \$1.15 million to support students and post-doctoral fellows in research and development internships that support Saskatchewan industry and institutions. We're also investing \$225,000 in GIEMS, the Global Institute of Energy, Minerals and Society, which will help GIEMS build long-term sustainability and continue to secure research funding to advance its work.

Before I close, let's return to the impact that the federal

international student policies are having on institutions right across the country. A number of post-secondary institutions across Canada have had to make the very difficult decisions to reduce programs and lay off staff outside their normal planning cycles.

But institutions also routinely review their staffing complement as part of their annual planning cycles which happens each spring. I understand Saskatchewan Polytechnic is currently in that process. I want to emphasize that this is a routine process that does happen annually at this time of year. Post-secondary institutions in Saskatchewan have full autonomy over operational and human resource decisions, and government will not undermine that autonomy.

This budget provides strong support for our post-secondary sector. Our sector is not immune to the uncertainty and pressure that others are seeing, but it is certainly in a stronger position than most. While some post-secondary institutions across Canada are losing funding, Saskatchewan is delivering a four-year commitment of annual increases of funding.

We are increasing our Student Aid Fund while at the same time limiting tuition increases. This financial commitment is an undeniable vote of confidence in the value of post-secondary institutions in Saskatchewan. It underscores the post-secondary sector's role in meeting the goals of Saskatchewan's Growth Plan, the labour market strategy, the health human resource action plan, and the patients-first health care plan. And most importantly it helps protect Saskatchewan's future.

In closing I want to take this opportunity to share my gratitude to leadership across our post-secondary institutions. I greatly value the relationships I've built over the last few years, and I am proud how well everyone truly works together. I look forward to continuing to work side by side with our institutions to support a strong, sustainable sector that continues to adapt, innovate, and meet the needs of Saskatchewan students and communities.

With that, Mr. Chair, I thank you and the committee members for your time, and I welcome the chance to answer any questions that committee members may have. Thank you.

Chair Keisig: — Well thank you very much, Minister. First of all I want to start with welcoming our Deputy Chair, Mr. Burki, to the committee meeting. And I also want to remind all committee members that we are here to debate the '26-27 supplementary estimates. I open the floor for questions. I recognize MLA Grewal.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thanks to the minister for his opening remarks, and also thanks to the ministry officials and everyone involved in this estimates process.

So we have important issues to discuss here on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan, and I hope that we can work in that spirit to explore and discuss them. So first of all I would like to pick up where I left last year. So I asked this question, but there was no definite response. *The Regional Colleges Act* requires that there be regular review of the regional college system, yet no review has occurred since 2010-2011. Is the ministry planning a review this year?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much for the question. With major priorities like the multi-year funding agreement over the last year and now having that finalized and completed and implemented, we are in a better position to move forward on the next regional college review.

Over the past year we've taken some initial steps, but personally I wanted to have an ability to move around the province to meet with various regional college institutions. I haven't met with all of them, but I have had an opportunity to visit several of them. And over the past year the ministry has been preparing the groundwork for the next review, to ensure that it's focused on finding actionable solutions to real challenges.

I continue to be very impressed with our regional college system. They are very responsive to needs in the local communities. I have MLAs from both sides of the House come to me, talk about the outstanding work that is being done and the response to communities. And whether you talk to mayors or councillors . . . And I'm sure we'll have an opportunity to do that at SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] over the next few days here. I did have somebody reach out to me this morning from a community and wanting to talk more about regional colleges in a positive way in what they're done.

But we do commit as a government to, from time to time to do a review and to see if, you know, we're operating in the most efficient manner possible. And you know, happy to say that we are preparing to undertake the next regional college review in '26-27, which will focus on ensuring that the regional college system remains responsive to local and provincial training needs.

So again very impressed with the work that they're done, wanting to ensure that they have the support of the ministry and all involved, but at the same time look if we can do even better.

[16:00]

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister, for a very good answer. I'm looking forward to the review.

So during the last many months I have had many consultations with the post-secondary schools with the management, faculty, staff, and the students. And one of the major concerns we are hearing is that post-secondary schools in Saskatchewan are forced to suspend programs in 2026 and 2027, largely due to the loss of revenue from significant reduction in international students. That's what you said in your opening remarks. I would like to ask a few questions about this.

My first question on that is, what's the total loss of revenue due to the reduction in the number of international students? Can you break down by institution?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Well thanks very much for the question. And certainly the member is right. The situation with international students as necessitated by the federal government's policies is very serious. It impacts financially. It impacts on faculty. And we're very, very concerned.

And I had an opportunity to speak to many colleagues across the country over the Easter break as well, and heard first-hand the impact that's happening in provinces, you know, which are in a

much more serious situation than we are in. You know, Manitoba, for example, having to close institutions, and Ontario and BC [British Columbia] and New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. But that's not to lessen the impact here in Saskatchewan.

The member's asked for some specific dollar values. I have those here. The University of Saskatchewan experienced a \$10.22 million decrease in '25-26. The U of R [University of Regina] is still working on those final numbers, but the president has said it is about \$20 million over two years. So again using an average close to the same as the U of S [University of Saskatchewan], about \$10 million a year. Sask Poly is \$24.58 million in '25-26, so a significant decline.

Specifically, you know, a hit to the bottom line, but of course also not having those students there impacts on the jobs of faculty as well. So we continue to lobby our colleagues in the federal government to, you know, ensure that . . . The pendulum was swung too far open under the previous federal government and now, in my view, has swung too far the other way, and we have to move it to a more balanced position.

I know many ministers and many provinces are lobbying for the same thing or at least to have an individual province-by-province approach. And I think that Saskatchewan would be in a very good stead if they were to look at each province individually as well. But the lobbying continues. The frustration continues. But we still are working hard, and that's why the multi-year funding was so important this year to go forward.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. Do you have numbers for the loss of revenue for regional colleges?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — No. I would have provided it if we did. But we don't have that yet for the regional colleges.

Tajinder Grewal: — So my next question is, how many programs across the province must be suspended? And can you break it down by the institution?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — So we don't have an exact number on the number of programs cancelled or suspended. Right now all of the institutions are going through their business plans. This is the time of year that they do it. And you know, certainly the impact is greater on Sask Poly than it is on the universities because the programs are shorter and they're more influenced by immediate needs and changes and all of that.

And you know, we're talking about international students. It's hard to attribute exactly how many of the programs are specifically regarding international students. Because again this is the time of year that institutions undertake their annual analysis, their analysis of enrolment and, you know, the amount of instructors needed and the amount of programs that need to be adjusted. This is their annual business planning cycle, and I don't have any more specific information than that right now.

Tajinder Grewal: — I have read somewhere that the number of programs to be closed are more than 30. Do you believe in that?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — That's a number that, you know, I haven't heard specifically on it. But that's a number that, you know, institutions determine at this time of year each and every

year. So it's hard to speculate. It's hard to comment on specific numbers.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. So my next question just follows up on that. How many domestic students have been enrolled in these programs? And how many is the ministry expecting to enrol in similar programs outside this province?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Sorry. If you could just . . . So domestic students?

Tajinder Grewal: — I'm just saying that all these programs that are closing, which of the programs are closing in different institutions. How many domestic students are enrolled in these programs? Programs which will be suspended next year or the year after.

[16:15]

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much for the question. And you know, just as a general observation that certainly international students, they contribute financially, but they contribute to having the bodies to have the wherewithal to put those classes in place. So when those students disappear, it does impact on of course the international students that aren't there but the domestic students as well. But we don't track those numbers specifically. We don't really have that level of information.

You know, what I can say though, it was very positive that in the fall of 2025 there was a 3 per cent increase in the number of domestic — non-international — students studying in Saskatchewan, bringing our total to 40,290, the highest rate that it's ever been. This follows a strong academic year for enrolment in '24-25 and suggests that after years of minimal growth, domestic enrolments are on the rise.

Again I thank the member for the question. I wish I had more specific detailed information. You know, maybe we'll start trying to ask the institutions to provide some of that so we have a better understanding. But overall, in light of the international challenges and headwinds that we have, I'm very pleased to see a domestic increase of 3 per cent in our students studying in Saskatchewan.

Tajinder Grewal: — Well I do agree with you, Minister, on that. Enrolment of domestic students increased significantly. I just heard 3 per cent. So my question was again that same. When those programs closed, the majority were international students, but there were also domestic students. So basically then those domestic students, when the program is closed, so they have to go somewhere else to study in their particular program?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Yeah, if the program is no longer offered then they'll have to, you know, choose another program or maybe go somewhere else. But the overall enrolment numbers are showing a 3 per cent increase, so that's very positive. If I had more specific numbers on the exact content, the exact impact of those, I'd provide them. But I do not have that.

Tajinder Grewal: — Yeah. Given that we have seen an outflow of people out of Saskatchewan in the last two quarters, this raises a concern that we will lose more young people who won't have

the chance to study in the province due to the suspension of the programs. And does the ministry have any analysis of how many students are leaving the province compared to the ones that study in the province?

Chair Keisig: — I don't understand how that question relates to the budget. The minister just told us that enrolment was 3 per cent higher. I'm just confused on how that's related to the budget.

Tajinder Grewal: — The question: if the program is suspended, then the students who will go into that program, then they will go somewhere else. They're leaving the province to go somewhere else to study that program. So that's relevant to the Ministry of Advanced Education that when we don't offer the programs, our young students are leaving the province to seize that program somewhere else.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — You know what, let me try, Mr. Chair. Let me try. You know, I think I follow the logic in what the hon. member is getting to. But yeah, I guess that same, you know, equation could be followed for every province. And many provinces are in a much more difficult situation than we are as well. When you have hundreds of program closures, you know, people are going to have to look at different studies or to move somewhere else. But I guess in our situation, very pleased to see the overall domestic 3 per cent increase. Wanting to ensure we have more international students.

You know, I think the member knows too, like the federal government puts a cap on it like that, it sends a message around the world that Canada is not the place to study. So that's why I'm working so hard to have bilateral agreements with countries. And we're trying to put the message out there that Saskatchewan is still the place to come. So we're, you know, running uphill but we're working very hard on it.

But you know, to say that population numbers . . . I was elected at a time when we had under a million people in Saskatchewan. And now we're very, very pleased with our number, and we're very, very enthusiastically working towards 1.3 million, you know. Every quarter, with the exception of the last two, have seen increases, you know, over the last almost 20 years. And yeah, the last two quarters have seen a dip. I'm confident that they will continue to turn around, and I'm confident that we'll see 1.3 million people. But you know, will Advanced Education be responsible for all of that? No.

And you know, as the Chair said, I think we're wandering away from some things here, but I hope I've attempted to answer your question in a way that's relevant to advanced education.

Tajinder Grewal: — I agree, Minister, that we have increased in the current year 3 per cent more domestic students. I'm talking about the future years — next year or year after — when we are going to close that program. So we do have increase. We know that. It's a fact. So I'm talking about the next year and the year after when we are going to close the program. The program's already in place right now. The current year they're in place, but they will be closed in the future.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Well you know, I would say to the member, it goes way back to the way we view advanced education as a government. Advanced education is a leader.

Advanced education contributes to population growth and to economic growth. And that's why we make sure that, first of all, we come up with growth plans. And we share that information with all of the institutions so everybody is operating on the same song sheet, that we're able to move forward in that direction.

And I'm very excited about the future when I think about the 60 major projects that are coming forward, and you know, representing over \$62 billion in economic activity. All of those programs are very, very closely related to advanced education. And I've had meetings with a lot of those companies, you know. Most recently in Saskatoon, Paladin had their grand opening. And you know, they're talking about the need for relationships with places like North West College, for example. You know, we're all aware of BHP and their partnership with Carlton Trail and the wonderful work that they are doing and the example that they are setting.

