



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

---

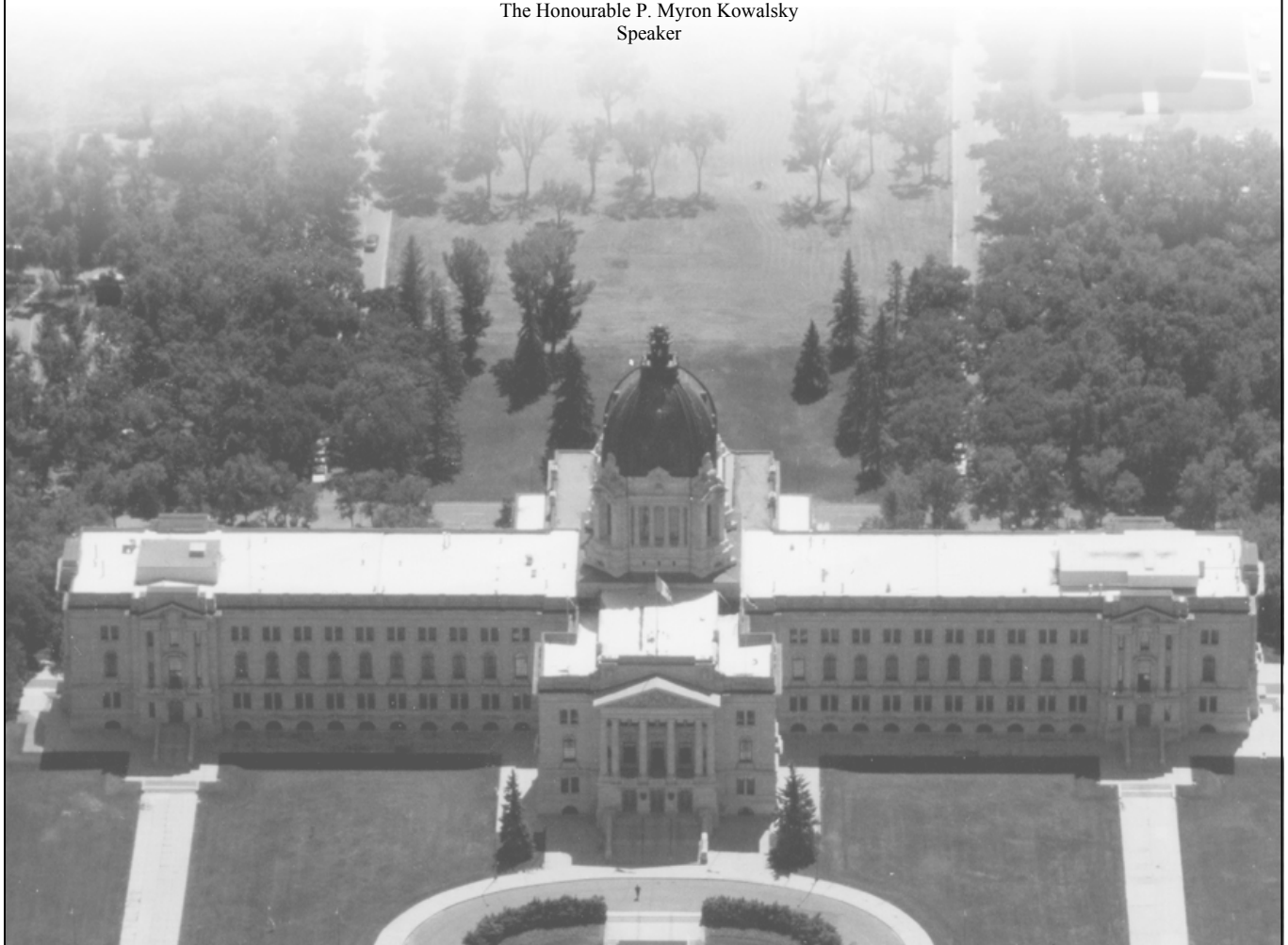
**DEBATES  
and  
PROCEEDINGS**

---

(HANSARD)

Published under the  
authority of

The Honourable P. Myron Kowalsky  
Speaker



**MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN**

Speaker — Hon. P. Myron Kowalsky  
 Premier — Hon. Lorne Calvert  
 Leader of the Opposition — Brad Wall

<b>Name of Member</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>	<b>Constituency</b>
Addley, Graham	NDP	Saskatoon Sutherland
Allchurch, Denis	SP	Rosthern-Shellbrook
Atkinson, Hon. Pat	NDP	Saskatoon Nutana
Bakken, Brenda	SP	Weyburn-Big Muddy
Beatty, Hon. Joan	NDP	Cumberland
Belanger, Hon. Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornerud, Bob	SP	Melville-Saltcoats
Borgerson, Lon	NDP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Brkich, Greg	SP	Arm River-Watrous
Calvert, Hon. Lorne	NDP	Saskatoon Riversdale
Cheveldayoff, Ken	SP	Saskatoon Silver Springs
Chisholm, Michael	SP	Cut Knife-Turtleford
Cline, Hon. Eric	NDP	Saskatoon Massey Place
Crofford, Hon. Joanne	NDP	Regina Rosemont
D'Autremont, Dan	SP	Cannington
Dearborn, Jason	SP	Kindersley
Draude, June	SP	Kelvington-Wadena
Eagles, Doreen	SP	Estevan
Elhard, Wayne	SP	Cypress Hills
Forbes, Hon. David	NDP	Saskatoon Centre
Gantfoer, Rod	SP	Melfort
Hagel, Glenn	NDP	Moose Jaw North
Hamilton, Doreen	NDP	Regina Wascana Plains
Harpauer, Donna	SP	Humboldt
Harper, Ron	NDP	Regina Northeast
Hart, Glen	SP	Last Mountain-Touchwood
Heppner, Ben	SP	Martensville
Hermanson, Elwin	SP	Rosetown-Elrose
Higgins, Hon. Deb	NDP	Moose Jaw Wakamow
Huyghebaert, Yogi	SP	Wood River
Iwanchuk, Andy	NDP	Saskatoon Fairview
Junor, Judy	NDP	Saskatoon Eastview
Kerpan, Allan	SP	Carrot River Valley
Kirsch, Delbert	SP	Batoche
Kowalsky, Hon. P. Myron	NDP	Prince Albert Carlton
Krawetz, Ken	SP	Canora-Pelly
Lautermilch, Eldon	NDP	Prince Albert Northcote
McCall, Warren	NDP	Regina Elphinstone-Centre
McMorris, Don	SP	Indian Head-Milestone
Merriman, Ted	SP	Saskatoon Northwest
Morgan, Don	SP	Saskatoon Southeast
Morin, Sandra	NDP	Regina Walsh Acres
Nilson, Hon. John	NDP	Regina Lakeview
Prebble, Hon. Peter	NDP	Saskatoon Greystone
Quennell, Hon. Frank	NDP	Saskatoon Meewasin
Serby, Hon. Clay	NDP	Yorkton
Sonntag, Hon. Maynard	NDP	Meadow Lake
Stewart, Lyle	SP	Thunder Creek
Taylor, Hon. Len	NDP	The Battlefords
Thomson, Hon. Andrew	NDP	Regina South
Toth, Don	SP	Moosomin
Trew, Kim	NDP	Regina Coronation Park
Van Mulligen, Hon. Harry	NDP	Regina Douglas Park
Wakefield, Milton	SP	Lloydminster
Wall, Brad	SP	Swift Current
Wartman, Hon. Mark	NDP	Regina Qu'Appelle Valley
Weekes, Randy	SP	Biggar
Yates, Kevin	NDP	Regina Dewdney

EVENING SITTING  
COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund  
Learning  
Vote 5

Subvote (LR01)

**The Deputy Chair:** — I'd call the Committee of Finance to order and the business before the committee are estimates for Learning, (LR01). I'll call on the minister to introduce the officials.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. It is a pleasure to be here tonight to answer questions on the Department of Learning, post-secondary side of the budget.

Tonight I'm joined by a number of officials, which is good for me. Directly to my left is Neil Yeates, the deputy minister of the department. Seated next to him is Kevin Hoyt, the director of finance and corporate services. Directly behind me is John Biss, the executive director of university services. Behind him is Joy Campbell, who is the Provincial Librarian. And seated next to John is Wayne McElree, who's the assistant deputy minister. Oh, and seated next to Wayne is Nelson Wagner, the executive director of facilities.

**The Deputy Chair:** — We'll be dealing with the subvote on Learning, (LR01). All agreed?

I recognize the member from Saskatoon Silver Springs.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister and his officials for coming this evening. Thank you to those officials that have been here before and those that are new and joining us this evening.

Thank you also to our staff members who made sure that we were up on a night that the NHL (National Hockey League) hockey playoffs weren't on. I suspect that will improve our ratings, although I've never seen any stats on what our ratings would be like but I think that we'd rather surprise ourselves sometime.

