



SECOND SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

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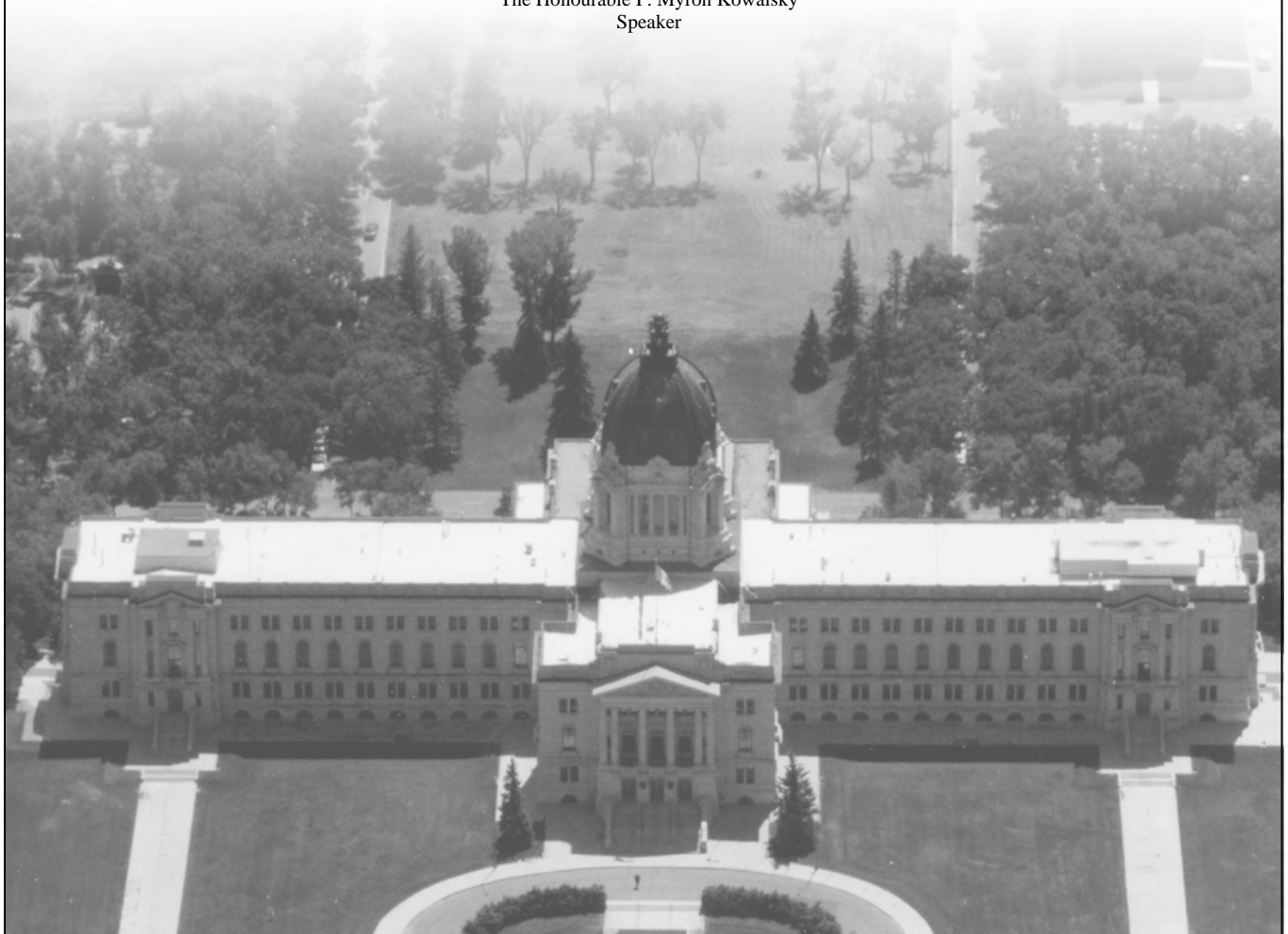
Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
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The Honourable P. Myron Kowalsky
Speaker



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[The Assembly resumed at 19:00.]

EVENING SITTING

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund
Agriculture and Food
Vote 1

Subvote (AG01)

The Deputy Chair: — Members of the committee, good evening. We'll call our committee to order.

