

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
April 10, 1984
EVENING SESSION
COMMITTEE OF FINANCE
CONSOLIDATED FUND BUDGETARY EXPENDITURE
SOCIAL SERVICES

Ordinary Expenditure – Vote 36

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Would the minister introduce his officials?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Perhaps I could introduce my officials. Seated to my immediate left is the deputy minister of the Department of Social Services, Mr. Podiluk; immediately behind him, Mr. Hnatiuk, the assistant deputy minister responsible for program services; immediately behind myself, Mr. Art Uhren, administrative services branch director; and immediately to my right, Mr. Dan Cunningham, assistant deputy minister for administration.

Item 1

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . S.S.S. Could we have a little order in the Assembly, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Minister, I wonder if you would give me a list of the salaries of not only your personal staff in your office, but also the officials who are here with you tonight; a list of the salaries and the job descriptions of those people I mentioned.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Mr. Chairman, we'll endeavour to provide those for the member opposite as soon as possible.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Minister, do you have the numbers there with you right now?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — We'll get them over to you as soon as we can. I don't have them with me right here at this particular moment, no.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Minister, has your deputy got them there in his briefing book?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, Mr. Chairman, we don't have the salary figures for all of the senior officials here, but as I indicated, we will get those over to the member opposite as soon as possible.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Minister, it's been routine in the Assembly in the first three departments that we have done, that the minister sends it across immediately during the routine. And I wonder whether or not, if you don't have them there right now, if you would send someone to your office so we could have them within the next 10 minutes, so that we could ask questions about the amount of money you're paying out of the public purse for your personal staff – for the political people in your office who are doing the political work for you.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — . . . (inaudible) . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Order. Give the minister a chance to respond.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Mr. Chairman, I indicated that I would get that information for the member as soon as possible. I have a comparison figure before me which the member would be interested, perhaps, in. The average total cost per month, in terms of personal salaries, in the

office at present – that's my personal staff – would be 13,882 which includes a total of six people: three secretaries and three assistants. I believe the figures for March 31, '82 for comparison purposes: 16,142, a total of eight staff members at that time.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — I wonder, Mr. Minister, when you're quoting the numbers if it wouldn't be fair that you would send them across, so that people could make that comparison. I think the cowardly nature of this minister is shown again tonight where he will try to hide behind his staff the same way he has tried to hide behind them in cutting the welfare payments to those at the bottom of the . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Order, order. I would ask the member from Shaunavon to retract that statement. I find that unparliamentary.

AN HON. MEMBER: — What did you find unparliamentary?

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Calling the minister cowardly. I would ask him to retract that.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — I will retract it when he gives the information I requested.

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Order. I would ask the member from Shaunavon to retract that statement.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — I'll retract the statement, and call the minister sleazy in the fact that he has stood behind his staff. This is a statement that was used by the Minister of Finance in the budget debate. It was used in the budget debate, and is accepted in this House, and has never been questioned.

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Order, order. The House Leader.

HON. MR. ANDREW: — Mr. Chairman, when the Speaker, or the Speaker's delegate which is the Chairman, calls a member of this Assembly to order, it is a point of order. If I could have the floor to . . . (inaudible) . . . When . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Does the House Leader have a point of order?

HON. MR. ANDREW: — The point of order is this, Mr. Chairman, the point of order is this: when a member is called upon to retract a statement, it must be . . . it must be retracted unequivocally. That ruling has been made in this Assembly, many, many times.

MR. CHAIRMAN: — I ask the member from Shaunavon to retract that statement.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Chairman, the record will indicate that I withdrew the statement, and I will stand by that, that I withdrew it, prior to the Minister of Finance standing up.

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Withdrawals must be unconditional.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Chairman, I'll make it unconditional.

MR. CHAIRMAN: — The member from Shaunavon.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — I will challenge the minister in the attitude that he has taken in producing the numbers, that he will stand behind them, and to approach it in the sleazy manner that he is trying to do tonight—by quoting numbers, but not giving any facts. Mr. Minister, you are the first one to come to this Assembly and quote numbers which you are unable to produce for the committee. You have them there? You just said, a minute ago, you didn't have the numbers of your personal staff. If you have them, will you send them over?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Mr. Chairman, the member opposite, if he would take the time to listen carefully and think about the questions that he has asked, he would remember that I indicated that I did not have here this evening the information on the departmental staff salaries. I did indicate that I had comparative salary figures for my personal staff, and I read them out. If the member opposite had requested that I provide them, I will do that. They are right here and I'll be happy to give them. You never asked for them.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the minister, after some time, producing the numbers which he was trying to hide from the committee. I find it interesting, Mr. Minister, that you do this on a number of occasions. I was at a day care hearing committee in Saskatoon and Regina, where you did a similar thing — where, during the committee, you would get up and say how much you were opposed to profit day care and two minutes later go outside of that hearing and give an interview to the TV stations which was quite contrary, and misleading to the day care community in Saskatchewan.

And I saw it again in the cuts that you made to the welfare system in this province, where, on the one hand, you talk about the principled position that you have taken, and have talked about how you believe in those who are less advantaged than yourself and other members of the society. And then when the smoke clears away, we find that you, Mr. Minister, have taken the low road of cutting back from those people who are most in need. And I think it's representative, Mr. Minister, of the kind of operation that you are attempting to run in this province.

And I would say to you, that this is not my opinion. I have a letter here, which has for a title, the St. Paul's Cathedral. This is from the St. Paul's Cathedral, Mr. Chairman. I would like to read it into the record, which talks about this Minister of Social Services.

It's dated March 30, 1984, and is addressed to the Hon. Gordon Dirks, Minister of Social Service, province of Saskatchewan, and it says:

Dear Minister: I am writing in regard to your recent announcement on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan regarding the proposed reform of welfare system.

Reform of the system is a worthwhile endeavour, and in many ways long overdue. The reforms which you proposed, though, are hardly reforms at all. They are simply cut backs, taking away from people who already have very little. I fail to see any person, in indulging in doublespeak, by calling cut backs by honourable name of reform. This appears to be the same doublespeak as releasing employees to seek jobs in the private sector.

Perhaps to use Orwell's term "doublespeak" is most appropriate this year. I find the proposal of your department, and the government, most distressing. To refer to able bodied, single, employable people, is to appeal to the worst of the prejudices of those of us who are comfortable and well off.

The underlying assumption of this is clearly that there is employment for employables. Your proposal to remove from welfare assistance 16 and 17 year olds, I grant has some merit. I, and all the parents, are responsible for our own children. However, I only assume that you have failed to ascertain why the present 16 and 17 year olds require welfare assistance now.

To propose the educational upgrading, which you are reported to have described, is simply not true. Young people, including those with full high school education, constitute the highest unemployed age group in the country. What purpose then in upgrading their high school education?

Mr. Minister, the letter goes on to say:

The proposed new limits for recipients of welfare assistance, I find extremely distressing. On what calculations are they based? Are they based on any? People simply cannot live on the funds which you propose. What are they to do? Could you or I live on that money? I strongly suspect that the decision which prompted these proposals for reform are based on nothing more than political expediency. Your appeal for support to the comfortable and well off, no doubt, get the desired results for the time being. It is far too easy to make this sort of proposal, because it does not directly affect those who have any power, any voice. Your proposals are simply an attack on the weak. It is disgraceful and shameful. Who will be next? Single mothers? The sick? The disabled? The elderly?

Mr. Minister, I urge you and your colleagues to reconsider these proposals. They are, quite simply, punitive of the weak. They are an appeal to the worst red-necked prejudices in our present social climate. They will produce an unbearable strain on the resources of the private social agencies, such as the Church. They are short-sighted and do not begin to get at the underlying problem.

And it's signed, "Yours truly, The Very Reverend Duncan Wallace, Dean of the Qu'Appelle Parish."

Now the members opposite will laugh, and they heckle as I read the letter from this distinguished individual from Regina . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And the member from Moosomin now calls from his seat, "What has it got to do with what we are discussing here tonight?"

Well I'll tell you, my friend from Moosomin, that these principles that this person refers to – an attack on the weak; an attack on those least able to defend themselves – are evidence of what this minister is attempting to do in the province of Saskatchewan. He has, very simply, taken a proposal from the B.C. government, the government of one Grace McCarthy who runs the social service department out there, and implemented it in Saskatchewan, and attempting to put a good face on it. And Mr. Minister, I would like you to get up and defend your policy on this issue, in light of this letter that I just have read into the record.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Mr. Chairman, perhaps the most appropriate way to respond to the letter which has been written – in my estimation, very extreme and lacking in any rational criticism whatsoever of this particular policy that we have implemented – perhaps the best way to respond to it, however, would be to quote from some other letters that I have received recently in my office. I would quote first of all from Reverend Wendell Stevens, the president of the Saskatchewan conference of the United Church of Canada. Most interesting. He indicates that:

I fully appreciate that the intent of the revisions is to provide incentive to young and able recipients to get out of welfare through the training and temporary employment program. That intent is to be commended in its basic purpose.

He also talks about . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: — Read the whole thing, Gordon.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — I shall, I shall. He also talks about our desire to limit the abuse with regards to 16 and 17 year-olds. And he indicates:

In many ways the concern expressed in the protection of the public purse, and the desire to lift the number of young people out of the welfare dependency, is commendable. You need to be encouraged in that.

I would hope, of course, that you would let the rest of the public do that.

He goes on to provide counsel and encouragement that the reform measures themselves will be implemented in as humane and compassionate and just a fashion as possible. I would like the member to know that today I responded and indicated that the reform measures will be carried out in a professional, social-work sense, which will be compassionate, reasonable, and sensible.

I think perhaps it would be worthwhile, Mr. Chairman, for the members of this Assembly to hear some of the letters that the common folk of Saskatchewan are writing in response to our welfare reform package. Here's a letter from Prince Albert, and I'm sure the members from Prince Albert will appreciate this:

My family and I would like to congratulate you on the stand you have taken on the welfare issue. Such action is long overdue. We appreciate your integrity in preparing to take action to overhaul a system which is not only a tremendous drain on public funds, but which tends to discourage personal initiative.

That letter from Prince Albert. A letter from Saskatoon which starts off:

I want to congratulate you for the stand you are taking on social aid and day care.

Here's a letter from Alberta:

Just a note to back you in your proposed welfare changes as stated on the national news recently. Power to you. This country needs more stances such as you are taking.

I'm sure the members opposite will be interested in a few other letters.

Congratulations, and thank you for having the courage to take a stand.

Here's a letter from someone in Regina.

I want to take this opportunity to offer my congratulations to you on the bold step you have taken with regard to the restructuring of the welfare payment system in the province of Saskatchewan. There is no question that strong leadership in this area has been overdue, and I am pleased that in the very early years of your administration that you are prepared to challenge the status quo, and bring innovation into an area where it is so badly needed.

A letter from Saskatoon.

Regarding your recently announced changes to social service policies. I'm a taxpayer who says thank you. Putting responsibility for young teens back on their parents is an excellent move.

Respecting the minimum wage by ensuring that less is available for some people on welfare is an excellent move. I suspect some other provinces will be watching the effect of your changes.

Last week you announced that you would be giving social welfare recipients an opportunity to work; 16 and 17-year-olds are not to be able to leave home as readily to receive welfare assistance as heretofore. I want to say "bravo."

These are just a few of the short comments.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

HON. MR. DIRKS: — . . . a few of the short comments of the people of Saskatchewan. I might indicate that the letters and phone calls that we have been receiving in my office are running about two to one in favour of the initiatives that we have taken.

Finally, one last letter:

Let me be the first of many to commend you on the recent changes to the social welfare act, some of which were long overdue. Of particular satisfaction is the removal of the 17 and 17-year-olds, who, finding that they prefer not to follow parental guide-lines in the home, has the opportunity of moving out and having the taxpayer foot the bill for their desire of independence through welfare benefits.

One must seriously question why such benefits were made available in the first place, and on what basis. You will, of course, already have been charged by the official opposition and their supporters as being cruel and heartless and uncaring. No thought will have been given to the beleaguered taxpayer who, as always, bear the burden of such costs.

We live in a time when certain segments of society have been led to believe that they are entitled to practically any benefit simply by demanding it. Unfortunately, too many of our liberal left do-gooders have encouraged that sort of thinking.

I agree, as I am sure you yourself do, that society has a responsibility for the welfare of those unable to look after themselves. Unfortunately, this has been translated into the mistaken belief that this should also include those who, though quite capable of looking after themselves, choose to do otherwise.