Also thank you to Dr. Biss who I chatted with at the University of Saskatchewan convocation, and I think he told me that he looks forward to estimates like nothing else. So I think it was a little bit of tongue-in-cheek there, but welcome nonetheless.

I'd like to begin by starting where we left off before and some of the questions that I brought up in our last estimates session. With the Provincial Library, we'll begin with that question, and I just generally would like to know what changes have taken place with the location of the Provincial Library in Regina.

My understanding was that it was in one location and that it had been moved to two separate locations and that there's been some changes and some costs incurred. And I just generally would like an answer on that question.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I appreciate the patience the member had in waiting for me to have the Provincial Librarian here because obviously she understands these issues much better than we do.

I am advised that indeed there was a move of the Provincial Library from the Winnipeg Street location. The staff have been located primarily over to the Grenfell Tower location here in Regina. The collection is split between Grenfell Tower and the parkway campus site, which has been redeveloped.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister: could you just expand upon the reasons why the move has taken place?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I'm told that one of the key issues was in order to bring the accommodations up to fire code, and to deal with some occupational health and safety issues. So this in fact had a benefit both to the staff and also better safeguarded the collection. There was in fact a significant amount of work done around the parkway area to deal with the collections specifically.

Certainly the space is somewhat more expensive. We understand that, but in terms of the issue of the renovations and bringing things up to code, it was felt that this was the best approach.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister: do you have the values of, say, the lease at the old location and the lease at the new location?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Specifically the member has asked about the library cost. The cost at the Winnipeg Street site was about \$225,000. The cost under the new configuration for the upgraded space is about 479,000. It's important however to put this into context in that as we did the move for the Provincial Library we also amalgamated the department from seven different sites down into three. So while the cost billed to the Provincial Library line item will have gone up in terms of accommodation, overall the accommodation cost for the department dropped.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, I guess some of my concern is what I see happening across government and certainly in Saskatoon where we see SaskTel taking over some class A rental accommodations in downtown Saskatoon. And I was just concerned on the move, but I'm satisfied with your answers in that regard.

I want to move towards the SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) strike, the instructors' strike, and would like to have an indication from the minister if indeed the tentative deal has been ratified by the SIAST employees.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Recognize the . . . why is the member on his feet?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — To ask for leave, Mr. Chair, to introduce a guest.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Is leave granted?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. In the Speaker's gallery we have a long-time resident of Ile-a-la-Crosse who has travelled many, many miles to be here, Mr. Chair. And of course her name is Diana. Her original name is Diana Aubichon and I'm actually married to her cousin. But she's up in the gallery, Mr. Chair, sitting beside an English teacher that taught her English in school as well, the member from Saskatchewan Rivers. So I'd ask all members of the Assembly to please join me in giving Ms. Diana Daigneault a big, warm welcome on behalf of all the members in the Assembly.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Deputy Chair:** — I recognize the minister.

### COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

#### General Revenue Fund Learning Vote 5

#### Subvote (LR01)

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. The question I was asked was about the situation with the admin unit at the SIAST and the settlement there. Indeed this morning a tentative agreement was reached between the parties which will now go out for ratification by both sides.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Also I am referring back to the deal with the instructors. And could you just tell me what, if indeed that has been ratified, and maybe some of the details of that.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Deputy Chair, I can advise the member that in fact both sides have ratified the academic unit SGEU (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union) and SIAST agreement. The agreement was reached within the mandate that had been established by the province. It took into account significant issues that SGEU had wanted addressed, including, most significantly, I would indicate being the new salary grid and the salary arrangements there, restructured that approach.

Additionally it dealt with economic increases which were built in under mandate, issues around the extended health plan, pension issues, hours of work issues, and pay equity, which this bargaining unit had yet to deal with.

Although I don't have a clean copy of this, I can in fact perhaps later today or tomorrow provide the member with some detail in terms of what those provisions are. Or if he wants, I can read some more into the record.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. Yes, if you could go into a little bit of detail there regarding the wage settlement for SIAST and the pension benefits. What percentage of the agreement were the pension benefits? And also into the pay equity as well.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — If I might then just run through a few of these issues. In terms of the economic increases, these are the what I guess ordinary folk would call raises that have been built in, cost-of-living increases, whatever you might call them. Effective July 1, '04, there will be a point five per cent increase, and effective July 1, '05, there will be a 1 per cent increase.

The extended health plan, there have been changes to deal with the employee premiums. That will be eliminated as of July 1 of this year.

And the issues around pension, there is a point two five per cent increase to that for the employer's contribution. That will take it from 5 per cent to 5.25 per cent.

Hours of work, there was a change there. Effective July of this year we've reduced the academic year from 200 days to 199 days, and instructors will receive one additional scheduled preparation day in the calendar year, or in their work year.

On the pay equity issue, this was a somewhat complicated issue in that there was not an obvious male wage line to bring in. And as such, what ended up happening through this set of discussions where there was a rather innovation approach to dealing with a new salary grid. It will be phased in. The new grid will be phased in over two years. The pay equity provision will be brought in over five. So it is, I would say, an innovative approach to dealing with it. It's certainly one that has met the demands of the union in terms of pay equity and meets the government's guidelines in that regard.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, how many, if any, employees received decreases in their wage due to pay equity?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — No employees received a decrease in wage.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, factoring in the pay equity, what would you say would be the average increase the SIAST employees received?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Part of what is happening is, because there is a whole new pay grid being put into place, is that individuals have yet to be assigned to individual spaces. So it is hard to tell on an individual basis or in an aggregated number as to how many employees would see X per cent of an increase as a result of it.

We know that over a time period of the agreement that the cost increment is about 7 per cent over that five-year period, in terms of the value of this. But we haven't at this point . . . Because we haven't assigned employees or SIAST hasn't assigned employees to it and worked through this with the union, it's difficult for us to ascertain exactly what percentage would fall into which of these new categories.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, do you have an idea of what pay increases — say for SIAST management — would have been for over that same time period?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The management in this case would

fall into the mandate, as is established, the 0, 1, and 1.

I might, if it is okay with the members, I would elaborate a little bit on the structure of the new classification plan because it is a different approach. They have opted in the SIAST agreement to look at a credentialized approach. So as opposed to basing this on years of seniority, these kind of issues is based now more on the post-secondary academic credentials.

(19:15)

So for instance, they have taken a look, at SIAST, a credential with someone with a four-year university degree or professional designation falling into one category, someone with five years of post-secondary falling into another category, someone with six years falling into another one, someone with a Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) into yet another pay grade. So essentially it sets a base, and then adds increments on, based on years of post-secondary education.

That is largely approach . . . certainly one of the issues that takes, that they have taken a look at is how to deal with comparisons between SGEU and the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation), the Teachers' Federation. This has always been an issue, going back for more than a decade, about where these two bargaining units end up.

The new pay grade takes into account these issues and generally matches it up, recognizing there's some additional credential that would be in the SIAST situation, for instance with Ph.D.s, that would be recognized at a higher level.

So it has been a case of trying to deal with some unique circumstances within SIAST as compared to the STF agreement. But I would argue that these are quite comparable.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Mr. Chair, did the minister . . . dealing with the admin support workers within SIAST, you touched on it briefly. But can the minister confirm that the administration support workers at SIAST have reached a tentative agreement earlier today?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Indeed I can. I can advise that after a long night that both parties did reach agreement this morning. I am not in much of a position to outline at this point what the terms of that are as both parties will need to go back and deal with their membership and, in this case, the SIAST board to deal with ratification.

Once that has been undertaken, we'll be in a better position to obviously publicly discuss what the terms are. I can however indicate again to the member that the monetary issues fall within the 0, 1, and 1 mandate.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I appreciate your indulgence and would appreciate a copy of both the instructors' and the admin support workers' ratified agreements, whatever information you can share with me.

And also, because I suspect that information will come after we're done session, I would like to know as well, given the fact that we've had one outstanding labour dispute and then now a second one, have any students been affected? Have any lost

course work or incurred extra costs because of this second labour dispute?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I'm told that all the students who were enrolled in fact will have the opportunity to complete their programs. In terms of the financial costs to the individuals, we were advised that about 160 students have taken advantage of extensions within the student loan program that we had offered at the time of the strike, recognizing there were going to be some significant disruptions to their education. But I'm told that otherwise this program has a . . . management has been able to work through and SIAST has done actually a very good job of working through with students how to make up the missed class time.

That being said, I know that I think I can speak on behalf of all members on both sides — and certainly I know the member opposite and his view on this — that this labour disruption was extremely difficult for students and is something that I'm very pleased we will not need to deal with again for several years, and hopefully won't need to deal with again for many years. This is not a good situation, and I know it was difficult for instructors, difficult for the admin staff, and very, very difficult on the students. So in this whole process, I'm glad the members asked the question because that is indeed who SIAST is there to serve and who our first interest is there in terms of protecting.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, again on this topic, was there any cost-of-living allowance involved in this agreement?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The 0, 1, and 1 as I outlined is what I guess we would assume is the cost-of-living increase. That would be the raise or the economic adjustment, whatever we want to call it. The same type of provisions would be in place within the admin support unit.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Minister, there is no cost-of-living on top of the 0, 1, and 1; that's the way I understand your answer. Okay.