The item before us is the estimates for the Department of Agriculture and Food and the first item is central management and services (AG01). I would invite the minister to introduce his officials and if the minister has opening remarks to go ahead and make those opening remarks. I recognize the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would like to introduce officials from the Department of Agriculture and Food. To my right is Doug Matthies who is the deputy minister. Immediately behind me is Hal Cushon, assistant deputy minister. And to Hal's right is Jacquie Gibney, assistant deputy minister. And in the back row next to the Minister of Justice is Karen Aulie who is the director of the corporate services branch. We also have with us, next to Karen in the desk over is Stan Benjamin who is the general manager for Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation.

And we have other officials in the back row. Starting on the far side is Shawn Jaques, manager of customer service for the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation. And then Rick Ashton, and Rick is the acting director of the lands branch. Next is Travis Sulewski who is research economist with policy branch. And on this end behind the bar is Dave Boehm who is the director of financial programs branch.

And I have no opening comments other than to say I think we have a very good, strong team here who will try and provide full answers to any questions that the members opposite might have. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you. Just a reminder to the minister and to all members to be standing when you're speaking, just intended to be a friendly reminder. And I recognize the hon. member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate you reminding the minister to stand because I was about not to. So thank you for both of us.

I just want to start off by welcoming all your officials here tonight, Mr. Minister. And with that I would just like to pass it over to the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood who has some questions to start it off.

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

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. This Committee of Finance setting is somewhat different than our other committees, and I guess we all, all members have a little difficulty adapting to the proper procedures.

However, Minister, I believe it was last summer you were at a tentative meeting of all the Ag ministers in Canada including . . . I'm not sure if the federal minister was there in Alberta. And at that time, there was a communiqué issued. I believe the meeting took place in July. And one of the communiqués that was issued as a result of that meeting was, I think it said that all ministers of Agriculture in Canada had signed the memorandum of understanding whereby they had committed to developing a program or at least investigating the feasibility of a program of alternate land use services, the ALUS [alternative land use services] concept. And I believe you were one of the signatures to that memorandum of understanding.

It's my understanding that some provinces, particularly Manitoba, have moved a long way on this issue. Manitoba has a pilot project that will be centred in one of their RMs [rural municipalities] whereby, that they'll be running this year. The purpose of the pilot project, as I understand it, is to evaluate the issues and the problems that are involved with the ALUS concept.

And the ALUS concept, for those people who may be watching this evening, entails the principles of paying landowners for the environmental and ecological goods and services that they provide to society.

I think most people in this province and in this country like to see wildlife out on the land, whether that be deer or ducks or songbirds, and wildlife of course needs habitat. And the principle of ALUS is to reward those landowners who are providing wildlife habitat, who are good stewards of the land looking after riparian areas and watershed areas so that all communities have good, clean, drinking water.

But up until now the landowners are the ones that have all the costs. And really, other than the enjoyment of seeing wildlife on the land and those sorts of things, they really have no rewards. And the ALUS principle talks about rewarding landowners and farmers for the environmental goods and services, and I would like to know where Saskatchewan is on this piece.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — I thank the member for the question. Certainly we have been, at the federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meetings, talking about the alternative land use programs, really trying to get a sense of how those programs might be structured, how they might work. And two of the provinces have undertaken limited pilot projects, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island, and we continue to monitor and evaluate with them to get feedback about how the programs are developing.

And I think the other element that is very important is to look at the changes that are happening in Europe as well, and we're seeing in the European Union more of a move to structuring programs, whole-farm programs and programs around the use of the land, the stewardship of the land and . . . so these are very interesting in terms of where we might move in the future.

What it means in those situations is that other support programs have been cut back as they look at moving ahead on alternative land use strategies.

So at this point we need to continue to monitor and evaluate the programs, and we will continue to see what the impacts are on WTO [World Trade Organization] and trade in terms of providing supports for farmers through those programs.

Really I think a lot of it has to do with the sense of what it is that the transfer of wealth is about. Is it about stewardship? Is it about preserving natural resource? And a lot of that is being worked out, as well as process, through these pilot projects.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Minister. Minister, have you received proposals or a proposal for a pilot project here in Saskatchewan? It seems to me with Saskatchewan having over 45 per cent of the arable land that one would think that Saskatchewan — and particularly in view of the ongoing farm crisis, particularly in the field crops, the grains and oilseeds sector — that this would be . . . I see it as a program that would certainly benefit the environment, but it also would have real benefits or could have real benefits to our producers.

