

EVENING SITTING

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 92 — An Act respecting Elections

The Chair: — I would ask the minister to introduce his officials, please.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, these are the same officials that I had with me last Friday, and they're well-known to the House, so I'll dispense with that.

Clause 1

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, once again welcome to your officials. Where we left off previously talking about Bill 92, where you and I left off on that occasion, we had talked about the opportunity for people that were displaced to be allowed to vote when they're out of their constituencies. And given what's happening in some northern parts of the province, it's a typical example of how these situations can arise. The question I was going to follow up on prior to us finishing last year is . . . last year — pardon me; last session — is that, what security measures will there be in place to ensure that when this does happen, that the ballots or ballots marked in an emergency type of a situation, such as the situation to the evacuees last year, what measures will be in place to ensure that absolutely no tinkering can occur with any of those ballots?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to the member. The mobile polls will have in charge of them a deputy returning officer and there will be a deputy returning officer in respect of each such poll. The voting is conducted in the same manner as an ordinary poll, in the sense that the parties can appoint scrutineers, and to ensure for the satisfaction of the parties that the poll is properly conducted.

The voting procedures are described in section 99 and there are safeguards there in the sense that the deputy returning officer shall request the voter to make a declaration, and the ballot paper is initialled in a manner so that . . . in essentially the same manner or a similar manner as ordinary polls. And the voter marks the ballot paper by inserting the name or political affiliation of the candidate for whom he or she intends to vote.

The procedure after the closing of the polling place is covered by section 100. And the deputy returning officer follows the procedures there in so far as the counting of voters and the counting of unused ballot papers are concerned, as well as counting the number of spoiled ballots and dealing with those in the way described. And then, of course, counting the votes, or at least handling the votes in the way that is contemplated by section 100.

It is as close to the procedure in effect in normal voting places as we are able to get, considering that these mobile polls are held out in the middle of a burning bush or in the middle of some other very unusual place. But I think, therefore, that the

Assembly can be assured that it is as secure and regular as the circumstances will permit.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And that particular section 100 does go to fairly great extent in elaborating on what procedures and process have to be followed. Earlier when we talked about that, it makes it a little more onerous as far as having people in place and moving people around to all these areas.

My question along those lines is on the accessibility of these mobile polls. How would they be arranged for? How would people arrange for this service, and would they in fact be available to every small community that might feel that perhaps it would be more appropriate under the circumstances, or their circumstances, to have the mobile polls brought to them?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — The returning officer that is in the constituency in which the problem occurs — let's take Athabasca for an example because that's where there was so much forest fire activity during the last election a year ago — the returning officer may establish one or more mobile polls if, in the opinion of the returning officer, special or unusual circumstances require mobile polls. That's the test.

That can arise almost in any way at all in my opinion. That could be a process initiated by the returning officer or initiated by someone else for the consideration of the returning officer, but at the end of the day it is the returning officer that makes the judgement that a mobile poll should be established. And the criteria is the special or unusual circumstances requiring such.

Now we've never done this before. You know, I think we're going to learn a lot over the years, and it may be that some more refined criteria may find their way into the Act in the future. But for the time being, based on the experience of last summer, this would seem to cover the situation.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And that leads me to the question about these unforeseen circumstances. The Chief Electoral Officer will make the final decision to determine under what circumstances the mobile polls will in fact be valid. And can I just ask you, will his word be final in these situations? Or will in fact, given the opportunity or if the time allows or permits, will there be a requirement to have the CEO (Chief Electoral Officer) talk to cabinet or bring it to cabinet? And I guess, is there any limit to these extraordinary decision-making powers with respect to the need for the mobile poll?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — The establishment of the mobile polls is initially the returning officer's decision. The member will have noticed that the Chief Electoral Officer approves the establishment of the mobile poll. This is all contained in section 90.

And that's the end of it. There is . . . the cabinet never becomes involved. It's never a political decision at all. It is the election machinery that establishes the mobile polls.

Mr. Osika: — I thank you for that, Mr. Minister. The CEO's powers have increased in this Bill when it comes to investigations of political parties or their candidates. I would just wonder if you might be able to explain for us the procedure that must be followed, particularly in terms of the CEO entering private buildings or residences to search for documentation. Will that then require him to seek the assistance of peace officers in those circumstances, follow that kind of a process? Or will he be guided in accordance with the Act and be given those authorities?

(1915)

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, it is not contemplated that the police would become involved because of the nature of the process here. After all, the Chief Electoral Officer is dealing with registered political parties with responsible, democratic organizations, and it is therefore expected that there will be a high degree of cooperation. The idea of the Chief Electoral Officer having these powers to inquire into irregularities is not new of course. It was in the Act, in the old Act, in a rather summary way. It has been fleshed out here, and in the fleshing out has, I think, regularized such inquiries and laid out for everyone to see and understand what are the ground rules.

These are to be found in section 280 and 281 and it requires every political party, and every candidate, and every business manager, to open up the offices to inspection by the Chief Electoral Officer, and to open the books as it were, and the records, and cooperate.

But then it makes the significant exception that:

The Chief Electoral Officer shall not enter a private dwelling without a warrant . . . unless the occupant of the dwelling consents to the entry.

If a warrant is necessary, then you go to section 281 which requires a justice of the peace or a judge of the provincial court to issue the warrant on being satisfied as to certain matters set out in section 280. All of which is a system that ought to work considering the nature of the process. Who's involved and the fact that all of our parties would willingly cooperate with an inquiry by the Chief Electoral Officer under this Act.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I appreciate that. And I agree that that would be the process related to, in the event again, of unforeseen circumstances or extraordinary circumstances. But you've answered my question, and I thank you.

In the draft copy of the Bill, public opinion polling was originally listed as an acceptable election expense. Mr. Minister, can you just explain a little bit why this was taken out of the final draft copy?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, and to the member, I think we had discussions about this during the consultation process. But our thinking — I'll still answer the question, of course — our thinking was based on the fact that the public purse refunds certain election expenses or a portion of those expenses. And

that's an appropriate thing to do, I think, in the functioning of a democracy. But there ought to be certain limits to it.

And we decided that the kind of polling that is done by political parties during elections did not really fall into the category of an expense that should be eligible for reimbursement; that political parties use polls for their own purposes and that's the way it is. That's appropriate. That's how . . . it will be a feature of elections, I'm sure, for the future. But they're not the kind of expense that we should expect the taxpayer to reimburse. And so it was taken out of the reimbursable category and exempted from such claims.

Mr. Osika: — I thank you for myself, Mr. Minister, and I thank you on behalf of the taxpayers. They'll be pleased to hear that one. Thank you.

The Bill states that the CEO will provide guidelines for the parties and candidates, and I'll appreciate that takes a little bit of time. And with new laws and new Bills, and particularly those that need to have guidelines to allow people to ensure that they follow them closely, I was wondering if you can anticipate how long into the future it will take to build these guidelines for parties and candidates as a result of some of these changes?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — In our discussions internally with planning ahead as to regulations and guidelines, we have been planning that proclamation of the Act would take place as quickly as possible, but that would not happen before January 1, 1997. There's just simply too much ground to cover, too many regulations and forms to prepare and clear with the Department of Justice, to be ready to implement it before then. Anything's possible, but that's been our thinking up until now.

The guidelines are perhaps not an event, in other words perhaps not just something that you publish once and for all, but the guidelines could be such that they would be produced over a period of time and cover different subjects. I don't know what the Chief Electoral Officer may have in mind for that, but that could well be the way in which it is handled.

The scheme of the Act, as the member will know from his work on it, is such that we wanted to set out in the statute what the rules were, to the greatest extent that we could, and that we would give some legal basis for these guidelines so that if our business managers saw it in the guidelines and complied with the guidelines, that would be compliance with the Act.

And it would be subject to as little interpretation as possible but would be clearly spelled out so that our election campaigns and the processes after the campaign, the election, the returns that are filed and the claims for reimbursement that may follow are clearly spelled out also and not the subject of subsequent interpretation.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. With the changes relative to additional documentation that may be needed by parties and candidates, can you tell me how much more documentation, how much more paperwork, you might see as being involved in this wider scope of needs for reporting processes and procedures?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — In answer to the member's question, Mr. Chair, I hope the answer is that there will be less red tape and that, in any event, it will be more clear as to what we have to . . . what documentation we have to accumulate as we go along, and what documentation has to be provided to the Chief Electoral Officer when the time comes to file returns. So we're trying to make it crystal clear.

So the documentation shouldn't be any more complicated, and it will be much more clear what that documentation will be, and that will save us a lot of follow-up steps trying to obtain documentation and satisfy the CEO as to whether a particular expense is justified or the nature of it or what have you. I hope in the end we will have accomplished a simpler system.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you again. My reference to the next item, Mr. Minister, is one that you'll be aware is near and dear to my heart, and we have had some discussions about it, and I wondered if I might just be able to ask you — as a result of our discussions regarding the Bill and the recommendation that election expenses on behalf of a candidate perhaps be expanded to cover some of those expenses incurred outside of the actual writ period . . . And we've talked about this, Mr. Minister. The point being that it would not in fact increase the cost because the spending limit would remain the same. In all fairness to all the candidates that would be new to the process, if you wish, the newly nominated candidates, I wonder if you might, for the benefit of the House, explain the objections to this kind of a proposal?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, this was one of the most interesting debates that we had during the consultation process because there is a fair amount of merit in the position that the official opposition took.

The argument, if I can presume to make it for the member, is that people running for office for the first time are not known — very often are not known — to their constituents. And it is normal and natural that they would incur expenses in getting their name before the public with such things as brochures or business cards, candidate cards, the like. And that, what is hurt . . . if that is grossed up into the actual money being spent during the election period, so long as the total amount spent is not more than the amount which the Act allows.

I think I've captured the member's argument, and you're nodding to indicate I have. And that is an interesting argument. And we, on this side of the House, spent a lot of time considering that. And in the end we did not accept the argument and opted for the formulation which is in the Act. And that is, that election expenses means the cost of goods and services used during an election. Which is to say, after the writ has been dropped, as we say, the election has been called, and the date of the voting.

We took that position for this very simple reason. That the whole system it seemed to us worked better and more cleanly, and in the end in a more satisfactory way, if we could define with precision what expenses were covered and what weren't.

And the most . . . the cleanest way of describing that was to pin

down the dates on which they were used. If they're used during an election period, they have to be reported. By reporting them, they become part of the allowable expense, the allowable amount that a candidate may expend.

And it is a clear definition of what's allowed and what's not allowed.

That's a system that we're all familiar with because we've operated under it in past elections and know that it's a workable idea. If a member, a candidate, buys 10,000 candidate cards and uses 2,000 of them during the election campaign, then two-tenths, or one-fifth, of the cost of those cards are an election expense and they're reported as such, and they are a reimbursable expense to that extent.

(1930)

That's a very convenient way of doing it. Now it doesn't meet the member's point entirely. We recognize that, which is why we had such long discussions about it and considered it so carefully. But in the end we opted for the tighter system and that is how come we're where we're at.

Now I think the member will agree that it was the only one of the points raised by the official opposition that we were not responsive to. And we tried hard to be responsive to that, but in the end we felt that the system would work better if it were limited in the manner that I've indicated.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I don't mean to continue flogging this issue, but in terms of the expenses during an election — and again we get to the matter of interpretation — when does an election process begin? And one might argue that candidates are sought out. Candidates are nominated. There is a specific date when a formal nomination process takes place. The candidate is on record as being the representative of that party from that day forward.

And you alluded to the costs of informing the constituents by way of introductions, whether it be business cards, letters, on a more appropriate basis, even some of the travel cost that that particular individual now has to assume in order to participate in our democratic process. And in all fairness to the voting public, the constituents, they should have every right and perhaps some expanded opportunities to get to know that candidate, whomever he or she may be, a lot better. And that is difficult to accomplish sometimes in that short period of time when the writ is issued.

Our position was that the expenses would only be those that might be reasonable expenses within the total amount eligible for a person to expend in order to become elected. The travel costs, information brochures, biographies, any number of things, any amounts that are expended over and above that that may not be considered within the guidelines that will be prepared in the near future, as you indicated, could then outline specifically for example that the rental of an office would not be an eligible . . . or considered an eligible expense leading up to the issuance of the writ.

Telephone costs may not be. However those items of introduction of a candidate, I believe, would be a lot fairer and give people in the constituency a better opportunity to get to know the person that's representing whichever party.

Mr. Minister, I know we've talked about this and I respect the position that's been taken. However we will be hoping that perhaps with some second sober thoughts . . . and I'd like to serve, just pass over, the House amendment which we will be proposing when we arrive at the appropriate time, for you to consider once again perhaps. As I say, second sober thoughts sometimes do occur. And I would appreciate that.

But those are strictly the points, that again it creates a lot more parity. The incumbents who are already in place in those constituencies do have that privilege, luxury, opportunity. They are known and they continue to be allowed the privilege of communicating with constituents because of their office, and rightly so. To allow nominated candidates, whether it's 6 months before or 12 months before, at least a portion of the same type of opportunity or privilege would not detract, I believe, from the intent of keeping a cap on, if you wish, election expenses and allowable expenses that now are reimbursed to some extent. Could you perhaps respond, please.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to respond. It's an engaging argument that the member puts and we understand it. We have understood it from the first time that we met about this Bill, and the matter was then the subject of a written brief. The member may recall the argument was put out very clearly. And I will be happy to look at the House amendment, a copy of which you have just sent over to me, and consider that for the next time that the committee sits.