It has become fashionable to sneer and joke about the Protestant work ethic. It is ironic that it is only because of the work ethic that social benefits are available. Wishing you and your government continued progress . . .

A letter from Saskatoon. In wrapping up these few comments with regard to the member's criticism, I might say that, Mr. Chairman, we inherited a welfare system which was run by the former government for 11 years. It was unproductive; it was inefficient; and it was inequitable. And Mr. Chairman, everybody in the province of Saskatchewan knows that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

HON. MR. DIRKS: — And I might add, Mr. Chairman, everybody in the province of Saskatchewan expected this government to make significant changes. That is what we have done, Mr. Chairman: changes that are rational, based on sound social policy — a far cry from the kind of policy which the former government afflicted on the taxpayer of Saskatchewan.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — I wonder if the minister would care to tell me how many people and their dependants were on welfare when he and his government took office.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — In April of 1982, the total case-load in Saskatchewan was 22,597.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — I asked for the number of the welfare recipients and their dependants, Mr. Minister, and you know bloody well that's not true — what you just told me.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Mr. Chairman, I thought that the member opposite had asked for the total case-load. The number of recipients in April, 1982, was 45,156.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Can you tell me, Mr. Minister, under your great administration, what it is on the last day of January or February of this year — the most recent numbers you have?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — I'll give you two figures: the case-load in February '84 was 28,846; the number of dependants who were related to that case-load, putting them all together, recipients 57,330.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — What month would that number be for, Mr. Minister?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Indicated February '84.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — What was it in January of '84?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — In January of '84: case-load was 28,376; and recipients total 56,633.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Well I think Mr. Minister, what we see here is a 12,000 increase in the number of people who are on welfare since you took office. And for you to stand here in this Assembly, and try to explain that you are doing much more to keep people off of welfare, simply is . . . The message going out to people is that you are not to be believed. That the fact that you're saying that there were 45,000 people on welfare and their dependants, when you took over, and there's now 57,000 — and I would question that number — is not to be believed. Mr. Minister you are misleading people to say that there were large numbers of people on welfare when you took office. You will know full well, and the members of your department will be able to tell you, that Saskatchewan, in April of 1982, had the lowest per capita number of people on welfare in the country.

And you will know very well that the 45,000 people who were on welfare were basically two groups of people: the aged, who were without a decent pension; and secondly, the mentally and physically handicapped of the province. And Mr. Minister, for you to try to explain to the public that these are people who are slackards, not willing work, doesn't do justice to what Saskatchewan is all about. And I say, Mr. Minister, that the people, the newly found people on welfare, are a result of your economic policy as opposed to the welfare system.

Are you trying to tell me that there are 12,000 or 15,000 more people on welfare because suddenly they became lazy when Grant Devine became the Premier of the province? Or why are they now on welfare when they weren't in April of 1982? I'll ask you that question very pointedly. These are basically young people, the single unemployed, who you are now attacking. Why do you suppose there are 15,000 more of them on welfare today, in March of 1984, than there were when you took office in 1982?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Mr. Chairman, I want to correct a misconception of the member opposite, and I think he needs to be careful that he convey the appropriate impression to the public of Saskatchewan. I think the vast majority of people that are on welfare are good folks that have fallen upon difficult personal circumstances, and they need to be assisted, and our government recognizes that. All governments recognize that. The provision of welfare assistance has become a corner-stone of social policy in Canada, and this government will maintain it as a very important corner-stone. Those people who need to be assisted should be assisted. The problem with the system that we inherited was that it was a system which locked people into the welfare syndrome, rather than helping them get off of the welfare system and everybody in the province knows that.

I might indicate. Mr. Chairman, that in the last few years here in the province of Saskatchewan we have experienced a growing population. People are coming back to Saskatchewan. They like what Saskatchewan has to offer. Our population is increasing, and increasing significantly. And one would naturally expect, as a consequence, that there would be some people from across Canada coming here, which would result in some increase in case-load, and I would remind the member opposite that, while our case-load is increasing during a time when our population is increasing, in fact, when

the members opposite took over government, their case-load jumped dramatically in their first year or two, when the population of Saskatchewan was decreasing dramatically.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Minister, I'll ask you again: why do you suppose that there are 1,500 more people on welfare today than there was in 1982? I didn't get that quite clear, what you were saying. Are you saying that the people who are moving here, are moving here and going on welfare? The people that the Premier is talking about bringing home are coming home to go on welfare? Is that the point that you're making? Or what is the explanation for the increase in the number of young people on welfare? What has caused that over the last two years?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, let's put the question in perspective. I think that an answer is only a sensible answer if you can compare it to something. Let's compare the situation today to what it was in the mid and latter '70s, when no one was coming to Saskatchewan from out of province. They were going to the other provinces; they were going to Alberta and they were going to British Columbia.

And the people from Saskatchewan, the young people from Saskatchewan, they weren't staying here. They were going to Ontario; they were going to Alberta; they were going to British Columbia. So naturally we are going to see in those years a lower number of single employables on welfare.

Today Saskatchewan is a place where people want to be. We are at the forefront of what Canada has to offer people. Consequently, we have people coming into Saskatchewan from British Columbia, where their unemployment rate is twice that of Saskatchewan, from Alberta, from the East, from Manitoba. They are coming to Saskatchewan. Not only that, but the people that are graduating from our high schools and universities are staying here in Saskatchewan, because here is where the opportunities are. The opportunities are no longer in British Columbia, and in Alberta, like they once were. And so naturally one would expect, because you have more people coming here, and you have more people staying here than stayed here previously, that you're going to see an increase in the number of single employables on the welfare roll.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — I would question, Mr. Minister, your theory that the reason that we have 12,000 more people or 15,000 more is because people are graduating from high schools and universities. I don't think that that is the reason that high schools and universities are set up, and I find it difficult to believe.

Mr. Minister, I would question one of your numbers. Basically I believe you said: 57,000 case-loads and dependants in January of '84. I have a monthly statistical bulletin here that is printed by your department that would indicate on page 4 that the number of beneficiaries, including the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan recipients is 61,912. I wonder if you could clarify that 4 or 5,000 number discrepancy that I see here in your bulletin that you had printed a month or two ago.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — We'll endeavour to respond to that. Just so that the public is not led astray in terms of statistics quoted by the member opposite, the case-load in January of '82 was 22,000-some. The employables total 8,400. The employables today on the case-load total 14,000. That's an increase of approximately 6,000 — not an increase of 15,000 single employables, as the member opposite suggested.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — What I said, Mr. Minister, is that there are about 15,000 more people and their families, members of their family, on welfare today than when you took office. And I will await your definition and description of why you quoted to this Assembly and this committee a number that does not — and I asked you twice about it — fit with the number that you have printed in a public bulletin, which is a public document which says very clearly 61,912, the provincial total. And if we're going to be asking for information and you continue either not to give it or to give information that isn't accurate, then the people of the province are going to

have to wonder what kind of a line you're stringing here. Many people are asking whether or not you do give correct facts, but I would like this clarified so the committee and the people of the province know what you're talking about.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — My apologies to the member opposite. The sheet that I was quoting from was not the correct sheet. The figures in the monthly bulletin are the correct figures, okay, and the case-load in January of '84, 30,306, total beneficiaries, 61, 912.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Well, I would hope, Mr. Minister, that either you quit making errors in giving me numbers, because it's very simply difficult for me to have all the information here and continue to go back and recheck numbers and statements that you make.

The people in the day care community will question statements you make and then come back and say something different. The people who are on welfare, and believing you earlier on, that you were a just person, and then come in and cut their income by 40 per cent, question your credibility. And tonight in committee, when we are in the committee and asking for information and you have it in front of you, you won't give it to me, and then when you do give me the information, it's not accurate. And I would ask you, Mr. Minister, if you'll make a commitment now that the rest of the information you give this evening will be correct and sound because I think that the people of the province and members of this committee deserve that from you.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — The information, as I indicated to the member opposite, is in the monthly bulletin. That is the correct information, and certainly we endeavour to provide correct information whenever possible, naturally, to the member opposite.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — I would like to, if I could, Mr. Minister, go over some of the cuts that you are making in the area of your so-called welfare reform. Can you, in brief, outline the kind of cuts you are making and sort of a reasoned explanation for why you're doing it?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to provide the following information to the members of the Assembly. This information is the sum total of the changes to the benefit structure under our income security plan. Okay? I will provide those, in context.

The Saskatchewan Income Plan is increasing maximum benefits 100 per cent, from 25 to \$50 per month, for low-income seniors. The family income plan is increasing approximately 10 per cent, up from 91 to \$100, for low-income, working families.

Single employables are seeing a reduction from the maximum available to them of \$445 per month, during the first three months, down to \$345 a month; and for those who had a maximum of \$545 a month, after three months the maximum available to them will also be \$345 a month.

I think it's important to put that figure in context. The average maximum available benefit for single employables in Canada is \$312 per month. The maximum of 345, which we have established for single employables here in the province of Saskatchewan, is right in the ballpark with Manitoba, which is somewhat lower, at 319; or British Columbia, which is around 325, I believe; and Ontario, which is, I think \$2 higher; and Nova Scotia. So we're right in the mid-range of Canada. We're above the Canadian average when it comes to single employables.

Room and board is increasing \$25 per month. The single disabled are seeing no change. A single-parent family, for example, is seeing no change. No one with family obligations is seeing any reduction of any kind. Large families, of five to seven individuals in the unit, are increasing \$5 per month — remembering that there was approximately a 6.5 per cent increase a few months ago. And the families of over seven people per unit are increasing, I believe, \$10 per month.

The exemption for gambling games and lottery prizes, instead of being \$1,000, is now \$200. The exemption for gifts, which was previously only \$25, has increased to \$200. The asset exemptions

for single clients is being reduced from \$2,500 down to \$1,500, to bring it in line with just about every other province in Canada. The asset exemptions for clients with one or more dependants are being reduced from \$5,000 down to \$3,000 once again bringing it in line with the rest of Canada. Tax rebates were previously exempted. They are no longer being exempted except for seniors.

Supplemental drug prescriptions. Previously they were covered if the client requested them. Now clients will have to pay \$2 per prescription, substantially less than the average taxpayer in the province. However, if they are clients that have ongoing or significant drug requirements, they will remain completely covered.

Supplemental dental care for fully employable people. Previously coverage was available from the time assistance began. Evidently there were some problems encountered with people coming on to welfare and then immediately getting their teeth fixed. We have decided that that is not in the best interests of the taxpayer, and so coverage now begins after a person has been on assistance for six months. Emergency coverage will, of course, remain for people. I believe those are the basic changes to the benefit schedule.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — There's a couple of items that I would like to check on. I wonder what kind of dental work in the past has been covered by the welfare program. What would have qualified as qualifying for payment through the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan in the past?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Mr. Chairman, there were no limitations on the dental work covered by the plan previously.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — So are you telling me that if a family needed their teeth straightened, that sort of thing, that the orthodontic work would have been covered by the department?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — It would have been covered for medical reasons, not for cosmetic reasons.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — And what kind of situations are you eliminating here in that first six months? Are you saying that if a person has a toothache or if they need a tooth filled — what kind of cases are you eliminating here? I hardly think that people go to their dentist for anything other than emergency reasons when they're getting teeth fixed. Are you saying that if a child of a welfare recipient needs their teeth filled, a four-year-old for example, that you are now refusing to pay it? Or what would you qualify as an emergency in a non-emergent dental care program for these people?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Emergency services are set by the dental plan. We don't have their schedule of emergency services here. Certainly, if we have a four-year-old and the dentist indicates that that child needs to have a cavity filled today or within the next week or 10 days, and it shouldn't be left for a period of time, then it's important that that be done.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Then what we can indicate to people here tonight, who might be interested, is that any four-year-old, for example, who needs any kind of dental work other than cosmetic, would qualify as emergent type care under the dental program, and that really this is nothing but a smoke-screen, Mr. Minister, because people only go to their dentists for dental care when they feel it is important to do it. Which children, which four-year-olds, are you going to say, when they go to a dentist if they have a cavity . . . We'll use that very pointed question. If a four-year-old goes with any kind of cavity, are you going to turn them away?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — For the member opposite: under five, children are covered for everything; and from five to 16, they're covered under the dental plan.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — What about a 19-year-old or a 21-year-old who has just graduated from university — let's use that example — and is in a similar circumstance, unemployed, classified as

an employable? If they have a toothache or a cavity, can they get that filled in the first six months?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — If it was deemed to be an emergency, it would be covered; if it was not deemed to be an emergency, they would have to wait for six months.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — And who will make the decision if it's an emergency?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — The professional dentist would naturally make the decision.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Minister, what would your department accept as an emergency? If the dentist said, in that individual, that they had a cavity, any kind of a cavity, and one dentist said it was an emergency, would your department accept it, for example?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Mr. Chairman, the dental plan establishes the criteria for emergencies. We rely on what the professional dentist suggest should be done. And if he indicates that this is an emergency, needs to be looked after immediately, then naturally we comply with his request.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — I'm glad you're pointing that out, and what I would encourage people to do is go to their dentist and get their teeth fixed, the same as they have in the past. And really, it points out how ludicrous this proposal of yours is, Mr. Minister, because very few people go to the dentist because they're bored. Most of them go there because they have a toothache or because they have a cavity or they need some work done. And why you would penalize them for six months and punish them again when you, first of all, either have, in many cases, fired these people from their jobs, cut their income from welfare by 40 per cent . . . And then you're not satisfied enough. You, as the Minister of Social Services say also, "If you have a toothache, you have to wait for six months to get it fixed." What we're pointing out here, Mr. Minister, is the mean-spirited attitude of these so-called welfare reforms.