That's how we reverse those numbers. That's how we get back to the same trajectory that we were on, you know, with the exception of the last two quarters. And that's how you grow a province. And that's something that, you know, has happened very well here. And I'll continue to do my part to ensure that the institutions are following the growth plan and helping us grow those population numbers. And I know we will see the day when 1.3 million is achieved here in the province.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. Has the government considered the potential workforce impacts? So not only in the total side of the workforce I'm talking about, but also on the critical skills. Some of the programs are important — health and technology skills — that our province needs. So my question is, like is there impact on the potential workforce impact when we close these programs?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — To answer the member's question, yes, of course we take into account the skills and the technology and the workforce needs and the labour-skills needs. To give an example I think, and a very topical example right now, is health care in Saskatchewan. You know, we're expanding programs in Sask post-secondary right across the province, every institution — the HHR [health human resources], 1,000 new seats in the province. So again it is a very ambitious target. We're seeing those numbers come forward. You know, we're bringing programs home for speech pathology and occupational therapy and some of what I alluded to in my initial remarks. And so we're very, very in tune with what's needed and what's happening and what direction we have to go.

And I just want to share a statistic with the committee. In a recent Stats Canada release it showed that over the past 10 years Saskatchewan has attracted more university graduates from other provinces than we've lost, and we've had a net gain of around 320 graduates in that period. So that's the benefits of a growing economy. That's the benefits of having a BHP here, a Cameco, a Paladin, and others.

So you know, we're able to continue to do that and to work well, but of course to specifically answer the member's question, skills, technology, workforce needs, labour force needs are right at the top of our priority list for sure.

Tajinder Grewal: — Minister, I can also give you one example

that, on the health care side, that there's one program, health care information, HIM [health information management], health care information management program at Sask Poly is going to close next year. And it provides workers to more than 10 organizations in Saskatchewan.

So once this program is closed, all these organizations have to go somewhere else to find the workers. It will directly impact our workforce, the skilled workforce, as we need more people on for data accuracy, for data management, as like everything now going to data. So we need more of these workers, not less, in the future. And this program is going to have big impact on the Saskatchewan organizations, the employers. And what's your take on this?

[16:30]

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Thanks very much for the question. And yeah, indeed it is a concern. And it's a relatively new announcement that happened as far as this health information program goes. And you know, we want to continue to work with the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] and the Ministry of Health to ensure that we are able to deliver all of the programs when the demand is there.

There have been some enrolment issues in some of these programs. You know, the online option is proving to be somewhat popular as well, so that's impacting the numbers. The Ministry of Advanced Education is working closely with both post-secondary and health sector partners to understand the provincial needs for the profession and to assess the viable options for training availability into the future.

Current health information management students can complete their program without interruption. And the program has 46 first-year students — 14 full-time, 32 part-time — and 15 second-year students that are currently enrolled and expected to meet the short-term workforce needs. But even those numbers, looking at 46 first-year students and 15 second-year students, they're showing some attrition there as well. Students are choosing to not complete the program or to do other things or maybe get into the workforce a little bit earlier. We're not sure.

So again it's a priority. It's a priority for me. It's a priority for the ministry, and we're working together with the SHA and the Ministry of Health to just ascertain what the enrolment needs are and what the program needs are as well. And as the member knows, the institutions themselves are at arm's length and make the decisions possible, you know, with the information that is in front of them. And I don't hesitate to talk to them, to challenge them, to provide some direction in that regard. And that's what we're doing in this instance.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you. How does this current trend affect the sustainability of our regional colleges in their current form?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Thanks very much for the question regarding sustainability. And you know, it's one of the real advantages that we have with our regional colleges. They are sustainable. And they are very nimble, and they are able to adapt to the labour market needs of their region and of the province very, very quickly. So you know, I don't see any concerns

regarding long-term sustainability, for sure. They are less impacted by international students than some of the larger institutions, for sure.

But you know, again going back to the budget and specifically what we're talking about, regional colleges have seen a \$2.2 million increase or a 6 per cent increase in operating funds; 3.5 of that increase delivered through a new four-year funding agreement as we've talked about, and you know, increases to create health care training programs as well.

So you know, I don't want to say that there's no impact, but it's certainly a less impact. And as far as long-term sustainability, we see our regional colleges as very sustainable and able to adapt very quickly. And again my earlier comments about talking to MLAs and to mayors and to city and town councillors, they're very impressed with the ability to change things quickly. If some new business comes in and needs some specific skills, they're able to move on that right away. So I think that will hold them in good stead for the future and ensure that sustainability going forward.

Tajinder Grewal: — Good to hear that. The minister is saying that these colleges are sustainable, but I'm hearing something different. So my next question is, do we see further reduction of the programs being offered, or even closures, without more funding?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — So you're not talking regional colleges. You're talking around . . .

Tajinder Grewal: — I meant regional colleges, yes.

[16:45]

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Thank you very much. And yeah, we're not aware of any planned suspensions or closures or anything like that. If the member has some additional information that I'm not aware of, I'd be happy to have those discussions.

But going back to the actual numbers and what we're seeing and what we're hearing. Like for example, the numbers for 20-21 for regional colleges was 16,097 students, and their most recent numbers, 17,133. So we're seeing a modest increase over time, but in light of substantial headwinds, an increase nevertheless.

But again, as I said earlier, you know, the institutions are beginning their planning cycle right now for the next year, so I hope that the information they're giving me continues to be very positive. Because what I see is stability right now, enrolment enhancement, meeting the labour market needs.

And again we work very closely with Immigration and Career Training, with the ministry, with the minister. He's my seatmate in the legislature, so we're very, very close on things. That's more a joke than anything. But again, you know, the two ministries are very much in line because again we have to educate to the needs that are out there and to fulfill those needs in the labour market for sure.

I have some specific numbers on regional colleges, and you know, we see funding again increasing substantially: Carlton Trail, up 7.2 per cent to \$317,000; Great Plains, increase of 11.3

per cent, \$598,000; Northlands, 7.7 per cent, \$738,000; North West College, 11.1 per cent increase, \$577,000; and Southeast, 462,000, 11.7 per cent increase; and Suncrest, 813,000, 11.7 per cent increase.

I see the Chair writing numbers down, probably wishing his salary went up by that much, but no such luck. You're in politics like the rest of us. That's not going to happen.

But in all seriousness, you know, a substantial increase. Getting back to the original premise of the question, we see a stability in the regional sector. And a lot of that credit doesn't come to this chair or this desk. It comes to those institutions and how they adapt and respond and are nimble to the economy.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. So one thing we do know, that our post-secondary institutions are way more dependent on international students as compared to in the past. So my next question, my last question on this topic is that, can the ministry make known the percentage of their budget coming from foreign students this year, last year, 5 years ago, 10 years ago?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Thanks very much again for the question. I do have a number of statistics to share. I don't have, you know, going back 5 years, 10 years, what it was like. But Sask Polytechnic: 4,171 students comprising 21 per cent of their student population; U of R: 3,907 students comprising 23.5 per cent of their student population; USask: 2,236 students comprising 9.4 per cent of their student population. So modest percentages certainly led by the USask being only 9.4 per cent.

But when we compare that across the country, Saskatchewan's population as a percentage of the whole of the country is 3.1 per cent. Our per cent of the international student population is 1.8 per cent. So we were actually quite modest when it comes to international students.

And when you talk to the institutions, you know, they didn't load up on international students by any way. They wanted to participate. They wanted students from across the country, across the world to come here. They find great advantage of them coming and studying here, a great advantage to our economy, great advantage to the other students as well. So our numbers are very modest, and we have to credit the institutions because of course we know that they pay a higher tuition rate and that can be somewhat enticing.

And that's what has run into problems in Ontario and British Columbia. And again, Ontario has 38.9 per cent of Canada's population, but they have 56.4 per cent of international students. BC is 13.6 per cent and 13.8, you know, but it doesn't include large private college of international enrolments in the BC numbers as well.

So again we're in good stead. I would say that it's been done in a responsible manner, and you know, we would like to get back up to those numbers, where they were before this federal government decision.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. So in reaction to the budget, Geraldine Balzer, Chair of the University of Saskatchewan Faculty Association, she stated that "This budget

emphasizes health care training, a necessary response to Saskatchewan's needs, but seemingly ignores other areas such as engineering, agriculture, and education.”

These are extremely important for our province's future. So the question is, how many new spaces in these fields is the budget supporting, and to what extent will the number of young people trained help cover our needs for our skilled graduates in these fields?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Again, thanks very much for the question. And you know, the member threw out some specific colleges: Education, Agriculture, Engineering. You know, we don't fund specifically to each of those, but we again go back to the multi-year funding. We have a 7.5 per cent lift, so that lift raises all boats for sure. And so we're in a good situation when it comes to those specifically.

When we talk about Education, for example, in 2024-25 there were 5,390 students enrolled in Education. Between 2015 and '24 nearly 12,000 Education students have graduated from our institutions. So Education is doing very, very well.

Health care has been a priority, absolutely, and through the HHR program is funded a little differently, but the numbers are astounding. Like you know, in 2024-25 there were 11,600 post-secondary students enrolled in health programs. And over the period from 2015 to 2024, over 27,000 students have graduated from health programs in our institutions.

[17:00]

And you know, Engineering, Agriculture, and others are doing very, very well, and again I have to give credit to the institutions. Let's use the University of Saskatchewan for an example. And I know the member, the critic has been at many of the announcements that I have been at when we see engineering, the private sector coming forward and making donations and helping out and expanding the areas in the engineering field, for example. We certainly have seen that in great amounts, and agriculture as well. You know, there are times when I'm on campus two, three times a month to welcome direct investments from the private sector into those areas as well.

But that being said, the government is doing our part, and certainly a 7.5 per cent increase helps all of those colleges. But that's why, you know, we're so fortunate to have a U15 university like the University of Saskatchewan. And they're able to provide that research in so many areas and to excel in all of those areas as well. And again, great credit to the institution. I'm using the U of S in this example, but we can say the same thing about other institutions as well.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. So I have a follow-up question on that. Has the ministry conducted an analysis or looked at external data on potential labour shortage in the next decade? And can you share with us if we are on track to meet the shortage in mining, agriculture, and other fields?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Again thank you for the question. You know, we don't see any potential labour market shortages, for example. But I know when I go to meet with the Saskatchewan Mining Association, they always say, we want

more, more, more, and one more thing, Minister — we want more.

So you know, they certainly want us to continue doing what we're doing and to do more because . . . Part of it is because they see their future as being very bright in Saskatchewan and very aggressive. And so that's, you know, specifically on mining and agriculture we ensure that we do that. And I value that interaction with the mining association and with agriculture groups as well. It's good for me to hear that first-hand. It's good for officials to hear that.

But from a formal perspective on the labour market, Immigration and Career Training does that formal analysis of what is needed in that area. And you know, we hope that we're nimble and we're ahead of that, but it's ICT [Immigration and Career Training] that provides those overall numbers.

And you know, I gave some pretty good credit to USask in the last answer; I want to give some credit to Sask Poly in this one. They have program advisory committees. They go out, they reach out to the private sector and hear first-hand about what their needs are, what their vision is for the future, where their expansions are happening. So again, Sask Poly tries to get ahead of it through their program action committees, or PACs.

So I'm very, very pleased with again how the institutions are very much in tune with what the government is doing and where the government wants to go, but also very in tune with the private sector and where they're moving and where they're going.

So you know, pleased with that. Can we do more? We have to do more. We have to continue, because the economy is so reliant on advanced education that it's incumbent upon us to do that.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. My next few questions are on regional colleges. So we are seeing some desperately needed funds for our regional colleges. As the minister is aware, that we are expecting collective bargaining to start on August 31st — collective bargaining agreement, new agreement. And what does the ministry approximate an agreement like the one cost in 2026?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Thanks very much for the question. And I guess I hope I understood the question and the cost of, you know, the collective bargaining going forward. You know, one thing you learn very quickly when you become Minister of Labour, you don't discuss the collective bargaining situation in the floor of the legislature or in committee at all. But again, you know, we want to have those agreements done in a timely manner. We want to work towards that.

We've introduced the multi-year funding agreement with post-secondary institutions, but we've been very clear that it provides predictable funding and supports financial sustainability. We expect institutions to manage expenditures, including collective bargaining costs, from the combination of government funding along with tuition and other revenue sources. So we feel that, you know, institutions are in a situation where they can cover those costs now with the multi-year funding agreement. And you know, we encourage the collective bargaining process to operate as it should, and we'll do everything we can to assist in providing information.