The member was indicating it was uncertain what this election period meant, and I just refer the member to the definition in clause (o) of section 2(1); section 2(1)(o), where the term "during an election" is defined, as I had said earlier, commencing on the date the writ is issued and ending on the polling day. And it is to that limited period that the Bill now refers.

But I just want to say again, I'd be glad to review this ground with my colleagues. And I appreciate how strongly the member and his colleagues feel about this, so we'll be pleased to take another look at it and report back to the committee next time.

Mr. Osika: — I thank you very much, Mr. Minister. A question on the extent of cooperation with the federal elections officials as far as sharing of information. But when it comes to enumeration, do you foresee any problems that might be involved or entailed in this type of cooperative effort?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I think that there is going to be a very high level of cooperation between the federal officials and the Saskatchewan officials on this subject. We have reason to believe so. These officers meet regularly, and exchange information, and enjoy a very good relationship. And so at the level of the officials, I don't think there's any real problem at all, and at the political level there's no difficulty standing in the way of this.

It's really quite exciting when you think about what is possible her — moving perhaps towards a permanent voters' list that could be used in federal elections, and provincial elections, and even in municipal elections. Save everybody the cost of enumerating and re-enumerating people, checking it or, in one way or another, using databases that are appropriate. And I say that, "are appropriate" advisedly because there are confidentiality considerations and that sort of thing in many of the databases that may limit their use, but lots of things can be done. And I think that the cooperation between the federal and provincial governments is certainly one of them that looks very promising indeed.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I'd like to pursue the avenue that the Leader of the Opposition was taking on the idea of pre-election expenses being included as part of your election expense category and therefore are reimbursable. It seemed to me that what the Leader of the Opposition was saying was that this would give a new candidate an equal opportunity to a candidate who had been in the field before, whose name was known, whose policies . . . or whose party was well known.

But I disagree, Mr. Minister, with that. As listening to what the Leader of the Opposition had to say about it, my understanding of it was that, in his terms, the pre-writ period would start at some point when a candidate was nominated or when he announced that he was seeking the nomination perhaps. Although I'm not sure how you could include election expenses from a nomination . . . the period leading up to a nomination meeting into the election writ period, because that's actually not election as far as the general voter is concerned.

So let's say it starts at the nomination period. A new candidate who may get elected a year in advance of an election and who wants to put his name out there — his or her name — and get known, could spend, let's say half of their election expense allowance, \$35,000, so \$17,000 roughly, in that period between the nominating meeting and the writ.

An incumbent such as ourselves, any member of this House, generally doesn't get nominated until just before the writ period, or in fact many times, during the writ period.

So what happens in that case, using the Leader of the Opposition's scenario, all of the monies that the incumbent might spend prior to his nomination would not be eligible for reimbursement. So that would mean that that candidate, the incumbent, would still have his entire election expense account available to him to spend during the writ period.

So while the first candidate may have spent his \$17,000 in the year leading up to the election, he would have \$17,000 left to spend during the election. The incumbent could spend whatever he wanted until his nomination date prior to the writ period — let's say he's nominated the first day of the writ — he would still remain with the \$35,000 that he could spend during the writ period. I don't see how that would work to the advantage at all, Mr. Minister, to the advantage of the new candidate.

So I think the Leader of the Opposition's premiss is wrong, Mr.

Minister, Mr. Chairman, in his suggestion that it would aid a new candidate. I don't believe it would do so.

What it would do is allow a candidate with limited funds to claim the entire amount that he might spend, both writ and pre-writ. I think it only benefits someone who has a limited amount of money to spend, not someone who is known or unknown. I don't think that's the criteria. It's how much money do you have to spend and where do you want to spend it? And I think that's all that that argument presents, Mr. Minister.

So I think that the advantage is there. If the candidate wants to spend his money in advance of the writ, I think that's his privilege today. If he wants to spend it during the writ, that's also his privilege. So I see really very little, if any, advantage to making that change, Mr. Minister.

One of the question though that I did want to ask, dealing with the mobile polls. Obviously in most cases political parties are not going to know very far in advance as to when or where a mobile poll will be. Even more than that, they're not going to know who would be resident at that mobile poll. If you're talking the fire line, they may move crews in and out on a daily basis. You won't know today who is going to be on the fire line tomorrow.

Political parties, under that circumstance, would have a great deal of difficulty organizing who is going to be their representative at that mobile polling station. If they don't know who's going to be on the site, it's pretty hard to say, well Tom is our representative.

So under the proposal for the mobile polls, Mr. Minister, what arrangements have been made for the political parties to have representatives there? And who would pay for the transportation of those representatives from some other site to the mobile polling station?

(1945)

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — There are some provisions contained in the Act in section 90 and section 92. The returning officer has to post a notice of the mobile polls in the returning officer's office and has to provide each candidate with a written notice of the mobile polls.

And then subsection 4 of section 92 says that:

The returning officer shall supply means to transport the poll officials and any candidate's representatives who wish to accompany the poll officials.

So the election machinery will pay for the transportation.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. When it comes time to provide notice as to where the mobile poll will be, have you outlined any time frame, or is it sort of an overnight thing? A fire starts up at 4 o'clock in the afternoon the day before the election, or I'm not sure how fast fires go in that sense, but how big they get quickly, that you would need a crew out there, but what kind of a notification period would you

have? Four hours, six hours, twenty-four hours, forty-eight? What do you envision happening in that area?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — There are no such time lines set out in the Act. It's intended to be flexible. It's intended to be responsive to the real situation. So if, as the member says, a fire starts the day before the election, a crew is dispatched.

I don't think it impossible at all that the returning officer could mount a mobile poll to go in there on election day and have a poll set up for the people who are there. It's a little tight, but written notices can be delivered and, you know, the Act can be complied with in practically no time at all. So it's not beyond the realm of possibility that the situation the member describes could be responded to.

Mr. D'Autremont: — The notices for the mobile poll you say would be posted in the returning officer's office. Would that include sending out notifications to all the candidates, campaign offices, or to the candidates themselves, so that they would be aware that the poll was actually going out at some point in time and even though it is on maybe short, eight-hour notice?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — It's a mandatory provision in the Act that the returning officer will provide a written notice of each mobile poll to each candidate.

The committee reported progress.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Public Service Commission Vote 33

The Chair: — I would ask the minister responsible to introduce his officials, please.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. We're going to be assisted tonight in our deliberations by Mr. Mike Shaw, who is the Chair of the Public Service Commission, and Mr. Rick McKillop, who is the executive director of employee relations.

Item 1

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome, officials, and minister, this evening. Minister, I wonder if you could start off please, by outlining the objectives, goals, overall direction of the commission, please.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, not to go on at length, perhaps what I could do is simply quote from the mandate of the Public Service Commission, which I think in a very capsulized way describes the totality of the commission's work:

The Public Service Commission provides leadership and policy direction for the human resource function in the public service. The commission either directly delivers or collaborates with the departments and agencies of government in the delivery of a wide range of human

resource services for the public service. Essentially, the Public Service Commission provides the human resource service for the executive of government.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Are there any programs or services in the commission that are overlapping with other agencies or departments in government?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, there would not be any overlap. Some services are delivered directly by the Public Service Commission. Other human resource services are provided within departments under policy established by the PSC (Public Service Commission) but we do not see any overlap in that system.

Mr. Gantefoer: — What are the relationship between the Public Service Commission and the human resources agencies or branches in other departments? How do you interface that?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I think it would be described best as a very collaborative and a cooperative operation where departments will have their own human resource sections. The Public Service Commission will set overall policies and work then very collaboratively with the separate departments in the work they do.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Minister, how would you describe the relationship then that you have with the Public Service Commission and SGEU (Saskatchewan Government Employees Union) for example.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I'm appreciative that the member brought that up because I think there has been some real change and some real progress made in the relationship between the Public Service Commission and SGEU, which would be the largest bargaining unit representing employees of government.

I think if one went back even three years ago, or four years ago, certainly you would see quite a different relationship than what exists today. Over the past three, two and a half, two years, there has been a new relationship develop with SGEU and the Public Service Commission where we are beginning more and more to see ourselves as partners in the provision of public service. We have moved to an interest-based bargaining model which in some ways is setting the pace for employee relations in the public sector. There is much work yet to be done, but we feel that we've come a great deal of distance in the last two and a half years. And I think the last round of contract negotiations was indicative of that.

And if I may say, the process, the difficult process that we went through earlier as a result of some shrinking of the size of government, the last budget initiatives, where, in that process, both the PSC and SGEU worked very closely together and collaboratively.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Minister, speaking of the reduction, I believe the Public Service cut-backs were something like 582 full-time equivalents in this last budget, and you alluded to the fact that you worked collaboratively with SGEU in order to

make that as smooth as possible. Was it the role of the Public Service Commission to initiate the whole retirement package that was put together in regard to these cut-backs?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — The establishment of the early retirement and other adjustments will be discussed and there will be a process of consultation working with SGEU. It becomes the Public Service Commission role then to bring that forward to government, to bring it forward to cabinet, and make recommendations to government. But the recommendation that the PSC will bring to government will be recommendations based on conversations and consultations with SGEU. And then certainly in the implementation of those programs, we worked very closely with SGEU particularly, and other public sector unions.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Minister, have the details of that early retirement package been released and are they a matter of public information now, or would we be able to get that?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Depending . . . I'm not sure if I understand the question entirely — you may want to go with a supplementary — but yes, I mean the details and the provisions of the plan were announced by way of news release and widely known. You may have some interest in knowing some of the follow-up, but clearly this is a matter of public knowledge. There's nothing here that's not in the public domain.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Minister, one of the comments has been, is that there's other areas of employment, of people employed, that as a result of government decisions are facing cut-backs — and I think particularly of district health board employees — quite often where there are reductions in the number of full-time equivalents, of front-line health care workers or school boards or things of this nature. And quite often the comment that is made by people affected by these kinds of decisions is that if the opportunity would be there for some employees to be able to access an early retirement package, that it may make that whole difficult adjustment much easier.

Has the public . . . or does the Public Service Commission have any role in terms of thinking about proposing a more general early retirement package that not only the PSC people themselves or government employees themselves directly could access, but also that might be made available through the Public Service Commission, or what other function, for district health boards or school boards or things of that nature.

(2000)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I think we have to be clear, Mr. Chair, that the PSC serves to represent the employer, in the case of government, to the direct employees of government. In terms of our health care workers or workers in education — their employer — and the health care field, will be the district health boards represented provincially by SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations). The employees in the education system equally are not employees of government *per se*, and so in each of those cases the employers or the employer groups, would be responsible to craft early retirement packages if that's desired.

In our case this package is crafted by government for direct employees of government. This also separates from the Crown sector where the plan that was utilized here applies to the employees of government, not to employees of the Crowns. They're employed by their employer, whichever Crown it would be.

Mr. Gantefer: — I realize, Minister, the difference between the different jurisdictions. I guess the comment is that quite often district health boards, schools boards, and even perhaps to some extent Crowns, may not have the wherewithal to implement early retirement packages, because quite often there's an initial capital outlay or cost associated with these packages in order to make them happen. And this then becomes a matter of government policy, because if government policy has resulted in district health boards having to terminate or face the prospect of decreasing full-time equivalents as a result of government policies on whatever level, then I'm wondering if government does not have a responsibility and a role to be able to craft some type of early retirement package that makes that downsizing much more attainable and much more positive for all these other entities, if you like, that are forced with almost the same situation as government employees were.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the member would, I think, by his comment — and a fair enough comment — but would move us into the broader discussion then of the budgeting of government generally.

As you will know, we all live within budgets. Part of a provincial government's responsibility will be to establish its own budget, and within that budget, budget the various departments. From the budget to various departments will come the budget to third parties.

If one wants to argue that the budget should be larger for health districts to enable them to do that, I think that's a fair argument and a good discussion. It's not something that the Public Service Commission *per se* would do. This is part of that broader budget discussion.

It's a responsibility of the Public Service Commission, within government, to look at the kind of resources we'll have available and determine if we should recommend to government, as the deciding body, whether an early retirement is the appropriate expenditure of public resources. And I think we all know that one can make, in some cases, a good, solid economic argument for an early retirement package, where there is an initial expense but by helping people exit the system, we know that in the long run there are greater savings.

But this would be then I think a discussion for employers in every case, and if the argument is that there should be more money to the various departments, I think that's a different point of debate than what we're doing tonight.

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Minister, then focusing on the package that was offered . . . and you indicated that parts of the package were public knowledge. As well, you indicated that some of the results of this package perhaps are not as public. And I'm thinking of how many employees accepted this package, how

many of them were unionized, what was the cost of severance, how many people are on re-employment lists or how many people . . . and I'm trying to put this into sort of a global question instead of four or five individual questions that really address the outcome of the package that was offered. Is that information available for us?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — We'd be more than happy to provide the information. We're still moving through the process. Given bumping provisions within the contracts, we expect that the process will not be completed until the end of June, or perhaps into July. At that time we will be very pleased to provide the specific numbers to the areas that you raise. And I think that's an important question. It's something we may want to make very public so that the people of our province can see and understand what has happened to their public service through this exercise.

We don't have the . . . we'll have some numbers to date, but they won't be the total numbers, given that process continues for a few more weeks.