As I said earlier in my comments, currently producers have all the costs associated with providing wildlife habitat, for looking after the watersheds. And they really don't get any real benefits, and I'm talking about financial costs. It does cost producers more in their operations to leave pockets of wildlife habitat in their cultivated fields. And it just seems to me that we could marry these two benefits, the environmental benefit and perhaps providing another income stream to our producers through this program.

And I would hope that we in Saskatchewan would be on the forefront of this. You indicated that Manitoba and Prince Edward Island have pilot projects. I understand that there is a group of individuals in Saskatchewan that would be very interested in partnering to have our own Saskatchewan pilot program. And I understand, I believe, that there has been some representations to you and your department on this pilot project. And I would just like to know to what extent these proposals have been put forward and what your response has been.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Well thank you. I appreciate the member's perceptions on how an ALUS might work. And at this point in terms of producers in Saskatchewan, basically what has happened is they've talked about the concept. They've asked us to explore concepts, and at this point we've met with a number of groups and had discussions about concepts.

The department has asked APAS [Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan] now to come forward with proposals that are beyond the just simply concept and idea stage and make a presentation to department officials. We've also met with Delta Waterfowl which is also talking concepts.

So certainly the discussions are ongoing, and we're trying to get a sense of — through evaluating the pilot projects and the discussions about concept — where people might want to go with this. But we also need to get a more in-depth sense, and so we're asking APAS to come forward with their proposals.

Mr. Hart: — Minister, I understand that the RM of Colonsay . . . and I'm not sure if that's the actual RM name but the RM that surrounds the Colonsay area. I believe the council there is willing to put \$50,000 towards a pilot program, and I understand you mentioned the Delta Waterfowl Foundation. That's the organization that seems to be one of the major players in this whole ALUS principle, and they were one of the driving forces in Manitoba.

So if we need to have at least a model as to how to set up a pilot program, it seems to me we only need to look a bit to the east and our neighbours in Manitoba where an RM, in concert with the Delta Waterfowl Foundation and other interested players, met with their provincial minister and I'm not sure . . . I believe there perhaps may be some federal money involved, but their project is up and running this year.

And I understand that there was some fairly in-depth discussions about getting a Saskatchewan pilot project running, and I've been told that they were met with less than enthusiasm by some of your department officials. And I think that's a shame. This is an area that we really need to move forward on.

And as I said earlier in my comments, the grain and oilseed sector of agriculture is in a crisis mode. We've seen that for the last five to six years if not longer, but it's really reached its pinnacle of crisis in the last 10 to 12 months, and it seems to me we're at a crossroads where we need to look at a new direction for this industry that is the backbone of our province and that industry which this province was developed on.

And it just seems to me that we need to be a little bit more enthusiastic and a whole lot more aggressive in looking at these various ideas and concepts that are out there. And I would urge you and your officials to, instead of being roadblocks and naysayers, to be much more supportive and move forward with this whole project.

And it seems to me, I think people in other provinces, particularly in Manitoba and PEI [Prince Edward Island], have the right idea where we need to run pilot projects to work out the details as to how a larger program may run and to discover those problems because I am sure there is problems with every program, a new program. So it seems to me it's hugely important that we have a pilot project in this province, not only in Manitoba and PEI. And then furthermore I understand that other provinces such as BC [British Columbia] and Alberta seem to be further along down that road to embracing this concept and coming up with their own pilot projects.

And I would like to have your comments, Minister, on what I have just said.

[19:15]

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Well I think as we look at the overall stewardship of land, as we look at the issues of support for the industry, we need to evaluate a wide range of possibilities. And certainly there is recognition that many farmers in terms of their stewardship are hosting significant wildlife on their land.

I think it's also important to know that we have over three million of our 7.8 or more million acres of Crown land, over

three million that has protected habitat for wildlife as well. So within our own structures, there is also certainly a fair bit of environmental stewardship that is being managed that is vitally important to the biodiversity of the province, to the health of our provincial environment.

Along with that we have also through the APF [agricultural policy framework] got about . . . oh let's see. We'd be about 39 to \$40 million in APF funding for environmental farm planning. And it's not exactly the same as what's going on in terms of ALUS, but it is also very, very important in terms of making sure that we have the best environmental stewardship available. And to that end we've now had somewhere 5 to 6,000 farmers who have taken part in the environmental farm planning workshops.

So we are certainly concerned about the environment, and we're also working on the issues of providing funding, long-term funding for care of the land which we do through our Crown programs as well.