Tajinder Grewal: — So it seems like the answer is that they have to serve those extra funds from already allocations you provided, or they can choose their reserves too if they need to, right?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Yeah, we went away from providing additional funds to cover and had a very lucrative multi-year funding agreement in place that puts the onus on them to cover that. And you know, they realize that as well.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you. My follow-up question is, if these institutions are expected to pay for the majority of the cost of their new agreement, how will their reserves and budget be impacted?

[17:15]

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Well you know, the member is correct. We expect a high level of financial management by the institutions to ensure that they with, you know, the generous increases that they've received and the tuition funds that they have and other funds coming forward, you know, we want to make sure that they're able to fund their human resource needs for sure.

As we know, 70 to 80 per cent of some budgets are, you know, they're human resource needs coming forward. You know, collective bargaining is part of that. We expect them to have balanced budgets. From time to time there are deficits, but over the long term we expect them to have balanced budgets and to, you know, ensure that they have it going forward.

Again these are very professional institutions. They do their best to budget accordingly. They were very, very pleased with the announcement that they have received in November. And again of course I won't speculate on the collective bargaining process, but I'm encouraged that we're going to make some headway in that regard.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. And for future years, how are the potential fees increase factored in the multi-year funding agreement?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Well the multi-year funding agreement sees an increase of, you know, a substantial amount every year going forward, a 3 per cent increase each year for four years, so that has to be worked into it in all of that.

I can tell you to compare that to any other province in the country. Our institutions are in a very, very good position. It's not going to solve every problem and fund everything, but it's going to put them in a position to make responsible decisions. And what I've seen in the past, and what I've seen in the current, and I expect in the future, will be those responsible decisions.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. You already said that our regional colleges across Saskatchewan are a great asset, or a great strength to our province. Given the current challenges, did the ministry analyze how sustainable . . . again I ask this question again. I'll ask the question in different form now. How sustainable are regional colleges currently or with the new agreement, potential well-deserved wage increases, current reserves, and inflation pressures? There are so many things

happening. A new agreement happening, they're using their reserves, and inflation's happening. So still you feel that they are very sustainable in the future?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Yes, I do. And I read to the member some of those increases — some 7 per cent, some 11 per cent — and very, very generous increases as well. So yeah, I believe that they are sustainable.

All of them will have difficult decisions to make. I agree. They will make those difficult decisions, and the sustainability of those vital colleges will continue.

Tajinder Grewal: — The government of BC just finished a review of the post-secondary education sector. And meanwhile Manitoba government's latest budget, they approved the commission to study the sustainability of post-secondary sector. Do you think a similar commission in Saskatchewan would be helpful?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Yes, you know, we're aware that British Columbia and Manitoba are choosing to do a review of their situation, you know.

We had some choices to make a number of years ago and we felt that the multi-year funding approach was the best approach. And as you know, the recent agreement we signed was the second agreement. And the first one served us very, very well.

And you know, what continues to impress me is the open relationship that we have, the very frank discussions that we have with the major institutions, with the regional colleges, with SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies], First Nations University, Gabriel Dumont, and all of that. You know, we consult on a continuing basis. We're hearing very, very good things.

And you know, I don't want to pat ourselves on the back too much, but we do hear this from institutions that amongst their colleagues, amongst their groups across Canada — there's the similar institutions — they are seen as the leaders. And unprompted I hear that from our senior leadership; I hear that from middle leadership, that when they go and meet with their peers — and I've seen it first-hand when I meet with my peers, with the ministers of advanced education across the province — that we're leading the way when it comes to advanced education funding in the country right now.

And you know, to be frank, I see no need for a review of the overall sector right now. I think it's steady as she goes. It's continuing to lead in that manner. And I'm sure we'll have some headwinds along the way and all of that. I don't want to, you know, say things are perfect at all, but I just don't see a need for an overall review right now.

I see some very serious situations in British Columbia and Manitoba that maybe need to be addressed as well, but I don't want to speak for those provinces or those ministers.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. And we all know that with AI [artificial intelligence] becoming increasingly important in workforce efficiency, is the ministry planning any implementation of AI?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Sorry, AI? What do you mean? I haven't heard about that.

Tajinder Grewal: — Artificial intelligence.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Yes. Every discussion we have is, you know, regarding the adoption of AI in institutions and all that. And that's why we were so pleased to have the Bell announcement right here — the largest AI project in Canada right here in Saskatchewan. And even more pleased about it is already agreements that are being made with the University of Regina and Sask Poly.

And of course, we all know about the announcement of the quantum computer at the University of Saskatchewan as well that's going to play right into that. You know, I had a chance to talk to the CEO [chief executive officer] of Bell at the announcement, and I said, you know, we have a quantum computer coming at the University of Saskatchewan. It's not public yet, but we have one coming. He said, oh really? Wow, he said, I didn't know that. And then of course we all celebrated — I think members on both sides of the House celebrated — when that announcement came. So yeah, right on top of AI.

When I meet with the presidents of the institutions and hear about their activities, you know, quarter by quarter, they're making sure that they're on the top of their game regarding AI, attending conferences nationally to make sure that, you know, we know the challenges and we know the benefits going forward.

So you know, we all read the newspaper and we all see what's happening across North America and how the major companies are adopting it, the billions of dollars that they're investing into the technology. And so we're all learning as we go, but once again the universities, the regional colleges, and Sask Poly are amongst the leaders in the country when it comes to this, and continue to do that and are continuing to challenge themselves.

And you know, and as a minister I'm trying to learn along that road as well, to know what does the future look like and . . . But it's very exciting. And to have that Bell Canada investment in our province, in our backyard — just a couple of miles from where we're sitting right now, or a few kilometres away — is very, very positive.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. My next question is about the operational, (AE03). The allocation for operational support under student supports is down this year despite a large investment in student support overall.

Can the minister explain why this item is being reduced, and explain if the ministry has looked at if we will still be able to efficiently process applications and ensure students get the supports they need?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — All right. Well as far as student supports go — and a very important part of what we do — the budget in '25-26 was \$48.4 million, and that increased to 53.1 million in the '26-27 budget. So as far as student supports go, an increase of \$4.7 million or an increase of 9.8 per cent. So a very, very hefty increase as far as student supports. Government continues to support the post-secondary students, focusing on the students with the greatest need.

In '26-27 government provided \$119.3 million in direct support to students through tax credits, grants, and scholarships. Government will be providing \$12.2 million in scholarships in '26-27, including 8.6 for the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship, \$50 million for the Indigenous language scholarship. Yeah, it continues. But it's an important part.

You know, I am seeing in talking to students as well that private sector institutions — banks and others — are being more aggressive in helping with student loans as well, and student supports, because they want to entice those students to become clients earlier and as they progress and certainly in the professional colleges as well. So we are being assisted by the private institutions I feel as well. But we're certainly doing our part and increasing those supports.

And you know, any time you talk about supports, you have to talk about the graduate retention program. And you know, moving that program up by 20 per cent from \$20,000 to \$24,000 is certainly helping in that regard as well.

[17:30]

And when we do hit that 90,000 postgraduate number as far as people that take advantage of the graduate retention program, we'll all be able to celebrate that number as well. So I hope that answers the member's question regarding student supports.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. The cost-of-living crisis in Saskatchewan is also affecting students, many students I would say. If we compare increase in tuition, the cost of living, etc., to the increases in the student aid since 2021, can the ministry break down if the average student aid recipient is better off today than in 2021?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Well I think the member knows, and some new numbers came out just this morning, I think, that continues to show that Saskatchewan has the lowest cost of rent across the country. And you know, we continue to look at all aspects of affordability for students. And we want to make sure that this is a cost-advantage place for students to come and to get their education. So I'm very pleased that we're leading the pack as far as modest rents go.

I still know that it's trouble to make ends meet sometimes when you're a student. You know, we look at student supports. We look at affordability measures that we have for all members of the province. We look at the graduate retention program from when they graduate and continue on. So I can honestly say I feel students are better off from year to year.

And that investment in their own education, we've seen the numbers. It helps with their income throughout the year and changes the way that, you know, they're able to live for the rest of their lives for themselves and their families. So you know, I talk to students about this when I meet with them. They are concerned. That's why, you know, the multi-year funding agreement had a reduction in tuition from zero to 3 per cent. A 3 per cent cap, I think, is a recognition factor about that.

But to answer the basic premise of your question, yes, I think students are better off today than they were a year ago. And I think they'll be even better off in the few years going forward

under the multi-year funding agreement.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. Has the ministry looked at the student population as a whole? How have the rates for students, who cannot continue their studies due to cost, changed?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Again, some very good questions by the member. And certainly, you know, this is something that we looked at a number of years ago, trying to define or find out why students discontinued their studies. But it is very difficult to quantify and we weren't able to get an answer.

When questioned, the answers we got back were numerous different things. Some was cost. Some was affordability. Some was, you know, change in program. Some left the learning cycle to get a job. You know, one thing is when the economy is moving very well there's an enticement sometimes to get into that economy very quickly and maybe not complete, or complete your education at a later time. So it's just not possible to know the exact numbers and the exact reasons why.

A couple other facts that I did receive here, just shortly. Direct support to students in Saskatchewan over the last five years: up 18.2 per cent. So you know, we adjust student aid by CPI [consumer price index] every year. So we're continuing to monitor the economy, monitor the needs, and try to address those needs through our student support programs.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. And how does the average student loan repayment of a graduate in Saskatchewan differ from that of other provinces, particularly compared to Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, and Manitoba, which do not have interest on the provincial portion of the student loans?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — So the question regarding loan repayments, regarding student loans, I think we're in the sweet spot. We're in a good position here in Saskatchewan. We loan payments at prime interest rates, and you know, we have a 91 per cent repayment rate, so 91 cents on every dollar repaid.

We're about at the national average, and you know, we're continuing to want to do better. And this is something that's funded by the taxpayer, and we want to be responsible to the taxpayer as well.

And I think it's a good lesson for students that — you know, at a modest interest rate — that you're taking out a loan, but you're investing in yourself and the value. And I talked about that a little bit earlier, but you know, it's formally called an earnings premium. And in 2023 compared to someone without high school completion, Saskatchewan residents in 2023 earned an average extra \$10,550 with a high school diploma and an extra \$19,700 with a post-secondary certificate or diploma and an extra \$33,000 — you know, this is on a yearly basis — with a bachelor's degree and an extra 46,000 with a graduate or professional degree.

So the numbers speak for themselves. And I think that's why we're all so passionate about advanced education, because it is truly life changing for those students and for their families and for their individuals that rely on them. So we have to do that.

And you know, we continue to operate with a modest prime rate of interest, and I know that students want to operate in a responsible way. And it's getting them ready for life in the future. Because if they have a car payment or a mortgage payment, any type of loan payment, they are going to be paying interest on it.

And then again, you know, we feel the best way to deal with that is through the graduate retention program where you can take that graduate retention money and the tax credit — and at this time of year, as everybody's doing their taxes, I'm hoping that it results in a tax refund for a lot of individuals — and they're able to take that lump sum and put it against their student loan. And that's the way it operates the best, and that way we can reinvest that money in future students.

So I'm very comfortable with where we're at. Some provinces choose to do it differently, but I think we're in a good spot.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. And how has the average level of total student debt changed over the last 5 and 10 years for the average graduate in Saskatchewan?

Chair Keisig: — I just want to advise the member, we are talking about the '26-27 budget. And it's a valid question, but to ask the minister to go back 5 and 10 years on budgetary things, I can't see how it's relevant to the current budget questions.

Tajinder Grewal: — This is comparing like the numbers. And if they are taking time they can provide the numbers later, not now. They can give the numbers later on to us if they don't have the numbers right now handy. They could provide us later.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Thank you for the question. And the Chair is right, most oftentimes we just don't have that, you know, 10-year history right at our fingertips. But in this instance we do.

So you know, the average Saskatchewan student debt load in thousands of dollars in 2025 is about \$10,000. That number — I've got it going back a number of years. You know, let's say 2020 it was \$8,000; 2021, 8.7; 2022, 8.9; 2023, 9.2; 2024, 9.9. And as I said earlier, 2025, \$10,000. So again modest increases to that student debt, and hopefully with the multi-year funding and the cap on tuitions that will continue to be kept modest.