One other item. I would like to know how much you are going to save by cutting the bingo winnings from 1,000 to \$200. What is the estimate in your department that you will save from that innovated and intelligent approach that the mayor of Regina thought that someone in a small room must have designed with the lights out? Can you tell me how much money you intend to save by that great move?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, Mr. Chairman, the former regulations permitted an exemption of up to \$1,000. Up to \$1,000. That was the regulation under the former government.

It's impossible to know how much we would save because, under the former government and under the regulations which we just changed, we have no idea how many people were winning up to \$1,000 or \$500 week in and week out.

It's important to recognize, Mr. Chairman, that under the regulations of the former government somebody on welfare, using the taxpayers' dollar, could have won a lottery ticket this week and picked up \$500. Next week, they could have won \$1,000 at a bingo. A month later, they could have won another \$500. And then they could have won another \$1,000 six months later. And they wouldn't have had to have had any reduction in their welfare payments whatsoever.

The regulations, in other words, permitted welfare clients to keep substantial gambling earnings as a result of that particular regulation. So what we have done is reduce the exemption to \$200 a month, which I believe is more reasonable. Pardon me, \$200. This will enable the welfare recipient to continue, if he wants to, to participate in some bingo socializing, for example, and to win himself some bingo money here or there. But not on the order of 500 or \$1,000, a number of times a year. I think you'd be hard pressed to find any taxpayer in the province who would be interested in seeing his tax dollar subsidize somebody to make substantial gambling gains.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — One individual who publicly stated that he would be opposed to the goofy idea that you brought in was the mayor of Regina . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . and one member over here says, “Just one,” but I can tell you that, when the mayor of Regina is stating it, I think that he represents probably a good number of people.

And, Mr. Minister, I’ll ask you again. Certainly, when you would cut back in an area like bingo winnings, you would have an idea of how much money you were going to save before you did it. Otherwise, why would you do it? What is the point of cutting back on bingo winnings if you don’t even know how much money you’re going to save? Certainly you must have some estimate. The people in your department who recommended it must have said, “We’ll save this much money for the taxpayers if we implement a bingo recapturing program for welfare recipients.” How much? Roughly how much? Just an educated guess, if you could do that for me.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Mr. Chairman, I think the remarks of the member opposite are indicative of the problem that the former government found themselves in, and still find themselves in today.

The issue is not one of how much the taxpayer is going to save. Certainly the taxpayer will save some dollars. The issue is one of principle. The people of Saskatchewan expect their government to be a government of principle, a government that is going to apply sound social policy principles to the welfare system. And to allow the welfare client to use taxpayer dollars to earn substantial lottery winnings, and to not have to declare those winnings, is simply not sound social policy. And I defy anyone, the member opposite or the mayor of Regina, or anybody for that matter, to suggest that it is sound social policy for the taxpayers’ dollar to be used to subsidize welfare clients to earn substantial amounts of money through gambling. Makes no sense.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Minister, how do you propose to control this illicit gambling that you talk about, where some widowed woman between the age of 60 and 65 might go to a bingo downtown in Regina, and win \$500? Are you going to be having some sort of a squad out at the bingo galleries watching closely as people win, and monitoring this system? Or how, in fact, do you intend to control these middle-aged women who are out squandering your hard-earned money at a time when you have \$150 million for oil companies? How does this make any sense. Mr. Minister, that you would now come here to this Assembly, and say that we’re going to come down hard – we’re coming down hard on these welfare recipients who are taking vast amounts of money out of the system?

How are you going to control it? Do you intend personally to go down to the bingo games and watch closely to see who’s winning, then check to see who’s on welfare, and do some sort of an analysis? How are you going to control it? Or, in fact, are you attempting to drive very honest people to become dishonest? Mr. Minister, that’s what I accuse you of because it’s a goofy idea. You know it, the mayor of Regina knows it, any intelligent person knows that taking bingo money away from people in Saskatchewan is not what the public wants you to do and I wonder how you are going to monitor this system.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well first of all, Mr. Chairman, I can understand why the member opposite has a fixation on oil wells these days. Not only . . . The oil wells that the member opposite was referring to, are in fact creating thousands and thousands of jobs, many of them which are now available for welfare clients that weren’t there previously.

With regards to the policing, to use a phrase of the member opposite, of welfare clients, I would remind the member opposite that this is not a big brother government such as the member opposite was involved with. We are a government that believes that the people of Saskatchewan can be trusted. I indicated earlier on that most of the people on welfare are good folks who have fallen upon difficult personal circumstances. Honest people, and when they sign a declaration, they are saying, “this is in fact how much income I am declaring.” And we accept

that. We accept that in the same way we will accept their declaration that, "I have now received a \$150 personal gift," whereas previously they could only receive a \$25 gift under your administration. We assume that they will, in fact, be honest in that regard. We assume that they will be honest when they tell us that they have now received so much unemployment insurance money. It's a matter of trusting people.

Now I realize that it would be naïve to simply trust and never have any accountability mechanism in place, and so naturally we have our investigation unit, we have our pre-audit unit, just as the member opposite had. And unfortunately, had the member opposite spent a little bit more money in that area, he would have saved the taxpayer a lot of money.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Can you inform the Assembly how many people will be on this squad watching the bingos?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, I can inform the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite seems to be making light of the fact that there is a need in the province of Saskatchewan, not to watch people who are playing bingo — of course not. There is a need in the province of Saskatchewan to ensure that those people who are fraudulently using the welfare system, who are abusing the taxpayers' dollar — and we know that a small minority of our clients are doing that — there is a need, Mr. Chairman, to ensure that that fraudulent activity decreases.

And had the members opposite spent the kind of money that should have been spent beefing up their investigation unit, beefing up their pre-audit unit, putting in place the computerization of the welfare system that they should have put in place a long time ago, had they done that, they would have saved the taxpayer literally millions of dollars that could have been used on sound social programming in the province of Saskatchewan.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Minister, can you tell me what the penalty will be, for example, for a 63-year-old woman who fails to declare a \$500 bingo winning? What will the penalty that your department will impose on an individual like that?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, Mr. Chairman, there is no penalty for someone who inadvertently does not declare income which should have been declared, other than that income will naturally be recovered by a reduction in benefits over the next few months. That policy was in place under the former administration, and it's a policy that we're continuing.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Well Mr. Minister, I think one thing you have done is probably guaranteed the re-election of my friend from Regina Centre for the next 50 years. Attacking people who play bingo for a living is hardly what I would call good politics.

Mr. Minister, I would ask you for the changes that have occurred to the amount of money that people can have in their savings account. Now I would like to use the example of an individual who may be divorced or widowed — a woman who is 40 years old and has a child who is 15, and they have saved enough money for university, and they have \$5,000 in their account. The money is in the child's name and it's the family allowance that they have saved for 15 years. Are you telling me that that \$5,000 will have to be reduced to \$3,000 before that family will be eligible for the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well the basic principle has not changed at all. The basic principle has not changed, and the concern is that the exemption level was too high. It needs to be brought down to a more reasonable level. We're talking about the income for a family unit. We're talking about the income for a unit, otherwise you run into the situation where someone could be putting \$5,000 in the name of a particular child here, and another \$5,000 in the name of a child there, or whatever. We're concerned about income for the total family unit. And I think that's a policy that the former government was concerned about as well. The income exemption of \$5,000 is simply too high for a family unit, however, in our estimation.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Well, I still don't quite understand what you're saying because of the amount of doublespeak you're using. But, the amount of \$5,000, for example, that a family may have saved for educational purposes – are you saying that that \$5,000 will have to be spent down to \$3,000 before they are eligible?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — No, clients that have been on the system are being grandfathered so the reduction from \$5,000 down to \$3,000 does not apply to them. We're simply talking about new clients.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Well what I'm talking about is new clients. A person who will for the first time, and there are many of them. I have already indicated that 15,000 more today find themselves on welfare than when you took office and every day that increases . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, with the new numbers the minister gave me, with the new numbers, not the incorrect ones, but the new numbers, it's 15,000.

What I would like to say to you, Mr. Minister, that it's unfortunate that you will be forcing people to spend their savings that have come, in many cases, from family allowances for education before your department.

Mr. Minister, I think that that is one area that I would very, very seriously look at if I were you, because it doesn't make a great deal of sense. And I would encourage you to allow the children to keep their accounts, and that you keep your sticky fingers out of the children's accounts that might be saved for university or technical school.

Because as I understand it, if a child has saved \$5,000 of their family allowance, with interest, that now when the parent is unfortunate enough to go on welfare, you, the Minister of Social Services, will come in and take 2,000 of that money. And I want you to clarify that, whether that is accurate or not.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Mr. Chairman, first of all, it's important to realize that the exemptions across Canada are as follows, just so the members in the Assembly understand the level of exemption that Saskatchewan is now providing.

In Newfoundland, the exemption is \$2,500; and in Prince Edward Island, it's \$1,200. In Nova Scotia, it's 2,500; in New Brunswick, it's 1,000; in Manitoba, it's 2,000; in Alberta, it's 2,500; in British Columbia, it's 2,500. Here in Saskatchewan, we're talking about \$3,000. So we're significantly higher than most of the provinces in Canada.

And our concern, of course, is that \$5,000 is simply too high. People on welfare have a responsibility to use whatever assets they have, in fact, accumulated over time, prior to their coming onto welfare. Our concern is that there be a reasonable asset exemption, not an excessive asset exemption and the \$3,000 is a reasonable asset exemption, as indicated by the fact that it is still higher than the rest of Canada.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Well, I wanted to spend a little time on this.

Mr. Minister, are you telling me that the child of a welfare recipient – for example, a 17-year-old who is ready to go to university – that the department will force them to go into that child's account with money they may have saved – collecting, selling papers, or through their family allowance – and force them to spend it, down from 6 or 7,000, down to 3,000? Is that what you're telling me?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well I would remind the member opposite that children's income is exempt and any income that a child earns is, in fact, exempt and would not fall under the scenario that you're describing.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — You're saying income. I'm talking about a savings account in the child's name, Mr. Minister. I'm saying a child's saving account, and I want that clarified because I don't think you're giving the straight information.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, I'm just wondering if the member opposite would want to have a policy which encourages people to put substantial amounts of money into children's accounts, in order that they can get further welfare dollars. I don't think that's what the taxpayers' interested in seeing. I would remind you that the exemption that we have set is \$3,000 plus \$500 for each dependant child after that.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — The question, Mr. Minister, is this: are you going to go into the child's account and take the \$2,000 between 5 and 3? And I would like a yes or no answer, not a bunch of gobbledegook that you're trying to give us here.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — If you have a child that has been earning \$1,700, for example, while he's been going to school, saving it, okay. Earned money — that's exempt.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Are you saying that the child can have an account of \$5,000, and that you won't force them to spend it down?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — If it's earnings that the child has derived through personal employment on the part of the child, that's exempt.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — And what about family allowance and savings from family allowance, is that the same?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Family allowance was included under your administration, just as it is under our administration.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Minister, I'll ask you again. The family allowance and interest, are you going to force them to spend it down from 5,000 to 3,000?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well I indicated that for cases that are on the rolls right now, those people are being grandfathered. I think the key question here is whether or not the taxpayers of the province think that a \$5,000 exemption is reasonable or excessive. And I think the average taxpayer out there in Saskatchewan would say that, in fact, \$5,000 is an excessive exemption; \$3,000 is adequate, and it's as simple as that.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — I think that after all this slipping and sliding that the Minister has done, it becomes obvious that family allowance and interest that children may have in an account, at \$5,000, that the minister will be forcing them — the new welfare recipients — will be forcing them to spend \$2,000 of that money that they will have saved towards their education. And I find that unfortunate, Mr. Minister.