Mr. Gantefer: — Minister, moving away from that then — and we'll appreciate that information when it is available — moving away from sort of the sad side of the tasks at hand, what I want to move towards is for you to describe the process and the categories for hiring. When someone comes to a job, where are the categories in terms of . . . that are open and fair and non-partisan kind of competitions? What categories involve more the partisan kind of hirings, and how does that break down?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I want to reassure and relieve the member of a concern that he may have.

All classified positions within government go through the competitive process, through the PSC. All classified positions. I believe the only unclassified positions in government will be the senior, the very senior, officials of the departments, deputy ministers, the like, and ministerial staff — the staff in ministers' offices, the ministerial assistants and secretaries. I believe that would represent what we describe as the unclassified. And so by far the vast, vast, vast majority of government employees, people employed by the Government of Saskatchewan, are hired through the competitive basis through the PSC.

Mr. Gantefer: — I guess that in this . . . I would like to know then what the criteria, the general criteria, are, the processes for these classified hirings, and how that process occurs. You know, if there was a position offered and it's a clerk steno 1, or whatever it is, how does that process work to make sure that it is indeed done non-partisanly?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I'll just share with the member some of the arrangements that were crafted through the agreement with SGEU signed in May 1993. So they've been operative now for some time.

But maybe I should just say as a caveat . . . I mean there is, you'll understand, the process of application. If someone is coming to government for the first time, there's a process of

application. The application is submitted to the Public Service Commission.

There is the process within government through, again through contractual arrangements, where positions will be posted and those who are currently at work in government will have opportunity to apply for those positions.

But there is, by contractual arrangement with SGEU, recognition now that staffing decisions would be based on the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to function successfully in the particular position being staffed; two, appointment of the most senior qualified applicant who meets the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for a position; three, the setting of knowledge, skill, and ability requirements prior to a position being posted. And that process of determining the knowledge, skill, and ability will be in consultation with a rep from the union. And recognition also now of the union's legitimate place in the staffing process by recognizing their participant, a participant of the union, as a representative in decision making, not merely as an observer, and a requirement that this union representative be from the department where the vacancy is so that they will bring their own greater knowledge to the participation process.

So these provisions, new as of 1993, we think have even strengthened, strengthened our ability to ensure that we have a very professional public service, that those who are being hired and placed in positions are the very best for the position, based on fair hiring practices.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Minister, I believe the *Estimates* book shows there's 9,603.7 full-time equivalents of people in all departments. Would you have the breakdown of how many of these people would be between classified and unclassified?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, if I could ask the member's indulgence, we do not have the exact numbers here but we can get them for him. I can reassure him that the unclassified will be a very small percentage of that total of 9,600 people who work for government. The unclassified will be a very small percentage. We can get the exact number. We don't have it here tonight.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Minister. The unclassified, by being a small percentage, are we talking several hundred, any kind of a guess?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, it would be less than . . . we think it would be less than 200 in total out of the 9,600 government employees. So whatever that works out to — 1 or 2 per cent.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Minister. That's all the questions that I have on this area tonight. Thank you to the officials as well.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Minister, to you and your officials. I was listening with some interest to the dialogue between yourself and the other members. And that dialogue brought to mind a few questions

here that I'd like to sort of just get into for a minute.

Now you talk about the fact that you hire people for all of the government necessities, and in that hiring process there would be a considerable amount of money that is spent for training and for re-education programs and that sort of thing. Now I guess that would come under staffing and development.

And in that area of development, what sort of courses are provided for new applicants; and how many people are trained after they have been hired; and what type of training would they receive?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, that's a very broad question. I think the member will understand that departments individually will be doing training with their employees on an ongoing basis. There would be some training provided to some employees of the . . . or through the Public Service Commission to some employees of government. What we could do . . . we do not have sort of the statistics of the numbers of people who've been trained.

We can provide for the member, if you give us a little time, an inventory of all the training opportunities that happen within government. But that too would be a fairly, I think, a fairly extensive project to find all those training programs. But if the member desires, we can produce that.

(2015)

Mr. Goohsen: — Well thank you, Minister. We will accept your offer to provide that information. I believe . . . probably it may not be as onerous as you would think because, after all, you must have records that probably somebody with a little knowledge would be able to tap into as to how much money you're spending on training programs within the public service. After all, you had to come up with your estimates from somewhere and they should be based on some facts. And of course they are under one of the major headings and it does look like we've got probably something like \$1.9 million being spent in that area. So somebody must know what's going on over there, so we'll presume that you can supply us with that type of information.

Because it's always possible that in doing this research you may actually help yourself, as minister of this department, to determine where there may be some overlapping. As you have mentioned yourself, some of the departments do their own training and of course that is funded through other areas.

We may in fact find that we're duplicating some training programs and have people studying the same thing twice. And of course I think your government has dedicated itself to the principle of cutting down on duplication of services and to streamline the cost of government. So maybe we can be helpful in that way, by allowing you a chance to find out if in fact that's happening.

I was wondering, how many openings do you presently have that you are looking for employment . . . people to fill?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — On average, Mr. Chair, there would be about 400 vacancies in government generally — 3 or 4 per cent of the total employees would be . . . positions would be vacant.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Now suppose I'm a young fellow just coming out of university, or a young lady that I might know might be interested coming out of school, wants to follow a career in the public service direction and find a placement in the government somewhere to try to do some great and wonderful work. Where would that person apply or where would they get an application form?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — For the most part, Mr. Chair, applications would be directed directly to the Public Service Commission. I know the member will be aware that the Public Service Commission, on behalf of departments or authorizing departments, will place advertisements for public sector positions.

The application form — there is a sort of a standard application form available from the PSC. And whenever I've had the question put to me about how one does do this, I simply refer to the application process and I invite individuals to get an application on file and to watch both the career bulletin that's produced by the PSC, advertising positions, and our local dailies and weeklies.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm sure that there are a lot of young people . . . (inaudible) . . . in our province that don't know that and we hope that this information can get into their hands as the school year winds down. And of course we know that there are several young people who have come out of the university system that this year unfortunately don't have employment just yet, and of course that's no secret to anybody in my constituency as well as others. And we're following up every possibility for these young folks to find their niche in life some place, or any place as far as that goes.

So we will pass this information on and along with all of the other information we've gathered on the job opportunities that are available within our province. After all, we don't want to send everybody to Alberta. And if there are some openings, we might just as well have our own young people applying for them.

I was wondering, as you talked about the SGEU and its involvement with the process, must a young person applying for a job become a member of the SGEU before they apply or would they apply after they got a job?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — No. One would become . . . In the organized workplaces in government, you would become a member after you've been employed. I don't believe you could become a — well I'm not sure of this, but I don't . . . It would be difficult to become a member before you even applied. Your membership would come with your employment.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well I've had people tell me that you've got to become a member of the union in order to get . . . (inaudible) . . . jobs. So I thought we'd just clear the air as to exactly how the process works. And if it's going to give you an easy chance

to get the job, well why not join up ahead of time? I mean you're going to have to anyway. So may as well find out where it's at.

We want to talk to you, Mr. Minister, about the . . . under — what page is that? — 110 here; I'm on that section no. 2 there. And it says you've got some renovation services here. And the obvious question is, for what? What do you renovate that falls under the jurisdiction of SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation)?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I want to reassure the member that, you know, be careful because — note the words — that we've only budgeted here for minor renovation services. We want to be open. You know we want to let people know what's going on here.

But it's minor renovation services. If you want to move a wall or if you change a rug around or something; that's all we're talking about here. We're not talking about buildings or anything like that. So it's very minor renovation. In fact we don't have here exactly what we do with this. It would be a pretty small amount of money.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Mr. Minister, thank you. But I didn't really hear an answer there.

I got to say though that, in quite frankness, I have seen a United Church minister that thought a minor renovation meant replacing the church, and that's exactly what happened.

So now what is minor to you may be a pretty big project to me. So I wonder, Minister, if you could be a little more specific about these minor renovations. Because after all, it says this whole million dollars here is being targeted to go for Property Management Corporation office accommodation. It goes to them.

You're paying another government branch for your accommodation or your offices. You must have some pretty swank offices or sure a big pile of people some place because I only find two and a half pages in this whole section . . . this whole department doesn't even take up two pages in the book, and yet we've got accommodations for the people that run it that take up a million dollars worth of costs.

And so if there's no renovations, and they're very minor — and don't cost much, I presume, if they're minor — then you must be paying that money all for rent to the Property Management Corporation. Maybe you're renting offices you don't even need, you see. We've got to have you take a look at this.

So maybe you can check with your officials and find out how much space you're providing and how many people you've got in those spaces, where they're at — which parts of the cities or which cities — are you spread out through the province?

Now you also talked about mail services and records management. Well of course that's important stuff, but I can't really see where you could spend a million dollars unless you're doing an awful lot of more work, you know, in your

department here than would be obvious on the surface. It just doesn't look like a real high, record-requiring function of government here. But maybe I'm wrong. So I'd like you to explain to us just how all this money manages to get spent.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I think the member understands that — since I believe it was when his party was in office that this was established — that we now have something called the Property Management Corporation which handles all of the government properties. And we simply pay our accommodation fee to Property Management, who make the arrangement for the space that we occupy.

In the budget of the million fifteen, \$976,000 is the budget for accommodation rental, the amount of money that we are obliged to pay to Property Management for the space that we have here in Regina and in Saskatoon; \$34,500 is the budget for postage, and records management, \$4,500. And our projections right now is we don't even have any money budgeted in here for minor renovations. Now if we have to move a rug, I guess we'll absorb that somewhere in the other budgeted amounts.

But the bulk of that money is payment to Property Management for the space here in Regina and the space in Saskatoon.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Mr. Minister, I'm glad you're not doing a lot of renovation, but then that does present another problem for us because here we are with you paying Saskatchewan Property Management an awful lot of money.

Now who determines what's fair market value or what's fair property value to be paying to them? How much space are you leasing from Property Management and how do you know that you're paying a reasonable fee for that?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, we rent three floors of the Bank of Montreal Building here in Regina, and office space in the Sturdy Stone Building in Saskatoon.

The member, I think, has a fair question, probably best addressed to the Property Management Corporation who goes about the process of leasing this space or maintaining leases which they inherited. I know that Property Management has done some very thorough review of leasing costs for the government. And I do believe they're working as hard as they possibly can to get the very best deal for the taxpayer that they can get in the markets in which we must lease accommodation.

I would trust that the \$900,000, the \$976,000, would represent fair market value for leased property in downtown Regina and Saskatoon.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Mr. Minister, maybe I can make another point for you. If it's going to cost you \$900,000 to rent space in downtown Regina and Saskatoon, and I'm going to presume you must have about equal space in both places, and if monies like this is going to be going out, like that's about \$400,000 going to the Bank of Montreal, maybe, in Saskatchewan — you'll correct these figures I know, to get them more accurate — but it seems to me a horrendous amount of money to be paying for space. So I'm suggesting to you one

very simple solution. Why don't you move out of downtown Regina and get to the outskirts where you can rent something a lot cheaper? Any chance that you could review these leases and get more reasonable accommodation and save the taxpayers some money?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I hope the member had an opportunity to discuss these matters with the minister responsible for SPMC. Some of us might take that very same point of view. Oh, I should just say at the outset that the bulk of the space is here in Regina, that the three floors at the Bank of Montreal represent the vast majority of the space the PSC uses. I think it's much smaller office space in Saskatoon, the Sturdy Stone.

But I again would say that I may very well share the point of view of the member, hoping that we might escape some of these leases. But you'll understand some of these leases have been signed and exist for many years, and the cost of exiting the lease I think would be disadvantageous to the taxpayer.

I know that Property Management has worked very hard to secure the very best, the very best, accommodation for the very best price on behalf of the taxpayer.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Mr. Minister, you just never know about these leasing arrangements. Now it didn't take the government more than a few minutes to figure out how to break 60,000 contracts with farmers in the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) program retroactively, deeming them never to have existed. So I don't suppose leases with a few banks really would hold you back a whole bunch if you really seriously wanted to get out of them. And of course you can legitimately and legally buy your way out of leases as well.

So I think probably what we have to do is talk to you a little bit about how these leases become effective, and why you accept that kind of accommodation. As minister of the Public Service Commission I think you must have something to say about whether or not you would stay in that accommodation. You might simply say to Saskatchewan Property Management, we don't think this accommodation is suitable because it's far too elaborate, far too fancy, and far too expensive for our department. Move us to something cheaper.

I have a suspicion that they would have to comply with your wishes as the minister. Is that not so, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the member might be interested to know that in the late '80s . . . I can't give him perhaps the exact year or month, but in the late '80s under the former administration, in fact, we had occupied publicly owned space. And under the direction of the former government, the whole Public Service Commission was moved into this privately owned space, and lease arrangements struck.

Now there would be many of us who think some of those arrangements made at that time have not served the taxpayer well. However, we've done I think our best, since coming to government, to straighten out some of these arrangements and achieve for the taxpayer the best deal possible. But that's what

got us into some of these leases, and it'll be a while, I think, before we're going to renegotiate or get out of them.

Mr. Goohsen: — So, Mr. Minister, this intrigues me because I wasn't here in the 1980s, so maybe you'll enlighten me a little bit about this process.