In terms of running a pilot project and you've asked a couple of times, we believe that in some senses we're further ahead of other provinces in terms of our work on land use and environmental farm plans. But in terms of pilot project at this point, we're open to proposals, open to discussions.

And, I mean, from what I see of the interactions, interrelations, if there's somebody who's got a proposal — Colonsay RM [rural municipality] or someone else who's got a proposal — I am quite sure that they would be met with welcome by the department, asked to provide further information. And certainly as I said, APAS will be coming to present a proposal to the department in the near future.

Mr. Hart: — Minister, you mentioned a couple of things in the whole area of agriculture and environment. And what I am sensing and what I see happening is this is the new direction, that we may be going down the road with agriculture in that we are taking these two areas and we're melding them together and both areas can benefit if we do this properly.

The alternative land use is one part of that. The biofuels is another part of that. This whole area of climate change and dealing with CO₂ in our atmosphere in removing that, farmers can play a significant role in that whole area. And I believe other areas . . . You mentioned earlier that other areas of the world — Europe in particular, I think — they've moved a long ways down that road. I understand in the US [United States] that there is movement down that area.

Because frankly, the consumers of and taxpayers of our country and farmers themselves are really not happy with the current state of affairs, particularly in the grain and oilseed sector of our agricultural industry here in Canada. And the cash bailouts, emergency payments are short-term, stopgap measures that really, I think, when . . . and many farmers will agree with that. We really haven't solved any problems. We've just simply delayed those problems.

And now, we're at a point in time where we need to find some real solutions. And I think melding the environmental aspects and agriculture together instead of them being at loggerheads as

they have been perceived in the past, I think we can move those two areas together and have real benefits to both agriculture and the environment.

And things like the ALUS program will bring, if it's done right and if it works the way the people that are putting it forward, and I have no reason to believe . . . I think it's a good concept. It'll bring additional revenue streams to those people on our farms so that they won't have to depend on all their revenue coming from the sale of their commodities because we have seen in the past that the consumers of this country and of this world aren't prepared to pay what is needed to the producers to sustain them on the land. So we need to look at alternative sources of revenue and this being one of them.

So simply, I would urge you and your officials and I would urge you, Minister, to make it very clear to your department officials that this is something that Saskatchewan needs to move on because, even though you have said that you don't think there has been any stonewalling within your department, I have had individuals tell me that that in fact is the case. That when they discuss this concept of ALUS with some of your officials the reply they get is they quote, we really don't think it'll work that well here in Saskatchewan. And I'm not convinced — and many producers, including APAS, are not convinced — that that in fact is the case. In fact they are convinced that this is a real opportunity for our farmers in Saskatchewan — not only our farmers, all citizens of this province.

So having said that . . . And as I said I would like to urge you to give this a high priority in the department's list of priorities, that we need to move on this, and we need to move on it fairly quickly because the clock is ticking, and we are running out of time. Not so much time in getting the principles down and getting the projects up and running, but running out of time as far as losing many producers if we don't solve the cost price squeeze on our farms. And I believe this may be a piece to that puzzle.

Having said that, Minister . . . Well perhaps I'll give you an opportunity to respond, and then I'll cover another issue.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you. I appreciate that because I think it is important to know that there are many aspects to the concepts that have been put forward and certainly I would expect, in good faith, that department officials would engage in discussion, active discussion with people who are putting forward concepts and proposals.

But overall we have clearly, as a department we have in our budget presentations in fact talked about continued investigation into ecological goods and services programming. We have in many, many forums engaged in discussion and been working with farmers and farm groups in terms of the need to be responsible environmental stewards. So that work is ongoing.

And you know maybe in the back and forth of discussion that happens, maybe somebody felt that they were not getting exactly a warm welcome around a particular idea or part of an idea. That can happen in any kind of a dialogue where people are being real with each other. And so that could easily happen. But the reality is that we are working in the area. We are very

clearly monitoring.

You talked about a number of other areas where we have been working renewable fuels basically in terms of development in this province. We're out ahead of most of the country in terms of the movement on renewable fuels with our mandate with the plants that we have up and running, ones that are scheduled to be up and running soon — like the Husky operation and others that, though unannounced, are well on their way towards announcements. So we see, we see some really good moves in that direction.

We see good moves in terms of biodiesel. We've got a task force that will be presenting very soon, and they've been doing a lot of work meeting with a wide variety of players. And always the focus as we're working on these projects is, how can we see a better return to the primary producer? And I think that's essential in so much of what we're doing.