You may say that across Canada these are the numbers, but I would question those as well, because other numbers you have given me here tonight have not been accurate.

Mr. Minister, I find it unfortunate that you would try to save money, so that it can be given out to banks, and interests on deficits, and other such things — so that you would go around and dig into the bank accounts of some young person who has been saving their family allowance, with interest, for 15 or 16 years, and you will now go in and take that money. And I would like you to explain to the people of the province how much money this new and innovated idea will save the province, and save the Department of Social Services.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, I have to respond, once again. I realize that some repetition is in

order this evening. Earnings of children are exempt.

AN HON. MEMBER: — Family allowances?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Very simple. They are exempt.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — No, we're talking about family allowance, and money they will have got from family allowance, and savings, because you refused to talk about it, Mr. Minister, and the people listening will know that you refused to comment on it.

How much money will you save by taking the family allowance accounts of children down from 5,000 to 3,000, of new welfare recipients? How much money do you expect to save?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, I would remind the member opposite that family allowance payments are not considered income for children. That's family income. It was considered income under your administration, and it's considered income under our administration, as well.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — I agree, Mr. Minister, that it was included in family income, and we allowed the child, if it was in their name, to save up to 5,000. You are cutting it down to 3; you'll force them to spend \$2,000. I want to know how much money you intend to save by that new program you're putting into place?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — For the information of the member opposite, approximately 360 recipients' assets exceed the new levels. So we are not talking about a large number; the savings would be approximately \$50,000.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Well, Mr. Minister, I think if I were you I would get rid of one of the staff, the political staff you have in your office, which would about cover off the amount of money you will be saving by taking the money out of the accounts of those children who will have saved their family allowance for their education. I find it hard to believe, Mr. Minister, that the education money that children may have in an account, and the bingo money that people may win, are the targets that you would attract in order to save \$50,000. Do you have any idea how that kind of saving will impact on the deficit of \$830 million which you now face? Is it a meaningful amount in your mind that you're saving by attacking the bingo money and the children's bank accounts?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, the member opposite is missing the boat completely, and that has become quite common. The issue is whether or not taxpayers want to see excessive exemptions for people on welfare. I don't believe the taxpayers do. I don't believe the taxpayers want to see a system which engenders dependency. And that's the system that the former government was running — a system which did not create initiative, a system which led to dependency. This government does not see that as a productive welfare system, as one that operates in the best interests of welfare clients. We expect to change that. We expect the taxpayers want it to be changed. That's why we have made the changes that we have made. And I would remind the member opposite that they have been well received across the province. If he wants to go against the grain, go ahead against the grain.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Well, Mr. Minister, people like the mayor of Regina, and the parish people from various diocese around the province, have written to me, and they may be wrong and we'll just have to see how this thing boils down. But I would argue whether or not attacking those people and trying to solve the deficit problem of this province — when we're paying out \$11,000 an hour in interest to the banks — that taking \$30,000 a year out of the accounts of children, or \$50,000, is going to solve in any meaningful way the problem that your government has built up over the last two years. And I think if you're trying to solve the deficit problem, that attacking people who have very little or nothing is not the answer to your problem, that there are other people in this society — and I agree that all of us should share in that — that attacking

those who have the least, to solve your problems, is not the way you should be going.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, Mr. Chairman, the fact that the member opposite does not recognize the positive, long run, beneficial changes of our welfare reform package, simply indicates to me, that Mr. Laxer was right when he said the NDP is locked in the 1950s and the 1960s, a dead-end party with dead-end solutions. And if they simply want to continue handing out welfare cheques, month after month after month, without any productive approach to welfare, then they're going to continue to be opposition members of government. That's not what the taxpayer wants. It's the 1980s, not the 1960s. We need some creative, bold, dramatic, productive changes. That's what this government is all about.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Well, Mr. Minister, for a government that has allowed 17,000 extra people to fall onto the welfare rolls, you make quite startling statement about how your government is going to not pay out more and more welfare money. Can you tell me in 1982 the amount of money that was paid out in welfare in Saskatchewan?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Mr. Chairman, the total amount paid out in the '82-83 fiscal year was 151.490 million.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Minister, I wonder, when you're looking at the kinds of numbers that we are this year, where the estimate that I have here in a booklet that is outlining . . . "Saskatchewan Social Services Welfare Reforms: Questions and Answers," which says the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan — I guess it's a projection — in 1984-85 will pay out 162 million and in 1983-84 will pay 171 million. Do you really think that the kind of reform of taking money out of children's accounts where you get 50,000 or taking back bingo money is going to have any significant impact on the kind of money you are paying out in welfare at the present time?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, Mr. Chairman, this government has no interest in taking money from children, and if that were to be done it wouldn't have a significant impact anyway, but this government is not taking money from children.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — You just said a minute ago that you took it from 360, and I think people who might be listening to the proceedings tonight are going to wonder where you're getting your answers from. Either there are 360 accounts that you're going to be taking money out of, or the information you gave me a few minutes ago was inaccurate. But I'm just wondering whether you can tell me what impact you think this will have on a budget of 160 or \$170 million. Will it have any impact at all?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well I just indicated that we're not taking money from children. Your question is redundant.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — One of my colleagues is trying to steal, Mr. Chairman. I want this watched more closely. One of my colleagues is trying to steal the light out of the . . . (inaudible) . . . here. I want, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, to . . . I don't suppose I can improve on the manner in which my colleague phrased it, but I guess I'd feel better if I said it myself, because I feel pretty strongly about this. It surprises me that someone who has spent a good part of his lifetime exhorting the public to feed the poor should decide that the poor should become the victims, and the perpetrators of all our problems.

Mr. Minister, I would be interested in knowing on what factual basis you decided that unemployed employables, who by definition are not the author of their own problem, but who cannot find a job, I'd be interested in knowing the basis upon which you decided that 40 per cent of what they got was surplus to their needs. Did you do any studies? Did you throw a dart at a wall? Or did your thought process fall somewhere in between? On what basis did you decide that 40 per cent of what you were giving them was surplus to their needs?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well Mr. Chairman, I know that the member opposite finds this difficult to accept, because his conception of social policy programming is simply to give and to give and to give taxpayers' dollars in ever exceeding amounts. That is not sound social policy. This government, this government in fact has taken a look at what is available to single employables across Canada: and we find that in Manitoba \$310 is the average maximum available to single employables, in British Columbia, somewhat higher, 325; in Ontario and Nova Scotia, almost identical to Saskatchewan, 345. We find that in Saskatchewan there are thousands of single employables who are living at less than the maximum that we have set of 345. The average pay-out to single employables in Saskatchewan right now is less than \$345. So there's no need for precedents to be set in terms of people proving that a single employable can live on that. Of course they can.

I don't suggest that it's easy. Welfare's not designed to be easy for anyone. It's designed to meet their very basic, fundamental needs. That's what the taxpayer wants to provide those people who are in need of assistance — assistance to meet their basic needs. Nothing more, but nothing less. And that is in fact what we have done. And I would remind the member opposite that, under their government, social assistance was available to single employables up to a maximum of \$545, and when you add on to that the bus pass and the special needs allowance and so on, you're coming very, very close — and in some instances you're equalling — what was available on minimum wage. And in fact I have had people phone my office, saying to me, "It's awfully difficult for us to hire single, healthy, welfare clients, when they only stay around for a couple of days, because they say, "I can get just as much on welfare, almost, as I can on minimum wage."

This government doesn't believe that that is sound social policy. Your government may have. If you do, I suspect that you are out of step with the rest of Saskatchewan.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Well, I wouldn't have expected the minister to have had any factual basis, and what he has just said is, he doesn't.

Mr. Minister, the National Council of Welfare has done some analysis of the problem — something that is apparent that your government has not. The National Council of Welfare has done some analysis of what is a minimum for people in Canada, and I wonder if the minister would comment on the studies that they have done and the minimums they have set. Do you accept them? If you do, I would ask you how yours compare with the level set by the National Council of Welfare; and if you don't accept them, I would ask what analysis you have done which you might stack up against the lengthy and very detailed work and study which they have spent on the problem.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, there are differences of opinion as to what constitutes a poverty line. The poverty line is an imaginary thing, and I suspect that the average taxpayer would say that people can live, in fact, at much less in some instances. Single, healthy employables who are on welfare for a short period of time can live at less than what someone arbitrarily sets as some kind of an imaginary poverty line.

Now, the member opposite seems to forget that, in fact, the approach of this government is not just to hand out a welfare cheque — yes, we will provide them with that assistance — but also to redirect dollars and add new dollars to provide them with training, with education, with job preparation experiences that they never had before. So that in the long run, those clients are going to be much better off that they would have been previously.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — I suggest to you, Mr. Minister, that the work that has been done by the National Council of Welfare is thorough, and I suggest to you that it deserves some attention, other than to being dismissed as another opinion.

I suggest to you, Mr. Minister, that it is simply not possible to live in the city of Regina, at the rate that you provide, at a decent and civilized level. I suggest to you that the rates you provided do

not provide a decent living, and I suggest to you, Mr. Minister, that you are providing a rate which is less than what they need to maintain the very bare minimums.

I ask you, Mr. Minister: have you done any research or analysis at all? Or has this government just come to the conclusion that it's good politics to beat up on the poor? And if you did, Mr. Minister, you'd be forgiven, because it would be entirely in keeping with the history of the Conservative Party in Saskatchewan in recent times.

Mr. Minister, I saw shades of what you did, seven years ago. It was on the road from Canora to Kamsack, in the middle of a by-election. I heard an advertisement come on the car radio. It was a "Did you know?" advertisement sponsored by the Conservative party of Saskatchewan. "Did you know that Premier Allan Blakeney promised to the Indians of the Kamsack reserve . . . " and they listed a wealth of promises that had not been made, but which perhaps we should have, but which were clearly designed to excite racial tensions in that riding.

And I thought to myself, Aha! We have entered upon a new era in Saskatchewan politics. Mr. Minister, I see the same thing, I see the same attitude by the Minister of Labour, who refuse to raise the minimum wage, because those people apparently are in some fashion contributing to inflation, and they need to exercise restraint—a type of restraint which is apparently not designed for the more affluent, and not appropriate for the more affluent, of which members of this Assembly are one.

Mr. Minister, this is part of a pattern of making victims out of the poor, because in this government's belief that is good politics. It's part of a policy of beating up on those who are unable to speak for themselves. When I see the minister standing here, saying, "We are defending the taxpayers' dollars," I see the same type of mean-spirited attitude as I saw that day on the road from Canora to Kamsack when the Tory party was trying to excite racial tensions. You're doing the same thing today.

You are, with red necks flashing and apparent for all to see, you are attempting to make victims out of those who are least able to defend themselves.

Mr. Minister, I suggest to you that while you might or might not win the battle of public opinion, it is my view that you won't, because it is my view that, just as the Saskatchewan people were too sophisticated to fall for the type of nonsense which was peddled by the Conservative Party in the Pelly by-election, I think they are too sophisticated to fall for the sort of welfare baiting in which you are engaging, and frankly that surprises me.

Even if you're right, I suggest, Mr. Minister, you're going to be judged by a higher court. I suggest, Mr. Minister, that what you have done has not done you any credit.

You have pandered with the meanest spirit in our society, and frankly, Mr. Minister, I think that is inappropriate for the Minister of Social Services, who should see himself as a spokesman for the poor, not someone whose role it is to keep the poor thoroughly under his thumb and out of sight.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm sure that the member opposite, having give us that homily on being concerned for the poor and the downtrodden, would like to table in this legislature the letters that he has sent to his colleagues in Manitoba, the NDP members of the Manitoba legislature. Because, in fact, their social assistance rates are significantly lower here, in the province of Manitoba, than they are in Saskatchewan.

The member opposite would be interested to know, for example, that in Selkirk the amount available to a single employable is \$246 a month, but only one month. And that's it — under an NDP government. In Winnipeg, 335 a month, and that's it. Saskatchewan's maximum is \$345 a month. Now that is above the Canadian average. I would remind the member of that.