I'd like to turn to community colleges, and have some questions about community colleges in Saskatchewan. The Southeast Regional College can now appoint its own board of directors, instead of the Government of Saskatchewan appointing the board. Is this correct, and is this being considered at other regional colleges in Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — If I can just step back to the previous question, just so I'm very clear with members. When we talked about cost-of-living, we should all recognize that within the ranges there is movement based on seniority. And in fact, that also occurs with management. Those adjustments are often 4 per cent until you reach the top of your grid. So there will be . . . That's just built into it. Some people refer to that as salary creep, but it's part of the way the system is developed.

So I wouldn't categorize it as cost-of-living. But it tends to be build into the grids. It's just as within mainstream public service. There are a number of categories. You'll start at one, and you'll escalate up five or six steps. Just so we're relatively clear in terms of those issues.

On the question of the regional colleges, indeed the college boards are still appointed by an order in council. What we have adopted has been a new approach brought in by the member, I believe, for Moose Jaw when he was the minister, that established that the boards would nominate members and in fact would take on an additional role in recruiting members, that they would provide a list of names. We undertake consultation with them to try and fill in to make sure both the regional interests are represented, but also that there's a good mix of community leaders and community interests represented on the board.

So that would be the approach. I wouldn't characterize it as one that the boards appoint themselves although certainly they have a large say in terms of who sits on those boards now.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister, can you just sort of outline for me, if a regional college came to you with their suggestions, would you be taking that carte blanche and adopting it, or would you be looking at each individual? Would you be doing a review, and also if you could just outline the benefits to this arrangement that you see.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — When the nominations come forward, what we tend to do is obviously review the candidates that are put forward. The lists that I've seen, although I've only been the minister for a brief time, tend to involve a list of names with several names on it that the board has talked to people in a local community who have an interest. What we try and balance out is to make sure on the board that there is a relatively good distribution of skill sets. We have people with various backgrounds that are of use from a corporate governance standpoint, that we would take into account geography to make sure the region isn't overbalanced in one way or another.

Certainly we look also at issues like gender, to make sure that where First Nations communities play an important role within the regional college area that they have some representation. We take a look at local industry. Who are significant players there? These are the primary clients of the grads out of the colleges. How do we strengthen that?

We try and weigh these out, and granted they're all fairly subjective in terms of how we balance it, but this is largely what we take into account.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Well members on this side of the House have heard from executives with the Southeast Regional College, and they certainly like that approach. They like it — the farther removed, I guess, from government it can be, the better from their perspective. And I think they're quite capable in addressing the outlines that you've put forward.

Maybe if the minister could just expand upon the benefits of this arrangement and doing it this way.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Regional colleges in Saskatchewan have a very unique position in that they offer a very strong local involvement in bridging both the social benefit of education, the training aspect, and then the employment issues. So they're very important in terms of regional economic development issues.

Our government has taken an approach over the last many years to try and draw the communities into these kind of organizations more, to get more regional and local buy in — the thought being that if you can get a stronger community buy in that you will end up with a stronger product, stronger ownership over the colleges.

And indeed as we look at the regional college system that is really one of the strengths of it, is the connection to community. This is not to say that from time to time that we don't have disagreements between who may be nominated and who we believe needs to be put on the board to balance off a skill set or a particular local interest. But for the most part, in the brief time that I've had an opportunity to deal with these issues under this arrangement, I haven't seen any particular conflict come forward, and I'm not sure where we would run into that. I do think that, because of the strength as I said of regional level, at a local community level, that this model works quite well.

I would also say that from the Southeast Regional College perspective that that is a very strong regional college. It has very good community connection and in many ways serves as a real model in terms of how the regional college serves to bring the business community, the academic community, generally the student learning population together. And I think that as we look across the country, it's one of the things that Saskatchewan people should take real pride in.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Certainly members on this side of the House and I'm sure all members of this House are strong proponents of the regional college system.

Can the minister just outline, has the enrolment across the province gone up or gone down within the regional colleges?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I'm advised that the number of people who participate in programs is relatively stable at about 30,000 throughout the . . . across the province.

We can certainly talk at some length tonight, if the member wants, about where we can see the regional college model being expanded to take a greater role in terms of partnership with regional economic authorities dealing with this on a regional basis to strengthen the economy.

I think that there's an opportunity here. It's one of the issues that, as we move forward as a department, that I've identified that we need to spend more time talking about which is labour force development, both through the Labour Force Development Board but also obviously the other component — universities, SIAST, regional colleges, and other issues. And how do we draw together a community of common interests that involves business and educational stakeholders?

So this is, in terms of the student population numbers, relatively consistent at about 30,000.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, through the Chair, can you just explain to me the resources committed to the regional college system in Saskatchewan and compare that over the last couple of years — say the last three years or so?

(19:30)

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I do have the operating grants to the colleges in an aggregated form over the last four years since 2001, the 2001 budget year. The grants have gone up for the most part relatively steadily. In 2001-2002, the operating grants were 13.4 million. They went to 14.7 in '02; 15.4 in '03; and 15.7 in '04. So there's been a relatively steady increase. I don't have it on a college-by-college basis except for the last two years.

The other issue that we should identify into this, although not directly related to the regional colleges, of course, is the work that's done through SIIT (Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies), the Indian technical college; GDI (Gabriel Dumont Institute), Gabriel Dumont, and Dumont Technical.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, my next question dealt with the individual colleges themselves. Could you outline which ones received increases in funding in the past year, which ones received decreases in funding? You indicated you have information for the last two years, and if you could go through both years. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Deputy Chair, all regional colleges received an increase this year. I'm told it was done on a straight-line basis of 1 per cent.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you. Mr. Minister, does the department plan on any additional educational training programs for farmers now that the government has cut the rural ag reps in Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Indeed, although not related to the issue that the member has raised, we have in fact implemented just this year a new program in partnership with the federal government to deal with improved training for agricultural workers, farmers, and others, who want to transition out into other skills. And in fact this has been a fairly innovative program that is available on-line.

Unfortunately I don't have the Web site here tonight but you can link on to it from the gov.sk.ca site. This has just been announced in fact in the last couple of weeks. We announced this in partnership with a number of different agricultural stakeholder groups also.

So I think it'll be a very innovative program. We'll see how it works as we move forward. The Council on Community Development had a great deal to do with this and I was very pleased that they profiled that.

The other program I should indicate is that we do have an older workers in agriculture pilot program which has been in place for some time, since 2001. And that program in fact enjoys multi-departmental support and targets obviously those farmers who are in the 55-plus age group who are interested in diversifying or moving into other lines of work.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Well we'd certainly encourage you and encourage the department to continue to work in that direction, especially in light of the cuts to the rural ag reps. We think that this is an area where certainly

the Department of Learning can pick up some of the void that's been created.

Also I just wanted to ask a question regarding the First Nations initiatives that the Department of Learning is undertaking, through regional colleges specifically.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The department has been working on what they call the Post-Secondary Sector Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan, which I'm sure has a catchy acronym that we haven't named yet. But I'm sure we'll get to work on that. This program really does take a look at a number of different issues and works fairly closely with First Nations organizations to identify specific areas where skills training is useful, whether that's offered through Aboriginal and First Nation institutions like SIIT, whether it's done through Métis institutions like GDI or DTI (Dumont Technical Institute), whether we can draw in First Nations University of Canada, or whether it is best done through a regional college basis.

I can tell you, as the member obviously knows opposite, that there are a number of different priorities identified by First Nations largely based upon what the regional economies look like. So for instance if we're talking about a need to deal with trained forestry workers or . . . I had a very interesting discussion several weeks ago with a First Nations group that was wanting to talk about how to get people trained up for increased careers in the mining sector.

There are a number of different initiatives that have been undertaken in the past to deal with skills to deal with things as simple as getting the pipeline laid across the province and how we can increase Aboriginal participation in that, when that went through some four or five years ago, I guess it was. Forestry of course is another area that a lot of time is invested in to make sure we've got good participation there.

So there are a number of different issues there. There's also been a renewed interest in terms of how do we better draw Aboriginal people, First Nations and Métis, into the trades — which I personally believe is an area that we can do a great deal more work in terms of finding involvement and moving towards a representative workforce. It's an area that we've spent some time talking to business leaders about; they certainly are receptive to this and very interested in it. The First Nations and Métis community are very interested also in how we can do it.