I mean we can see very clearly how, though primary producers are producing a good quality commodity that's moving throughout the world, that has demand, they're not the ones who are getting the return. And so there's a lot of work going on about how do we make sure that farmers are getting the kind of returns that they should be getting whether it's in a development with biofuels or further along in the bio-economy.

Really the question and the work that is going on is to try and make sure that this very vital part of our Saskatchewan economy is moving along successfully and the people engaged in farming are getting an appropriate return for the work that they're doing in producing goods and as well as being good stewards. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, I request leave to introduce guests.

The Deputy Chair: — The Government House Leader has requested leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — That is agreed. I recognize the Government House Leader.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the co-operation of the minister and the opposition in allowing me to take just a moment to introduce some guests who have just moved into the Speaker's gallery to join us here.

These folks, Mr. Chair, are members of the minister's advisory committee on the status of the artist. And they are people who have been giving great, serious deliberation and consideration to what it takes in our province to make this a vibrant place for artists to be able to display and share their talents and also make a living at the same time, all of which are noble objectives for our province of Saskatchewan. And they come from many of the disciplines of the arts and have been working hard for

several months, in some cases for several years, to this objective.

And I just would like them . . . I appreciate very much . . . I had a chance to meet with them earlier. I appreciate their taking an interest in this accountability exercise in our parliamentary democracy, and I would ask all members of the Assembly to show them appreciation for their work on the committee, but also for the talent that they bring in making Saskatchewan a vibrant place to live and work and raise a family. So thank you.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Agriculture and Food Vote 1

Subvote (AG01)

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the hon. member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, one of the . . . another area, the issue that I'd like to raise with you is the area of agroforestry. I believe last year when we discussed this whole issue, I raised this issue with the Minister of Environment, and he said that your department was the lead department on this issue. Then it was in the Speech from the Throne, there was a very definitive statement about converting 10 per cent of Saskatchewan's arable land to agroforestry, and I believe it was in the next 20 years.

However, Minister, I looked for some reference to agroforestry in this year's budget and, unless it's in the fine print, I really didn't see anything in this year's budget specifically aimed at agroforestry. Minister, we've had . . . I've discussed the area, this whole issue of agroforestry and some of the proposals that the past . . . the former federal government and some of the plans they had for this industry five or six years ago. And to move 10 per cent of arable farm lands — we're talking about three to four million acres — into agroforestry, it's not a simple task. There's some pretty significant issues to be dealt with and one of them is replacement income and developing markets and that sort of thing.

So, Minister, I wonder if you could summarize where agroforestry is currently and what is going to be done on that particular file during this fiscal year.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Well thank you for the question. I think it's important to know that in government we don't operate in particular silos and that certainly there is interest in agroforestry in Environment, Agriculture, and Industry and Resources. Industry and Resources, however, is the lead partner in the agroforestry development, and so that question would be best asked of Industry and Resources.

That said, we see some tremendous possibilities. I've been to a couple of meetings of people, farmers and others, exploring agroforestry possibilities in the province. And there are some farmers who are going ahead, are doing woodlots, doing some

development of their shelterbelts, expansion of shelterbelts, and looking at some of the potentials for higher value wood production, and so there is certainly exploration going on.

The forest centre is doing a fair bit of work in terms of exploring what the possibilities are. And so basically if you are looking for numbers through Industry and Resources, through forestry centre, you would find probably where the initiatives would be more direct and would be . . . Certainly through that forestry centre and the department, you'll see where the lead is taken. But both Environment and Agriculture are also keenly interested and working with them to try and may sure that with this industry there really is potential and trying to make sure that that potential is reached.

[19:30]

We've had international consultations, people in to speak to some of the agroforestry groups, and they've put forward some very, very interesting ideas about how agroforestry has been developing over many, many years in Europe and the kind of products that they are producing. So of keen interest but I think you'll have to wait till the Industry and Resources estimates to get more detail on that.

Mr. Hart: — Well, Minister, the term is agroforestry which implies that we are turning some of our . . . and as the Speech from the Throne said, taking 10 per cent of our arable acres, farm acres, farm land and putting down to forests, primarily fast-growing hybrid poplars. I guess my question to you is what level of involvement in the agroforestry objective that was outlined in the Speech from the Throne, what level of involvement you and your department have in this whole issue.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Again I'll just say clearly that we don't operate as silos. We do have support people, agrologists, who are working with the agroforestry centre and working in consultation. They are consulting with farmers as well. And if you're looking for any line in our budget that would be supporting it, you'd find about \$100,000 that would go towards support for the forestry centre.