Now what possible gain could there have been for the past administration to want to go this route? Perhaps you'll explain to me what motivated them to do this dastardly deed that you discuss.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I can neither, nor will I, speak for the former administration. I think the member who puts the questions would have a little better access to some of those answers from some of his current and former colleagues.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well now, Minister, in all honesty by association and implication, you have suggested that something of a rather shady deal went on here. And I'd like you to tell the world and me what that was all about. I mean did they lease property that they shouldn't have? Did they overpay for it? Were they paying somebody kick-backs or something? I mean there's all kind of things that come to mind. Would that be possible?

What are you suggesting, Minister, that went wrong in the '80s that tied you to this leasing program that you don't like so much?

(2030)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I'm sure the member doesn't want my speech on what went wrong in the '80s.

Mr. Chair, the member began his line of questions by suggesting that we should get ourselves out of some of this privately owned, bank-held properties. I'm explaining to the member how we got into those properties. Now if he wants to know why that decision was made, I tell you, this is not the place to ask that question.

An Hon. Member: — Sure it is.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well I could give you my speculation, but I won't do that. He can go directly to the horse's mouth and find out for himself how this happened.

I just want to reassure the member that the Property Management Corporation, which is not under estimate tonight, but that the Property Management Corporation, I know, has been very diligent about seeking the best possible deal for the taxpayers of Saskatchewan in the rental accommodation that government must have.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Mr. Minister, I think you really should take a few minutes to explain what your suggestions and speculations were. Because to suggest wrongdoing may have happened and then not to be willing to discuss it leaves the people with the impression that there may in fact be something that you know about the process that should be corrected, or

should have been corrected.

And I think it's only fair that you tell the taxpayers of this province what you think was done that was perhaps immoral or illegal or unacceptable in the process of these leases. I mean come on now. You made a vague kind of in the grey area suggestion that there's something here that is amiss. So let's get it out in the open. Let's talk about it and straighten it out.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, to use the member's train of logic here . . . Please get this, Mr. Chair. A few moments ago he suggested the United Church ministers call small renovations tearing down the church and building a new one. Now I'd like the member to get up and explain how he can justify to the United Church of Canada that ministers go around knocking down churches and calling it minor renovations.

Now if I want to find out something about the processes or the behaviours of United Church ministers, I think I should go and talk to my colleagues in the United Church. If the member wants to know why decisions were made in the 1980s to go from publicly funded and owned accommodation into leased accommodation in bank buildings and other places, I think the place he should go is to his political colleagues and friends.

I make no accusation here; I simply state the fact. He complains about this fact that we're into this private accommodation. I explained the fact to the member that we weren't until the late 1980s, when those decisions were made that moved us into those accommodations on a long-term lease. And if he wants to know all about this, I know where he should go to find out.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Mr. Minister, you suggest that, by the very tone of your conversation and the way you've delivered your answer, that you know the reasons. And you say I should go some place else to find out. Well if you know the answers, why don't we find out from you? After all, I honestly don't know who else would know the answers.

Unlike you, I'm not privy to a lot of people that have a lot of information about what went on in the '80s. And as you discussed this issue, you suggested to me that when I said the accommodation seemed awfully expensive, you said . . . basically I think you said you agreed — you think they're too expensive. But you more or less said then, but it's not our fault; it was the former administration. They got stuck into a bad deal of some kind.

Well tell us what that bad deal was. Why would you say it was a bad deal? How come you think it was too much money? And how much too much do you think your accommodations is really costing you? If you had the chance to do the lease over today, how much would you pay?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I'm trying to reassure the member that I sincerely believe that the Property Management Corporation has done an excellent job, given some of the circumstances, in securing as good a deal for the taxpayers as can be done. If the member wants to pursue the activities of the Property Management Corporation, I think he had lots of opportunity in the estimates to do that.

He will know that every department of government is working with the Property Management Corporation, who does the accommodation for government. If he wants to know about arrangements that were made in the 1980s, I suggest he talk to those who made those arrangements.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I think I'm starting to clear the fog of a greyness here now because it seems to me now you're saying that I should talk to Saskatchewan Property Management about this because they would know more about it. But of course, you see, when we talk to them they say, well you should talk to the minister of the Public Service Commission to find out why he needs such big amount of space, and why he needs such big accommodation; because he comes to us and says we need such a space, and such an amount of accommodation, and we need it centrally located in downtown Regina, or downtown, and then our job is to go out and find that.

It's not our job to question why the minister has asked for it, it's our job to go out and get what he asked for. So obviously now, we've got a chicken and an egg situation again where both sides are telling us we have to ask the other side why we got this accommodation.

But I am happy about the way that you are addressing the issue of the '80s because I really wouldn't want to have to see you apologizing in the House, as some members earlier today did, for making false accusations about things that were done wrong in the past. Because we know very well that an awful lot of the political rhetoric that we hear to get elected in election time really is just that. And when we put people on the spot to decide exactly in real terms to tell us how these things were illegal, or improper, even immoral, they are hard-pressed to do that because it was political rhetoric that was determined to be used in order to win an election.

And that's fair ball if you're doing that. But the suggestion to keep on saying that there were some serious, dark, sinister plot in the past that caused you all to have these leases stuck to you and that there must have been somebody that got a whole bunch of money for nothing, I mean I've been hearing these stories like forever since I got into politics. And I've yet to hear anybody point out one specific case that you could prove that somebody got extra money they shouldn't have had, or that there was actually any basis in fact for these sinister kind of suggestions that are made by all of the people in the NDP (New Democratic Party) benches.

So, Mr. Minister, I take it that most probably this was nothing but political rhetoric intended to try to sway the vote in the general public, because this is your opportunity to come right out and tell the folks what you know, and what you believe, and we will quite gladly join with you in finding some kind of an RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) member that might want to go into digging up this whole mess and dredging it up, and maybe we can even get to the facts of finding out if somebody was guilty of doing something wrong, for a change.

And if not of course, maybe we can bury this and get on with life and talk about how we can get out of these accommodations

in downtown Regina that are costing you really a fortune for office space. Not that they're probably not good offices because I have never been in them as far as I know. Maybe I went through and wasn't aware of where I was. But if you have a picture of me down there some day, don't hold it against me because I really didn't know that I was in the building doing that particular thing for that reason or looking for those offices that you occupy.

But really, Minister, what you need to do is try to save the people some money here. And I think that if you were to put these offices, say in Swift Current in the ACS (Agricultural Credit Corporation of Saskatchewan) office that has just been announced is going to be closed down, there'd be nothing wrong with having that out and to fill up that office. I bet you could rent that for 25 per cent of the cost that you're presently spending, maybe even less.

So, Mr. Minister, I think I should allow you to respond.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, if there were a question in the member's comments, I missed it. Perhaps he could repeat the question.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Mr. Minister, how long are your leases for; when can you get out of them; and do you think you could possibly negotiate to get some cheaper accommodation?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I tell you what. Perhaps the member's confused. This is not the estimates of the Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation. We do not bring here tonight information about all the leases being held by government. This would be the estimates of the Public Service Commission tonight.

Now if the member is interested in this particular lease, I'm sure I can contact the minister responsible for SPMC and the minister in SPMC will provide for the member the exact terms of this lease, its duration, and how it compares with other properties in Regina.

I want to say to the member though, he needs to be clear about how property is assigned. SPMC, Property Management Corporation, establishes standards for the departments of government. These standards are based on the number of employees and the kind of work they do. Under that standard we will be allotted a certain amount of space. It's not up to the PSC or any other department of government to go out and provide for itself lavish office accommodation or excessive office accommodations. We all work within a standard that's established by SPMC.

Mr. Goohsen: — But, Minister, you've made my point. It doesn't matter if that standard is matched in downtown Regina or on the outskirts of Regina or in Swift Current, as long as those standards are matched. And you've said by your own admission I think, here, that you really have no lease. SPMC has a lease and they simply let you move in and use it and you pay them some money, whatever they tell you to pay. But you don't have a lease. You're not responsible for the lease. Obviously if you don't have a lease, then you're bound to

nothing. You signed nothing. You don't have to stay. So pack up your bags and let's get out of town. We can go somewhere else and get a smaller office and a better location where the prices are cheaper, either Swift Current, Yorkton — take your pick. I mean all around the town. I mean around the province, any place. I mean . . .

Downtown Regina has got to be the highest priced accommodation you could possibly be getting, and they tell me that there's scads of offices up for grabs around Regina. I mean that's what the real estate folks have been telling us — all kind of space is available.

So, Mr. Minister, don't you think that you have now the right to move if you choose to? Just in case you missed that question, Mr. Minister, I'm asking you if you think you have a right to move now that you don't have a lease and that you haven't signed anything?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Chair, the member will know that decisions of securing accommodation for any function of government are not simply based on where you can get the cheapest rate. I mean obviously one has to take into account the work that's being done in a department or a service of government. You wouldn't likely lease in Wood Mountain a centre for northern forest fighting even if the space was a give-away. You have to match your needs, both in terms of your budget but also in terms of the service you provide.

Now obviously Regina, being the capital city and the centre of government, the PSC has a fundamental work to do here. That may not be true of other services or departments of government, but I would argue that the PSC has a natural home in the capital city.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Minister, you made my point again. Then tell me why do we have an office in Saskatoon? Why are they important? They're not the capital of the province. They're not the centre of your universe then, not the centre of government. Why do we have one in Saskatoon? And if we can justify one in Saskatoon, how come we can't justify one in Swift Current or Yorkton?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, as I said initially tonight, that one of the responsibilities of the Public Service Commission is to serve the departments of government. That's its fundamental role: to serve the departments of government. The departments of government are essentially headquartered in the capital city. That would come as no surprise. There is a small, as I said before, small office in Saskatoon, being our other major centre and serving essentially the north of the province.

But the bulk of the work of the Public Service Commission is to direct human resources to the departments of government, and naturally that happens in the capital city.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Mr. Minister, the first question of course is how small is small now? We talked about minor renovations a while ago, but how small is small? How big is your office in Saskatoon? And you just said now that the reason you have these offices is to serve the needs of the government.

And in this case your need that you are serving is to provide employees.

Now because the government is centred in Regina you need to supply those employees through the Regina office. Okay. Then what have you got an office in Saskatoon for? What government departments are you specifically serving with employees out of that office that couldn't be done in Regina? Why wouldn't you just fold your operation in Saskatoon? Or is that just politically expedient, to have an office in Saskatoon so that they feel a part of the province, seeing as how they've got the next biggest centre for votes?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, again, to go back to some of your earlier comments. The PSC provides the policy framework and the staffing processes. Departments themselves will do hiring. The bulk of the PSC's work in advising departments and setting up the staffing processes, and then managing the various issues that face employees of government, essentially happens in the capital city. There are of course regional operations of government around the province, and so there is some sense that you have some employees in Saskatoon, the other major centre in our province. But this is a function essentially internal to government, advising departments of government.

And if I may say, as we compare the record in Saskatchewan, the Public Service Commission is a commission that had its roots in the 1940s, that has maintained a Public Service Commission that we can all — a public service in Saskatchewan that we can all — be very proud of; has done that work through successive changes of governments over these years.

The PSC I believe has served the population of, the people of, Saskatchewan very well, and it's something I think we should be very proud of.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Minister. Well let's share this pride by finding out exactly what it is we should be proud of.

Now I'm of the opinion that some of the services that you talk about must be things like pension plans and benefit plans. Are we on the right track there, and if so, could you tell us what kind of pension plans and benefit plans you are administering, or how you help the people that you are serving with those processes?

(2045)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the pension plans for government employees are administered by PEBA (Public Employees Benefits Agency), and that's through the Department of Finance.

Mr. Goohsen: — So, Minister, now I'm let down again, because one of the things I almost thought you might be doing that was constructive, you no longer take care of that either. So I'm having really a problem finding out why this department even exists at all now, after we've discussed this matter with you for some time.

We not only have offices that we can't justify, we can't figure out what the people there are doing because they don't really have any direct input into anything, and they don't have any direct responsibility over anything. Each department sort of says what they want and gets it, but you don't know quite for sure how you fit into the scheme of things. And the rest of us are becoming quite confused as to why you're spending \$1 million in this department.

You can't figure out why you can't have office space some place cheaper. You suggest all kinds of rhetoric about how the past is biting you at the heels, and you can't shed it. But then when we question you harder on it, we find out that no, you don't even have a lease. You're not compelled to pay anybody anything. But yet you suggest in the next line of conversation that, well you just can't get out of it. It's sort of your responsibility. Well maybe you ought to just say, enough. We don't want any more of this. We'll move everybody out of those offices and shut the program down because you realistically haven't been able to show that you're doing very much.

At first you claimed that you had some employees that you had to hire. Now we can't find out for sure if you're training them or if you're hiring them or if the departments do it on their own and only use you as a vehicle, as a rubber stamp. We're trying to find out, Minister, seriously how do you justify having your department?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, let me say again that Saskatchewan has been well, well served through a succession of governments since the 1940s by the Public Service Commission to ensure that we have a professional, qualified public service that serves the people of our province.

The member wants to know what the Public Service Commission does. Well let me just reference him to the annual report. It's public. It's public. It's delivered to the member at his request. It'll be delivered to his desk in the House at his request if he should want it. If he would just read the annual report, I'm sure he would gain a better understanding of the work of the Public Service Commission.

And perhaps for the member's benefit, I won't at length read from the report, but let me just highlight functions of the Public Service Commission. They fall under three general categories: the categories of staffing and development; administration and information services; and the third category, employee relations.