And the member has said that this particular government has no concern for the poor or the downtrodden. Well let's talk about the 100 per cent increase in the income supplement for 20,000 low-income seniors. Let's talk about the 10 per cent increase in income supplements for 8,000 low-income working families. All right? Let's talk about the over 6,000 productive opportunities that are now going to be available to welfare clients, that were never available to welfare clients under your administration. Your approach to welfare was to hand out a cheque and to wash your hands of the particular client, and say, "Don't bother me again for another month," and then hand them another cheque when they came back a month later. That's not sound social policy. That's not compassion for people who are on welfare.

An approach which provides people with education, with retraining, with specific jobs for specific welfare clients is a much more sane, sensible, rational approach to welfare than your administration ever delivered, and that, I expect, has ever been seen in the province of Saskatchewan before.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Well, Mr. Minister, what do you believe the National Council of Welfare is? Do you believe this is some sort of an airy-fairy group of intellectuals? I really would be interested in a comment by yourself of this group, who have spent a whole lot more time studying the group than you have. I really wish, Mr. Minister, you'd give me a comment on their work, because I think it's deserving of some time and some comment. You seem to dismiss it airily as something that couldn't possibly affect the considerations of someone such as yourself.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, just a couple of comments for the member opposite. First of all, the social assistance rates here in the province of Saskatchewan, including the 6.5 per cent increase which we gave to clients in October of last year, has in fact exceeded the rates of inflation over the past number of years. And as it relates to the organization that you have just referred to, I indicated previously that there are differences of opinion as to where the imaginary poverty line rests. And there are certainly those people who would say that, in fact, while the poverty line may be some kind of an indicator that you might want to use on occasion, in fact single, employable, healthy individuals who are on welfare for a shorter period of time can in fact get by on \$345 a month. Thousands of them are doing it in Saskatchewan; thousands of them are doing it in Canada. That's much more sane and sensible than to provide them with welfare assistance on the order of minimum wage. That, of course, is not in their best interests. You know it and so do I.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Mr. Minister, you have been accused . . . It has been said of your administration that you have reduced the levels of welfare to encourage people to get off welfare and seek employment. Do you regard that as a fair commentary?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — I'm sorry, would you repeat the question?

MR. SHILLINGTON: — It's been said of your administration that you have reduced the levels of welfare to encourage people to get off welfare and find employment. Do you regard that as a fair commentary?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — No, I don't consider that to be a fair commentary. There are some people who have a misconception that somehow this government is saving significant dollars by making reductions to single employables. In fact, we are going to be spending substantial amounts of money on single employables, money that had never been spent before, on creating over 6,000 productive opportunities for people that are on welfare.

In fact, the overall expenditure for welfare clients, when you put together my particular department's expenditures plus those from the Department of Advanced Education and Manpower, in fact will exceed welfare payments to clients of last year by approximately 5.5 per cent. So this government is concerned that we do spend our welfare dollar appropriately in a sane and sensible fashion, rather than just continuing to give it out month by month in terms of

financial assistance, not realizing that there's much more to meeting the needs of welfare clients than just giving them a cheque.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — I would say, Mr. Minister, that I do not argue with the general principle of providing education and upgrading for people on welfare. And to the extent that that wasn't available — and I simply don't know — to the extent that that wasn't available to welfare recipients in the past, it may have been a worthwhile reform. What is unfortunate though, Mr. Minister, is that you have combined that with this ratcheting down of the level of subsistence at which a welfare person must live.

Mr. Minister, if you don't have any respect for the National Council on Welfare, how about StatsCanada? Because the figures at which you're asking people to live is well below the poverty levels established by StatsCanada, and I wonder, Mr. Minister, is it the whole army who's out of step, or is it you? Is it the other people who are all wrong, or is it you? I really ask you, Mr. Minister, again, a simple yes or no: did you do any research on this matter? Did you take any time to study the conditions of people living on welfare? Or did you just rush into this blindly, as has been the habit of this government in other areas of administration?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — I would remind the member opposite that in fact a small portion of welfare clients are being reduced. A very large percentage of welfare clients are being increased. Some of them are being increased very dramatically, so let's not leave the impression that, in fact, all welfare clients are being reduced. They are not. And I would remind the minister opposite of the over 6,000 productive opportunities. And I'm pleased that someone on the opposition benches is finally saying that this may be — this may be — a reasonable thing to be doing. I realize it would be difficult for them to say, "Yes, this is a sound social policy initiative that our government should have taken," but certainly it is good to see that finally you are admitting that, in fact, there is sound rationale to the kinds of things we are doing.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Well, don't let the compliments go to your head, Mr. Minister, because I am ashamed to be part of a society which has allowed what you have done to occur without a greater outcry than has happened. I'm just ashamed to be part of a society which has not protested in louder terms on what has happened.

This government obviously believes, as the Minister of Agriculture is suggesting, that it's good politics to beat up on people on welfare. You believe it's good politics to beat up on trade unions, you showed that yesterday. You believe it's good politics to beat up on people at universities. The Minister of Advanced Education has done nothing else but attempt to alienate, attempt to alienate the people at universities.

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Order.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Mr. Chairman, I may have touched a sensitive spot. I'm not sure whether I did or not. I'm just not sure. I'm not sure whether I did or not.

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Order. Order. Order! Let the member ask his question.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — The Minister of Advanced Education, who has such a vast fan club at the universities . . . I understand he goes to universities and has been surrounded by people who want to pay him compliments. When I see the Minister of Advanced Education's outbursts in this House, I can . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Order in the House. Let the member ask his questions.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Perhaps the Minister of Advanced Education has a hearing problem. He didn't hear you the first time, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I want to get back to a serious problem. And the Minister of Advanced Education — he's not as serious a politician as you are, I might say.

I suspect somehow or other the universities might survive his tutelage. I am not so sure that a goodly number of people on welfare are going to survive your administration.

Mr. Minister, you reduced the level of housing to go from the macro to the micro. You reduced the level of housing to \$200. I found that curious because I try to spend some time in my riding. It is not as easy with eight people in the opposition as it used to be. But I try to spend some time in my riding. I do not recall having seen apartments rents out for \$200.

Some member of the media apparently telephoned those apartments which were available, and found four available in the city of Regina which rented at under \$200. Frankly, it doesn't surprise me. Let's supposing he's wrong. Let's supposing there isn't four. Let's supposing there's five. Let's be generous and supposing they're not four, but 40. Mr. Minister, I did a calculation using the last annual reports, tried to figure out how many of the 6,000 unemployed employables might live in the city of Regina. Using your annual report, I arrived at the conclusion there might be about 2,000 to 2,500. How, Mr. Minister, do you assume that 2,000 to 2,500 people are going to crowd into four, or even 40 apartments in this city which rent out at \$200?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well I would remind the member opposite, and I believe this information has been available to him for some time, that the average shelter need in the province of Saskatchewan at present is \$185. In Saskatoon the average shelter need was \$174, and herein Regina it was around the 200 maximum which we have set.

Of course, the member opposite needs to realize there are many, many options for accommodation available to single employables: whether you're talking about renting your own kind of accommodation; whether you're talking about light housekeeping; whether you're talking about a shared kind of a situation; whether you're talking about room and board; whether you're talking about living with your family or your parents. There are all sorts of options that are available there for single employables.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Mr. Minister, I can assure you, I am going to get back to the subject of rental accommodation. At the moment, my colleague from Assiniboia Gravelbourg wants to get in on an issue, and I'm going to let him.

I can assure you, though, that we're going to get back to the matter of trying to find apartments in the city of Regina for \$200.

MR. CHAIRMAN: — The member from Assiniboia.

MR. ENGEL: — From Assiniboia Gravelbourg, Mr. Deputy Chairman.

Mr. Minister, I'm aware of your background, and where you come from as far as your concern over moral issues are concerned, and I'd like to know where you stand and what effect excessive consumption of alcohol has on your department and your work-load. Do you feel that that is a problem in Saskatchewan, or that we have an expenditure in the Department of Social Services that relates to excessive consumption of alcohol?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — The Department of Social Services naturally provides support to families that may be experiencing difficulties because of alcoholism. The direct treatment and services to people suffering from alcoholism is something which is provided through the Department of Health, not through the Department of Social Services.

MR. ENGEL: — The Department of Health will get involved when somebody is completely incapacitated and needs medical help. I'm talking about the problem you get because of family breakdowns. You know, the expenditure you have in trying to rehabilitate people, get them back on the mainstream. What kind of budget are we looking at? Is that a problem in your department, and about how many dollars are we talking about, annually?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — We have approximately 5,700 people on our SAP (Saskatchewan Assistance Plan) case load that are there because of family or personal difficulties, but it would be difficult to provide you with an exact statistic on how many of those are there because of alcoholism. So it would be difficult to come up with a figure on how much money is being spent, particularly for those particular clients.

MR. ENGEL: — Is this number, this 5,700 . . . Is this the 25 or 27,000 people number, or is that a number that relates to when you're talking about 50 or 60,000 that are directly involved in it? Is this household numbers, or is this numbers that are related to people that are directly involved?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, we're talking about 5,700 cases on the welfare rolls because of ill health or disability. When you add their dependants, you have a figure of about 8,000. Of course, as I indicated before, it would be very erroneous to say that those are all alcohol related cases. We have no idea how many, in fact. And, of course, alcoholism is a very complex issue. The factors which come together to create alcoholism in a client are multifaceted, and it would be simply too simplistic to say that it was this or that which caused this particular welfare client to be suffering from alcoholism.

MR. ENGEL: — I can understand that, Mr. Minister, there's just one more area that concerns me. That is young people directly involved and starting to consume alcohol even in excessive amounts. Would you have a number that would indicate — or would I have to get that from Health? — that would indicate how many teenagers there are that have a severe alcohol problem?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — No, we don't have that kind of a statistic. I doubt that Health would have an accurate statistic. They may be able to provide you with a projection or an estimate that they would use, perhaps based on some kind of studies done through high school surveys. But, other than that, we don't have any statistic relating to that in the department.

MR. ENGEL: — There's no situation where, from a broken home or a divided home, where you have young people that have had to leave school because of consuming alcohol, and that have been dumped onto your case load because of a condition like that. Have you some numbers that you could isolate and separate like that?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — No, I'm sorry, we don't have that kind of isolation on our statistics, and it would be simply impossible to, in fact, say that, you know, this was an alcohol related case and therefore we're going to categorize it as being that kind of a case. We simply don't have that statistic, and it would likely be very costly, administratively, to try and determine that kind of statistic as well.

MR. ENGEL: — Are you personally involved — now there's been a change in your program and how it relates to dealing with young people, and expressly in taking them off of an aid program that had been . . . Now, I'm not talking about people that are involved in alcohol anymore, but I'm just talking about teenagers that you're saying that the parent is responsible. Have you a number as to how many people you're talking about in that category that are on their own and are asked to go back to their parents?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — For the member opposite, there are approximately 500 16 and 17 year olds that are receiving assistance under the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan at present. Our desire and our intent in our reform package is to provide assistance to these individuals, according to their needs under The Family Services Act, in more of an adult-directed, supervised kind of an environment. And the degree of adult involvement would vary from case to case, from individual to individual. The department has never sanctioned the breakup of youngsters from families. We try as much as possible to keep them together. However, the regulations are such that a 16 or 17 year old can, in fact, receive assistance out on their own. And we want to

change that around.

MR. ENGEL: — How many of these 500 would you say. . . Have you a breakdown of them to see how many of those are single parents, or parents, as such, that have dependants of their own?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — An estimate would be approximately 170 to 200 would be unwed mothers. All right, 170 to 200 would be unwed mothers, as an estimate.

MR. ENGEL: — In your own opinion, how many of those 175 to 200 would you consider got into that situation and became an unwed mother because of alcohol or alcohol related problems?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, I wasn't there at the time that the teenager was in . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: — Don't be facetious.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — I'm not being facetious. I'm very serious in my answer. I wasn't there in the relationship that developed. I have no idea what the reasons were for those relationships developing. And so it's simply impossible to give an answer to the member. Those kinds of problems that 16 and 17-year-olds fall into, are usually a result of many factors coming together. Social problems, family problems, school problems, psychological problems, there's a host of factors that usually interact to create the situation that that youngster finds himself in.