Mr. Hart: — Well, Minister, it just seems to me that if you and your government is serious about this initiative that it would seem . . . I would at least think that your department would be much more involved in this. What we are looking at, as I said earlier, is taking 3 to 4 million acres over time and taking that land out of production and planting trees on that land.

Well I have some experience with planting trees. I did work for a time at the shelterbelt centre. We planted the shelterbelts on our own farm. I know that even in the forest fringe areas it takes at least probably 10 . . . a minimum of 10, more probably 15 to 20 years to grow trees that have some market value.

So it would seem to me that in order to accomplish what you and your government have set out to do that we would require some sort of agriculture programs to aid in that transition. If you take a farm that's in the forest fringe area or other areas of the province who are looking at converting significant acres or a significant percentage of their farm to agroforestry, there is a loss of income from that area on their farm.

There's also added costs. You just don't plant a trees and then come back in 15 to 20 years and harvest them. They need to be maintained. Weed control needs to take place — all those sorts of things.

And it would seem to me that we need to have some transition programming. And that was part of the federal proposal that was put forward to this province. And we're talking in terms of billions of dollars to make this happen. You mention \$100,000 from your department. Perhaps there's more money in Industry and Resources, and perhaps there's some more money in Environment. But in order, in my mind at least, to make something significant happen in this whole agroforestry file, we need to have some dedicated funding within the budget, not only for this year but for multiple years.

And so again I would urge you to move forward on this file because again that is something that is another stream of revenue that could come to farmers, landowners, which is another piece to solving the cost input squeeze that our producers are currently under. And so therefore I'm suggesting that you and your department get much more involved in this. And then perhaps you could give us an indication as to how many people within your department are working on this file; have you got a special unit set up within the department to move this piece forward; provide us with some detail as to what level of involvement your department has in this file.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Well again I will point out to the member I appreciate the enthusiasm that he has. And I know that certainly if we provided the kind of funding that he and some of his colleagues on the other side indicate is available for every project that's going along, our budget would be more like 14 billion rather than seven. But let's be clear. As I said this is not an area where Agriculture is the lead, but we do have agrologists who work in our business development centres who are working with farmers who are interested in this.

But let's also, before we let the enthusiasm carry us away, let's also take a look at some of the significant things that are happening in the forest industry today — not just in Saskatchewan but across the world where we are seeing some dramatic changes in terms of the forestry industry.

The pulp industry is in trouble across North America as cheaper pulp is coming on from other markets. And so there are changes that are happening within the industry, and one has to be . . . When I say one, I mean I think a responsible government has to keep eyes wide open, not to just a narrow area but to the whole of the picture of where forestry is going, what needs to happen in forestry. And some of the changes that have happened from outside that are impacting on Saskatchewan today do impact where we're going, the speed with which we're going at developing particular programs.

That said, we do fund through Agriculture and Food a certain portion of the forestry centre work. Plus we do have agrologists who are advising, and there is funding provided through Environment and through Industry and Resources. The question I think that sits before all of us as we look at trying to develop a more profitable agriculture industry in Saskatchewan is, where today is the federal government in terms of its planning? What are they going to be putting into the overall picture of

development to help make this industry more profitable? Today we don't know that. We hope that we will see more enthusiasm and interest in helping develop the sector from the federal government as well.

But what I can say is that, of the funding that is available through our department, we hope that that and we expect that that is being used responsibly, not only there but in each of the areas that we are responsible for. And as I say, though I appreciate the member's enthusiasm for the idea, I think we have to remember that there are some pretty huge demands today that have to be met broadly across the industry, and we try and keep that in mind as well when we're looking at where the precious resources can be put.

Mr. Hart: — Minister, I'm looking at a brochure that was an insert in *The Western Producer* two or three months ago. I believe it was in one of the issues of *The Western Producer* in this current year so it's you know, as I said, two or three months ago at the most and it's entitled *Agroforestry: A Growing Trend*. And interestingly perhaps it may have been in other papers, but it was in *The Western Producer*, one of the publications that have very wide distribution throughout the farming community.

And it talks about your government's agroforestry initiative, and it talks about economic benefits, more jobs for the rural part of Saskatchewan, an increase in skilled labour needs for rural areas, diversified local economies. It initially outlines the objective that was outlined from the Speech from the Throne. And it talks about the economic, environmental benefits and the social benefits, and it encourages producers to get involved in this industry and to investigate it and to explore the opportunities.