We know that there's funding pressures. We know there's rent pressures right across the country. So that will continue. But when I put that up against the earnings premium that you get from being a post-secondary student in the province, I know how I would advise my children and have advised them in my personal circumstance to continue to do that. So I hope that provides the member with the information he was seeking.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. And according to Stats Canada, Saskatchewan increases in the average undergraduate tuition since 2019 have outpaced the increases we have seen in Canada on average. How has this affected the affordability of being a student compared to other parts of Canada?

[17:45]

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — All right, lots of numbers to share

here. You know, our interprovincial college tuition fees, in Saskatchewan from 2019 to 2024-25, there's been an increase, a year-over-year increase of about 4 per cent. The average across the country has been about 4.1 per cent. So we're just slightly below that average. But when you look at very recently, like '23-24, '24-25, '25-26, our increases have been quite modest.

But undergraduate tuition fees were the third highest. We are the third highest in the country, and our goal is to be right at the middle of the pack. So we've got some work to do here. But we're down from the second highest a year ago.

We're the third lowest for domestic graduate tuition. So on the graduate side, we're below the middle. We're actually in the lowest quadrant.

Fifth highest for international undergraduate tuition, but this is nearly \$9,000 less than the national average. So we are in that middle of the pack when it comes to international undergraduate tuition, and second lowest for international graduate tuition as well, down from the third lowest a year ago.

So we're moving in the right direction. And you know, I started here in 2003 and I was the critic for post-secondary at that time, and I remember the minister telling me those numbers back some 20 years ago. And that continues to be our goal as well coming forward.

So we're in the middle of the pack. But then when you look at the lowest cost bundle that we try to achieve here in Saskatchewan with our utility rates and the fact that, you know, we do have more rental space available than others and reflect that in the lowest rental rates across the country, when all that comes together, we're in a pretty good situation to offer affordability for students. And that's where we see it at this time.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. Currently the Government of Canada provides grants for students with disabilities, while the ministry does provide supports for disabled students in the form of material and academic supports. Given that affordability that become a major challenge for many students, does the ministry have any plans to increase grants to disabled students?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Well another good question. I've learned a few things along the way here myself as well. And you know, the federal government has a very generous program, as you've outlined, and it's up to \$20,000 for a student with disabilities — \$20,000 for equipment and other needs as well. There's a \$2,800-a-year cost-of-living allowance as well.

And what we do with the ministry is provide a \$2,000 top-up if the \$20,000 isn't enough. But we find the vast majority of students that we're aware of that are accessing the 20,000, the 20,000 is enough. But we do have a \$2,000 top-up if that is necessary.

And we also . . . You know, one of the areas that we want to contribute is repayment assistance if that individual does not get the job that they're looking for, to repay that on schedule. We will look at repayment assistance to ensure that they're able to keep up with those payments as well. So you know, modest compared to what the federal government is doing, but happy that

they are providing leadership in this way. Providing a top-up and the repayment assistance, I think it's a good model overall.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. In the past year we have seen significant layoffs at Saskatchewan Polytechnic. This represents an unfortunate loss of talented individuals at the institution, potentially impacting the training provided at the institution. Why we are seeing an increase this year? I'm wondering if the government has been working with the institution to potentially increase staffing levels again.

[18:00]

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Well the member asked if we're working with the institutions, and absolutely we are. Because you know, this minister and this government feels that one layoff is too many. But that being said, we have to look at the situation across the country — 20,000 layoffs across Canada. Saskatchewan, you know, we're in the 150 range. Again I have seen this in my own family. Layoffs — my wife, my son, others — it is not happy times. It is not something that we want to have happen, but at the same time we see this across the country.

And again credit to those institutions for not going overboard with international students, having it operate in a responsible manner. But that being said, because of the federal government decision, we have less international students. We have less students in the classroom. And you know, as I mentioned earlier, at this time of year institutions have to make those decisions going forward. And there have been some layoffs and there may be some more, and we want to make sure that we do all we can to minimize that amount.

So what we do is the multi-year funding agreement. And you know, some 8 per cent in operating increase is coming to our institutions this year. We trust them to use that money responsibly and accordingly to develop their own financial plans in a professional way and to ensure that that money is used to employ the right individuals at the right time and to educate as many students as possible. And that process is happening right now.

And you know, I'm confident if the federal government didn't move in that direction, or if they consulted on a province-by-province basis, we wouldn't be in this situation today. But it is what it is, and we're working with them very, very closely to ensure that they are able to make the decisions with the least amount of impact as possible to Saskatchewan workers and to Saskatchewan students.

So you know, the institutions are arm's length and we respect that. But at the same time we feel a partnership and we want to work with them as best we can. And again looking across the country and doing a cross-country scan, when we see, you know, 1,000 in British Columbia, programs shut in Manitoba and others, I think we're in a pretty good situation. So I'm trying to be as forthcoming as I can, least political that I can, and just say that, you know, relative to other institutions in the country, we're in a pretty good spot. But we will not stop until those directions are . . . we're going in a different direction again.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. In some fields, such as sonography, Saskatchewan offers its own programs but also

has reserved seats in Alberta, in this case SAIT [Southern Alberta Institute of Technology]. So can the minister explain the difference in cost to the province in reserving seats compared to creating more in the province?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Well when it comes to interprovincial agreements, not to let out of the bag what we talk about in our caucus meetings, but you know, it is something that members from my caucus certainly ask me about a lot. And you know, it's a balance. It's a delicate balance between interprovincial agreements and what you can do in your province. And we have to weigh that balance and look to see if we have a critical mass in Saskatchewan and to offer that program.

And that's something, you know, philosophically I certainly want to have all those programs that we can afford to bring back to Saskatchewan. But I've also learned that there's some partnerships that work very well with NAIT [Northern Alberta Institute of Technology] and SAIT and Red River College. And sometimes it makes sense. And of course we're the beneficiary of the Western College of Veterinary Medicine. We have students come from British Columbia and Manitoba to Saskatchewan, and we feel we offer them a great education at a modest cost.

And you know, that's another thing that we have to look at is the cost of the program in our province and looking at what the cost is out of the province. And the cost out of the province is only the seats that you use that you pay for. But in all that realm, the goal is to bring those programs back. And we've had much success over the last year.

This year \$9.9 million will support a total of 105 seats in three new Saskatchewan-based programs that were previously available only through interprovincial agreements. And you've heard me talk about it off the top. Occupational therapy, respiratory therapy, and speech language pathology will all start in Saskatchewan in 2026. So we're very, very pleased to do that.

The member indicated sonography. And you know, it immediately came to mind when I was touring Suncrest. They have a program there where they have six seats. And I know other members are nodding their heads; they have been there and heard about it as well. We purchased 16 seats from SAIT and five seats from NAIT that were phasing out as well.

So this is top of the agenda, sonography, and we are looking to see how best to move forward with it. It's a growing area, a growing demand, but we're showing greater expertise in Saskatchewan and enabled to deliver the program. And I'll give a shout-out to Suncrest College for the great work that they do as well.

Tajinder Grewal: — So in terms of cost, you didn't answer my question, that it costs the same to us, offering a course in Saskatchewan and offering the same course buying the seats from Alberta. It costs the same or less about?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — What I'm saying is there's a critical mass that has to be there to offset the cost. If the number is lower, it's going to be cheaper to do it outside the province. But if we reach that critical mass and that we can do that, as we have with Suncrest, then it becomes cheaper to do it in the province. So our

goal as a government is to reach that critical mass.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. How does Saskatchewan's post-secondary institutions compare in terms of safety to other provinces? And can the minister outline if his ministry's taking any action to support safety on campus? Or is this solely done by allocation to the post-secondary school?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Well, being the Minister of Workplace Safety I guess this has to be very important to me, and I'm very glad that it is and the institutions take it very seriously. You know, as a government we want to provide a safe workplace for all workers in Saskatchewan, and specific to learning institutions we want to make sure.

And again we do work with the institutions, but you know, I have conversations with all of the senior leadership — certainly the presidents — on a quarterly basis. And this comes up from time to time, and you know, they're usually way ahead of me, because these are operational safety decisions that have to take place within the institutions.

[18:15]

And again they participate in best practices across the country and show leadership in many regards as well, you know, whether it's mental well-being; suicide prevention; dealing with racial violence or antisemitism; anti-violence seminars, certainly they're doing that; sexual assault policies; and ensuring accessibility on campuses as well. So these are operational safety decisions, but I'm pleased to say that with my experience, it is a priority with all of our institutions and they take that responsibility very seriously.

And you know, since 2021 the ministry has supported this area in a specific way, and it's called Healthy Campus Saskatchewan, which brings together over 20 post-secondary institutions to form a community of practice. It supports institutions with knowledge, tools, and resources to support student mental health and well-being. Healthy Campus focuses on mental health promotion and prevention supports across the post-secondary sector. It coordinates training opportunities and general mental health literacy and suicide awareness to build institutional capacity to connect students with the appropriate supports.

So that comforts me greatly when I hear that and I see that, and credit to those in 2021 that made those decisions. And again, we're listening very closely. You know, if I happen to get a letter from a student that is in this regard, I ask for it to be followed up and to ensure that we look across the country and make sure that we're leading best practices.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. Currently Ontario, BC, Quebec, Manitoba, and PEI [Prince Edward Island] have laws and policies that relate to gender-based violence in universities. Given that Saskatchewan has some of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the country, does the ministry have any plans to support or legislate a policy that will reduce gender-based violence on campus?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Thanks very much for the question. And you know, I received a letter not too long ago from the president of the University of Saskatchewan Students' Union,

Emma Wintermute. And I've met with her and her executive and certainly heard their concerns and have passed them along to the university, to USask. And I'll just read from my response back to Ms. Wintermute.

We have contacted the University of Saskatchewan and they have assured us that they take these concerns seriously. The university is currently in the process of reviewing their sexual violence prevention and response policy and procedures. A working group is in the final stages of drafting a revised policy and procedures document.

The University of Saskatchewan has conducted an extensive review of other policies at Canadian universities right across the country, as well as the current literature and best practices. The university will begin consultations on the draft with key stakeholder groups sometime in late April with the expectation that an updated policy and procedures will be ready to bring to the Board of Governors this fall.

So as you can see, that topic is of utmost importance to the University of Saskatchewan and it certainly is to this minister and to this government. And I work very closely with the minister in charge of the Status of Women in the province here as well to ensure that that information flows freely from my ministry to her ministry as well. So again, thank you for the question and certainly a priority for us in this government.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. You already talked about Healthy Campus Saskatchewan and mental health support. Many students report that access and waiting times for mental health support is still a problem. Can the minister update us on last year's wait times and waitlists? And on this year's target?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — You know, the question is a very timely one. As the members will know, this came up in question period today, and the Minister of Rural and Remote Health addressed the question as well regarding mental health wait times. And you know, I think it's the goal of all of us to try to reduce those times as much as possible, to get the help that people need as soon as they need it. And the minister answered that question in question period today.

You know, what we are trying to do — the ministry is, you know — beyond the question of wait times is do all we can to ensure that mental health-related programs are supported and that the education necessary is there so we have more support workers in the province — over 100 new seats in mental health-related programs. Saskatchewan residents will benefit from over 100 new training opportunities for students in key mental health and related programs including clinical psychology, mental health and addictions counselling. This brings the combined total of first-year seats in these programs to over 200.

So from a ministry we realize that you just can't do enough to educate people in this regard, so we're doing all that we can. You know, we don't have the statistics on the mental health wait times at specific institutions. We know that it's a priority for all of them. Yeah. We want to make sure that students have that success. And as the minister indicated in question period today, she said that the many, many programs that her ministry is funding as well are of great importance.

So you know, it's something that we'll continue to do better on. And the member and I can have discussions going forward as I learn more about what the institutions are doing. But I'm convinced that it's a priority for them and they're doing all that they can to make those wait times as short as possible.

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Minister. I believe all Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions have some sort of initiatives or plan to ensure reconciliation efforts. Can the minister update us on how far along our institutions are implementing these plans?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Well the topic of reconciliation is certainly a key part of every strategic plan of every institution that I've had a chance to review of in advanced education in Saskatchewan.