Under staffing and development, these are the staffing services for the departments of government. We handle, through the Public Service Commission, all of the student employment and hiring across the province. We, under staffing and development, administer the employee assistance program. We have the Saskatoon regional office of which we spoke. We continue to staff development process here, and we have human resource planning. Under administrative and information services, these are the administrative services: the information services, the record management which is a huge job, the human resource services, the financial services, and

communications.

Under employee relations — and note this list — responsible for collective bargaining, grievance and arbitration, contract interpretation, compensation and benefits, classification services, classification appeals, and organizational design. Mr. Chair, this is a major undertaking which has been done by the Public Service Commission for the last 40 and 50 years with a degree of professionalism. And in terms of its hiring practices, when audited by the Provincial Auditor, the Provincial Auditor in his report says that the staffing process used by the PSC staffing development division meets "a high professional standard of service and is in general compliance with legislative requirements of collective agreements."

So everyone in the province gives very high marks to the Public Service Commission. I think it should be something we should be very proud of.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, Mr. Minister, I want to thank you for finally taking the time to get serious about your department and showing us that it actually does have a good, realistic purpose for existing. And I'm glad that I was able to hear you put into words something that we can tangibly hang onto, that we can understand that this department does. And it does seem like you do do a reasonably good service, so I take back my suggestion that you should disband the whole department.

But I do believe you should look at some cheaper accommodation for your offices. I think you could do better. I know in fact that in Swift Current, they've got office space that's available that . . . I guarantee you that we could work day and night to find you at least half-price accommodation that would save probably 2 or \$300,000.

You could likely hire another 25 to 50 students in the province so that they could get an education next year and have some employment doing something constructive around our province. There are so many jobs to be done if we just had a little money to pay them, and they could feel good about themselves. And I know that you will want to work on that because I know that your past life's experiences have put you in a position where you want to help people. So I would suggest to you, Minister, there's a way that you can save some money in your department and hire some more of these students so that they can have jobs this summer, and we'd all feel a lot better about it.

But my colleagues say they have some other important questions, so I will thank you for your time and let them carry on.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome this evening, Mr. Minister, and to your officials. Mr. Minister, the Public Service Commission is the central human resource agency for executive government, and it's tasked with the responsibility of coordinating recruitment and employment equity programs for the Government of Saskatchewan, from what I understand.

There is one group, Mr. Minister, that has a particular interest in

the employment equity program, and it is the Regina People First association, whose president is Don Thibault. They're particularly interested with inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the equity employment program.

They have, however, run into a great deal of difficulty, they claim, when they submit a request to any department that they've gone through in government for assistance with employment. They are told to submit applications for work to the Department of Labour and the Public Service Commission, and they say that that just has not worked for them.

They are particularly frustrated with what's happening here. And so they asked me to question on whether or not your government is going to follow the advice of the Human Rights Commission that stated that the goal of 9.7 per cent of the workforce should include people with disabilities and that can be done through the employment equity program.

So, Mr. Minister, do you think that this percentage will ever be attainable or achievable?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I thank the member for her question and the concern that she brings. In the equity program we are seeking to reach targets within the public service, and this would represent targets for women in management and non-traditional positions, targets for persons of aboriginal ancestry, targets for persons with disabilities, and targets for members of visible minority groups.

I can report to the member that we've made progress. We've not yet reached the targets. In terms of disabilities, for instance, we do have a target of over 9 per cent, reflecting, I would say, generally the percentage of the population. So we do see that as our target. We have not met that target. We began in March of '91. At that point in time, 2.3 per cent of the public service would fall under the category of persons with disabilities. We have made slow but steady progress, so that in March of this year 3.3 per cent of the public service are now persons with disabilities, in that targeted group. So we've only, in this group, achieved a 1 per cent increase and we have a fair ways to go.

We have achieved greater increases in other areas of equity targeting. For instance, in persons of aboriginal ancestry, in March of '91, we began at 2.9 per cent of the total public service. That now is up to 6.5 per cent, so we've had some more success there. In terms of women in management, we started at 26.1 per cent; we're now up to 32.7 per cent. In terms of women in government, total, we're about the same percentage. So we're making progress. In terms of persons with disabilities, the progress has been steady but it's not as fast as I think you, or I, or others, would like us to see.

If I may say, a recent development that encourages me is that the disabled community generally in the province, have come together now under a provincial organization or an umbrella group, PIND (provincial interagency network of the disabled). And I'm looking forward, and I think that we as government are looking forward, to working with this provincial interagency network on this issue and many issues that face the disabled.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, when people with intellectual disabilities, some of them severe, some of them not so severe — and I can understand some difficulty that your departments may have in placing these people — but when they come in asking for opportunities for employment, do you still refer them to the Disabilities Directorate? They claim, when they talk to me, that they are being advised to register with the Disabilities Directorate. And they said that they have done that for years. And they say that they feel that government is really not serious about helping them or they would issue a directive requiring the departments to hire a certain percentage of people with cognitive disabilities in places where they can function.

They further say that it is obvious that some of the training programs have not resulted in permanent employment or even part-time employment, so they make some suggestions and recommendations that they have asked me to pass on to you.

They would like you to do a follow-up of the success of some of these training programs. They feel that the government must lead the way for the private sector employers by changing possibly government's own discriminatory attitude. They say, actions speak louder than words. They claim that just having a Disabilities Directorate who say pious words about encouraging employers to hire them has never really worked, nor is it going to change things unless a directive by the government makes the percentage of 9.7 per cent, the goal that's stated by the Human Rights Commission, mandatory, especially in your own administrative departments.

So could you comment for me, please, Mr. Minister, on that, on those comments by the people from Regina People First association.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Very specifically we have not, Mr. Chair, taken the position that we would issue directives to departments to insist that each department hire a certain number of specific individuals. We've taken the approach that we set targets, we set goals, and we work towards those targets and goals.

The member, I think, will understand, knowing that as a result of a number of tough budgets over the last few years, that in fact the size of the public service is not expanding — in fact it has shrunk; it is a smaller public service today than some years ago. And when you're in the process of shrinking the public service, it becomes that much more challenging to find success as you move towards your equity goals.

All of that said, you ask some important questions, and the People First group asked some important questions about the effectiveness of training programs — do they in fact result in long-term employment, whether it be in the public or the private sector. They ask an important question around the leadership that the public sector can or should play in the market-place towards equity programs. They would ask the important questions about the disability directory to the inventory that has been kept in government.

Perhaps it would be more than appropriate, and something I

have not had the opportunity to do, but would be perhaps more than appropriate if I were to meet with the People First group here, either/or its provincial umbrella organization. I know some members of People First in Moose Jaw where we could have a more thorough conversation about this and get their ideas on how in some of these circumstances we can better achieve our goals.

I'm also again encouraged by the establishment of PIND, who will be representing the wider disabled community, because many of the issues, while different, are similar as we look at these equity issues.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I would be very pleased to give you the name and address of the president of People First. I have it with me and I would appreciate you giving them a call because I know that they are a concerned and frustrated people.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, and thank you to your officials for assisting tonight.

(2100)

Item 1 agreed to.

Items 2 to 4 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 33 agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I just want to take this opportunity to extend our thanks to the officials that have been in the House tonight and assisted us in our discussions, but also through them, to thank all of the staff over at the Public Service Commission for the work they do for government and for the people of our province. And if I may say, they've had some very, very challenging times in these last years and this year too, and they have served us very, very well. So our thanks to them.

**General Revenue Fund
Social Services
Vote 36**

The Chair: — I would ask the minister to introduce his officials, please.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — We're joined again, Mr. Chair, by . . . from our last point in time we're joined tonight by the deputy minister, Mr. Con Hnatiuk. Tonight we have with us Neil Yeates, who is associate deputy minister; Bob Wihlidal, director of the budget bureau; and Phil Walsh, executive director of income security.

Item 1

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to your officials this evening, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Minister, I just wanted to ask a few questions about the treatment program that will be transferred from the Whitespruce

Centre to the Calder Centre in Saskatoon as I understand is the plan. Will the . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I should go with that to Health?

An Hon. Member: — Yes, it's a health program. They fund it, move it. I mean if you have something that applies, we'll try and answer it, but it is Health.

Ms. Julé: — All right. Okay, I shall comply with that. Mr. Minister, I've had some concerns from employers that are concerned that the training program through New Careers has done I guess a pretty fair job, but they say that there has been some omissions possibly in the training. Because they find — this is a particular hair salon — they find that they have people coming in to work who have been trained through New Careers, and they have been trained well in techniques, but after a few days of just showing up for work for a couple of days, they don't seem to have the skills to be able to stay at work. They don't seem to want to stay at work, and they quit after a few days, and then it is heard that these people have reapplied for social assistance.

Now do you have any understanding of what the New Careers program offers? Does it offer anything where people are trained to be responsible to their employers and their clients?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the New Careers, while we certainly have much . . . we retain much interest in New Careers as a functioning program, responsibility now for New Careers is with the Minister and Department of Post-Secondary Education and the New Career officials will be serving him. I do appreciate the member's concern. And certainly the questions, we'll be sure that gets passed on to officials and the minister.

New Careers has served us very, very well and, I think the member agrees, continues to. There may be room for need to encourage those who have been through New Careers training to not just learn the skills of employment, but to learn the skills of sort of ongoing commitment to the employer where you begin.

I had the happy experience this morning of being in downtown Regina to participate in the grand opening of the new office space for the Mobile Crisis Services and they are located in Regina's old fire hall. And the renovations to allow this to happen was renovations provided through New Careers.

And one of the happiest stories we heard down there this morning was the project was a little delayed in getting completed because not one, but six, of the New Careers individuals working on that project were lifted from that project into active employment by the carpenters' union. So even before their training was finished, even before that job was done, they were lifted out and put into employment.

It's six — there's lots more to do, but that's six very happy stories. But I hear the member's concern about it's not just the training we may need, the actual job skills, but also sort of some of the life skill issues and commitment to employment, and we'll be sure that gets on to the minister of the department.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, maybe I should reword the question that I'm going to give you. It is claimed that these people reapply for social assistance, so my questions to you is. when they come for social assistance and it is . . . is there any follow-up or is there any looking into the fact that they may have quit their job after a few days? And if they do quit their job, are you allowing them to have social assistance again or is there some kind of insistence on the government's department here that these people have to in fact go back and stay with their job?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, under the regulations for social assistance, SAP (Saskatchewan Assistance Plan), we require that you make every, every effort to find or to keep employment. If you voluntarily leave employment without cause, then you will be denied benefits, and it has been the practice of our appeal boards, when these cases are brought forward to appeal boards, they've been fairly consistent in maintaining that policy.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, just another line of thought here. I have heard and I reinstate that — it's just heard — that there are some social service recipients that have been in a particular city in this province, have been not able to cash their cheques in specific banks or any other place because they don't have any credentials and so it's very difficult for them to cash their cheques, and that there are pawnshops in Saskatoon and Regina that in fact take these cheques, take a certain percentage off of these cheques, and leave the social service recipients with considerably less than what the cheque was issued for in the first place. Has there been any effort on your government's part to have some sort of a card or whatever that would grant these people a passage into banks to have cheques cashed so that they wouldn't have to have such a deduction from their cheques by passing them through pawnshops, etc.?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — What we've really been trying to do, Mr. Chair, is encourage many of our clients to establish a direct deposit system so that their cheque is directly deposited in their account. What that means is they would have to have the identification to go and establish the direct deposit, but once that's in place, then it's complete and all of that hassle is just wiped out.

We really try and discourage any of our clients from going to the cheque-cashing operations, the pawn operations, those who will charge a fee to cash a cheque. We don't . . . I mean the benefits are not large, and we sure don't want to see any of those benefits being used up in some of these circumstances. So we've tried to encourage as best we can — with some success, I think — the utilization of direct deposit.

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Minister, have you any documentation or anything at all like that that would indicate what the percentage is of people that are getting their cheques deposited directly right now?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I think, Mr. Chair, we're up to between 10 and 15 per cent. Now this will not . . . we will also have, as the member will know, those others who have trusteeship,

where their funds will be handled by a trustee. But this will be clients . . . so it's now up to 10 to 15 per cent. So the number is significant already.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, there's one other area of concern that has been brought to me that I'd like to just question you a bit on. This is in regards to, I think, parents who are trying to take care of their own disabled children in their home, the mentally disabled.

They claim that . . . some of them have started approved group homes. They have up to four young adults in them and they get very little support from Social Services, whereas they say that Social Services says that they just don't have the money to really support them that well, but they seem to be able to give it to places like Elmwood home for the mentally disabled.

Now this lady's point of contention is that these places, places like Elmwood and so on, seem to be bigger, larger institutional organizations and they seem to have a monopoly on the funds. Could you comment on that for me, please.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, in fact, while I suppose it could be argued that there are never enough resources — and I know we often feel that way — we have been able, in this budget year, in addition to the last budget year, in fact providing some new funding for the group homes. In this budget year we're talking about 500,000 new dollars to try and assist in this regard.

We've had a long-established process now in the province of moving towards deinstitutionalization, believing that for many of our brothers, sisters, friends, neighbours, the smaller group home, community living, is better than the large institution. Not to say that we still don't have need for the large institution, but we've had a long history of moving towards community-based.

(2115)

We will work with the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living to establish these circumstances. And again, to repeat, we've directed some new resources in this budget to that end.