It's not always a simple issue of simply bringing Aboriginal people into the traditional training programs that we have in place and then expecting that we'll see the graduation results in the same number that we do through the non-Aboriginal community. We need to be obviously sensitive to cultural issues, family issues, geographic and location issues that also need to be dealt with. And so this is part of what we're trying to accomplish through the Aboriginal education training action plan.

I think it's a good piece of work. It is certainly important as we look at how to move forward in terms of building the labour force and building the economy of the province, and it's one where I'm very pleased that we see a good . . . not only a tripartite arrangement — business and labour and government — but really also see the larger community come into play.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister, for that very complete answer.

Just moving along now to a general question, a broad question I guess: just how much money did the department spend on renovations to office space in the past year and what is the justification for the spending?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — In undertaking the amalgamation of post-secondary and the libraries, the K to 12 (kindergarten to grade 12) system into one department, we did undertake to take advantage of the situation and try and consolidate our space, to move from seven down to three locations. I'm told that over a period of years the cost was about \$6 million in total over several budgets. I don't have the detail here tonight but I will provide it to you.

In fact, despite ever-increasing rent costs, what we in fact have seen is an overall decline in the total cost as a result of the reconfiguration. And that has actually resulted in a lower rent cost and more space.

So this has been generally a positive move forward for the department, although I do understand that there is always interest in the renovation cost and I can endeavour to make sure we've got a complete answer for the Assembly in the coming days.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, to the minister, given that the Learning minister said on April 5, 2004 that there is no single group more important that the provincial government focuses on in the budget than learning . . . The minister said, make sure that we have a well-educated, well trained group of young people who can take their rightful place in the provincial economy of this province — words which I certainly agree with.

But given the minister's statement, is it consistent that several programs such as the student support programs have been cut back by 4 per cent — like the Student Aid Fund, provincial training allowances, and apprenticeship training programs?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I do believe that these are not inconsistent issues for this reason.

The budget changes that we undertook around student assistance were undertaken to reflect utilization. So it was not in fact a change that was done to decrease anybody's allowances; rather we simply adjusted the budget items back to what the utilization numbers were.

As we take a look at student financial services and the student loan issue, of course, one of the things that we all know in Saskatchewan is we have a harmonized program with the federal student loan system. This has some difficulty from a Saskatchewan perspective. It's an issue that we raise regularly with federal ministers and indeed I hear regularly here. But we have traditionally opted for a harmonized system.

Other programs that have been reduced in terms of their line item really do deal with changes in the federal program or in utilization. So I don't see any particular discrepancy between the comment that I made and the funding priorities that we've

outlined in the budget.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess I do see a bit of a discrepancy in that, you know, you certainly have the ability to make this area a priority, and I just fail to see how decreasing this funding supports the goals of the department. Maybe you could expand upon that.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — This is a case where we have opted to realign the line items with what the expenditure is. What this provides us with is an opportunity to make investments in new areas.

The member opposite is renowned — even though he is new in this House — renowned for haranguing me about needing new capital and new programs, and expanded seats in nursing, and for us to do expansion of programs in just about everything that can come along.

In large part, I agree with what the member says: that it is good to see new nursing seats added, and it is important that we see new programs added in. But those also cost money, and what we are trying to do is work with our partners in the education sector, both in SIAST and the universities, to make sure that funds are available in the appropriate places.

From time to time, there will be a reconfiguration of the system, and I'd certainly never advocate that we should have a funding item which may present better in the blue book show up at, beyond what we believe the utilization is.

I mean, we have to have a certain degree of rationality and accountability built into it, so I appreciate the comment of the member opposite, although I must respectfully disagree with it.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Well thank you for the answer, Mr. Minister. I think the terminology of haranguing is a little bit strong though.

I know that I am new in this House, but you don't remain a rookie here for very long. And one of the reasons I was elected to this House was to see that changes are made and improvements are made, certainly in the Department of Learning.

Maybe we could just go into the reasons. I guess you're pointing towards a decrease in utilization; maybe go into the background behind that. And given that the budget in this area has also dropped last year as well, is it fair to say this is the direction of the department — continue to the point that there is a continued reduced expenditure in this area?

(19:45)

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Well there are certainly always issues as we deal with student financial assistance, whether that's through incentive programs, whether that's through student loans. And I appreciate the other member's comments about that.

Certainly what we try to balance off here, and one of the things that the NDP (New Democratic Party) government has reintroduced were bursaries in order to deal with student debt



load issues. We have reconfigured those programs and added new monies in to deal with it.

Utilization does change within the program. We have in some cases drawn the programs back to meet what their mandates were, as opposed to covering off areas of federal off-loading.

But in large part we have continued to support and I would argue have significantly enhanced student financial assistance programs since the NDP government took office. And that has been a hallmark of this government. It's one of the reasons we enjoy significant support among young people and students.

I do appreciate that, in the same way, I am a new minister in this portfolio. I appreciate the comments of the member opposite. I often forget that he is, as he says, a rookie. I think it's quite fair to say that he lays it on as good as anyone that's been here for a number of terms. And I appreciate that he is as up to speed as he is on these files, and I hope that he doesn't take it in a personal way as we disagree on some of these items.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Not at all, Mr. Minister. I think that we are both working towards the same goal and we just see a little different approach is the way to get there.

I want to turn to the topic of the post-secondary tax credit. Is the \$500 per year credit for graduates who choose to stay in Saskatchewan included under the student support services?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Indeed it is not covered under student financial assistance. It is dealt with as a tax item, and so it simply shows up as, I guess, decreased revenue would be the way that that would be demonstrated. So it's not billed through as a program item in the budget.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Could you just comment on the utilization of that tax credit. Has that been going down as well?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — This has been a tremendously successful program, and I've been very pleased that it was brought in. In fact, today in the House, I think in the second reading speech around the expansion of this, we indicated that Saskatchewan was the first province to bring this in, in the year 2000. Since that time we've seen about, I'm told the average is about 9,000 certificates issued annually for students who are taking advantage of the program.

I would anticipate that that number would remain relatively constant as we're not looking to change the criteria of the program significantly, although we are certainly looking at increasing the amount of the deduction or the credit. So I would anticipate it will stay somewhere in that 9 to 10,000 certificate range a year.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you. Could the minister just comment on how the \$500 compares to different provinces across Canada, and how it compares to the difference in the personal tax rates that students would have to pay, not just in Alberta, but other provinces as well?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — What I can say to the member is that, as a result of the income tax reform programs that were

launched by the Minister of Finance some years ago, we have brought our income tax regime basically into line with what other provinces have seen. In fact we have seen our taxes go from being from the third highest on a top marginal basis down to the third lowest — third, fourth lowest. So we have a very competitive tax system.

As it pertains to this credit, I am not aware of any other provinces that have implemented a credit system of this nature. Now I have to say I have not looked in detail at what other provinces have brought in in this budget cycle. But as far as I know, Saskatchewan remains the only province to offer this kind of an innovative program.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you. Mr. Minister, given the huge outflow of young people from the province to other areas of Canada and to the United States, does the minister feel that a one-time \$500 or . . . I know it's increasing to \$1,000 over four years — but a 500 to \$1,000 tax credit is enough to keep young people in Saskatchewan? Are you doing enough?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — One of the interesting things about this I found as I was talking with students — of course I represent, in part, the University of Regina here — but as I was campaigning, I thought it was interesting that both the party opposite and our party were both promising essentially the same mechanism, the same amount of credit. So, are we doing enough? I always believe that there's more than can be done.

But when I take a look at what we are offering in terms of graduate tax credit, what we're offering in terms of a program for everything from job opportunities through CareerStart, through co-op education programs — which the U of R (University of Regina) remains a national leader in — when I take a look at the quality of the graduates that are coming out, when I take a look at the strength of the economy through initiatives that this government has launched, as I see the fact that Saskatchewan today has in fact in many times over the last year reached record numbers of people working, I do believe we're headed in the right direction.

Are there a large number of people, the member opposite says, a huge number leaving? That wouldn't be a word I would use to describe the out-migration. Obviously what we would prefer is a large in-migration of students. And in fact over time that is what we do see, is that a number of students do move into the province. It's not simply a case . . . I think people listening to the members opposite may be drawn into the belief that the highways in this province only run in one direction, and that's to Alberta. In fact, highways run in both directions and what we find is that we have people often moving into the province to take up job opportunities.

So there is, while there is a net out-migration, I think it's interesting to see the in-migration numbers. And that is something that perhaps the members opposite would be interested on focusing on at some point also, is that a lot of people move to Saskatchewan, take advantage of the fact that this is a great place to live and to work and to raise a family in. I think a lot of people know that. You don't have to be born here to know it. A lot of people from across the country realize that and move to this province to do it.

So yes, there's a comprehensive package of things. Are they going to stay just because of a graduate tax credit? No. Is it a helping piece? I think, absolutely.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess what really concerns us is that net value. Certainly we realize that some students move back to Saskatchewan. Our concern is that not enough of them stay here to start their careers. They move on to other places and we would like to see that turned around.