And I've got some of the details, a lot of the details here in front of me, but I just want to stress that from an overall perspective, you know, we value reconciliation. We value the efforts. And we're showing leadership in the country, and so we should because of our large Indigenous population in Saskatchewan. The First Nations University of Canada is located here, and we see great strategic work from places like the SIIT, the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies.

[18:30]

And I've had those discussions with Riel Bellegarde and with Darcy Bear, and I remember their words to me when I let them know about the multi-year funding program and the funding that they received. I think it was \$2.5 million to that institution. And their words back . . . Yeah, in '26-27 Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies will receive \$2.5 million funding increase to recognize and support its unique and important contributions to the province's training sector.

You know, those individuals said to me that that's economic reconciliation right there by giving them the means and the needs and the way to ensure that those students are able to get those skills in a way that recognizes the reconciliation in our province.

I can go on. Like the University of Saskatchewan, as all members will know, make this a priority absolutely, as does the University of Regina, Sask Poly, and the regional colleges as well. I don't want to take up too much time. I know we're getting to the end of our time.

But I can see, you know, basically starting in 2021-2022, very aggressive programs have been put in place and they are led by consultations with Elders, and Indigenous strategies are something that are part of the university plan at the U of S in 2025.

University of Regina has been Indigenousizing the university and implementing specific initiatives to support the success of Indigenous students. It's something that we monitor very closely. And there's dips along the way; it's not a straight line going up and forward. So when those numbers do dip a little bit, we take great concern and ensure — because again, that's the future of our province and that's the future of our economy — to ensure that Indigenous students have reconciliation and we're part of it and we're going forward.

So in many ways we're leading the country, and you know, specifically when it comes to advanced education we are now investing more than \$24.1 million in Indigenous post-secondary institutions and programs, an 84 per cent increase in funding from 2007-2008 — \$13.1 million to \$24.1 million. Money isn't everything but it shows the importance to each and every institution and to this ministry, to this government, and to this minister. Thank you for the question.

Chair Keisig: — Well thank you, Minister, for that very knowledgeable answer. Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates, we will now adjourn considerations of the '26-27 estimates and '25-26 supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Advanced Education.

Minister, do you have any closing comments?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And you know, I joked about it with the member, with the critic, earlier that last year went pretty well, and I have to say this year went pretty well also. I have to thank him for the well-researched and knowledgeable questions and the way they were delivered in a professional manner, and I hope my responses were the same way.

I think we share many goals, all of the colleagues here, in wanting the very best advanced education system. And those in front of me and those behind me share all those goals.

And I'm just very excited about the future and how this ministry is going to support a growing economy. There's no place I'd rather be. There's no Minister of Advanced Education I'd rather change places with. And I'm just very, very pleased.

But credit to you, sir, for the questions and the way you delivered them today. Thank you. And thank you to all my ministry folks and for helping me to answer the questions as well.

Chair Keisig: — Thank you for that, Minister. MLA Grewal, do you have any closing comments?

Tajinder Grewal: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks to the minister for answering very well-researched or very well-mannered answers. And also thanks to all the ministry officials for your hard work for the budget and estimates. You worked very hard. Thank you. And thanks to all the committee members, Assembly Clerk, and *Hansard* operator. Thank you very much.

Chair Keisig: — Thank you. Thank you for that, MLA Grewal. I want to thank all the committee members for their hard work, their due diligence, and their attention to details on the estimates coming forward today. Thank *Hansard* and all of the building staff for all of their hard work. And this committee stands adjourned until 7 p.m. this evening. Thank you everyone.

[The committee recessed from 18:35 until 19:01.]

Chair Keisig: — Well welcome back, committee members. We have Nathaniel Teed joining us, chitting in for committee member April ChiefCalf. The committee will now be considering the '26-27 estimates for the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety.

General Revenue Fund Labour Relations and Workplace Safety Vote 20

Subvote (LR01)

Chair Keisig: — We will begin with consideration of vote 20, Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, central management and services, subvote (LR01).

Minister Cheveldayoff is here with his officials. I would ask that officials state their names before speaking for the first time, and please do not touch the microphones. A *Hansard* operator will turn your microphone on when you are speaking to the committee. Minister, please introduce your officials and make any of your opening remarks.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good evening. Good evening to committee members as well. It's a pleasure to be here to discuss the budget of the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety.

The officials I have with me today are my chief of staff, Kenneth Cotterill; deputy minister, Veronica Gelowitz; assistant deputy minister, programs division, Elissa Aitken; executive director of corporate services, Pat Parenteau; executive director of occupational health and safety, Bryan Lloyd; executive director of fair workplaces, Kristin Anderson; CEO of the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board, Phil Germain; CFO [chief financial officer] Dale Markewich of Workers' Compensation Board; and Labour Relations Board registrar, Jonathan Swarbrick.

The ministry's '26-27 budget of \$20.33 million will enable the ministry to continue its work in supporting workplaces to reduce time-loss injury rates, creating fair and balanced labour laws, and establishing a culture of workplace health and safety.

A key focus of our government has been on keeping the economy strong, our communities safe, and building on our success and protecting Saskatchewan. In the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, I get to see that vision put into practice each and every day. With every workplace inspection, mediation, review of injured workers' claims, and through strong employment standards and provisions that support workers and employers, the work of this ministry directly impacts people, workers, and employers.

While I may be new to the portfolio, I'm not new to how important creating safe, healthy workplaces is to the citizens of this province. The work of the ministry does contribute to this goal. In the last fiscal year, our government passed amendments to employment standards provisions that would strike a balance for both workers and employers. We extended various leave provisions, protected workers' tips, and removed administrative burdens for employers. We know that having effective employment legislation in place is key to protecting and growing Saskatchewan's economy.

In '26-27 we are going to continue reviewing legislation and regulations. We began a review of labour relations and essential service provisions last year and are analyzing the responses we received to determine if we need to make amendments. We will

also continue the review of occupational health and safety regulations this year. This is a significant piece of work and will take place over several years through a multi-phased approach.

We're also looking at how we support trade across Canadian jurisdictions through an enhanced mutual recognition framework. Saskatchewan will continue to rely on inspections, enforcement, and compliance to ensure that standards recognized from other jurisdictions deliver equivalent safety outcomes.

We recognize that workplace violence trends, ongoing labour disputes, expired collective agreements, and rising costs continue to challenge workers and employers. This is not just in Saskatchewan, but indeed right across the country. To address these issues and to keep our economy strong, our government continues to work together with citizens, unions, businesses, and other stakeholders in protecting Saskatchewan and creating healthy, safe workplaces.

I'm confident this budget will allow the ministry to deliver on its vision while building a framework of regulatory authority that sets our province up for success today and into the future. These are just a few of the highlights of the work of the ministry, and I'm sure we will get into more details as we engage in conversation today.

I've had the opportunity to be minister now since mid-December. I've had an opportunity to reach out to stakeholders across the province, both from unions and from businesses, and to talk to workers. And I'm finding it a very interesting ministry and something that certainly I'm learning a lot as we go. But I look forward to our discussion this evening and would be happy to answer any questions that any committee members have at this time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chair Keisig: — Thank you, Minister, for your brief and poignant opening remarks. I will now open the floor for questions and just remind all committee members that we are here to debate the '26-27 budget and all questions must relate to such topics. I recognize MLA Teed.

Nathaniel Teed: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And thank you very much to the minister and the ministry officials and Assembly staff and everyone else who contributes to this estimate process here tonight. Appreciate your remarks here off the top. We have some important issues so I'm going to jump in.

But I'm going to start with some of the comments from the opening statement around changes to employment standards, specifically around the OH & S [occupational health and safety] multiphase approach and the labour relations and essential services requests. Could you provide me with the number of submissions that you received for the OH & S regulatory changes?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — All right. Regarding the OH & S submissions, the number of submissions was the question. The public was invited to provide input into the submission phase from October 7 to November 30, 2025. The ministry issued a news release and a discussion paper and sent letters to 137 stakeholders inviting their participation. A total number of 87 submissions were received and the ministry is currently analyzing these submissions.

Nathaniel Teed: — I have received a number from stakeholders, but I'm wondering if we would be able to table those submissions. I know last year they were able to provide me kind of the package of submissions following the legislation going through. I'm wondering if I'm able to receive those earlier than that.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — When we asked for the submissions, we put a disclaimer on and we said, please be aware that submissions may be disclosed according to the provisions of *The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. So you would be certainly able to request that information through that process.

Nathaniel Teed: — Okay. Last year they were just provided to me. We didn't have to do a FOIP [freedom of information and protection of privacy] process. Is that an option this time?

Chair Keisig: — I'm just curious. To the member of the committee, how is tabling these documents analyzing the '26-27 budget?

Nathaniel Teed: — The minister mentioned them in his opening remarks and the work of the ministry, which would be dollars allocated from the budget to do this process under . . .

Chair Keisig: — No, fair point to the member opposite.

Veronica Gelowitz: — Veronica Gelowitz, deputy minister. Thank you for that question. We can release them once we receive permission from the third parties who provided them. Any submissions that are public, we'll be able to release those right away.

Nathaniel Teed: — Thank you so much. And then following OH & S regulatory changes, there were submissions — a call for submissions, as you mentioned in your opening remarks, to labour relations and essential services. Can you provide how many letters were sent out and how many responses you received from that process?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — So the ministry began external engagement on October 23rd, 2025 with letters being sent to 102 organizations including employers, employer associations, and labour organizations. The engagement process closed on December the 4th, 2025. The ministry received 32 written submissions.

The ministry is in the process of analyzing stakeholder feedback. We appreciate the responses and certainly thank those stakeholders for sharing their thoughts as part of the review.

Nathaniel Teed: — Anything high level of note in those submissions? Or you know, one of the feedbacks I received about this was that it was a short window and it didn't have an explanatory paper when it went out. And so stakeholders were left wondering what the intention of the review . . . Of course the business plan talks about the need to move through those reviews.

[19:15]

But we were just wondering if there is a little bit of background

both from what the ministry is seeking and if there's any high-level intentions to move on issues surrounding labour relations and essential services legislation.

Veronica Gelowitz: — You're correct. We did not issue a discussion paper with this review. There weren't any specific provisions that we were looking for any advice on. And really we wanted stakeholder perspectives to really drive this review, so we didn't issue a discussion paper.

What we've heard so far: as you can expect, pretty diverse opinions on a number of things. But I think it would be premature to discuss any specifics until we've completed our analysis.

Nathaniel Teed: — Thank you so much. As far as timelines go on the OH & S regulations, when can we expect to see the first phase of that released?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — So what we are looking at is a multiphase review, of course with phase 1 happening. And we're looking at a goal of late fall. Certainly by the end of the year, but the goal is by late fall to have that phase 1 in process.

Nathaniel Teed: — And as far as the labour relations and essential services, what is the timeline that we might see any legislation from that process?

And I guess I'll just tack on the additional request of the tabling of the 32 written submissions for that one once the privacy process has been completed.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — So with regard to labour relations and essential services, there's certainly a number of steps that we need to go through. Our target timeline is the fall or the spring, so we're looking at both.

And you know, at some point here I wanted to bring in the topic of the minister's advisory committee. And I'd spoken earlier about, you know, when I first became minister in December, I sought out to have one-on-one meetings with most of the labour leaders in the province and business organizations and interested individuals. And every one of them took up the opportunity to have a chat and to educate me on their priorities. And I found it very useful.

But certainly the majority of people I met, unprompted mentioned the minister's advisory committee. And it has taken place various times throughout history under different ministers. And you know, a lot of it's on time availability of ministers and whatever. But most people that talked to me said they found it valuable, and having everybody in the same room. And I'm kind of that type of person too. I like to get everybody in the same room, and then if divergent views are coming, we can certainly have those discussions.

So I'm looking forward to the committee and looking forward to their advice when it comes to things like labour relations and essential services and all of that. And I've heard from various members that they're excited and interested about it as well. So at the end of the day, I think we'll get a better result if we just take the time necessary to get that in place and to use their advice.