MR. ENGEL: — As a former counsellor yourself and one involved in working with young people . . . And the question I asked you as far as your own opinion is concerned: what percentage of young people get into problems and find themselves involved in problems because of alcohol? What percentage of these problems would you say are alcohol related?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — I really have no idea how many of the teenagers that have difficulties today with personal problems, or family, or social, or education, or whatever, have those problems largely because of alcohol. I have no idea. I would simply be pulling a figure out of a hat, and I don't think I would be very responsible as a representative of the public if I were to do that. It's simply impossible for me to estimate. The number may be very low, it may be minuscule, it may be relatively high, I have no idea. I would suggest to you that a high school counsellor who deals regularly with youngsters would be able to provide you with a more accurate estimate.

MR. ENGEL: — As Minister of Social Services, have you not bothered trying to do a survey or determine what problem areas we're facing in our society. And what some of the causes are because we have this many young people that need social aid, and need help, and you're trying to bring them back into the mainstream, get them involved in adult supervision? Have you not tried to determine what the sources of the problems are, and what causes these frustrations, and what these young people do to bury their frustrations? You haven't tried to determine what the cause of the problem is at all? Is that what you're telling me?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — No, in fact we're very concerned that young people that have difficulties, in fact, find solutions for their difficulties. That's one of the reasons why we are moving to provide assistance for 16 and 17-year olds under The Family Services Act. Under the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan, there was no way that, in fact, we could really do that in the fashion and to the degree that we wanted to. So we're going to be developing special programs and services, a thrust that is going to zero in on the 16 and 17-year olds.

And of course we have many programs in the Department of Social Services which relate to the needs of young people. I think of our teen parent program — a very fine example of a program which is meeting the needs of many, many teenagers throughout the province of Saskatchewan. Unwed mothers, who need assistance raising their children. I can think of the family service bureaus and the assistance that they provide in terms of counselling for people that are in need.

So there are a number of things that are presently under way and the program that we will be developing for 16 and 17-year olds will be an improvement over the former policies that were in existence.

MR. ENGEL: — I'm not going to go back and belabour all these statistics to determine where these 500 are, if that's the total number of young people that are in that age that are receiving assistance. But is there a young person . . . Can a young person get assistance without counselling? Is that a possibility under the system, either what we have today, or what we had in the past?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, under our policy and regulations, if a 16 and 17 year old wants assistance, we work with the 16 and the 17-year-old, and the parents, to determine whether or not the parents can, in fact, be a resource for their own child, which is naturally what we would want. So there is a counselling component to the social assistance that is provided.

However, in many instances, we cannot bring the two together. We cannot bring the parent and the 16 and 17-year-old to a resolution. The 16 and 17-year-old may say, "I'm not interested. I'd rather be out on my own," even though they have loving parents who are most interested in providing a healthy environment for them. Under the regulations as they were, we simply couldn't do anything. We were obligated to provide assistance if they didn't have income.

MR. ENGEL: — The point I was making, though, is that all young people are counselled by a staff member of yours, of one type or other — a social service worker. Every young person that gets any kind of assistance gets some counselling beforehand, or has to get involved in talking to an individual — I'm calling it a person that's involved in counselling. It might just be a social worker that takes an application and decides whether he's going to get assistance, or she's going to get assistance, or not.

Through that process of counselling, do you not try and determine if this person has a problem with alcohol consumption; or is involved in and getting alcohol; and trying to determine where he gets that alcohol, or where she gets that alcohol, from? You don't consider that an aspect of counselling at all?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Yes, that kind of a concern is an integral part of the process whereby a client is served by the Department of Social Services, and if there is a need of some kind, they may be referred to an alcoholism treatment program. They may be referred to the Department of Health; they may be referred to a high school counsellor; they may be referred to the family service bureau. We have approximately 55 non-governmental organizations here in the Saskatchewan that exist to provide that kind of service to people that do have personal problems.

MR. ENGEL: — How many people . . . Since you've been Minister of Social Services, how many people have received, or have you recommended referral to, from your department in the length of time that you've been involved, that have been referred, either to one of these NGO organizations or that have been referred to the Department of Health?

How many people have your counsellors dealt with that have been referred out, and have been dealt with?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well for the member opposite, only a small proportion of the people that come through the social assistance system, in fact, have alcohol problems, as far as we've aware.

We don't have the statistic here as to how many individuals have been referred to a particular NGO that are social assistance clients. We could find out for you. It would take some time to find out from each individual NGO how many, in fact, are providing services at present to a social

assistance client. But that information could likely be dug up for you.

MR. ENGEL: — I'd appreciate that, Mr. Minister, if it's sent to me in a later date.

I suppose the bottom line as a member of the treasury branch, and as a member of cabinet, and as one that knows and is familiar with the problems that are involved in alcohol. Constituents of yours are telling me that you tell them that you've voted against increased alcohol consumption. You've even said this around in the province. Where did that happen? We've never had a vote in here, as far as a vote for advertising of alcohol, or putting alcohol advertising . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Order. I find that statement out of order. I find that statement out of order. I'd ask the member from Assiniboia-Gravelbourg to change his line of question.

AN HON. MEMBER: — What's out of order?

MR. CHAIRMAN: — The alcohol advertising, I don't feel has any part of Social Services estimates.

MR. ENGEL: — Mr. Chairman, the root of the problem of many of these cases is the consumption of alcohol. The consumption of alcohol is directly related to how much advertising takes place. And if we can't discuss alcohol advertising when we're discussing Social Services, then you're going to have to rule me out of order, and just put up a big smoke screen, and say, "Look, fellows, we can't discuss the root of the problem in Social Services."

Its . . . what do you read. Tell me.

MR. CHAIRMAN: — The line of questioning up until now has been in line with Social Services. But the alcohol commission is underneath Health, and I would ask the member to refrain from using, and asking questions on alcohol advertising.

MR. ENGEL: — All I'd say, Mr. Chairman, to the minister is that I was hoping you'd use your conscience in your good office to speak out against anything that encourages additional consumption of alcohol because of the severe problem it causes.

I have talked to counsellors. I have a stack of letters I could go through. And I promised I'd only take a half an hour in this, and I see my time has gone. And I'm going to keep my commitment with my colleagues.

But I have talked to people that are involved in counselling. I've talked to many people that are involved in these NGOs that are working directly with young people in particular. And the teenage population that's watching prime time television, and is encouraged to consume more alcohol, is a serious problem — is a serious problem in Saskatchewan.

I say that you should stake your reputation on this very topic, and say: look, either we do everything in our power to discourage the consumption of alcohol, or you'll resign. And that would be the honourable thing to do, and that would be the respectable thing to do. If a few people in your caucus would stand up for what they believe, and what they know is right, we could cut back on the consumption of alcohol. That's what I'm concerned about, and that's my plea to you as a minister: to use your office and use your knowledge of where alcohol is being consumed, and under what conditions, and fight to cut back on the consumption of alcohol.

I like what they're doing in a lot of American states, where people with some convictions got elected to high office, and got appointed to ministerial places, and they've used their office to cut back on alcohol consumption. They got tough on highways — and I know that's out of order because we're not dealing with Highways and the highway traffic safety division, and that whole thing of jabbing the needles in the arm — we're not into that, and I know we're not, and I'm not

going to refer to that.

But to cut back on that consumption, they first of all demanded that the advertising of alcohol be taken off the television and air waves. And they have found as much as a 25 per cent reduction in the consumption of alcohol in their states.

I wonder if the minister has written to any of these states, and has record of any of these states that have cut back on alcoholic consumption, and decided to implement that kind of program in his department.

I give you full points for telling parents in Saskatchewan: you've brought these children into the world; you're responsible until they're adults. I give you full points for that, and I'm behind that 100 per cent. But at the same time, you're bombarding these kids, hour after hour, during prime time television when these kids are watching it, with these terrible ads – and you as a Minister of Social Services.

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Order. I find the member's statements out of order in Social Services estimates. I would recommend that he brought them up to the minister of the liquor board, when his estimates come up.

MR. ENGEL: — Mr. Chairman, I want to wind this little part up by saying that you are telling your constituents, and you are telling a lot of people in Saskatchewan, that you voted against increased consumption of alcohol, and you voted against the advertising of it. Why didn't you make that public? I have a little copy from the Prince Albert *Herald* here, that says: "The Province May Ease Liquor Laws."

I wish you would use your influence in cabinet to say that that be a free vote, and that be an open vote, so the people of Saskatchewan can stand up and see whether you're really going to vote against it, or not. That's all I've got to say about it.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — No, I think we're some distance from that, Mr. Chairman, regrettably.

Mr. Minister, when we left off 35 minutes ago, we were discussing the amount allowed for people to rent their accommodation. You quoted figures of \$185. I would ask the minister: is that Regina figures, or are those Saskatchewan figures?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — The average monthly shelter allowance in the province is \$184. In Saskatoon it's \$174, and in Regina it's just a touch above the 200 figure.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Mr. Minister, there are very few – I say again – there is very little accommodation available for under \$200.

You have gone from \$300, which I think is almost the minimum for rental accommodation, and you have gone to \$200. Now I grant you there may be some hovel somewhere which exists. There may be some holes in the walls which exist, but I argue, Mr. Minister, that there's any decent accommodation in Regina for \$200.

They may be able to find a room; they may be able to find some hovel somewhere, and that may be what you think welfare people deserve because, after all, they are these leeches on society, and that's the role to which you assign them. But I say, Mr. Minister, there's almost no decent accommodation available in this city for \$200.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well first of all, just a personal anecdote. I happen to have a close acquaintance of mine, a single employable, who is living in very fine circumstances in Regina right now, a two bedroom suite on the third floor of a house for, I believe it's \$170 a month is the rent, well below the maximum shelter allowance that we have set. And I think his circumstances

are likely not unreasonable. They are representative, I suspect, when you consider that two-thirds of the single employables in Saskatchewan at present have shelter needs under \$200 per month.

The vacancy rate in the province right now, and in Regina, is somewhat higher than normal. The shelter allowance in Saskatoon, for single employables, has been \$180 a month. All right. And, of course, we have our regional advisory boards which monitor, and which would advise us about the availability of appropriate accommodation.

So when you put that all together, and given the fact that single employables do have options other than their own apartment, they have room and board, they have rooming together situations, living with their family, light housekeeping, a variety of situations to go to. I think that the shelter allowance that we have set is very reasonable.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — The minister said that there was a vacancy rate in Regina of a non-specified amount, but an amount which he apparently believed to be on the high side. Can the minister tell me what the vacancy rate in Regina is in absolute terms? Can the minister tell me what the vacancy rate is with respect to apartments which rent for \$200, or any residential accommodation which rents for \$200 or less? Can you tell me what the vacancy rate is for those?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well the fact that we have two thirds of the clients right now that are under the \$200 maximum shelter that we have set is good indication that there is adequate housing available for your clients — the fact that in Saskatoon the maximum shelter allowance was \$174. And there are large numbers of single employable clients in Saskatoon existing at present, as you know. So the fact that we have significant numbers of clients, hundreds, indeed, thousands in the province that are presently living in accommodation under \$200 a month is an adequate rationale for setting the limit at 200. The precedent, in other words, has been set by literally hundreds and hundreds of single employable clients.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — The minister's refusal to address the question confirms what I have suggested, and that is that he hasn't any idea how many vacant apartments there are that rent \$200 or less. It must be . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well I could tell you, Mr., I can take and tell you Mr. Minister, it must be as close to zero — as close to absolute zero as one can ever get. The number of apartments for less than \$200 which are decent, which are vacant, must be extremely close to zero, extremely close to zero. There may be . . .

You may have a friend who rents good accommodation for \$175. I'll bet you he's not looking for alternate accommodation. I'll bet you he's hanging on to what he's got, because he's very fortunate to have it. And the minister well knows that, and by definition not everybody is going to be so fortunate.

Mr. Minister, the whole tenor of these "welfare reforms" — this welfare bashing — if it's designed to serve any purpose other than to further the electoral prospects of the Conservative party, then I suppose it's designed to encourage people to get off welfare and to go out and find a job.

The whole assumption underlying your comments that we doled out welfare like, to use the illustration of the Minister of Health, like someone throwing water out of a bucket . . . The whole tenor of that suggestion suggests that, in fact, unemployed employables who have been target of this criticism are on welfare when they could easily find jobs.