That leads to my next question. Since the tax credit was instituted in the year 2000, the department should have some data on the effectiveness of the program. What percentage of graduates stay in the province today compared to prior to the introduction of the program? Does the department have any measures or methods of measuring the outcomes of this program?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Indeed we have been undertaking work to take a look at how we retain graduates and indeed what percentage of our labour force does have post-secondary education. I don't know that we have it here tonight, but I do have some work that's been done by Doug Elliott that I'd be quite willing to share with the Assembly which may be of interest, and he looks very specifically at this set of issues.

I think it's also worth noting that, you know, in terms of the number of people who move in and out of the province, nobody stands up in this House and makes a point of the fact that almost 10,000 people moved into Saskatchewan from Alberta last year. I mean, that's a significant number of people; almost 3,000 from Manitoba, 2,000 from Ontario, over 3,000 from BC (British Columbia). I mean, thousands of people move here on an annual basis and I think that that really does speak to the fact that Saskatchewan is a good place to live, to work, and to raise their families.

Is there out-migration? Yes, there is a net out-migration. Is that number shrinking? Yes. It is not as bad as it has been, by any means. And in fact 2002-2003 it appears that there was a significant trend towards keeping the . . . in terms of reversing that.

And so this will fluctuate over time. The trend lines certainly are improved over when this government first took office in '91, and we're not in a case where you could count — as was the case when the Conservatives were in power, some of your colleagues were on the government benches — where you could count the out-migration in thousands per month. Today we're at a case where the out-migration is a few thousand people per year. And so this has been a significant, significant turnaround.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — I think the minister would agree and, just based on the numbers that he's giving, there's a lot of work to do in this area. And I certainly encourage the minister, through his department, to try to create an environment where more students and more young people would create their careers here in Saskatchewan.

Question for the minister: which action does the government feel is more important — a strong economy for graduates, a credit program, or lowering the drinking age as suggested by

Premier Calvert?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I would say one of these things is not like the other, would be the simplest way to identify this. Certainly a strong economy and the graduate tax credit, the tuition policy, the approach that we have in terms of a low cost of living through our Crown utilities, these are all important factors. The quality of life is an issue.

The question of the lower drinking age was one that really came back to a debate about, in some ways, very philosophical issues about citizenships and the rights of citizens to be able to participate fully within their society, and a question of simply a modernization, a liberalization of personal freedom within the province. That is in large part where the debate around that came down to.

Do I believe that it drives migration? No more so I think than when the Conservative government in the mid-'80s introduced beer cans into the province instead of bottles. I mean, it's just at some point you have to look for a modernization and move in a progressive way. There have been a number of changes that way.

And we can talk about that as it pertains to the youth agenda and making this place more hip and happening and with it, or we can talk about it in different estimates. I'm sure other ministers are quite prepared to discuss that also.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm sure you will agree that we were probably more hip, happening, and with it when we were in university than we are today. But thank you for the answer.

You know, just to expand upon my own views, I believe a strong economy is the best thing that we could do for students and for graduates and to ensure that they stay in Saskatchewan. That would be my answer.

Over the past 10 years, how many students have either left or moved into Saskatchewan? What would the net number be in that regard? And what's the long-term impact of students who leave the province? What would the budgetary benefit be if indeed they stayed in Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I don't have . . . I'm working off of a chart here and so it's hard to tell. I don't have the specific number. Oh, here we go here. The net loss between, now we're looking at 2002-2003, was 1,900 youth, 1,950. And we count youth as being school-aged, from age 15 to 24. So 1,953 from other provinces. That was down from 3,200 in 2001.

So this is a significant number and we understand that, but the trend line was positive in terms of turning that around, and I think significantly fewer than what I've listened from some of the members opposite — not the critic himself but certainly some of his colleagues — would lead people to believe is a mass exodus out of the province. I don't think it can by any means be categorized that way.

(20:00)

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I wanted to

ask a couple of further questions regarding Aboriginal education issues. And you touched on a bit of this in your earlier answers. And I wanted to talk about the SIIT, SIFC (Saskatchewan Indian Federated College), and the First Nations University of Canada.

I know that some of this is federal money, that is federal money that's designed to address these issues. But just regarding Aboriginal education in general, what steps is the provincial government taking to ensure that adequate training and education is available to the Aboriginal community so it joins the labour force in more representative numbers?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — There are a number of issues that we can talk about in this area.

I want to just momentarily return to the previous discussion we were having which was about youth and youth working.

I think it is worth noting that in April of this year there were over 80,000 young people working in this province — 80,000 who fall within that 15 to 24 age range — and indeed that our youth unemployment rate was significantly lower than the national average, more than three points lower. So we do need to take some time to celebrate these successes of the system and not simply always carp on the negatives.

As it pertains to Aboriginal participation, Saskatchewan recognizes and certainly the NDP government recognizes that the future of Saskatchewan really does depend on the future success of young people. Given our demographic trend, that means in very large part the future of Aboriginal youth moving through the school system, being successful in that school system, coming out of that school system, getting additional training, and finding work.

And we have undertaken a number of different initiatives in partnership with the federal government. At times the federal government has acted alone. At times we have acted alone to try and build an approach which deals with a number of different issues around this, not the least of which, I think we should identify, is the First Nations University of Canada which is the only First Nations university in this country.

The work that we have done to support the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology, the work that we've done to support the Gabriel Dumont Institute, the Dumont Technical Institute, the amount of money that has gone into apprenticeship programs to support Aboriginal youth moving into apprenticeship — there are a large number of programs that are out there. It is not a case that it is simply one program that is laid out that we say access this or don't access this, but rather that we need to have a multi-faceted approach, and that is what we've attempted to do.

This morning I had an opportunity, with several of my colleagues, to meet with a very progressive group of Aboriginal leaders out of the P.A. (Prince Albert) Grand Council area. And they brought forward a number of innovative ideas on how we can move forward yet again to deal with education and training issues that very specifically speak to meeting the needs of young Aboriginal people within the area of their jurisdiction in the PAGC (Prince Albert Grand Council).

They recognize, we recognize that this is an effort that we're going to have to pay close attention to in the coming years, that we do need to focus on matching up the skill set of these young people as they come out of school. We've got to, I think, spend more time thinking about how we make sure that we don't lose young people in the school system, that we see the dropout rate turn around. And we need to deal with a number of different issues in terms of how we can better integrate Aboriginal people, First Nations, Métis, or otherwise into the mainstream economy. And that is a goal that we share with the Aboriginal leadership, with the federal government, and certainly with the Government of Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Again just to correct some of the minister's terminology, we're not just harping on the negatives here. What we're doing is challenging you and your government to make improvements; that's a role of the opposition. You often ask us for suggestions on how to improve things, and that's what certainly I try to do as the critic in this area.

Further on in the minister's comments, the P.A. Grand Council . . . members on this side of the House have met with them today as well and certainly look forward to the ongoing relationship and the advice that they have to give us.

In an earlier question, you mentioned that the regional colleges received an increase of 1 to 1.3 per cent. That's lower than inflation and lower — a little bit lower, not much lower — than SIAST and the universities are receiving. Given that most regional colleges operate outside Regina and Saskatoon, and for many of these people regional colleges represent the primary post-secondary training experience, what message is this intended to send to those who may not live in the two major cities . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . What message is that intended to send to people who live outside the two major cities?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — It might interest the member, just so that we can put this into perspective here, to take a look at not only on a one-year basis but really over some time, where have we gone with funding increases.

The member opposite might be interested to know that in fact the regional colleges, since the last election, since 1999, have seen almost a 31 per cent, 30.9 per cent increase in their budgets — 30.9 per cent. I mean this is a significant amount of new money that's been added into the regional colleges. SIAST saw 21.6 per cent increase. Universities, federated colleges, Aboriginal institutions — 27 per cent. The K to 12 operating system saw more than 130 million put into it, or a 32 per cent increase.

I mean there's been significant increase over that time period that I think we need to take into account. And so we continue to add money in as we can afford it and to meet the needs and the demands, but I would think even the member opposite would find it hard to criticize a 31 per cent increase to regional colleges.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I want to move on to the Innovation and Science Fund. The Innovation and Science Fund has moved under the Department of

Learning, and it's received transfer funds from the Department of Industry and Resources, I believe. I just want to find out what the hope is and what the direction and the vision that the minister sees for the Innovation and Science Fund in the province.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I don't see any particular change in terms of the criteria. Of course the projects that are funded through there are peer reviewed, and we try and match up funding on that basis.

The decision at budget time to transfer the fund was largely to strengthen the research relationship that the Department of Learning has with the universities, to recognize that learning involves both good pedagogy, but also it involves making sure that you're got good research, that there is in fact a continuum there. And that is one of the reasons we felt it was better reflected moving that from the Department of Industry and Resources to the Department of Learning.