Nathaniel Teed: — Thank you so much. No, you took the

question on the minister's advisory council right out of my pages. So I know that I've heard the same, and I think that stakeholders are really looking forward to an opportunity to have those discussions. And I know that the minister's advisory council had been something that had been missed for the last number of years under Labour ministers since Morgan, I believe. So yeah, I really appreciate that. Do you have any idea when the first meeting might be?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Well they're just finalizing the invitations and the membership list, so it's still very early days. The news release I think just went out last week, so you know, finalizing that. Again I don't want to commit to an exact date. A lot of it'll depend on my schedule and the legislative schedule and when we can put this together, but I guess late spring would be a target. And I think that's what the expectations are from committee members or prospective committee members, so we'll target for that.

Nathaniel Teed: — Thank you so much. Tying it back to central management and services that likely will be doing the work around these policy analyses and changes, I notice that we are seeing a 468,000 reduction in central management and services. Can the minister give a little comment on why we're seeing a reduction and whether that will affect those timelines that we're seeing on these regulatory and legislative changes?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — All right. Relatively easy answer to this one. The 468,000 decrease is due to central adjustments for changes to enterprise IT [information technology] recoveries from the Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement. So it's a cross-ministry manoeuvre. And with the consolidation of certain responsibilities with SaskBuilds and Procurement, the financing has to happen as well. So no staff implications, no timeline implications that we can see.

Nathaniel Teed: — Yeah, I think I remember last year we discussed that there were IT systems being integrated into SaskBuilds. Is that fair to say? Is that where this, the change . . . or no?

Veronica Gelowitz: — I think last year the conversation we were having was around the asbestos registry, yeah. No, this is something different, but it was government-wide. All ministries were reallocating some of their IT dollars, centralizing it into SaskBuilds and Procurement.

Nathaniel Teed: — Thank you so much. You had mentioned in your preamble the Ministry of Labour, or your role in the enhanced mutual recognition laws. What role does the Ministry of Labour play in those policies?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Thanks very much, and a very timely question indeed. I just had the opportunity to participate in my first labour FPT, a federal-provincial-territorial meeting. And we've been an active participant in this for many, many years, probably for decades. And we find it very beneficial, and certainly attendance at the FPT was beneficial for me being a new minister and hearing from other jurisdictions. We had many invited guests and national labour leaders and business leaders and others as well.

So just some of the highlights from the meeting. Saskatchewan,

for example, harmonized personal protective equipment regulations with other Canadian jurisdictions in 2021. The current phase of harmonization focuses on adopting a single national standard for first aid training for the workplace. The next stage will focus on high-visibility safety apparel.

We are working with our federal, provincial, and territorial partners to explore mutual recognition options, primarily in safety training. Areas of focus include working-from-height training and mobile elevated work platform training as well.

[19:30]

Very interesting, very good, you know, 14 different positions around the table. Every province, all the territories, and the federal secretary of state was there as well. Very interesting. The humour of the meeting, the best joke of the entire meeting was the minister from Alberta, who is 6 foot 8, and he says, "I have a lot of experience in working from heights." And so he does. If you see the picture, he's a good two-thirds of a foot higher than most of us there.

But you know, you learn from around the table — and some ministers have been there quite some time and they are quite well versed in all of this — but Saskatchewan, we play our part. And the deputy presented a paper, a position paper at the meeting, and so it was well done and well attended. And I think, you know, it falls into the work that the Prime Minister and the premiers have been asked to do to come up with common ways of doing things and making it easier for transitions across provincial boundaries and things like that.

Naturally the larger provinces want to, you know, do things their way. But I think we punch above our weight when it comes to doing that in Saskatchewan. And the work continues and goes on, but at the end of the day I think we're going to land in a good place and have those national, you know, harmonization. I guess there's debate around the word "harmonization" as well but, you know, those national prospects across the country, to ensure that we're part of it. And I think it will help our economy going forward.

Nathaniel Teed: — Thank you so much. I really appreciate the insight into the process of mutual recognition, specifically around workplace safety. I think at the start of this term, both parties had submitted mutual recognition legislation, and a little different, and so they were allowed to remain on the order paper.

Specifically ours included exclusions around occupational health and safety so that we wouldn't race to the bottom on that health and safety. We'll recognize, you know, training and we'll recognize all sorts of those other things to ensure that we can trade across Canada, all the provinces. But the occupational health and safety piece was really important. And I think what I'm hearing from stakeholders is that we just can't see a race to the bottom in that process, and that that rising tide should raise all ships in the process.

Would you say that from those meetings that you're seeing a willingness for provinces to look to the best health and safety procedures of the country and then go in that direction?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Yeah, many times that exact phrase,

"it's not a race to the bottom; let's do best practices across the country." Yeah, I got a good feeling from that but my depth in that area is not large, I would say though. But I'm happy that we're moving in the direction of moving to a higher standard across the country.

Nathaniel Teed: — Thank you so much. I'm going to move on here because I think I've gone through some of these questions around the preamble. I'm going to come up to Workers' Compensation Board. I was wondering if officials from the WCB [Workers' Compensation Board] can provide me with the occupational health and safety funding line for 2025, and if there is a projection or if they have a number for 2026. And possibly I guess, I'm imagining we'll see the 2025 Workers' Compensation Board annual report come with the AGM [annual general meeting]. Would that be correct to say?

Phil Germain: — Phillip Germain, CEO for the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board. Thank you for the question. If I understood the question correctly, for 2025 WCB ended with a net positive of \$18 million. Now there's a number of subcategories like you get to that number with, but it was a net positive. And for 2026 we're anticipating a net positive again. The projection is similar for 2026. It's not significant but it's a net positive again I know for 2026. I just don't have the number off the top of my head.

Nathaniel Teed: — Oh, for sure. Do you happen to have the figure for the funding line? I'm specifically like just looking at occupational health and safety funding line. In 2024 it was 13,190. The year before, 12,099.

Phil Germain: — Yes, the 2025 occupational health and safety funding for 2025 is 14,376 compared to 13,190 in 2024.

Nathaniel Teed: — Can you provide me with a breakdown of that funding line? And where does it correspond in the provincial budget?

Phil Germain: — The only thing I'll add to that is that does not include the Workers' Advocate funding, which was another 1,528. That's the breakdown we get, and then the ministry has their own details.

Nathaniel Teed: — Okay. Thank you so much.

Veronica Gelowitz: — So you wouldn't necessarily see a direct correlation with our estimates. So we bill WCB at the end of the year for our actual costs, and some of those costs would also be . . . They're in our OHS. They're also included in our central management services, a bit of overhead in those pieces, and again for the injured worker appeal services. And so our budgets wouldn't necessarily match what we're billing them at the end of the year.

Nathaniel Teed: — Okay. So that's why there would be like a discrepancy between say, for example 2024 . . . Well I guess we're looking back. In 2024-25 we had 13,190 in '24 for Workers' Comp, and then in the corresponding budget, OHS budget line, we have 9,675. So there wouldn't be a direct correlation between the two?

Veronica Gelowitz: — Correct, because the budget is produced

for the year in advance, and then we're billing WCB at the year-end. Again it's not just the one line item. There's a number of pieces from other line items.

Nathaniel Teed: — Is it easy to get a breakdown of where those funds are like specifically?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — I'm told that we could provide that breakdown. We don't have it here, but we certainly are very comfortable providing that to you.

Nathaniel Teed: — I appreciate that. Yeah, one of the questions that I was looking at was, certainly the envelope of money like goes into workers' occupational health and safety. Where in the annual report for Workers' Compensation Board would . . . Pursuant to 146 of the Act, WCB levees additional premiums on certain industries, collects from them, and pays them out to corresponding safety agencies. Which line item is that in the annual report?

Phil Germain: — So there is a couple of line items. One of them is under safety association grants. So in 2024, 11.824 million. In 2025, 12 million four hundred and ninety-five.

Nathaniel Teed: — Thank you so much. Further on to this, so the question that I was looking at was, you know, we have the envelope of money that comes from Workers' Compensation Board. We would bill them at the end of the month. Why are we seeing a cut in occupational health and safety of 775,000? Do we need more money coming from Workers' Compensation Board to do the work in occupational health and safety? It seems like a symbiotic relationship — the better the funding, the better resources OH & S has, the better WCB would perform.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — All right. Similar to a previous question, the 551,000 decrease is due to central adjustment for changes to enterprise IT recoveries from the Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement. So that's 551. And then on the government-wide workforce alignment, there's a \$224,000 decrease due to vacancy management.

Nathaniel Teed: — I imagine the reduction in employment standards line item is similar to the 213,000 from employment standards?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Yeah, a little bit different in this instance. The \$213,000 decrease was due to a planned organizational restructuring resulting in elimination of two vacant positions. So a savings of 213,000 there.

Nathaniel Teed: — Thank you. So the cut . . . Oh, I mean I guess the reduction you've mentioned is part of an internal technology transition, but we're still seeing I guess at this point a 4.7 per cent reduction to OH & S from this occurring. Will this affect work site visits and inspections that the department expects to occur?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — No, we're not anticipating any changes to front-line services at this time.

Nathaniel Teed: — I'm going to move on to some questions around workplace safety and some violence in the workplace. As we're all aware, Saskatchewan is above the national average of employees that experience being harassed or sexually assaulted

in the workplace. Again as we've heard, that these are technological changes but, you know, a cut is a cut in some capacity.

Can the minister provide any sort of evidence that the department is taking enough action on the cases of workplace violence? And are there any new initiatives that the ministry is planning to move ahead with in this area?

[19:45]

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Now there's quite a bit of information. I'll touch on the highlights, and if the member wants more I can go into more detail.

But Workers' Compensation Board is participating in the following violence prevention initiatives by sector. Under health care there's various points. In 2026 Workers' Compensation Board plans to partner with the Saskatchewan Health Authority on a health care violence prevention awareness campaign. Under education, project funds are supporting the Regina Catholic School Division in implementing a school-specific workplace violence risk assessment. And in service and hospitality industry, Workers' Compensation Board is leading a learning collaborative with the Service & Hospitality Safety Association and two community youth facilities to identify and implement best practices in violence prevention.

City transit operations, you know, certainly a big topic in Saskatoon, where the member and I share our constituencies. A province-wide transit violence prevention campaign was launched in 2024 and '25. Ongoing support through occupational health committee engagement. Workers' Compensation Board continues to monitor outcomes following the implementation of their safety solutions.

Under training and resources, WorkSafe Saskatchewan and Workers' Compensation Board provide coordinated training, prevention resources, and guidance to help employers meet occupational health and safety obligations, including workplace violence prevention, psychological health, and return-to-work practices.

So that provides a cross-section in various areas. Certainly able to expand on any if you like.

Nathaniel Teed: — Yeah, I guess my next question is, is there any way to gauge that the money that we are spending on the campaigns that you mentioned is reducing the incidence of violence in those workplaces?

I think one of the things that I am consistently hearing from stakeholders, especially in the public sector and public-facing roles, is that, you know — health care, be it health care facilities, a school classroom, the transit that you mentioned, the transit workers, group homes — all these people are reporting higher than normal incidents of violence. And so, you know, they will point to short-staffing in a lot of these cases — burnout, overwork.

But is there any metric that you can point to to say, this is the money that we are spending on these campaigns is lowering these rates over here?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — I'm going to start with the answer, and then I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Germain for more complete, front-facing information that he has.

Back in May of 2024, amendments to the occupational health and safety provisions of *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* came into force requiring all provincially regulated workplaces have a violence policy and a prevention plan in place. The policy also needed to be separate from a harassment policy.

The policy statement and violence prevention plan must include the employer's commitment to minimize or eliminate risk and review the policy and plan every three years; identification of work sites where violent situations have occurred or may occur; identification of staff positions that have or could be exposed to violent situations; the procedures to inform workers about the nature and risk of violence at their place of employment, and any information the employer has about persons who have a history of violent behaviour who could become a risk to the workers; the actions an employer will take to minimize or eliminate risk of violence; the procedures for reporting a violent incident to the employer; the procedures the employer will follow to investigate violent incidents; a recommendation that workers who have been exposed to violent incidents consult a physician for treatment or obtain a referral for counselling; and a commitment to provide a training program for workers.