And I guess maybe this is a question that perhaps maybe the Premier could answer later on when we do the executive estimates that he will be responding to, but it just appears to me that just its very name, agroforestry, there's an agricultural part to it and there's a forestry part to it. And we're not talking about the forest sector of our province and the forestry industry that is in the northern part of our province or at least in the Prince Albert and Hudson Bay area. We're talking about planting trees on farm land, and it seems to me that agriculture should play a fairly significant role for the reasons I outlined earlier.

I mean, if you're really serious about making this happen, we have to develop the transition programs and deal with those issues because this is a long-term venture. If producers go down this road, they won't see any income. They'll have all the costs associated with growing the trees and maintaining them, and they won't have any income for at least probably 15 years or more.

So I guess my question to you, and perhaps it'll be asked later on to the Premier, if you weren't serious about this agroforestry, why did you have it in the Speech from the Throne?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Well I think it's important for the member to know that there is a great deal of seriousness about the agroforestry and the development potentials that there are through agroforestry. I think it's also important for the member to acknowledge, as I have said a couple of times now, that there

are at least three departments that are engaged on this front and portions of budgets from each of them.

But we've also got, through the forestry centre, some very knowledgeable people who have been at work with producers and encouraging those producers to explore the possibilities for themselves. We got the agrologists who work in our business development centres who are working with farmers to try and help them get a better sense of what to do. And we have had Robin Woodward and Doug Currie from the forest centre come and speak to our senior management in the department about the way of moving forward in this whole industry and the kind of things that are essential today so that we can have a strong agroforestry industry in the future.

And what they emphasized was the importance of research and development today to make sure that the products that we're encouraging people to grow will have a good return. And to make sure that there are industries that will take those products and develop them further.

And so, it's not divorced from the rest of the forestry industry. I mean, there are elements where these things are intimately connected.

I think the other thing that it's important to know is some of the other work that's going on in terms of economic development — significant work in terms of conversion of wood product, biomass product to syngas [synthetic gas] and then to ethanol; some tremendous work going on in the northeastern part of the province.

So there is a lot of work. There is a lot of enthusiasm. There is a seriousness about it. And there is activity that's going on, that's staged, their investment that is being made. And I think the member just needs to look broadly and will see that in fact there is a serious commitment here, and it's being worked out.

[19:45]

Mr. Hart: — Well, Minister, I certainly realize that this is certainly a myth, that this is a file that not only pertains to Agriculture. It pertains to the other departments, and I will be pursuing this issue with ministers of the other departments. It just seems to me that perhaps from my vantage point that it would seem that perhaps your department could be somewhat more proactive in this area.

But having said that, I would like to turn to another issue that I would like to raise with you. Back on February 24 of this year, your assistant deputy minister wrote the executive manager of the Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association. And the gist of the letter was that their request for additional funding to maintain their programs was declined. As you know, and I'm sure many members of this Assembly and many citizens of this province would know or at least I'm sure have heard of the Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association. And particularly people in the agricultural industry are very aware of the good work that they have done.

The Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association is an association of mostly farmers and other people who see the value in their work. And their sole source of independent

revenue, as I understand it, is through membership renewals and sales. So in order for them to do meaningful work, they require additional funding. And they were able to obtain some additional funding both from the federal government and the provincial government, but both those sources of funding came to an end in the last fiscal year.

They put together a proposal and submitted it not only to your department. They submitted it to the Department of Environment to provide the extension capability to farm producers for them to be fully informed as far as this whole area of sequestering carbon and entering into agreements with aggregators and large . . . [inaudible] . . . to store the carbon in their soils.

This is an issue that the Soil Conservation Association has been working on for a long time. I would say without a doubt that they are the number one agency as far as knowledge and experience, and they've developed a number of ideas and concepts to deal with this issue. And as a result of the downsizing of your department, I don't believe your department has the capability to provide the information and extension work that is needed to make our farm producers fully aware of the benefits, but also of the liabilities and the pitfalls in this whole area.

So when their funding ran out, they put a proposal into both the two departments and, Minister, on February 24 they received a letter of rejection. And I would . . . and for the life of me, I can't understand why your department would not find some additional funds. We're at the risk of losing six of their long-term agrologists which would enable them to do much of the good work that they are doing. And for some reason you didn't see the value of the work that they're doing, and therefore they were turned down. And, Minister, I would like you to explain why their request for funding was declined.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you. I think it's very important to acknowledge the tremendous work that the Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association has done over a significant number of years in the province, certainly a lot of work in educating, informing around zero till. And I think there is some very important factors that I think it's important for us to pass on to the member opposite.