In terms of the criteria, I don't see any particular change. We have added almost \$2 million more in — that's about a 25 per cent increase — into the ISF (Innovation and Science Fund), and we are working currently with the universities to figure out where that is best spent.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you. Can the minister indicate how the less than \$10 million in the fund compares to funds provided by other provinces in Canada and . . . Yes, just answer that question.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — It's difficult to draw a straight line across the provinces and look at how it compares. I think it's important that we note that the province also funds pure research and applied research through other departments. Of course, the Department of Agriculture is a significant funder of research. The Department of Health is a significant funder of research. The ISF is one component of it.

But in terms of . . . Saskatchewan has recently been quite successful in winning additional federal support for our research program. We appear to be, from what I am told by officials, in line with what other provinces are providing. I can't put that into a specific percentage value, but I would think as we take a look across the various government agencies we would see a relatively consistent approach, but we've both increased research and continued to support the key programs.

The member opposite may ask why we do not then, through this budget, decide also to move the Agriculture funding and the Health funding into the Department of Learning for research, and there were a number of reasons for that. Certainly the agricultural funding is often used to leverage direct third party investment through the sector, given that the Department of Agriculture has a — Agriculture and Food — has a much closer relationship with the industry. It was just believed it was a better fit to leave it there. In terms of the Department of Health, we have relatively transparent flow through there, and it's very specific and very targeted. In future years, we may decide to migrate both of those research funding priorities to the Department of Learning, but at this point that wasn't our recommendation and wasn't the view of the province that it was necessary to do so.

But certainly we thought it was useful to move the Innovation and Science Fund over.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm pleased to hear that you acknowledge that the Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture have a role to play in research and innovation and a responsibility to fund some of those projects. And I certainly hope that that is the case when VIDO (Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization) and the CLS (Canadian Light Source) come to this government for funding.

Several individuals have contacted me with concern about the Innovation and Science Fund, and they perceive that the focus has changed away from innovation and commercialization to research only. And I hope the minister can allay those fears and say indeed that that's not the case. So I'd just like to pose that question to him, and indeed if there have been some changes away from innovation and commercialization towards pure research only.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — We haven't at a provincial level changed any of the approach we take to funding or granting monies out of the ISF. I have heard this. I have heard similar criticism, as I have heard it, to relate to the projects that have been funded under the Canadian Foundation for Innovation and the approach that they have taken in terms of focusing more on the big science projects that are underway — for instance, the medical beamline, the beamlines at the synchrotron, as opposed to some of the smaller, what might be categorized more as pure science projects at either universities, certainly at the U of R.

This is a criticism that I'm not . . . I don't have a strong opinion on. I haven't looked at it in a way to have a particularly well-informed opinion on it except to say that from a provincial standpoint what we do is take a look at what the CFI (Canadian Foundation for Innovation) has decided to grant, and then we try to match up what are appropriate funds with it. But from a provincial standpoint we certainly haven't changed any of the criteria that we use, although I would acknowledge that I too have heard this criticism. But it does tend to go back more to the federal government's approach, and unfortunately I'm not in a position to address their rationale or whether any changes have been made there.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. In regards to student bursaries, generally can the minister explain where student bursaries are on the priority list of the department and of the government? Student assistance received a cut in this year's budget. How does reducing funding help students that are facing higher debt loads every year finish their schooling?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Student support . . . and if we take a look at really what is the key critical measure here which is student debt, Saskatchewan's student debt loads tend to still be lower than the national average. Now that's for a number of reasons. Our cost of living is lower. We have in large part lower tuition fees. We see a number of different issues that come into play. But as a result, our students are graduating not with small amounts of debt by any means. A debt is significant especially when you need to think about how to pay it. But certainly through targeted programs like the bursary program, special incentive programs, debt writedowns and others, we have been able to manage those who are very much at the top of the range.

(20:15)

Students tell me as I meet with them and talk to them that there are really two competing issues here. One is there is a group of students who have problems accessing student loans to get the money that they believe is in sufficient amount to help them continue their studies. Conversely you talk to students who get a large amount but worry about how they're going to pay it back.

I believe very strongly that what we need to see in the country is for the federal government and the provinces to sit down and really talk about a new way of doing student financing that takes into account those issues. This is a fund that we've had difficulty over the last 30 years getting the federal government to reopen and to talk about.

And I can tell the members of the Assembly that this is an issue that I believe very strongly, through the Council of Ministers of Education, is one that we need to take up again and will take up aggressively once the federal election is over.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess my concern is if Saskatchewan is facing a shortage of skilled workers, why would the department cut funding to apprenticeship programs like the training allowance and the provincial training allowance?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Well these allowances again, the funding for them is based on utilization and based on need. What we see is in many cases, just a difficulty in matching up what the students want to go into, what people want to go into and study versus where we identify critical shortages within the labour market.

I do find it to be passing strange that we have a situation in Saskatchewan today where there are youth who enter the system and then argue that they have a difficult time finding a job afterwards, when I talk to businesses on the other hand who say that they have a terrible time trying to recruit employees and retain them.

We need to, I think, sit down in the coming months and really draw together a group of industry and labour and others, and talk about how it is that we get a more comprehensive, perhaps a better approach to doing labour market training and to identify how we graduate students out on a timely basis and then retain them.

That being said, one of the biggest issues that we need to deal with is helping students identify where those jobs are and how they can get them and the fact that they want to do them. We still are driven in the education system largely by student choice. And as we look at where the programs are in our universities that we fund, as we look at where the programs are within SIAST, a lot of them are indeed based more around general enlightenment and not always specifically directly related back to job attainment afterwards. And we need to balance those two competing interests. One is meeting our labour market needs and the second being meeting a desire to have an enlightened society.

So this isn't an easy issue. It's one which doesn't always match

up. But in terms of the funding that we provided, both in terms of the increases to the universities, the increase to SIAST, the regional colleges, and changes in terms of our targeted student programs to meet utilization, I think has done this in a way that puts resources where they're needed.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I'm sure I would support you 100 per cent in your endeavours to make the department or help the department show leadership in responsiveness to the labour market and ensuring that that takes place. Could you outline for me in a dollar amount, how much student aid, loans, grants, bursaries, did the department pay out last year, and what are the projections for the current year?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Student financial assistance is driven by need. Students who apply and meet the criteria receive the funds whether they're in the budget or not. We will adjust that as we need.

Last year I am told about 15,000 students received student loans totalling \$123 million on the joint federal-provincial fund. That 123 million was comprised of 68 million in Canada assistance and 55 million in provincial assistance. It might interest members to know that there were about 450 more students last year who received the loan as opposed to the previous year.

The other issue that . . . number that may be of interest is regarding the writedowns, the various types of debt relief that were provided through student bursary . . . Saskatchewan student bursary, Canada and Saskatchewan study grants, millennium scholarship, loan forgiveness and remission ends up being . . . the numbers I have for the year 2002-2003 were over 38 million was provided in terms of debt forgiveness. So this wrote down, reduced the provincial receivables from about 57 million to about 19 million. So these are sizable programs in large terms.

The only other issue, only other number that also may interest members is the amount of the average loan. Last year the average loan authorized was about \$8,500 to students. So obviously some will receive more, some will receive the maximum, some will receive a minimal amount. But those are . . . I know those are a lot of numbers, but I think what they show is that we have, over the years, provided significant support to help write down those provincial receivables. And in fact, we do it for a number of reasons, not the least of which is we think it is good for students. It's also obviously good for the economy in terms of encouraging accessibility to the institutions.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Have the 600 new bursaries for students studying in the health care field been created as promised? And if so, what is the value and the numbers of the bursaries that have been given out? And if not, when will the money in the budget be there to create the bursaries as promised?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I am told that in fact they have been created, but that is a program which is run by the Department of Health. And so it may be . . . I am sure that we can . . . the Minister of Health can take notice or this can be asked at that point, but I don't have the detail tonight.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Generally, does your department have any plans to expand the Saskatchewan bursary program in the near future?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The short answer is no. At this point we are not considering an expansion of it. Not to say that the overall number, dollar value of the program won't necessarily grow, but we're not looking at changes in the criteria.

There are a couple of issues that may impact on that around some changes in the harmonized student aid program, but we haven't worked those through for the '05 year. And so I'm not really in a good position to advise what the impact of that might be. So for this year, '04-05, the answer is that we're satisfied that the program as it's currently structured meets the needs that it's designed to.

**The Deputy Chair:** — I recognize the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood.

**Mr. Hart:** — Thank you. Minister, the Minister of Finance provided us with a list of federal dollars that were transferred to the province in this year's budget, and under Learning there is a Labour Market Development Agreement and funding of almost forty-five and a half million dollars. I wonder if you could explain where in your department those monies would be . . . show up as expenditures and for what purposes.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — These funds are primarily used through both the Department of Learning and would show up in part through the Department of Community Resources and Employment. They're targeted towards employment and training initiatives. So there's a number of different items that might be funded under those, but they are jointly shared by the two departments and flow through — I'm not sure to what proportion through each of the budgets — but they would flow through to specific programs to attach people to labour market and help in transitions.