So I think the member will agree it's a thorough undertaking and certainly a lot of work has gone into it. So that's from a, sort of a high-level overview, and I'll just ask Mr. Germain to come up with some other examples and some other information.

Phil Germain: — Thank you. So when we think about the work that we do with industries are crosscutting issues like violence across many different industries. The strategies that we develop are multi-year because there's a lot of things that need to kind of go right in order for systemic changes to happen. That includes — campaign is one piece — awareness, training, targeting, and consulting.

So there's multi facets to these strategies, and over the course of our history where we look at the WorkSafe program overall, the last couple of decades it's been very successful in reducing time-loss injury rates, total injury rates. And this is the model we've been using for many years.

Now we've tweaked it over the last few years to really focus in on serious injuries and fatalities. So we're only about three or four years into it. And I know that seems like a long time, but it's really not in terms of the type of work that we're trying to do and the influence that we're doing across many different employers, many different industries.

You know, and with our partnerships across labour and organizations, we've made a real difference. Our time-loss injury rate is the lowest it's ever been. Our total injury rate is the lowest it's ever been. Our serious injury rate trend is downwards.

And when we talk about industries in particular, things like health care. So the time-loss injury rate, our three main targeted industries for the fatalities and serious injury strategy is health care, transportation, and construction. And last year we saw two of the three go down and the third one, which was transportation,

stayed the same. So we're starting to see what we believe is consistent progress, but it's based on that multi-tiered approach of campaign, education and training, awareness, consulting, inspection. So there's a multitude of things that we do to make sure that the changes that we see are sustainable.

Nathaniel Teed: — Thank you so much. So is there any way to . . . I'm just going to rephrase here. We've got injuries. We've got violence in the workplace. It seems like we — and this might be more for the minister — we use a lot of carrot. And I know in previous estimates I've had Labour critics talk about, and we've talked a bit about, policy development. The ministry is working on these things.

Has there been ever any discussion that we need to move to stick — proper fines, making sure that employers know that if employees get injured or killed in their workplaces that appropriate fines and consequences will be in place?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Thanks for the question, very good question. And you know, I'm told we certainly do both. We have the carrot approach and the stick approach as well. And your question was more to the stick approach. And I guess, you know, that might be somewhat subjective, but I'll look at the summary offence tickets that are issued, for example.

There are nine occupational health officers designated as peace officers to issue tickets, and there are 12 ticketable offences. They include fall protection, excavations, trenching, personal protective equipment, submission of progress reports to occupational health and safety, and submission of information requested by the director.

OHS issued 42 summary offence tickets in '25-26 from April 1st to December 31st. And a ticketing program was implemented back on July 1st of 2014. And total number 349 tickets issued: 296 guilty pleas or just paid; 40 stayed or withdrawn; and 13 remain in progress. So on a summary standpoint, you know, certainly some very enforceable options there.

[20:00]

For prosecutions, you know, *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* violations for occupational health and safety: 19 occupational health and safety cases sent to the Ministry of Justice for consideration. Fourteen prosecutions were initiated, eight convictions, \$981,000 in total penalties levied by the court. And you know, the penalties increase significantly over time, increase to \$10,000 for the first offence, 25,000 for a second offence, and 50,000 for a third offence and subsequent offence. And you know, so you know, there is that option as well.

And I have other information here, an example of occupational health and safety, the prosecutions' outcomes: files sent to Justice, 19, or maybe I went through all of that. Yeah, so, you know, it goes back a few years but overall there seems to be a good balance between summary and prosecutions as well.

And then our friends at Workers' Compensation Board have just informed as well that they have a surcharge that they implement and it can be up to 200 per cent as well. So that would certainly fall under the stick approach as well. So three different options from that regard, you know. We still prefer the carrot and still try

to get ahead of it that way, but facing reality, there's three examples for you.

Nathaniel Teed: — Could you provide any examples of anyone receiving that 200 per cent surcharge?

Phillip Germain: — Yeah, well obviously I won't provide employer names, but we have many employers that hit that 200 per cent annually. It's not a few; it's surprising how many hit that. Some work their way off of it. That's usually who we're targeting through WorkSafe is the poor performers, and we're trying to help them change that. So there are many employers each year that get significantly surcharged above 100 per cent up to 200 per cent.

Nathaniel Teed: — Why aren't those companies or actors named publicly? I don't know, another bit of feedback I received from stakeholders is, along the stick method, you know, the name-and-shame method, is that like, how do I know that any one of our young children are going to be going into a workplace that's, you know, on the list? How do you, how do we protect future workers from these, from possible bad actors? And I appreciate the folks who are working off that. But there's a little bit of . . . The transparency piece has always been in question.

Phil Germain: — So a bit of the challenge is understanding what that number represents. Because even if somebody's 200 per cent surcharged, that could be a medium-sized company who had one major injury, for example, somebody who slipped and fell. That could be their only injury, but it may have cost the system a million, million and a half dollars.

If it's a young parent who's got two dependents, it could become really costly really quickly. For that employer, they may end up being significantly surcharged. But it could be one incident. So the dollars don't always tell the story. It can in a lot of cases, but not always. Some people might get a misunderstanding of what that surcharge can represent sometimes.

Nathaniel Teed: — Yeah. I guess, yeah. So there isn't really a way to gauge a bad actor employer because you could be a small operation with one significant accident and boom, you're at the top of the list. Okay, no, I appreciate that.

I guess then maybe coming back to the symbiotic relationship between WCB and the Ministry of Labour and understanding that WCB funds the occupational health and safety, and like, as you mentioned, a number of other lines within the ministry. In an effort to reduce injury, is there ever the opportunity to say, in these good years, to WCB, you know, we need more money to achieve the goals that we want to see in Saskatchewan of education and the like? Is that an option?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — So payments from the Workers' Compensation Board to government, they go to the General Revenue Fund. They're considered a "other business entity" on the balance sheets.

But I guess we have to take a step back and realize that, you know, the funds at Workers' Compensation Board, you know, are obtained directly from employers. So it's all about a balance. And we have to take that balance seriously and realize it's not a bottomless pit of money because, of course, then premiums will

be going up. So that's the way we approach it. We take a common-sense attitude. And you know, upon becoming minister, I was informed that premiums were actually going down this year. A well-managed fund, great returns, and you know, very, very pleased to see that. So I guess that's a balance that has to take place.

You know, you referenced in the good years, can we get more? And that indeed has happened. And you know, my experience is Workers' Compensation Board is very eager to offer up where they think they can make the biggest bang for the buck and at the same time be very, very strident on watching the dollars that they're asking the employers, the businesses to put forward.

So you know, I was going to save it for the end, but I just want to say, from what I've seen in the first five months of being minister here, is Workers' Compensation Board is a model that is seen across the country as being a leader and doing very, very well. And you know, to be frank, we used to hear from employers about ever-increasing rates, and that doesn't happen, I'm told, anymore. They see it as fair, and the recognition that, you know, it's coming from the one taxpayer is appreciated.

So I guess that'll be part of my job to, you know, look at that balance and suggest areas where maybe funds could be increased or . . . You know, this year it's a premium decrease, and I think everyone's happy with that. And you'll know. You'll see the annual report, I believe, on Wednesday.

And you know, I ask all members to come. And you learn a great deal, but seeing the stats that are behind the Workers' Compensation Board, it's very, very good to see the trend lines. Where they compare to others across the country is very favourable. So I think we're reaching that balance, but again that'll be my job to look at both sides and see if we can do even better.

Nathaniel Teed: — I appreciate that, and I've always been very appreciative of the tech briefings that we have received when the annual report comes out and the annual general meeting. And I think I was sitting . . . I sat in on them even before I was Labour shadow and always appreciated seeing the work that that organization does. And so thank you so much to your folks for doing that.

You know, earlier I did ask . . . I was asking, you know, corresponding the health and safety funding line item to the budget, and you mentioned that those funds go into the General Revenue Fund. And so I guess my question really was aiming at, you know, are we seeing 100 per cent of the occupational health and safety funding going into the Ministry of Labour? Or is it, you know, going into general revenue and then we're sending some in another direction, or is it going to other ministries, or is 100 per cent of those funds linking up to budget line items in the Ministry of Labour?

Veronica Gelowitz: — So as I mentioned previously, the ministry bills WCB for those expenses. So that's where the direct correlation to our expenses comes into play. There isn't a flat rate that goes into the General Revenue Fund to be used by other ministries.

Nathaniel Teed: — Okay, perfect. So basically 100 per cent of

those funds being billed to are being received in the Ministry of Labour. Wonderful. Thank you so much.

I was wondering if the department might be able to break down for us how much we are investing in total in prevention initiatives this year and possibly compared to last year.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Just wondering if the member could be a little more specific. We do it in all streams, so just maybe . . .

Nathaniel Teed: — Like central management, occupational health and safety, employment . . . [inaudible] . . . Would you say all three, all of those streams are involved in preventative measures or are paying for preventive measures? Does that help? Or which budget line item would preventative measures be coming from?

[20:15]

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — All right. I'll do my best to answer the question here. I think if the member has, you know, more detailed . . . certainly we can go down that road. Labour relations and mediation, preventative services, and employment standards, you know, certainly provide that. But we don't have the specifics as far as a dollar breakdown. But occupational health and safety, that goes over to Workplace Safety and the Workers' Compensation Board. And again, numbers aren't specific but that's from a high-level general way of doing things.

Nathaniel Teed: — Yeah, maybe. I guess I was just thinking here. Like I am just looking at the financial summary in the business plan — or sorry, this might be from the annual report — and it breaks down into the pie chart of the percentages of what Labour Relations and Workplace Safety overall does. I'm wondering if you have any breakdowns for like occupational health and safety specifically. You know, like percentages of what work that budget line item is facilitating. That might be closer to maybe what I'm looking for.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — All right, I think here we found the pie chart that you're looking at as well, so the occupational health and safety branch. And yeah, a large part of the budget there. We have it broken down by core lines of business. So safety operations, health standards, mine safety, legal affairs, and branch services. But we don't have dollar values associated with each of them, but those are the primary areas.

Nathaniel Teed: — Well I think that helps. Do you ever do the breakdown of those, of like the percentages, or is that not really . . .

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — All right, good news. We found that we have the information — but it's just not here with us — for '25-26. '26-27, the allocations haven't been made. But we'll undertake to get you that information, and it should give you a good start on where things are for '26-27.

Nathaniel Teed: — Really appreciate that. I apologize, I'm making a little make-work here tonight, and I apologize to all the folks who have to do that work.

I'm going to jump over to employment standards. And my question around employment standards was that in your annual

report you note that there was an increase in complaints that were investigated. And I'm wondering to what extent is that an increase in complaints as opposed to the department being able to investigate more cases.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — I think we need some clarification on just exactly what you're looking at.

Nathaniel Teed: — Yeah, I could go with like how many complaints did employment standards receive? And I think what I'm looking for is like, you know, were we just really efficient this year in processing complaints? Or was there like a lower amount of complaints that we received? Maybe more in that line of questioning.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — All right, I've got some numbers. You know, formal complaints filed. I'll go to sort of the post-COVID era. 2022-23, 1,582 bumped up to 1,923, which is what I'm told is a stabilization rate about that 1,900 level or so. It bumped up a little bit in '24-25 to 2,151. And for '25-26 we've got three-quarters of a year and it's at 1,338, so we're trending down in the '25-26 era as well.

And you know, percentage-wise the branch collection rate, again it's bouncing around in the 80 per cent range. Eighty per cent, 88 per cent, and now back to 81 per cent.

Nathaniel Teed: — And what percentage of those complaints are investigated? Would all those complaints be formally investigated?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Yes, all of them.

Nathaniel Teed: — We are seeing the reduction of two FTEs [full-time equivalent] in employment standards. That's the difference in the budget from last year. Will this affect the department's ability to investigate these complaints?

I think as a backgrounder I'm hearing feedback amongst kind of departments across the government that workloads are going up, and the Public Service Commission shadow minister as well. We're facing down a budget. And you know, we're looking at attrition and we're not going to replace attrition. That's what the government has signalled.