Again, I had a happy experience not long ago of participating in the opening of a new group home for three autistic young men. They will be living in this home with, of course, with appropriate supervision in a neighbourhood. This opportunity comes as a gift, just as a gift, to their parents. They're so thrilled to see this happening for their sons. And so there is progress. Sometimes we wish we could go further faster.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I'll pass the questioning on to my colleague.

The Chair: — Why is the member on her feet?

Ms. Lorje: — With permission, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To you and through you to all members of the Assembly, I would like to introduce three women who are sitting in the Speaker's gallery. One is here to watch to see whether her husband knows how to shepherd his minister through the estimates properly, and I'm referring of course to Glenda Yeates. As well we have Mrs. Rae Yeates from Ontario and her sister, Margaret MacLean, also from Ontario. Glenda of course is from Regina, and I think that she's well known to members in her role as a senior official with the Department of Health.

I would like all members to welcome these three people to this Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Social Services Vote 36

Item 1

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, just coming back to some of the questions that you were answering regarding clients and how they handle their funds as well as the abuses within the system.

And now you're quite well aware, Mr. Minister . . . I believe you were, even on the opposition side of the House were . . . raised the question about an investigation unit that used to exist in this province where there was a unit that was specifically there to follow up and make sure that clients weren't abusing the social assistance program.

And, Mr. Minister, I raise it again because even just most recently I had a constituent call from my constituency. And certainly it's something that I hear on an ongoing basis from individuals — the feeling that there are people who as we even discussed the other day, when it comes to even the use of food banks, there are individuals who may be taking advantage of a program that's in place to help a person in a time of need.

And I'm just wondering, Mr. Minister, what do you have in place today to address that concern? Do we still have a semblance of the investigative unit that was there? And as well, Mr. Minister, maybe I would like to also ask you if you can kind of give us a rough idea of the type of dollars that have been saved just through scrutiny of social service assistance files and claimants to make sure that the funds are indeed going to those in need?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, we share, I'm sure, the desire that the funding that is available for those in need in our province truly meet those who are in need. And to that end, the department has in place, I believe, a very significant range of controls within the system to ensure that the funds are well spent and go to those who are in need.

Now there . . . and there have been changes. There have been changes. Over the period of time that we now have served in government, we have changed the unit that was within the department into some other mechanisms. That unit, if memory serves me correctly, was costing about \$600,000 a year to operate and was achieving only a return of \$280,000. So we felt there were more effective ways to achieve the controls that we all desire.

I perhaps can just run through, without dwelling at length on the number of controls that are now in place. We conduct an annual program audit that will be a sampling, an auditing of a sample, of the social assistance case-load to look for any financial errors or mistakes.

We have worker accountability, and so each worker is responsible and accountable for his or her clients with a variety of tools to assist workers in maintaining accountability. We have verification workers whose tasks it will be to verify client identification, to confirm living arrangements — whether it be through rent receipts or landlord verifications — to require wage stubs to confirm income. We'd have the verification workers checking utility bills and those costs. And our estimate there is that for each dollar invested, that has returned a \$3 return to the department.

There are a whole number of automated system controls now. We have a do-not-forward mail service implemented. We are using enhanced case review with clients. We are using the technology, the computer technologies, to interface our computer programs with other income programs, for instance with unemployment, with student loans. We've just recently finalized a deal now with Revenue Canada, we have it with the Canada Pension Plan, with fire-fighting income. And so we're linking the computers.

We're working on maintenance enforcement, financial service workers, to assist with maintenance enforcement. The list goes on. I won't read it all. There are 17 different programs, projects, and policies which we now have in place that we believe has made our system very, very palatable.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, can you give me any kind of an idea of what figure of actual dollar savings that would have occurred because of these, if you will, safety valves or features you have put in place for the years, say '91 right through '96? It'd be an indication of how well your program is working. I would appreciate that, please.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, we only have with us the numbers for '95-96. We could go back and find those. But the member may be interested for '95-96 and these are rather dramatic figures in some cases.

Through case verifications, the net overpayments, if discovered, were in the order of \$3 million. Through interprovincial matching of computer systems and so on, \$86,000 . . . 87,000 essentially. Through matching with the Canada Pension Plan, again through the computer links, \$636,000. Through the assignment of unemployment insurance benefits, 88,088.7. Through fraud referrals, 891,000. Through following up on

fire-fighting income, 467,000. And for cheques cashed out of province, a net overpayment of 17,000.

And so these controls, they are stringent, and they have I think produced some real benefit.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, when you talk about fire-fighting, what are you talking about there? Are you talking about individuals who are on welfare and then have gone to work in fighting fires and haven't reported that and therefore have collected welfare plus a wage in fighting fires. Is that what you're referring to there?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Essentially yes, Mr. Chair. We see Social Services as the last resort, and other incomes should always be reported and considered income to the family.

Mr. Toth: — Wouldn't you consider fire-fighting as maybe something that New Careers would be working through, or even your department, if there was a need for individuals on the fire lines, that they could certainly contact social assistance and individuals on social assistance who might prefer to be out working, and in that way, Mr. Minister, would save you the problem of indeed having someone go and you're not being aware?

If you're working through the department, coordinating that, you're assisting both the Department of the Environment, as well as your department doesn't have to really go investigating because you're already aware of it. Have you got anything in place to address that right now, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Yes, I'm very happy, Mr. Chair. In fact what the member suggests is exactly what is happening.

There is very good coordination between SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) — the Department of the Environment — Department of Social Services, and New Careers, in the event of fires, that we can encourage and provide opportunity for clients of Social Services in fighting the forest fires or providing the training and then fighting the fires.

So that's happening and we think it's a great idea and it's working.

Mr. Toth: — Was that just recently . . . that program recently worked on? Because when I look at a figure of \$667,000, that's a significant chunk of change. And I'm wondering, are you foreseeing that in the year upcoming that that figure should drop substantially as this program is put in place, or are you still finding that there is this overpayment even though this may have been worked on for the last two, three years?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the member is exactly right. And we're hoping to get our systems so in tune that we can just eliminate this overpayment or bring it down to a very low level.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, another figure that caught my attention was \$891,000 I believe it is. I think you use the term, funds collected in fraudulent ways. Has the department . . . or does the department actively pursue

through legal matters recovery of these funds? Or what's the process of recovery? Or is it an investigative measure that you involve, say, police forces in? Or exactly what are we talking of here and how do you recoup the funds?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Yes, Mr. Chair. The figure that I reported are fraud referrals to the police. This in fact are referrals to the police where charges may be laid and prosecutions can happen. And not regularly but on occasion those charges proceed through the courts, and we'll see the outcome in the public record. So it does happen.

Mr. Toth: — How many cases would you have had, say, in the last year? And maybe give a bit of an example of what we've had, say, in '92-93, '93-94, '94-95, '5 and '6, if you would, please.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I'm sorry, to the member. We don't have back as far as the member asks. We do have tonight with us '95-96, '94-95. In '94-95 there were 242; in '95-96, 103, so a decline but I'm not sure if that's a trend. But over those two years, a decline.

Mr. Toth: — If you will, Mr. Minister, I'd appreciate those figures for the '91 through '96 period just much as before, if you don't have it tonight. For the money collected, maybe present those figures as well.

Mr. Minister, another concern that certainly comes to our attention — it's something that I believe your department has been quite well informed of and we've heard a fair bit about, especially when it comes to the landlords of this province and rental of facilities. And I think the big concern over the past has been the fact that have landlords been getting their payments or getting the money that's been coming to them that Social Services or assistance has made available to recipients.

And I believe what is being done, a lot of that money is being sent direct to the landlord. And I'm just wondering, Mr. Minister, if you can confirm if all payments are made direct or if just part of the payments are made direct. How many complaints do you get from landlords, and how much money would there be, roughly, outstanding that landlords are still waiting for as a result of clients not passing on the rental payment to them?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, in totally 75 per cent of cases, the rent cheques are signed . . . they're joint signature, so they must be signed by the client and by the landlord. And then there will be on top of that those who are under trusteeship where the trustee in fact will be making the payment directly to the landlord. So we've found that the joint signature has gone a long ways in assisting in this problem.

Mr. Toth: — So basically what you're saying then, Mr. Minister, is fully 100 per cent are in some way tied in almost a direct form to the landlord so that the landlord has to sign, or a trustee has to sign. And that money is basically accounted for. It goes direct to make sure that the rental payments are covered.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I don't want to mislead the member. It won't reach the total 100 per cent. There will be a number of people who, over the years, have shown themselves to be very responsible — there just isn't a problem — and/or where their entitlement under welfare won't equal their rent. They have some other sources of income and so on, and theirs is a supplement, so it won't entitle the rent. So it wouldn't come to 100 per cent but fully 75 per cent now are on the co-sign basis.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, one of the major concerns the landlords have brought to this Assembly is the deposit — the deposit on a rental unit. And of course the landlords have been lobbying for the longest time to have an increase in that.

Now I'm not exactly sure how your department views it, because a deposit, I'm sure, would be a major concern especially if you were to offer, or consideration was given to, the one-month deposit in order to cover the problems of having to redo suites. And I guess one of the concerns we get are from landowners who call us, and number one, the minimum 125 that they get for deposit doesn't even hardly buy a good quality gallon of paint or four litres of paint any more.

And the thing is, Mr. Minister, what is your department doing to address this concern? And in view of the fact that there's a reluctance on the government to even move to . . . in giving the landlords more of a down payment, of allowing them to charge more of a down payment, many of the landlords have been pulling some of their rental units off the market which may have a problem even for your department and for individuals finding rental units.

I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, what the department is doing to deal with this, how they're addressing the situation, and whether or not there is a view towards taking a serious look at some of the concerns being raised by the landlords rather than expecting them to carry the whole tab and be left with . . . And I certainly caught it even in my own communities where individuals, renters, have left and one of the greatest complaints actually comes from SAP clients who have left premises and basically haven't given notice. They've just gone and moved, and the premises has been left in very poor shape, and the landlord is left to fix up. And they've not only . . . don't even have much of a deposit to give back because it's eaten up before they hardly start. As well as they've lost that month or two. Generally speaking, you usually give a 30-day notice.

So I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, what your department is doing to address the concern of the landlords and how does this concern affect clients and recipients that you are working with on an annual basis?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the member will know that both the Minister of Justice, who has some legislative responsibility here, and myself have been . . . have met with landlords on this issue. I've had the opportunity to meet with individual landlords and to meet with, in fact, the landlords' association in my own community of Moose Jaw. We recognize that this has been an issue for landlords for some period of time.

Equally, there are many issues here. It's not by any means a single issue. If for instance we would simply raise the damage deposit a significant amount, that would have, you'll understand, some real implications for the budget of the Department of Social Services. As we secure rental accommodation on behalf of people on social assistance, that then has budget implications for the department.

But equally any change, or significant change in the damage deposit, has budget implications for individuals not on social assistance. Other low income individuals, students, seniors, would all be faced, in some cases, for them, significant new cost in securing rental properties.

Equally, we understand the difficulties that landlords have, particularly in circumstances where there has been, we can describe it, a bad tenant. Clearly not all bad tenants are on social assistance, and not all social assistance people are good tenants. We'll find, I think, the same mix in Social Services primarily as you'll find in the general public. Sometimes students will leave a place in a mess. Sometimes folks that you would be surprised, with good incomes, will leave a rented accommodation in a mess. So that is a difficulty for the landlords.

The other side of that coin is that we've seen some examples of landlords who have not provided appropriate accommodation for those to whom they rent. So there's a lot of issues here.

It also takes us then into the broader housing questions that face us as a province. What I can report to the member is that there has been considerable work being done through both the Department of Justice and the Department of Social Services, conversations internal to the government. We've not yet resolved, internal to government, to offer as policy to the public the solution that we seek, but we've been working actively on this and hopefully can come to some conclusions in a foreseeable future.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Mr. Minister, it would appear to me that the landlords certainly have a legitimate case and a legitimate concern to bring forward.

And I also think, Mr. Minister, that even if you did up the rates, the hardship would be that first deposit. And the other thing I think that comes forward is that anyone who's been left with carrying the cost, and the responsibility is placed on them to leave, if you will, to rent and to leave that rental facility the same way they found it, if they don't have much of an obligation as far as a deposit, it's quite easy to just walk away without even making any effort to clean up. Whereas if the deposit was higher, there would be every effort to make sure that property was looked after and that there was some value in it.

And I would suggest to you, Mr. Minister, that that deposit really doesn't become a burden. It's a burden the first time, but if you've become a good tenant and as you move from one property to the other, and you leave that facility in the condition it was when you moved in, that deposit then is available to you to go to the next rental unit and rent it.

And while I can appreciate your comments about the implications it has to the budget for SAP to all of a sudden have to, say put out a month's rent, it would seem to me that maybe an alternative is to look at a staged payment of a larger amount and that would also address the concern of the low income individual who may not be on SAP and the rental problems they may face, Mr. Minister.

So I'm bringing that forward as a suggestion to take a serious look at that, and I trust that between yourself and the Minister of Justice, and certainly your government, that some consideration will be given to this.