**Mr. Hart:** — So if I understood you correctly you said although it shows up under the Department of Learning, some of that \$45 million would actually be used by the Department of Community Resources and Employment? Could you give us an approximate breakdown of how much, how many of those \$45 million would be used in Learning and for what purposes?

I'm looking at vote (LR12), training programs. There's a number of allocations in that area. I'll just pick one, JobStart/Future Skills, \$13.6 million. Are some of the federal dollars in that particular line item? And if so, approximately how many of those dollars would be federal and how many would be provincial?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Well amazingly, the split is 60/40. It seems to be the magic number for just about . . . everything in the province seems to be split 60/40. At some point we'll finally get the votes working that way, and it'll be 60 per cent over here and 40 per cent there. But for the time being we aren't there.

The member is quite right in terms of identifying that the funding is used primarily in that JobStart, Future Skills type program. As I look at the training programs that are identified

here, from apprenticeship, workplace training for the unemployed, institutional quick response programs, quick skills, sector partnerships program support delivery, basic education, northern skills training, the PTA (provincial training allowance), the apprenticeship training allowances and labour market information — that totals about 50-some million dollars in terms of the Department of Learning support for that.

And so what we would look at is some portion of that being federally supported. I'm told that the formula works on a . . . It fluctuates on the basis of the number of people who are receiving EI (employment insurance) and something that the feds call reach back, in terms of the number of people who used to be on EI and have I guess moved into other forms of support, anyway. There's a formula that works out of that so it fluctuates back and forth.

But the split roughly between the two departments is 60/40. That's basically the range of things that we spend it on. It tends to be on those JobStart, Future Skills type programs.

**Mr. Hart:** — So even though all the money is shown by the Department of Finance as coming into the Department of Learning, in actual circumstances it is split between the two departments for various labour-orientated programs and those sorts of things.

(20:30)

I noticed that Community Resources and Employment has, as Health has and Learning has, also has some additional monies for labour market agreements with persons with disabilities. So would that money be also lumped into some of these programs such as JobStart and Future Skills and so on?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Those funds that the member references would be more through DCRE (Department of Community Resources and Employment) in terms of dealing with supports for employment for people with a disability, covered under a different agreement.

What the member identifies is that, of course, when we used to have the one department — the Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training — all of those funds flowed into there. But as a result of the reorganization and the new role for Community Resources and Employment, we now share some of those files. And so Finance may account for it as being attributed to Learning. Obviously it all goes into the GRF (General Revenue Fund). We would share out some of those program responsibilities. But under the old system they would have all flowed into the Post-Secondary department.

I do have more information here on the Labour Market Development Agreement. We understand about 8,000 EI clients, employment insurance clients, were assisted under this program in the '03-04 year.

**Mr. Hart:** — Thank you, Minister, for that information. I just have one or two questions on a perennial favourite topic of mine. Ever since I've been in this legislature I've taken an interest as to what is happening with the College Building at the U of S (University of Saskatchewan). And I understand that perhaps there are some things happening there.

And I wonder if you, Minister, if you'd just provide us with an update as to what actually is happening with the College Building. When will we see that building put into a state where the U of S can use it for the purposes that it deems necessary as far as the use of that additional space?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Well I have to say I share the member's interest in the College Building. That is truly one of the . . . beyond being an anchor at the campus, really is a remarkable, absolutely remarkable facility. And the history and the sense of grandeur that is attached to that in terms of the Convocation Hall is remarkable.

I am told that there is good news in fact, that work has begun on the renovations, that the province has provided its funds. The university I'm told is still attempting to secure some of its funding sources. So it'll be done in a two-phase approach . . . roughly a two-phase approach, might be three. We'll hope it's two phases. Anyway, the good news is finally that it is moving forward. I know that will be welcome news to really any alumni of the university and to those who take an interest in this province's history, because it is a remarkable, remarkable facility.

**Mr. Hart:** — Minister, can you give us an indication whether those renovations will be done in time for the university's 100th anniversary? I believe it's 2007. I think that would be just a great project for that 100th anniversary, and it would be my hope that between the province . . . And I know the university has been working hard to access federal dollars and I'm not quite sure whether they did and that sort of thing, but I think it would be great to put some special emphasis on that project and have that as one of the anniversary projects.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I'm told that that is in fact the target, and that we are on target for that. So that is in fact very positive news. This next several years as we look at the province's centennial, we look at the celebration in Saskatoon, we look at the U of S (University of Saskatchewan), it really is going to be a great opportunity for us to look back and think about the big dreams that people in this province had.

And I hope that our generation of legislators, that a younger generation of people coming up through the system really do catch some interest in that and start thinking about what they should be leaving as a legacy into the, for 100 years from now — assuming not many of us will still be sitting in here — so that they can sit around and talk about the great projects that were undertaken then. But certainly this does appear to be on track for '07, and I think is good news.

**The Deputy Chair:** — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister. I'm sure some student 100 years from now will be reading *Hansard* and looking back on those comments quite favourably.

I know we're getting on here in the evening and I do have several more questions, but I'll address some of them this evening. Regarding CareerStart, does the department plan to implement one-year, interest-free grace period for post-secondary graduates before the loan repayment is

required? If yes, when will the government be implementing this program?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The short answer is yes, we are intending to implement that. I don't have an implementation schedule here tonight but I'll endeavour to get that for the member.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I acknowledge that the minister did call me earlier today and to ask me where I was going with the question. I wasn't sure how far along I would get and certainly we can have the official come back at a later point in time. That would be fine.

I want to ask a question regarding funding for SIAST, ask the minister. How do you explain the fact that direct funding to SIAST for operations rose by two and a half per cent — inflation rate in Canada I guess was 1.6 per cent in April — yet funding to the Sask Property Management Corporation, the next line item, rose by 3 per cent? Why would this be the case that the rise in funding for SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) is higher than that of SIAST?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Totally, this is largely related to increased energy costs and energy usage and as such it is a flow through to make sure that the amount that they're being billed is in fact in their budget to be paid for appropriately.

I should just tell the member opposite I understand that my other official responsible for student loans was watching me labour tonight under the tough questioning and has decided to . . . in fact, here he is. So we can move into that line of questioning if the member wants.

I would take the opportunity to introduce Brady Salloum, who is the executive director of student financial assistance, who has joined us on the floor tonight, Mr. Deputy Chair.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again just to reiterate the question before, does the department plan to implement a one-year, interest-free grace period for post-secondary graduates? If so, when will the government be implementing this program?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Now I have an answer. The answer is still yes that we will in fact move on that. The schedule: we had prioritized the graduate tax credit this year as being a priority for new money and as such we will look at that in future budgets. In terms of the rollout, I don't have a schedule tonight in terms of what that might look at, but we remain committed to implementing that.

It's worth noting, I think, that students of course have their loans interest free while they're in school, have them interest free for six months after they're in school, and in fact for up to 54 months, I am told, in cases where they're not able to find employment or have other extenuating circumstances. But certainly the objective is to extend that initial grace period from six months to one year, although that is not provided for on this year's budget.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Well we'd certainly be interested in hearing when exactly that rollout will

take place since it was a topic of much discussion during the election. I congratulate the official on his intuitiveness and his ears must have been ringing. And I appreciate having him here.

What would be the cost of implementing this program? As the minister's own admission, it seems quite modest, but what would be the cost to the Government of Saskatchewan of implementing this program?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — One of the issues that we're trying to work out here — and this is a very good question — is the cost. Part of this will be dependent on how the federal government moves with some of its changes. Earlier tonight we had talked about some of the things we're working on with the federal government around changes to the harmonization of the program. Doing a one-off on our own is obviously more significant than being able to find a way to do it on a harmonized basis.

The other question is whether, of course, it would only apply to the Saskatchewan portion of the loan. If we went it alone, I would anticipate that would be the way that we would end up structuring it, as opposed to on a harmonized basis.

But this is one of the program details that we are working through, and are going to have to obviously work out with the federal government in terms of what their interest is in participating in that.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Next question is regarding JobStart/Future Skills. It's notable that funding for training programs such as JobStart/Future Skills is being reduced overall by 1.4 per cent. How is this justified in an economy which continually requires new and better skilled workers?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — What we have done under that program has been to protect the client services piece. But the program offering . . . but we have reduced some of the funding that we have provided around labour market information and planning issues.

I believe quite strongly that we can find other ways to tackle that issue without necessarily the high cost that has been attached to that in the past. Part of that is making better use of the work which is done among institutions. That'd be regional colleges on the local basis or SIAST at the provincial level or the universities. And so this was part of the rationale as to why we had reduced those funds.