Does the minister really believe that, that the unemployed employables can find jobs? I suggest to the minister that there are no jobs out there to be had. That is partially a problem of this government's making, although that isn't the subject of tonight's estimates. That will come up on a different minister. But I suggest to the minister there are no jobs to be had, and I suggest, as the Minister of Health does directly, and you do indirectly, that were throwing out money like

someone throws water out of a bucket, is to deal those unfortunate people, who don't have work, an injustice.

I suggest to you that most of those people that have looked, and looked hard: have been unable to find it, through no fault of their own. For you and the Minister of Health to suggest that they're lazy welfare bums who aren't looking is really, Mr. Minister, unfair to the . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: — Who said that?

MR. SHILLINGTON: — The Minister of Health said it directly, yesterday in the debate, and the Minister of Social Services is implying that, by saying that we were far too generous with them . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . He's saying it indirectly.

Mr. Minister, you have done the welfare people an injustice, and you are doing very little to solve the basic problem of people who are on welfare and want to get off.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, unfortunately, the former government did adopt a social policy with regards to welfare, which was to simply do nothing but give out a welfare cheque to clients, month, after month, after month. That, of course, is necessary, and this government recognizes that, and that is the reason why we have increased the benefits for many welfare clients.

Unfortunately, the welfare system which was in operation under the NDP did not have any long-run, developmental, productive opportunities built into it. In other words, you only had half of a program. You were concerned about providing financial assistance to people because you recognized that they needed to have basic needs met from month to month, but that kind of a program is only half of a program.

Many welfare clients need far more than just a cheque from month to month. They need someone to help assist them out of the doldrums of welfare; to provide them with job training, education, productive opportunities, a direct job experience. That is what this government is providing. And I would indicate to the member opposite that within a very short period of time, in fact, in only 10 days, we have already created 200 jobs for welfare clients under our program, which will create 2,350 jobs throughout the summer.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Yes, indeed, Mr. Minister, just like you guys were going to create 20,000 new jobs last year and wound up with 1,000. You may have created 200 to date; I'd be amazed if the number that you created ever got to 1,000.

Mr. Minister, I want to go back to an earlier remark, and that was your remark that we have created . . . We have given many welfare recipients additional benefits. Mr. Minister, it seems to me the average must have gone down. Last year we voted \$171,562,000 under the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan. This year we vote almost \$10 million less than that: 162 million.

Mr. Minister, if we are voting less money, and if there are additional people on welfare, are we not giving them, on the average, less assistance? Or am I overlooking something?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — We expect that the average cost per case will reduce marginally from \$496 per case to \$483 per case. The explanation for that reduction per case would be as follows: there would be a number of millions of dollars that would be saved through our job placements. We are going to be placing significant numbers of welfare clients in jobs; that, of course, is going to be saving us dollars. There will be a significant savings that will accrue to the government because of a reduction in overpayments through more administrative efficiencies and accountability controls that were not there previously. So there will be significant savings there. There will be a transfer of \$1.1 million to the Department of Health, and so when you put all those things together, in addition to the dollars that will not be spent to the same degree on single employables, you have the explanation for the reduction in the average cost per case.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Would the minister give me those figures in precise terms rather than generally alluding to them. Would you tell me exactly how you think? Mr. Minister, would you begin with a preliminary item? What does the minister estimate is going to happen to the number of people on social welfare? In your view, is that going to go up over the oncoming year? Does the department estimate that it's going to go down, or do you estimate that it will remain static?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — We are anticipating a reduction, and this, of course, would be because all single people, and some families who are placed in jobs, single people and families, heads of families, that are placed in jobs will, of course, not require assistance — and a general case-load reduction, primarily amongst employables, because of the skills training, the productive opportunities that we are providing. The costs that you were referring to — the savings produced by the job placements, approximately \$7.6 million; the reduction in overpayments to the increased financial controls, approximately \$2.8 million; the transfer to the Department of Health, approximately \$1.1 million; and the reduced basic allowances for your single employables, approximately \$5.5. million.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Mr. Minister, that really deserves the . . . Borrow the phrase from my colleague from Elphinstone, that really deserves the Governor General's award for fiction. Mr. Minister, I suggest to you that your assumption that the welfare roles are going to go down is . . . You've certainly got to be given high marks for optimism.

Let us assume that the unemployment rate remains static or decreases. Let's assume in your favour that it decreases modestly, the most optimistic economist would suggest that any improvement in the unemployment rate in this country is going to be very modest. What's going to happen is increasing numbers of people are going to tumble off the unemployment lists because of the length of time these people have been unemployed. They're going to topple off the unemployment insurance onto welfare.

So, if the unemployment figures aren't exacerbated, and they show no signs of slowing down, they march relentlessly upwards. But if they suddenly grind to a halt and stay where they are, I suggest to you the number of people on social welfare is going to go up, not down.

I suggest, Mr. Minister that you are going to be dividing a smaller pie among a lot more people. And I really would appreciate if the minister would share with me the basis for his assumption that the number of people on welfare is going to go down, because I do not think that that is going to be our experience. Our experience is going to be, it's going to go up, just because we're not going to be able to deal with the number of jobless quickly enough.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, I indicated to the member already that we are going to, in fact, be creating over 6,000 productive opportunities for welfare clients.

Many of those are going to be job placements. Many of those are going to become permanent job placements. A good number of those people are going to have skills developed which are going to lead to employment. A goodly number of those people are, in fact, going to go on for further education because their level of education has been upgraded.

Well, that's one reason why. The other reason, of course, is the general economic activity in the province, as a result of the significant economic measures that this particular government is taking. When you put those two together, I think you have a very sound rationale for anticipating the slight reduction in case load.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — How does the minister believe there are going to be 6,000 jobs created? What is the basis for that assumption?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — I indicated over 6,000 productive opportunities, comprised of 2,350 jobs – a goodly number of those will become permanent jobs – and 3,500 training, education, upgrading, job preparation kinds of experiences, totalling your over 6,000.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — The minister tells me he expects a couple of thousand jobs to be created. I gather this isn't by any sleight of hand of the Department of Social Services; I gather this is the handiwork of the Minister of Finance – this is the bounty of his budget address.

Mr. Minister, do I take it that the funding for the people who are getting upgrading, or education, be somewhere other than the social assistance plan? Do I take it that that's under a different vote?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — There is a significant budget allotment in the Department of Advanced Education and Manpower for the training costs of the skills program for welfare recipients, and that's in the magnitude of around \$5.5 million in the Department of Advanced Education and Manpower. So that's a fairly significant sum of money which is being allocated for the purpose of upgrading, and education, and job preparation, for welfare clients.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Well the minister was telling me he was saving 7.6 million by job placement, 5.5 million of it apparently, I'll take your word for it, is in the budget of the Department of Advanced Manpower and Education. Where's the other 2.1 million dribbled out on?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well I indicated before, there's 7.6 million saved through job placements; 2.8 million we expect through reduction in overpayments due to increased efficiencies; 1.1 million transferred to the Department of health; and reductions in the single employables of 5.5 million. So there are a number of means whereby the cost is going to be reduced as far as the average per case is concerned. Now that's something separate from the 5.5 million which is in Advanced Education and Manpower for training purposes.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Well the 5.5 million, which is in manpower for training purposes, is not money that will go directly into the hands of the welfare recipients; am I wrong? I would assume that is to cover the cost of their training, that's not their living allowance. Am I right in that?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — That's correct. That's for the cost of the training program.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Well then, where are the people who are the benefactors of this education and upgrading – where is their living allowance coming from? It obviously can't be coming out of the social assistance. Where is it in your budget? Where does their money come from?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well they will continue to receive social assistance payments as they always have.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Well then how are you saving any money? If they continue to receive social assistance, how are you saving any money on the people who are getting education and upgrading if they're still getting social assistance? I don't understand how that goes any distance towards justifying a reduction of \$9 to \$10 million in the social assistance plan. You indicated that because some people would get educational upgrading, that would somehow or other result in alleviating the drain on the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan. I don't follow you, Mr. Minister.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — The 7.6 million savings produced by job placements is a direct result of the reduced cost to the Department of Social Services, because of the 2,350 jobs which are going to be created for clients this summer.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — You are going to create 2,000 jobs and you're going to save 7.6 million. Am I following you correctly so far? I can't make the figures add up, Mr. Minister, and I'm undoubtedly lacking something.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, maybe you'd better change the batteries in your calculator. You're correct: 7.6 million is the saving that will accrue to the department as a result of the job placements.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Before I get around to announcing my results of dividing 2,000 into 7.6 million, which is a rather odd figure, can you tell me where you're going to place these people? Where are the 2,000 people going to be placed that you're going to get off welfare?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — We're going to be concentrating on three sectors: the small business sector, the municipal sector, and the non-profit sector. And we have already sent out application forms and kits to prospective employers, and as I indicated, 200 jobs have already been created in the first 10 days of the program. The small business sector, we anticipate, will create a number of permanent jobs for welfare clients. That was our experience last year; we anticipate a similar experience this year.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — What is the level of inducement? What is the level of financial inducement being offered to small businesses, municipalities, and others who respond to your request for job replacement?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Minimum wage incentive: 4.25 an hour.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — And you pay the minimum wage; is that what you're saying?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Yes, we pay the minimum wage.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — You pay the employer the minimum wage; for how long?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Up to 26 weeks; it depends on the length of the program that the employer has applied for.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — It's 26 weeks for everyone, or is that at the discretion of the Department? I didn't follow the conditions that might be attached to that.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, it's up to 26 weeks. It depends on the proposal which the employer puts forward. His program may, in fact, not require a 26-week incentive.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Well the minister suggests that you're going to save an average of \$3,800 on each of those 2,000 people. That's . . . Unless I have misunderstood something the minister has said to me, you divide 2,000 by 7.6 million: you're going to save \$3,800 on each welfare recipient. But I don't see how you're going to do that if your maximum is 26 weeks. It strikes me that you ought to save a different figure than that. I don't follow the minister's calculations, actually.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well we could continue to try and give the member the understanding necessary. And we can do that if you want to. What I could do is have the staff prepare for you a mathematical rationale for the explanation for the savings if that would be of benefit to you. That may take a little while to do that, but we can provide that for you.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — I don't understand why it will take a while. I'd be happy with that if the minister thought that the staff could do that by tomorrow at 2:30 when we resume these estimates. I don't understand why it's going to take a long time. Presumably it's something the staff could do in a few moments.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well as I indicated, we'll provide it to you as soon as we can. And it will be provided.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — I understand then, you're going to make every attempt to provide it by 2 o'clock tomorrow. Is that what you're saying?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Yes, we'll endeavour to do that.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Mr. Minister, let me just ask some more details about this program. Do I understand the employer pays nothing — for the first 26 weeks they get minimum wage, all of which is. . . The employer would pay the employee, but you would reimburse the employer in full for the first 26 weeks. Is that what I understand? Or do you anticipate that they would be paid something above the minimum wage?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — We anticipate that they will top up the minimum wage. We are encouraging them to do that. And we expect that that will happen, based on our experience of last year, where I believe the average salary was topped up approximately \$1 over and above the minimum wage incentive that was provided to the employer.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — But I gather there's no requirement they do that. You're simply encouraging them to do that.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Right. There is no legal requirement. We are encouraging them to do that. And knowing that many of the small businessmen, and the non profit employers, and the municipalities are people with concern and compassion, we know that, in fact, they will top it up.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Mr. Minister, do I understand that you had some similar program in place last year? You indicated that your experience last year was that some of the jobs became permanent. Did you have some similar program last year?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Yes, there was a similar program last year. And based on our experience of last year, as I indicated, we anticipate that we will be able to provide a number of permanent jobs for welfare clients in the small business sector. Last year the small-business sector, the non-profit sector, and the municipal sector were all involved in job-creation activities for welfare clients.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — How many jobs, in fact, were created last year

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Overall, jobs created through the job creation program, which was a joint effort on behalf of the federal and the provincial government; the provincial government only program; and the small capital construction renovation program — those three projects together created 3,125 jobs. And a significant portion of those jobs went to welfare clients.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — How many became permanent?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well we don't, at this point in time, know the number of jobs that, in fact, are continuing today. But we do know that 20 per cent of the overall jobs created in all three sectors — small business, municipal, non-profit, continued on for some length of time beyond the termination of the incentive. In the small business sector, as high as 50 per cent of the jobs continued on for a good length of time in terms of what we would call permanent jobs, but we don't know exactly how many that was.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — I think, Mr. Minister, you're being wildly optimistic in your assumptions. The economy of this province is, I suggest to you, tightening up. I won't use the word "recession" for fear of having some sort of a panic, but the expansionary mood of businessmen in

this economy is really grinding to a halt in Saskatchewan. There are two reasons for that. One is the farm economy which (and I'm overhearing conversations beside me) everyone agrees that the farm economy is very, very tight. Farmers are concerned about the cost-price squeeze in which they find themselves. They're reacting to that by not spending and it's being felt immediately on main street.