Will we see a reduction in the ability of the employment standards to do the work that they're getting with the loss of those two FTEs?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — So the two FTEs were vacant positions: an executive director and an executive coordinator, not really impacting the front line or the ability to respond in a direct manner. And you know, as the member will know and all colleagues will know, the heads of departments are asked to identify per areas, but along with that, where they'll have at least impact as possible.

And then I guess when you have a couple of spots like that and they're not filled for a while, you understand that you can operate without them. And you know, as a government we've tasked ministries to take a look at that, and we want to ensure that government doesn't grow faster than the economy grows. And we're, you know, quite adamant about that.

So no, I'm comfortable saying, you know, it's not going to have an impact on the front line or the ability to respond.

Nathaniel Teed: — You mentioned that one of those FTEs was an executive director that was an empty position. Does that mean the department and the branch of like reporting as . . . Is there a head of department that still is in that position, then the executive director reports to them? How does that function there if you have no executive director for a long time?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Basically to answer your question, effective April 1st of this year we established a fair workplaces branch that brings together three former areas: the employment standards, the injured workers appeals services, and the labour relations and mediation. So all that falls under fair workplaces branch from April 1st going forward.

Nathaniel Teed: — Fair workplaces branch, okay. Thank you very much.

[20:30]

I'm going to jump over to — while we're in kind of employment standards — the area of the regulations around tips. So it's been about four months now that we've seen regulations in the space of tipping for workers in the province. I'm wondering what work the ministry is doing to make employers and workers aware of those changes.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Yes, very good question, and certainly a lot of work has been done in this area. So I'll take the time to go through it, but I'll go through it quickly.

Information on the impending amendments was added to public training sessions, and webinars were made public. Public webinars were offered specifically regarding the amendments in November and December '25 and January '26, with a total of 153 attendees. A recorded webinar was posted on the ministry website since November 2025. News releases were issued in May 2025, when Bill 5 passed, and in September of 2025.

Presentations were delivered to employers, employees, stakeholders on demand through the period of September '25 to December '25. Ministry website information and employment standard publications — *Understanding Saskatchewan's Employment Standards: A Guide to Your Rights and Responsibilities* — was updated to reflect the legislative and regulatory amendments.

Employment standards unit received public phone and email inquiries as amendments were announced, with 2 per cent of the total inquiries related to the amendments, particularly regarding tips and medical note restrictions. Since January 1st, 2026, employment standards has delivered three specific training sessions on amendments on request and delivered one additional public webinar on amendments. So public overview presentations, including special content regarding recent amendments. You know, they looked at each and every option available and have done a good job of getting that information out there.

Nathaniel Teed: — Awesome. Thank you so much. How many complaints have you received in this space? And I guess, have

you had any violations of these new regulations?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — So the highest inquiry volumes were related to restriction on sick notes of 14 inquiries, and to tips, 13 inquiries. The area of unlawful discrimination action as well has seen an increase of 64 per cent increase in claims.

But what we're finding is there's a direct correlation to when the ministry highlights the changes. And I think people are quite inquisitive because of the 18 complaints regarding discriminatory action opened and closed in January 2026. None were found to be valid. So there's still an education process that has to go on for sure, but at the same time there is an interest in that from employees.

Nathaniel Teed: — Sorry, could you repeat just the numbers around sick notes? Eighteen complaints or sorry . . .

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Fourteen on the sick notes and 13 on tips.

Nathaniel Teed: — Fourteen. Okay.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — And then 18 complaints, which is an increase of two-thirds.

Nathaniel Teed: — And you mentioned discriminatory . . . Sorry, I was just jotting it down.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Yeah, discriminatory action.

Nathaniel Teed: — And that would be in general? Or is that referring specifically to health, the sick notes and tips?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Yeah, each of those are different things. The discriminatory action is an entity on its own.

Nathaniel Teed: — And so when folks are . . . So we actually haven't had any formal complaints processed through the tip regulations. Would that be fair to say? Or like if they're calling in, they're making note of it, it's investigated, or . . .

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — So I'm informed at this time they're all being investigated, but they haven't proceeded far enough to report anything to you. But they are all being investigated. I think it's a learning process on both sides here as we go.

Nathaniel Teed: — Sure. What is the consequences of a non-compliance with this specific regulation?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Just referring the member back to something I said earlier, and it would fall under *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* and maximum fines. And so we're talking about 10,000 first offence, 25, and 50,000. So you know, very heavy fines and certainly, I think, a serious look at the first offence and up to \$10,000.

Nathaniel Teed: — No, that's very interesting and good to know.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Just additional information for the member. Fines paid are approximately \$4,200 per conviction. That's the average.

Nathaniel Teed: — Perfect, thank you so much. I appreciate that. I'm just going to jump over to . . . I think I have about 20 minutes left, so I might jump to a couple different questions here. I'm going to go to group terminations. I'm wondering if you can provide me with how many notices the ministry received for group termination in the '25-26 year.

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Yeah, I've got the information by years. And so in 2025 there were 41 group termination notices and affecting 1,062 employees. And in 2024 it was 33 group termination notices affecting 875 employees. And you know, we've seen numbers as high as in 2015, there was 81 group termination notices and 3,160 employees affected. So yeah, that's the latest information there. So 41 is, I want to say, about average, but it's bounced around a lot.

Nathaniel Teed: — No, I appreciate that. And mostly I know I had asked last year, just with the change in Bill 5 to the number — the threshold raising from 10 to 25, I think it was. I'm going to jump over to the labour board. How many dispositions did the labour board render this last fiscal year?

Jonathan Swarbrick: — Jonathan Swarbrick, Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board. So in the past fiscal year of 2025-26, the board disposed of 267 applications.

Nathaniel Teed: — And how long on average did it take to decide those in the last fiscal year?

Jonathan Swarbrick: — So the average day from application at the board to order was 114 days.

Nathaniel Teed: — And what is that . . . Do you have any comparison year over year? Like one of the issues that I'm hearing from stakeholders is, you know, I guess they'll point to — and you're aware — you could get fired on Friday afternoon, go to the labour board, and you'd be reinstated by Monday. But it seems like the process now is taking much longer.

I know there was regulatory changes around, you know, introducing written statements in the labour board. There was introduction of lawyers involved. I guess like is there any indication that dispositions are taking longer in this fiscal year than in past fiscal years?

[20:45]

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — So as a rule we don't hear reinstatement applications. They're based on the collective bargaining agreement. Matter of practice, written submissions are preferred. They actually, in our experiences, allow hearings to go faster and they're able to triage what's the most important and to go forward.

So written are faster, but we'll hear oral submissions. And then again it gives time to any individual. They're welcome to have legal counsel present or they could engage in legal counsel and have the time to determine how they move forward.

Nathaniel Teed: — Okay, so what about employers in non-unionized environments? You wouldn't hear those cases of wrongful dismissal? I understand like in a union environment that would be done between the employer and the union. But

what if I just work at the 7-Eleven and I'm fired and I want to get my job back because I think it's wrongful dismissal?

Jonathan Swarbrick: — So when it comes to non-unionized workplaces, that would fall under the jurisdiction of typically employment standards or occupational health and safety if it's potentially harassment or discrimination based, but typically employment standards.

Nathaniel Teed: — Okay, and so those folks would not go to the labour board. So they're heard in employment standards. Is there a tribunal, or how are those folks heard in a labour dispute?

Veronica Gelowitz: — So after our staff do an investigation a decision is rendered. An appeal on that decision would go to . . . If there's an appeal it would go to our director either of employment standards or of occupational health and safety. If that decision is held up, they can apply to have an adjudicator appointed from the Labour Relations Board, and then that adjudicator's decision could be appealed to the board.

Nathaniel Teed: — Okay, and do you have any average on the timeline of that process?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — All right. I know our time is getting short here. I apologize for taking so long, but there are some nuances here.

So most are under 100 days, and if that's, you know, going forward without a hearing or anything like that. Of course if you're going to an adjudicator, it is longer. We do have a shortage of adjudicators. We're trying to get more. But you know, to accommodate both parties and all that, it can be substantially longer than that. So of course our preference is to go with the shorter and try to get that done that way.

Nathaniel Teed: — Yeah. No, I appreciate that. I guess maybe my last question here, coming back to the labour board dispositions and applications, it seems like the average days it's taking to decide are trending upwards. I've got 59 days in '23-24, '24-25 was 74 days. Now we're at 119 days. Is there any indication of why we're seeing an upward trend in the time it's taking to see these applications resolved?

Jonathan Swarbrick: — I believe the first numbers you were quoting were actually from the conclusion of a hearing, of all the hearing dates to order. Whereas the number I provided you earlier was from the first date of application to final disposition of the matter. It would appear that we're dealing closer to about 80 days right now. I would attribute that . . . Sorry, apologies. With the transition to written materials, it allows us to address hearings without having to wait for the entirety of a set of hearing dates, which for some matters can be short but many can be quite lengthy to complete.

Nathaniel Teed: — No, I appreciate that. That's good insight. I think that originally the thought around that was just an increased complication to the process. But if a written application is saving you from having to take the time to book all the parties in one room, that can always take time.

I think I've reached the end of my time limit here. But as I'm speaking about time in the labour board, I'll do a shout-out to all

the folks, the workers at the Heritage Inn picket lines. I think this line of questioning really came from feedback I was getting from UFCW [United Food & Commercial Workers] 1400. Workers locked out make applications to the labour board. It takes a long time. By the time that order comes down, the order says that the employer is in breach, and then the employer doesn't do anything after. And finally we have seen those workers, you know, reinstated.

[21:00]

But really this line of questioning came from . . . It just seemed like the time it was taking to process these, you know, unfair labour practices or breaches of the Labour Code left the workers basically out walking the picket line for so much longer. And it seemed like what the folks in the labour community were saying is that, you know, this used to be a lot quicker we used to get these rulings. So that's where this line of questioning came from and I'll give a shout-out to those folks. But I think that I'm complete in my time here.

Chair Keisig: — Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates, we will now adjourn considerations for the '26-27 estimates for the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. Minister, would you like to make a few closing comments?

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff: — Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. And just to respond to that last little bit as well. And you know, I've received some correspondence directly from both sides in different disputes that are under way right now, you know, Saskatoon Catholic and things like that. And I'm quite willing to undertake to consult with my ministry officials and to get back to those individuals.

So if you're in contact with them, you know, you can tell them to write a letter directly to the ministry, to the Minister of Labour, and I'll read it and I'll do my best to try to move it along and to answer their questions. I may not have the answers they're looking for, but they'll have my undertaking to do that.

And yeah, so I want to thank you as well. You obviously have some good background in this area and bring some skills to the table and certainly I appreciate your tone and your research and your questioning as well. So it's been a good day overall starting with Advanced Education and finishing up with Labour and having my colleagues listen to me go on for five hours, but that's what we do.

But I think it's been a productive day and I think we've gone into most of the most topical areas as well. I think we're very well served by the people beside me and the people behind me and Workplace Safety. And you know, they're undergoing some changes there and some branding and things like, you know . . . We'll be talking more about that in the future as well. And I mentioned earlier our friends at Workers' Compensation Board and the good work that they do.

So thank you to everyone here. And I think it's been a productive couple of hours and thank you to yourself, Mr. Chair, and colleagues. Appreciate it.

Chair Keisig: — Thank you, Minister. MLA Teed, any closing

comments?

Nathaniel Teed: — Yes, thank you so much. No, really appreciate the time we've had here today and appreciate your willingness to engage with the stakeholders in this file. I think it really helps that we're able to, you know, have those relationships. Really appreciate that openness to read the letters as they come forward and appreciate all the work that all the folks do in the ministries.

Thanks so much for answering questions here today and for championing safety in the province. And appreciate all the work of the committee members and the Chair and all the folks here who make this possible tonight.

Chair Keisig: — Thank you. MLA Burki, any closing comments?

Noor Burki: — No.

Chair Keisig: — Okay, well thank you for that. Anyway, thank you, Minister. Thank you to all members of the committee. Thank you to *Hansard*. Thank you to all the officials and for all of your hard work and attending this evening, truly appreciate it.

This concludes all of our business for today. I would like to ask a member to make a move of adjournment. MLA Kropf has moved. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Keisig: — Agreed. This committee stands adjourned to the call of the Chair. Thank you, everyone.

[The committee adjourned at 21:04.]