But it is not a reduction that affects the program offering to clients. It rather is one that deals more with the program cost associated with those internal issues around planning and information.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. As the minister alluded to in an earlier answer, much of Western Canada, including Saskatchewan, is experiencing shortages of skilled tradespeople. Does the minister have a plan to increase training opportunities at SIAST or regional colleges?

(20:45)

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The answer is yes; in the broadest brush strokes, we do have a plan in fact to do this. Obviously it is contingent upon the amount of funds that are available to meet those expansion. But certainly what we are targeting is a . . . we believe there is an opportunity anyway to see perhaps as much as 5,400 new training spaces allocated over the term of this government.

What we will need to do is to try and match up where the actual needs are in terms of how we do this. Whether it be on seat purchase, whether we do it simply through increased grants hasn't been entirely determined at this point. But there are a number of issues that we need to tackle including work we'll need to do with the apprenticeship and training . . . Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission as we work our way through that.

So there are a number of different areas that we need to work on. And do I have a document to date to slap down and say here is the plan? No, but we do have the broad brush strokes of a plan in terms of moving forward.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess we were somewhat disappointed that there wasn't funding in this budget for that, but certainly I realize you can't do everything all at once. And we would hope that you work towards implementing that in the next year.

How does the centennial merit scholarship program fit into the department's plans for student assistance? Does the department plan to increase or enlarge the program in the near future? Just generally, if you could expand on the program — what it is, what it's designed to do, and your future plans.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — This has been a discussion we have been having not only within the provincial government but with the institutions themselves about the amount of scholarship support that should be provided. I think it's fair to say that all the institutions and the funding partners, namely the provincial government, support increasing that funding level.

What we need to sort through again here is the trade-off between the amount we make generally available, in terms of usage for targeted programs, and that which we make available for meritorious award. And at this point I would say if I were drawing a line, I would put increased emphasis on us making sure that we've got appropriate funding for those with financial need, recognizing that it's always good to provide the support for academic excellence. But at this point, in terms of financial funding priority from a provincial standpoint, I would put the focus on those in financial need. That being said, I think we all recognize that this is an effective way to attract in highly qualified students into the system and is something that we need to work on. And indeed it is a significant part, I think, of what the University of Saskatchewan is looking at around their program to attract out-of-province students into their institution and to build their academic base that way.

**The Deputy Chair:** — I recognize the member from Arm River-Watrous.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just got a couple of quick questions there. Talking about the contract with the



instructors there, I know that was a very bitter contract, and the union said they would never sign for 0, 1, and 1. Was there any changes to, would it be to the pay grid or the . . . I'm not sure if I'm using the right terms, but I think it's grid, your instructor, your level grid. Was there any changes made to that in the contract?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — In the academic unit, there were indeed changes to the pay grid. It dealt with what we would call pay equity, around making sure that they were greater comparability between the SIAST unit and the STF increments, to take a look at how to deal with that.

The pay grid was essentially completely restructured at the request of the SGEU. And what the focus was, was to move to what I would call a credentialized basis of pay support. So there were significant changes to this pay grid, and at this point SIAST is now working through where individual employees would fall in.

In terms of the mandate and how those two issues interrelate, the 0, 1, and 1 is the band-aid on the base. The additional monies to deal with other issues were in this case grafted in to deal with pay equity concerns. This bargaining unit had not taken advantage of pay equity money as other bargaining units have in the past. But there was only a one-time pot of money that units are allowed to draw into to do that restructuring to readjust their salary grids.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I take it you could provide us a copy of that pay grid change there, as soon as possible.

Was there any other . . . Well I guess we'll get back to the cost of that. You talked a little bit about one pool of money. I'm not quite certain of that. Would there be . . . how much extra cost will be attributed to this year's budget with changing the pay grid scales?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The implementation phase-in of this new pay grid will be over . . . well the transition to the new pay grid will happen over two . . . years as employees migrate from their existing position in the salary grids over to the new one. And the implementation of the pay equity program will happen over a five-year period.

This is common to how it's worked in other units. The total value of this is about \$3 million or 7 per cent over that time period.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Will that be adjusting the existing budget estimates that were forecast at the beginning when the budget was first put out? Will extra money have to be put into the budget to cover that?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — No, we won't need to amend the estimate. I understand what SIAST has decided to do is to draw down a reserve to deal with this year's pressure, and then we'll readjust the base numbers in the next year. But SIAST does have some reserve to be able to meet the change as it affects them coming out of this agreement in this fiscal year.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, that's all the

questions I have for that particular issue. I guess it'll be interesting to look at how much changes were made in the pay, in the grid.

Just one other quick point or a quick question I want to ask, I know when I was . . . my term before, I had some constituents that were coming from the rural that when they applied for loans didn't qualify. And it had to do a lot with the gross farming end of it. And I know that there was going to be making some changes. Have you made any changes to that?

I'll use a farm family, but it might even be a business, applies, obviously they have to file their income tax. I'm not sure if they use gross pay or even if they use net pay. They still sometimes have to pay wages out of that. And I know that was a problem a couple of years ago. And I know that your department was going to look at it. I was wondering, has there been any changes made at that?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — We don't take farm assets into account in doing the calculation. And in terms of the net versus gross farm income, the calculation is done on net farm income. So those are the key program issues I think the member's asked about.

**The Chair:** — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Silver Springs.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And realizing that it is getting kind of late, I'll just limit my remarks to one final question or one final series of questions.

Has the Department of Learning taken any concrete steps in anticipation of the enactment of provisions of the Boughen Commission? I realize the commission looked primarily at K to 12 education, but is there an impact on post-secondary education, and if so, what would that be? And is there any plans based on the recommendations in that commission for post-secondary education?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — We don't contemplate any impact as a result of the Boughen Commission or the government's response in terms of an impact on the post-secondary side. Obviously it'll be significant on the impact at the K to 12 side.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister, for that answer. I was just trying to establish if indeed the Boughen Commission did have an effect on post-secondary education and with you having your officials here as wanting to ascertain an answer.

At this time I'd like to thank you and thank the officials for coming and sitting here through a couple of hours of straight questioning, and I appreciate your indulgence. I'm trying to learn as much as I can about the department and the goals and the future. I share your passion for this department, and I appreciate your asking . . . or answering the questions in a forthright manner this evening.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. I want to thank the members opposite, in particular the critic. I'm not sure if he's trying out for rookie of the year; I worry about that to a certain extent. I'm sure secretly he's a

Tampa Bay fan, so it's highly unlikely that's going to happen. But I do want to also thank the officials tonight for coming out, some deciding to come and save me from myself late in the proceedings. But I do appreciate the dialogue and the discussion. Really, I enjoy the chance to discuss the bigger policy issues beyond just the small issues, and I'm glad the member shares and enjoys that as well. So thank you very much.

I would, with that, move that we rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

**The Deputy Chair:** — It has been moved by the minister that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again. Is it agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Carried.

**The Deputy Speaker:** — I recognize the Deputy Chair of committees.

**Mr. Iwanchuk:** — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm instructed by the committee to report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

**The Deputy Speaker:** — When shall the committee sit again?

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Next sitting, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that the House do now adjourn.

**The Deputy Speaker:** — The Government House Leader has moved that this House do now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Deputy Speaker:** — That is carried. This House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

The Assembly adjourned at 20:57.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**EVENING SITTING**

**COMMITTEE OF FINANCE**

**General Revenue Fund — Learning — Vote 5**

**Thomson** ..... 1361  
**Cheveldayoff**..... 1361  
**Hart**..... 1372  
**Brkich** ..... 1374

**INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS**

**Belanger**..... 1362

## **CABINET MINISTERS**

Hon. L. Calvert  
Premier

Hon. P. Atkinson  
Minister of Crown Management Board  
Minister Responsible for Public Service Commission

Hon. J. Beatty  
Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation  
Provincial Secretary

Hon. B. Belanger  
Minister of Northern Affairs

Hon. E. Cline  
Minister of Industry and Resources

Hon. J. Crofford  
Minister of Community Resources and Employment  
Minister Responsible for Disability Issues  
Minister Responsible for Gaming

Hon. D. Forbes  
Minister of Environment  
Minister Responsible for the Office of Energy Conservation

Hon. D. Higgins  
Minister of Labour  
Minister Responsible for the Status of Women

Hon. J. Nilson  
Minister of Health  
Minister Responsible for Seniors

Hon. P. Prebble  
Minister of Corrections and Public Safety

Hon. F. Quennell  
Minister of Justice and Attorney General

Hon. C. Serby  
Deputy Premier  
Minister of Rural Revitalization

Hon. M. Sonntag  
Minister of Aboriginal Affairs  
Minister of Highways and Transportation

Hon. L. Taylor  
Minister of Government Relations

Hon. A. Thomson  
Minister of Learning  
Minister Responsible for Information Technology

Hon. H. Van Mulligen  
Minister of Finance

Hon. M. Wartman  
Minister of Agriculture and Food