The other factor is interest rates which is starting to rise, and which are spooking everybody. They're not a significant factor, but they are spooking the business community. Together, Mr. Minister, the business community of this province is not in an expansionary mood. And it seems to me that you are unrealistic to think that you can create a large number of new jobs in the business community, a large number of permanent jobs in a business community which really doesn't think it needs them at this point in time.

Mr. Minister, that leads me to express a concern, perhaps unfounded, that your program will indeed result in 2,000 people being hired at minimum wage, doesn't cost them anything, but which none of those will be permanent. What obligation is there on the employer to continue to employ those people after the 26 weeks runs out? What obligation exists on them?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well just a couple of general comments. The member opposite is indulging in doom and gloom, which is not surprising. The NDP opposition has tended to be doom and gloom, and we on this side of the House would disagree. We would say that, in fact, if there are any opportunities for growth and development and expansion, Saskatchewan is where that's going to take place.

In fact, if you take a look at the incentives in the '84-85 budget, as far as economic development, they are substantial. And, in fact, in the agriculture sector alone, the tax credit for beef is something which is going to create literally hundreds of jobs. And all you have to do is talk to the people in the feedlot industry to find out about that. So let's not be concerned about doom and gloom; let's be concerned about how to create jobs.

Last year in the province of Saskatchewan . . . And you were concerned about whether or not employers were, in fact, going to be hiring people on a long-term basis, and whether or not there would be funds there to help employ people.

Last year, local employers contributed almost \$16 million to our job creation program for welfare clients — \$16 million of employers' money alone, last year. Well, that's a very substantial infusion of funds from the small business, and the municipal, and the non-profit sector, to help to create jobs. And we anticipate that, in fact, that's going to continue to happen again this year. We have no reason to think otherwise.

We know that small business here in the province of Saskatchewan is interested in expanding. We know that the municipal sector is interested in taking advantage of this program to provide productive opportunities for welfare clients to meet needs at the municipal level. So we don't anticipate the kind of problem that the member opposite is suggesting, at all.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Well, Mr. Minister, there is an unfortunate number of cynics in society who might suggest that the reason why you have 26 weeks picked out is because 26 weeks of employment, and 26 weeks of contribution to unemployment insurance, will qualify them for unemployment insurance — which will mean they will be off your payrolls for a year.

Now that I think about it, you may well be right. I'd still like to see your figures, but you may well be right. If you provide people with 26 weeks work, you're probably rid of them for the next year because they will be getting unemployment insurance.

Mr. Minister, you haven't solved any problems by doing that. All you've done is to shift the tax burden to a different level of government. As I say, there's a goodly number of cynics, Mr.

Minister, who might tend to view that choosing 26 weeks didn't occur by accident —that that is the period which they need to qualify for unemployment insurance. And that's really all that is going to happen to them, is the vast majority of them will simply go from welfare onto unemployment insurance.

They may appreciate that, because welfare carries a stigma of indignity that unemployment insurance does not. So they may be happier, but you're not really suggesting by that sort of unloading of the burden on the federal government, that you solve any problems for the taxpayer, for the welfare recipient, or for the people of Saskatchewan, are you?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, that kind of comment is indicative of the very fundamental problem that exists on the opposition benches . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, it certainly isn't anywhere near a note of realism.

What you don't seem to understand is that there are large numbers of welfare clients there who want a productive opportunity. You didn't provide them with a productive opportunity. You didn't provide them with any productive opportunity — you simply provided them with a welfare cheque.

The creation of short-term employment is very important for welfare clients. If you're not interested in seeing jobs created for welfare clients, then say so. I think the people of Saskatchewan are very interested in seeing welfare clients have job opportunities.

And, Mr. Chairman, the creation of 2,350 full-time jobs, many of which will become permanent, is exactly what welfare clients need. To continue to live in the dependency and on welfare is not in their best interests. And the members opposite don't seem to realize that. The expenditure of millions of dollars to provide training and education for welfare clients is exactly what they need. It's what the taxpayer expects we will do for welfare clients. The 2,350 jobs which are going to be created will, in fact, provide many clients with an opportunity to earn a wage for a significant period of time to make a productive contribution to society, to enhance their self-esteem.

And I challenge the member opposite. I challenge the member opposite to tell the welfare community that the government should not create jobs for welfare clients. I challenge you to say that.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Well my colleague wants to get into it, and the hour is running late. So I will leave it, Mr. Minister, by saying that you're going to create additional jobs when the economy starts to expand. That's fairly elemental.

I would think, even to the members opposite, who have nicely isolated themselves from the problems of the real world, I would think even that ought to be apparent — that you're going to create permanent jobs when the economy starts to expand. Until the economy starts to expand, you're not going to create very much in the way of permanent employment.

The minister describes me as a prophet of doom and gloom. I say, unlike the minister, I earn a significant portion of my income as a self-employed person. And I know what's happening out on the street, both of the city of Regina, and in small-town Saskatchewan, because I earn some of my income out there. I'm not being a prophet of doom and gloom. I am simply reporting to the minister the feeling in the business community, and it's not a very expansionary one.

It is not expansionary because of the plight the farmers find themselves in, a plight that you absolutely refuse to recognize and refuse to do anything about — but that's a different movie — and interest rates, which you have, I suggest, not addressed, either, as your promised you would during the election.

But that's beyond the consideration of your estimates. The point of view of your estimates is the

economy isn't going to expand over the next . . . No honest, and impartial and credible observer believes it will. As such, you're not going to create any permanent jobs. You're going to create temporary jobs which will get them off welfare and onto unemployment insurance. You may think you pulled a cute trick, but you really haven't done much for welfare recipients in Saskatchewan.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well I thank the member opposite for his magnanimous approach, lifting the burden of interest rates off the shoulders of the Minister of Social Services. That was very kind of you.

I think the member opposite doesn't realize the benefit that is available to welfare clients through job creation of the kind that we're talking about. You will be interested to know, and we surveyed employees who went through this particular job creation program last year — You'll be interested to know the following statistics: 52 per cent of all of those welfare clients, who were employed, felt that they had learned new skills from their job; 69 per cent were of the opinion that the work would help them find another job; 62 per cent felt that their personal or family lives had been improved because of the employment through that program; 98 per cent, 98 per cent of welfare clients felt that that kind of job creation program was needed; and 96 per cent said they would participate again in a similar program if they were unemployed. And if that isn't a good rationale for providing the kind of job experiences that we are going to provide for welfare clients, then I say the member opposite is sadly out of touch with reality.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Mr. Minister, the type of program which you create doesn't create permanent jobs. It defies human experiences; it defies logic. What creates a new job is an expansion somewhere in the economy. Your payment may result in someone getting hired who was on welfare, but that's at the expense of someone else who would have got the same job, if it's a permanent job. You can create temporary jobs doing what you're doing. You can't create permanent jobs that way. That's only created by the expansion in the economy. That's just simple human experience. You may get someone on welfare employed, but that's if they find a permanent job through that, but that's at the expense of someone else who is then eventually going to wind up on welfare rolls as soon as their unemployment insurance benefits are exhausted.

Now, Mr. Minister, I say that your program isn't creating permanent jobs. That happens through an expansion of the economy which, unfortunately, isn't happening. You're creating temporary jobs, you're getting them off welfare, and you may well be making a saving, I can see now, as I could not when we began this discussion half an hour ago. There may be some savings, but you haven't done anything for the unemployed of Saskatchewan or for the people on welfare as a whole. You may have got somebody off, but somebody else is going to come back into welfare because of it. The total amount of benefit for the province, through this program, is going to be very close to zero.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well just a few comments. The member suggested that, in fact, the economy is not expanding in the province of Saskatchewan, an indication again of how sadly out of touch you are with what is taking place in the province of Saskatchewan. The economy is expanding, there are more people at work in the province of Saskatchewan now than ever before — Substantial job creation here in the province of Saskatchewan. The unemployment rate here in the province of Saskatchewan among the lowest in Canada.

So when you put together the activity that has been taking place previously, over the past year, in terms of an expanded economy, and when you marry that to the kinds of incentives that the budget has put in place for economic activity and job creation in the province of Saskatchewan, you're talking about a substantially expanded economy. So let's not lead the people astray with your doom and gloom about a retracting economy. In fact, that isn't happening.

The point is, though, that the member opposite is missing the point on welfare reform. What you

seem to be implying that you want to do is for the Department of Social Services to continue to do nothing but hand out a welfare cheque to employables. That is not the only thing that the Department of Social Services can do. It may have been the only thing that you thought the Department of Social Services can do. It may have been the only thing that you were doing when your government was in power. In fact, the Department of Social Services in this government can do a lot more. We can provide over 6,000 productive opportunities for welfare clients, and that is what we are going to do.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Minister, I wonder again out loud about the 17,000 new people who are on welfare now, as opposed to when you took office. It's true that you are doing drastic things to reduce the number of people on welfare; but it's resulting from the fact that you have a drastic increase in the number of people on welfare, as opposed to a problem with the welfare system.

I look at the statistics of the unemployment rate in Saskatoon and Regina, and I find that the Saskatoon unemployment rate is 12.8 per cent. Toronto, the unemployment rate is 8.5, and in Winnipeg 9.7. Mr. Minister, your unemployment rate in Saskatoon is as high as Calgary — two of the highest cities in the country. And I say that the problem we are having with high welfare payments in the province is being attempted to be hidden by a smoke screen that you are attempting to put up. Very simply, the 17,000 new people on welfare are there because they can't find jobs.

You talk about retraining. I would like to know what retraining you are going to be doing. Can you tell me an outline basically where we have a shortage of people? In which sector of the economy are you going to be retraining them for? Where do we have a shortage of skilled workers that you will be training them to take the place?

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, Mr. Chairman, a large number of our long-term welfare clients, in fact, have very minimal education. A good number of them, in fact, around the grade five, six, seven level, for example. And they're simply not going to be productive at all when it comes to applying for jobs. They're not going to be in any way productive or competitive. So what we intend to do is provide a significant number of clients with an adult basic education upgrading experience which is going to bring them up significantly in terms of their level of education.

We are also going to be providing a number of participants in the skills-training program with education that will upgrade them to a grade 12 level, for example. We are going to be providing a number of welfare clients with on-the-job training provided by employers who will put together an on-the-job curriculum training experience, knowing that there is an opening for that person to go into immediately, or once the training is, in fact, completed. And a good example of that is the La Ronge model which we ran last year, where people were trained to work in the hotel and the restaurant business. We found that to be very successful.

In addition to that, we're talking about a number of welfare clients who would receive training, for example, in the cooking industry, in order to get involved in the restaurant business. We're talking about training for entry level positions, upgrading the education of clients in order that they would be eligible for further education or training which is presently denied them, simply because they don't have the basic education to make them eligible for it.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Chairman, the minister seems to miss the main point. He talks about the program he had in place last year and the great success of it. He simply ignores the fact that there are about 6,000 more people on welfare now than there was before he started the program last year. He seems to miss the point that there's 2 per cent more unemployment in the province than there was at this time last year.

I wonder where these people are going to work? What I'm saying is: where are you training them to work? In which sector? Are you talking about in public administration, or in

construction? Which area will these welfare recipients move into? Can you tell me which area, as opposed to giving a long-winded speech about the great things you're going to do? I want to know which sector of the economy we see a shortage of workers at the present time.

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Well, the member opposite misses the point again. When he was minister of Social Services, there was a substantial number of clients that lacked basic training, basic education. You did nothing for them. They continue to be there. That is unconscionable. We have to provide something for those clients that will make them more competitive and more productive; make it more likely that they are going to be eligible for some kind of training experience, some kind of education experience, some kind of job experience.

That is something which you people simply ignored. You didn't make any effort whatsoever to help those particular clients who were never going to be competitive for jobs, who were never going to have the opportunity to get further education. You simply handed out a cheque, month after month. That's not adequate; that's not sufficient.

We're looking for the longer term, we're training and re-educating for the future. I realize that's an orientation which you may have difficulty understanding. That, in fact, is a productive approach to welfare.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 10:02 p.m.