I'm just wondering, Mr. Minister, are there cases in this province where individuals have been put up in hotels because they haven't had facilities available or just a short keep. And if so, how many individuals may that be? Is it on a monthly basis or is it just on an evening until a proper facility is located? And how many recipients would have received lodging in hotels as a result of this?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I appreciate the member's comments about the damage deposit, the security deposit issue. I want to reassure him again that we are looking at all the options. I'm including a phased-in option — that would be one — or a trust fund. I think one of the Maritime provinces have established a trust fund for the damage deposits, so we're looking at all the options. And I appreciate his comments.

In terms of hotel accommodation, only the rarest of circumstance in an emergency situation would we put a client into a hotel circumstance and only for a short period of time. However this caveat: there will be clients of ours who will choose — this happens more often I think in smaller communities — to make their residence within a hotel. And that becomes the individual's right to choose. So that does occur, but putting up in hotels would only occur on a rare, rare basis, and hopefully only for a short period of time.

Mr. Toth: — What kind of costs would be associated with a hotel? You mentioned about the odd client that may choose, and I would almost take that that may be a single person that would look at it, maybe someone who doesn't really have family around that may look at a hotel as being a viable home option for them.

And the reason I'm wondering is, because the department does actually have a limit I believe, as far as the maximum they go for rental payment. Would most of the hotel units here where clients are involved fall within that rental arrangement? Or what arrangements are made if the hotel happens to be . . . the rent for that room is more than what your maximum is? What does the department do in those cases?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — No, our clients, not unlike all of us, have to budget with their dollars. We provide the dollars on the basis of a schedule — there'll be so much for rent, so much for food, so much for clothing, and the clients will manage their budget like we try and manage ours.

In fact the rent schedules are set, and so there's no chance that

our clients will be living in any kind of a luxurious hotel accommodation, that's for sure. And many of those who will choose that, choose it freely, will often be single and often male and often older, in choosing that kind of accommodation.

The one example I can think of where we may have to use hotel accommodation on an emergency basis, I think we had one or two families in Saskatoon had to vacate their properties because the city of Saskatoon had come in and condemned the property. And so they are immediately put out and so, in the interim, as new accommodation is sought, we would accommodate in a hotel. But again, a moderately priced situation.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I have to come back to one question, back regarding the investigations unit and some of the problems you may run into.

A concern that certainly in my area has been raised on an ongoing basis is this problem with common law relationships and individuals maybe renting . . . You talk about some of the dubious rental accommodation out there. Well some of it is just almost, if you will, appears to be just a face, if you will, a face, a showcase — like an indication that that person's living there when they actually aren't.

And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, what the department does to try and make sure that people aren't circumventing the program by appearing to live singly and yet really living in a relationship and just having a beat, run-down abode and paying rent there to draw the full SAP assistance that may be available to two individuals with a couple of children each, rather than a couple with four children.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — We do have this entire area of common law relationship and living together under review and some consideration being given to that right now.

I do want to say to the member that sometimes there can be perceptions in the community, in our communities, and not all of those perceptions are accurate. We receive gladly inquiries to our regional offices, to our Social Services offices. We receive gladly from the public any concerns they may have. And they do on a regular basis come to our regional offices, and I can assure the member and the public that each of those concerns are followed up. We do have, as I described earlier, verification officers.

But if I may also say to the member, many of the accusations that do come, upon investigation, are proven not to be true. Folks may think that somebody is on welfare or report that, and they may not have been receiving social assistance for many, many years. I heard of one just the other week.

So some of our perceptions, we always have to check against reality. We do — the workers — and each time a concern is raised, it's followed up. And the result is some of the numbers that we talked about earlier tonight.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Another series of questions. Mr. Minister, are SAP recipients given the opportunity to act as foster parents? Is that program available to

SAP assistance; and if so, can you tell me about roughly how many families would be operating as foster parents, and what kind of dollars we're looking at?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — The answer is yes, Mr. Chair, that recipients of social assistance have every right to apply to become foster parents. We believe that parenting, while it needs certain financial resources, is not just a matter of money, that there's nothing to prevent someone with limited income from being a very good parent.

So yes, the answer is yes, that foster parents can be recipients of social assistance. We do not have a breakdown or a number.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, what kind of screening program is adopted when . . . or utilized? Is your department responsible for this as far as an individual who would be considered for foster . . . being a foster parent? I'm wondering as well, is this considered a job? And who gets preference — couples or single mothers or who really does get the preference?

(2145)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I thank the member for his question and his interest in the whole question of fostering. Before someone applies to be a foster parent, we encourage them to be a part of an information and educational kind of seminar or components so they have what we hope is a good understanding of what fostering is going to mean before they would even apply.

Once individuals have applied, we review their applications and their circumstances to see if they will meet the needs of the child or the children. Remember here, we're talking about children who are coming into care, who are coming into fostering, and very many of these children have some very high needs and come from some very difficult circumstances, and in some cases are pretty difficult young boys and girls, young men and women, to look after.

We also now, and this happens more and more, encourage and want our foster parents to be working with the natural parent, or parents, in this circle. And so these are some very specific demands on people who will offer themselves to foster. We're trying to develop foster parenting, reviewing the applications, with the desire to meet the needs of the child, and in some cases the child's extended family.

The foster parents will receive compensation — it's not payment — it's compensation for caring for the children. We don't particularly look for single parents or married couples as opposed to one another. We're looking for sort of stable homes with good parenting skills that can meet the needs of the children.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I would trust that indeed as you look for individuals or homes where people might be certainly looking at providing a good home atmosphere . . . and I guess I'll use the word loving atmosphere, because you're right, many of these children I think are leaving or have been taken from situations where there had been abuse, and they haven't been looked after, they haven't really been

even probably . . . even felt any kind of love because the parent might be under stress or it's a single parent trying to make it. And so to be a foster parent I think, takes a very special kind of individual.

And it really doesn't — whether they're on . . . under social assistance or whether they have an income of their own — it really doesn't make any difference. If they can provide that home atmosphere, I think it's certainly laudable, or certainly good, to give them the opportunity if they can provide a good home atmosphere for individuals.

And in your opinion, your department's opinion, has there been any major money-saving in including SAP individuals in this foster program? And how successful has the program been through the years?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, whether the family, the parents, the foster parents, were on social assistance or whether they were corporate executives with a large banking institution, the payment for the foster child is the same. And the payment is a matter of compensation for expenses. It's just compensation for expenses. We're having some real challenge within the budgeting of our department, recognizing that this compensation has not changed significantly for some years, and this too is another challenge in doing budget and providing resources to needs.

But just to be clear, it's a matter of compensation, and everybody, no matter what your other economic circumstances, would receive the same compensation.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I think I missed that comment because I remembered you mentioning about compensation. So basically it's assistance to help look after this individual that's in the home, over and above what you would normally get just for your own family to exist.

The other day we talked about child hunger, Mr. Minister, and there were some questions that I didn't quite get to as far as any specifics. And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, and I'm going to give you about three questions here, so maybe if you want to just listen for a minute, rather than go through them all individually.

Are there any child feeding programs in the province that the department is funding? If so, can you give us the names and the level of funding that may be received? And do you have an idea or any statistics of how many children are being assisted by these programs?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, we have now province-wide a total of 118 various projects related to child nutrition and these will be across the province. I have a sheet here that lists the umbrella organizations that provide these programs. Some of these umbrella organizations will be providing a number of programs within their community. It ranges from the Saskatoon Child Hunger and Education Program, the Battlefords Concern for Youth, Nipawin Nutrition for Kids, the Yorkton Friendship Centre, Lestock's Women's Centre . . . I would very happily provide this list to the member if he desired it.

The total amount of money being spent now on these 8 specific child nutrition projects is approximately \$1 million, plus or minus a little bit, approximately \$1 million. And interestingly enough, we estimate now that approximately 1 million meals are being provided to children across the province. We do not have a calculation on how many children that will represent, but in the course of a year this would represent 1 million meals. And even I can do that arithmetic, a million dollars, a million meals — that's about a dollar a meal, which is pretty good use of the public purse I think, for helping out the children of our province.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, how would this compare to say last year's funding for feeding hungry children? And as well, Mr. Minister, does the department provide any kind of training to individuals or families regarding preparing meals and helping people to find ways of maybe providing meals or stretching the dollar so that they can provide adequate food to their families?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, to the member's question. This area at 1991-92, we were able to find approximately \$575,000. We were able in 1993-94 budget to give that about a 35 per cent boost . . . No, check that, a higher boost than that, almost a 50 per cent boost to get it up to the \$1 million mark that's remained about constant since. It went a little over in '94-95 and a little bit under last year. So the expansion in that programing really came in '93-94, but it has essentially doubled since '91-92.

Many of these organizations — I know from my own experience and travels around the province now — many of these organizations are doing just what the member suggests should be done. And that's to provide not simply meals but other experiences in food preparation, in training, in family counselling.

Over here for instance, the Regina Food Bank, they're doing some great work in a community kitchen setting where people come in. I met a group in Saskatoon, again working on a community kitchen project where a number of people come together and prepare bulk meals and food for their families, and so on.

So much of this is happening all across the province. I'm sure if you went to any of these, you would find not only the public dollars, the tax dollars, but you would find volunteers from the community and you would find, very likely, community financial contributions. Because I think across the province we recognize that the issue of hunger is there; that child hunger is there and we as Saskatchewan people want to take that very seriously. And so you'll not just find the public dollars, you'll find lots of private dollars too, and lots of personal commitment and volunteerism.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. When I think of child hunger and child feeding programs, I think of the Chili for Children and Theresa Stevenson. And certainly just chatting with them at the Saskatchewan Volunteer Awards medal presentation, it's interesting to note the fact her interest in gardening still hasn't waned whatsoever. And that's a kind of a pastime even though she's retired from the program in the city.

And I know that many individuals over the years have actually gone above and beyond, if you will, to assist those within their own, if you will . . . our aboriginal people for their own kind and other individuals. I guess there are times too where people get a little annoyed when they see individuals on assistance, and I look just outside of the city . . . well actually on the outskirts of the city of Regina we do have a kind of a gardening program where people can get together, kind of a community gardening program.

And I think there certainly are ways, if we just encourage people a little bit, where they can do a lot to help themselves and, if you will, stretch their resources so that they can provide adequate meals. And so I think anything that we do to help people, I think also builds up a feeling that . . . the individuals feel good about themselves if they are able to do something to help themselves out.

Mr. Minister, when we look at the stats — and we're looking at some of the numbers as far as the individuals on assistance — how many of these individuals would be single parent situations, and specifically teenage mothers?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the single parents would represent 31 per cent of the case-load, and that represents 12,699 people. This is as of May 1996, the most recent figures. Virtually all of these single parents are female. I suppose there would be the rare case of a dad who's on social assistance, but the vast majority will be female. Of that number, approximately half, we believe, would be fully employable, the other half not fully employable. We do not break these numbers down into age of teenagers. So I'm sorry; I can't provide that information.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, is there any attempt whatsoever made by your department to make fathers responsible for some of the maintenance and upkeep of their siblings? Certainly I think it's not just a woman's responsibility, I don't believe. I think the only way a child arrives in this world if there was a man and a woman involved, and I think there is responsibility there. And many men across our province have shown their willingness to accept that responsibility. And I think this is one of the other concerns that's raised, even with regards to SAP, people on SAP assistance.

And I'm wondering what efforts your department makes . . . I'm sure you'd have to deal with the Department of Justice in some ways, but what efforts are you doing to address this concern?

(2200)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — The member is absolutely right that this is something we're determined to pursue. Where there are fathers who have responsibilities for their children, we believe those fathers should meet those obligations — for the most part, fathers. We have, government-wide, a number of initiatives through Justice, through maintenance enforcement, through some changes we've recently made through Legal Aid. We have our workers that try and assist individuals in terms of maintenance payments.

One of the changes that we're proposing to make, as we redesign social assistance, is to in fact encourage outside income, whether it be from employment, or in this case from maintenance enforcement, through a change we're describing as a working income supplement; so that in fact we would supplement outside income, as opposed to the current system where in fact when any outside income comes into the home on social assistance, we only allow a certain amount. And then we start cutting the social assistance. That includes monies coming in from maintenance. And so sometimes the current system serves as a disincentive to go out and seek those maintenance dollars. We want to turn that around because we think that fathers who have responsibilities should meet those obligations.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. A couple of questions I'd like to deal with regarding child care in this province — and it's certainly something that's been brought to my attention. Just a recent headline in the *Moosomin World Spectator* about a child care program that finally came to fruition after, I think it's about three years or better that we've been working . . . a group of individuals working to get some support for the program out there. And I believe they do have some support from the department.

I'm wondering . . . and here again I'll give you maybe about four questions. They're shorter questions. And rather than up and down, I'll give them to you, and you can respond. What is the current level of subsidy for child care, and based on what income, and if you would provide the details. How many child care spaces have been created since the NDP took office in '91? And how many spaces were there as of September '91, and how many are there to date?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I'm wondering if the member would accept . . . In terms of the level of subsidy and income, it's a rather complicated set of numbers. I wonder, if the member would agree, if we could just provide him the information in print on that question.

On the question of actual number of spaces back to '91, we again don't have the numbers back to '91. I think we could endeavour to try and get them. But I can tell the member that over the past four years we've added \$1.5 million and created 1,100 new spaces province-wide. So that would be 1,100 new spaces over the past four years, and that's on a budget increase of \$1.5 million.

Now what we've tried to do is focus where we felt the need again is greatest, and that's looking at teen infant spaces, looking at some preschool support programs, looking at infant and toddler centres, because the demand is very high there, and some innovative and I think important pilot projects in rural Saskatchewan and in northern Saskatchewan.

In this year we were able to again find some new dollars for wage enhancement grants, a \$500,000 wage enhancement package for child care workers, recognizing that their work is so important. They're looking after our children. And we wanted to begin again to try and recognize what they're doing. It's a small enhancement and I think appreciated in the field.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, when it comes to child care . . . and we certainly recognize that there are many families who find that it's almost impossible to make it on a single income any more, especially if you happen to be a single, low income family, and so therefore you've got the spouse out working as well to try and supplement the income. However, if there's one concern that comes to my attention on an annual basis with regards to child care, is what the criteria is for the level of support.

Let's say you've got a family coming where both individuals are on a minimum wage, a job and just drawing a minimum wage. Mr. Minister, is there a level where child care support would cut in, where you would receive a subsidy or could, say, put your child in a child care program, and then a level above whereby you would then have . . . pay for some of this support?

Because if I hear it . . . and I remember specifically the debate I had with a constituent whose husband happens to be a teacher. She chose to stay at home when some very good friends of theirs who both are in the teaching profession, were taking their child to a child care program. And it annoyed her to no end to think that . . . and whether or not they were getting assistance . . . I mean whether or not they were putting their child into a program that was totally covered by the government. Their feeling was they should have been paying someone else to . . . paying a babysitter.

So what I'd like to know, Mr. Minister, is what's the criteria? Is there a level whereby if a person uses, say, a child care program or a day care program in the community that they would pay for that program versus receiving any help from the government, from . . .

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Yes, the . . . again I'll say to the member, if we can, we will provide the total breakdown of the income levels and the subsidies attached because it is income sensitive. I mean there is a point which you do not receive any subsidies. We'll send you that. It's rather complicated.

And I might just say that — and here I'm talking then about the maximum subsidy — if your income is low enough to receive the maximum subsidy, this is what you would get. Prior to '95-96, it was a single subsidy level, \$235 for all age groups. That was the maximum, \$235, no matter how old your child.

Now we've not only made it income sensitive but age sensitive. And so in '95-96, a \$220,000 budget increase was able to raise the subsidies for infants and toddlers from the 235 to 265, recognizing that there could be higher costs for the infant care. That would be in a family care home, 235 to 265, so the max now is 265 in a family care home. And 285 and 245 respectively in centres.

We will just send to the member all of this information. But you're right; it is income sensitive. For those who may choose not to utilize child care and receive that subsidy, there are of course the tax provisions that can compensate individuals and families through the tax provision in that case.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I'll look forward to

receiving that information. Mr. Minister, I have some questions here related to some letters we received from individuals about some of the concerns that they have about different aspects of the department. And so I'd like to bring them to your attention. We're waiting to raise them with you before we responded. We responded that we would be certainly raising the concern.

And one of them has to do with family counselling, and we've received a number of complaints that social workers in your department seem to be too quick to counsel women to seek divorce or separation before going on welfare. And I've had my assistant go through this because I had a hard time reading the letter myself. And I'm sure that your workers certainly have all kinds of cases that come before them and have to deal with difficult situations and sometimes the demands that are being put on them.

I'm wondering though if . . . I wonder if you could tell us if your department has a particular policy about counselling for family break-ups and could you have your department to undertake to look into how often your department advises people to seek divorce and whether this is appropriate in all cases?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — No, Mr. Chair, there are no policies in that regard. The policies, I think generally speaking, we would follow would be number one . . . and these policies, I think, are followed by many counsellors, either through social services or in family service bureaus or in churches or in rectories and so on — that number one, there is confidentiality above all else, and that counselling is really a process of bringing people to self-determination, to making their own decisions.

And so there is no policy going into a counselling or a family situation that would recommend one thing or another thing. It has to be done sensitive to the family circumstances and hopefully, to help the individuals or the families or the couple resolve what will be best for their lives through their own decision-making process.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, is it possible that some counsellors may, through their counselling, leave the impression that . . . because the concern, certainly the concern . . . I was reading through one letter specifically where an individual felt that there was more of an effort given to advising a person to separate rather than advising the couple to try and work out their differences. And that's a very legitimate concern.

And a feeling that while it may not be a general policy in the department, is it possible that some counsellors may in some ways, because of the pressures they face when they're counselling, may give information that may lead people to believe that they're actually counselling individuals to look at separating versus trying to work out their differences?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I think, having at least some limited experience in the field of counselling both individuals and families, that through the counselling relationship with a counsellor, the individuals or families may leave with certain perceptions. That would be true of any counsellor in any circumstance. If the member has any very specific concerns or

reported concerns, if he wants, you know, we'll sure try and follow them up.

But the policy, again I would repeat, I think of the department is that, one, confidentiality is supreme, that we seek self-determination. I as minister and I know that we as government and I think we as legislators, support the concept of stable home environments, a stable family environment, and also respect the needs of individuals.

I think we all recognize that in some cases the home environment is not going to survive and that the stability is just not there. We would hope that through the process of counselling, family relationships can be strengthened. But also we recognize that in some cases we're going to have to support the individual where that family relationship just isn't going to make it.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I have a question here and I have a feeling it maybe should be in the Department of Health, but just to make sure I'm not out of the wrong area. The facts of life line? Does that involve Health? I kind of thought that's where it was, but I know it ended up in the folder here and in the question. I just wanted to make sure that I wasn't going to have the Minister of Health saying well, you should have asked when you had the Minister of Social Services here in front of you.

I talked for a minute a moment ago about day care services and one other question has come up by looking over the different questions that have come up from, specifically from individuals, is the fact that even though you talk about increasing the number of spaces and increasing the level of funding, there are still individuals who have no other alternative but to go . . . or utilize unfunded but licensed day care centres. And the question is, given the critical shortage of day care spaces, many of these low income parents have no choice but to use an unfunded facility. Why does your department exclude unfunded day care users from any grants or is that a legitimate question?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Okay, I'm not sure I quite understand the question. We have, of course, some limits. We have limits on our budget and so the funded day care spaces are limited by, well the need for those spaces in our community and our ability through budgetary measures to provide them.

We are, I think the member will recognize, at least disappointed in the activity of the federal government in this regard, where in the month just leading up to Christmas they suggested to Canadians they were going to have \$620 million available for day care and creation of new spaces or other important child care programs. And then we wake up in the new year and find out that in fact they weren't really serious about that money.

We're still negotiating with the federal government. We're hoping that we can utilize some federal funding, whether it goes directly into child care or it might be available for other programs that would enable us to move some other resources into child care.

We do want to partner with the federal government, but I think Canadians generally have been disappointed by the announcement of the red book commitment and then the seeming withdrawal.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, one further question regarding child care. And the fact, is the child care program funded up until the supper hour? We get the concern raised about individuals looking for some help, some support, low income families where their children, young children specifically, and there are no older siblings at home, where at 3:30 there's no place to go but possibly home, but there's no one there to look after them. And individuals have been asking me and certainly asking our caucus — and no doubt maybe some of your colleagues have had the same request — for a program that would recognize this, that would, say, offer the child care services up until a person is off work after the school hours. Is that a major problem right now and is there any funding for it? If there is, where would a person get it?

(2215)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I wouldn't be able to document for the member tonight, but there are a number of those kinds of programs around the province, perhaps not where — if an individual has approached you — in their community or in their neighbourhood, but certainly those programs are around.

The need that seems to be identified most often, at least to me, is the need for infant day care spaces for the very young. Because we do have young moms, mothers and dads and families, who have to be back into the workforce as soon as possible or don't enjoy contractual protection where they have maternity leaves and so on; so there seems to be a real demand for infant day care. But I accept that the member points out another need, and that's the need for after school, and in some cases because of shift work, evening and so on. Now there are cases where that is available. It won't be available in every community or in every neighbourhood.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to welcome the minister and his officials here this evening. Mr. Minister, we passed over a set of questions to your House Leader last week. These are supplementary questions to the global questions that had been presented earlier. I wonder if you have received those questions and if you'll be responding to them all.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — There's no question, and the member's been reassured by the House Leader, we will be responding.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. It's good to know that you can take direction. I do have one question that I would like to ask specifically. Your deputy minister or any of your officials that are entitled to a CVA (Central Vehicle Agency) vehicle, if you could indicate to me who they might be and whether or not they are utilizing the CVA vehicle or whether they're on a personal mileage circumstance.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the deputy of Social Services uses an assigned CVA vehicle. Our social workers around the

province will use CVA vehicles out of the pool, and there'd be a fair number of those who are travelling all over the province.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I was particularly interested in your . . . either the deputy or your department heads. But I gather it's just the deputy that has a CVA vehicle. Okay, thank you very much.

I'd like to go on to another issue. It came to my attention from a lady in Kenosee that she believes she was having a bit of a problem with some of the youth that are at the youth treatment centre in Kenosee. I wonder if you could indicate the treatment centres that you have for youth around the province, where they're located at, and how many youth they service.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the deputy is assisting us as usual. And I'm writing down from memory, is listing all the spaces and I'm writing it down and we have it printed on a piece of paper.

Mr. Chair, the secure custody facilities for young offenders are located at Kilburn Hall in Saskatoon, the Orcadia Youth Residence in Yorkton, the Paul Dojack Youth Centre in Regina, the Echo Valley youth centre at Echo Lake down in the valley, the North Battleford Youth Centre, and the Nisbet Youth Centre in Prince Albert.

Open custody facilities will include the Yarrow Youth Farm in Saskatoon, the Kenosee Youth Camp, which you mentioned, the Prince Albert Youth Residence, the Battleford Youth Cottage.

We have custody redirection at Dale's House. And there will be some facilities provided through Salvation Army, Concord.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay thank you, Mr. Minister. In a facility such as Kenosee or the open custody situations around the province, what kind of supervision is being provided for the youth while they're at that centre? And are they allowed off of the premises, and if they are, under what circumstances and how does that procedure work?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, in the open custody circumstances there is still constant supervision, 24-hour staffing, constant supervision. There may be experiences where the young people are actually out of the facility. For instance in Kenosee, I think, they work in the park. And so they'll be working with park staff, but again under supervision.

There may be — towards the ends of the sentence, if things have gone very well — there may be a temporary leave to visit family which would again take them out. But even in open custody there is pretty intensive supervision.

Mr. Toth: — So at Kenosee, Mr. Minister, when they're out with the park staff, are they under supervision of Social Services staff or are they under the supervision of the park staff?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, it in fact could be either. It would depend a little I guess, on the actual youth or youths who

are out to do a job, knowing their characteristics. If there was any risk at all, our staff would be there. If they're at a stage where people are feeling confident that they can go out and do a job with the supervision of the parks people, in fact they may be just supervised by the parks people. So it's a bit of a . . . and I guess it would depend a little bit on the job. So it's a mix and match of the individual youth and the job. But if there were any risk, our staff would be there.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'd like to relate to you the circumstances that led to these questions. Last summer some time, this lady at Kenosee found a youth on her deck. Supposedly this youth was under the supervision of park staff. The park staff were checking a creek that runs past her location. They were down at the creek doing whatever it was they were doing there; this youth supposedly was up on her deck. So initially that's where her concern started.

Later, she has been twice broken into over the last eight months. Now how she has come to the determination it's somebody related to the youth camp, I don't know. She has no proof of that that I know of. But nevertheless, she has a concern that it somehow relates back to the incident of the youth that was on her deck.

So she was concerned as to what type of supervision is provided to the clientele at the youth centre while they are resident there; whether or not they have 24-hour supervision in a manner such that a youth couldn't slip out of the window in the middle of the night or whatever the case may be. Can you give some information as to how close a scrutiny — since you say this is open custody . . . are they monitored during the night, are they . . . is there a bed check made or some sort of supervision provided to indicate whether or not no one could be leaving and then returning so that they would be there for breakfast in the morning sort of thing, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, in reference to the circumstance that the member describes, and I think we would all, if we were that individual and found a young offender or anyone else on our deck, that causes us to be somewhat nervous and maybe concerned about future events. My officials tonight believe that the director of the Kenosee Youth Camp has in fact met with that individual. If there is some more follow-up that should be done, I'd sure appreciate it if the member would just let us know, and we would pursue that.

We do understand that these are open custody circumstances where the security, while stringent, is not like the closed custody with the bars and the locks on the doors and that. There are, I'm told, regular checks 24 hours a day, night checks and so on.

But I guess, in these circumstances, where there's a will there will be sometimes a way. And some of the young people . . . mercifully it's a rare occasion when it happens, but some of these young people will run away, and very often I think they're apprehended in relatively short order, but can create some concern. But there are, I would want to reassure the member, there are certainly relatively stringent security. And my tours of these facilities tell me that there are relatively

stringent security. But in the open custody, we're not here talking about barbed wire and bars. So the potential does exist, and once in a while the potential gets realized.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Around the province, has there been any number of incidents related to the open custody where there have been complaints brought forward to the department that some of the clientele have been acting inappropriately, have been perhaps reoffending or causing some disturbances or problems in their areas?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, just a short polling of the officials that are with us tonight, say that it likely has happened. We can't deny that it hasn't happened, there haven't been some concern; but in their experience, it's relatively rare — relatively rare.

And I think that speaks pretty highly of the dedicated managers and staff and so on, in our centres who I think really work at trying to build community relationships.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 10:30 p.m.

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