First of all, we have over the years only provided very modest funding to the Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association. Over the last three years . . . three years ago it was . . . indication was given that the funding was phasing down. Last year we gave \$25,000, and I think, you know, that's had an impact. We have also provided office space for free for the Soil Conservation Association. And I think what is most important to understand is that the bulk of the financing for the Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association came from federal government, and that funding was cut.

The funds that were provided by provincial government were not enough to maintain or retain the structure as they had it and, as I indicate, there was a period over which we had talked to them about phasing down the funding and had been doing so, so that last year's funds were just \$25,000. Now as early as this morning, we had some indication that the federal government may have come through with six months further funding to

allow them to continue their operations for that period. And I suspect over that period there will be some evaluation going on as to whether or not there will be continued funding.

The issues around carbon sequestration, certainly we've worked very closely with them. We've put significant pressure on the former federal government to deal with some of the, I think, some of the key issues around carbon sequestration.

The federal government seemed to be insisting that there be a business-as-usual clause in the agreements they were working on. That business-as-usual clause would have meant that farmers who had been doing best practices, zero till, sequestering carbon for years, would really get no benefit for a significant portion of the sequestration that they had already done. Now that could have led to some significant negative consequences and might also have led to some problems in terms of farming practice so that they might qualify by bringing land on stream later on.

So there were some real key issues that were coming up that our department worked together with the Soil Conservation Association around. It's also important to know that we do have people within the department who continue and first of all acknowledge that the largest part of the work was done by Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association.

But we do have department people who are working in the same area who were working with them and received significant benefit from the work that the SSCA [Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association] undertook over the years. So we really appreciate that they have done a tremendous job over the years. But we also acknowledge that our small portion of the funding could not have kept them whole, could not have kept even one of their agrologists whole.

Mr. Hart: — Minister, you're correct in that the federal government did come through with some interim funding which will keep their organization and allow their organization to keep their staff in place and do the work that they have been doing for the next six months. After that, they will again be in the same situation where they will be seeking sources of funding to carry on with their work. And I think their work is very important at this point in time.

I know there is some uncertainty as to where the federal government is going with the whole area of Kyoto and those sorts of things. But having said that, this issue of climate change is not going away. It's here to stay. Even in the United States, who isn't a signator to the Kyoto Protocol, they have a system in place or are working on systems to pay landowners, farmers to store carbon in their soils. In fact there is the carbon exchange in Chicago. It's a commodity exchange where carbon is traded and that sort of thing.

So this is an issue that whether or not we stay with the Kyoto Protocol or whether we move away from it, it's a long-term, ongoing issue. And I think we need to make sure that we are at the table and involved in the development of the protocols that are required to . . . so that our producers receive maximum benefit from any commercial transaction that takes place in this field and also that they are not taken . . . or do not fall into the traps that can also come along with this issue.

It is a fairly complicated issue, and we really need to have someone out there who is knowledgeable in this issue, explaining it to our producers, and making them aware of, as I said earlier, the benefits and also the liabilities and pitfalls.

As an example, I guess, of the activity out there, there are at least two or three or more companies that have been and are currently, I understand, aggregating blocks of land for carbon storage. And there's one or two companies out of Alberta, and I understand that as of early March that another company here in Saskatchewan has been set up to do that very thing. At least if the information given out by the corporations branch is correct, it says in the nature of business is aggregating carbon credits.

And it's a bit troubling, Minister, when I look at this particular company and how, when it became an entity . . . and frankly the shareholders in this company . . . As I indicated, the letter of rejection from your department was February 24. The letter of rejection from the Department of Environment, I believe, was in early March.

Minister, there was a numbered company, 596000 Saskatchewan Ltd., that has been in existence, according to the information, since 1999. In May 2005 it was . . . it says under event of history, it was struck off the registry I believe. But however February 28, 2006, right in between the timeframe for the two letters of rejection, this company was resurrected, and it was changed to a new name, and the name is C Green Aggregators Ltd. And, Minister, do you know this company, and do you know the shareholders in this company?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — A number of things that I'd like to address for the member coming out of your comments.

First of all I think it's important to look at what we do have available today. Certainly as I've indicated we have expertise within the Department of Agriculture and Food, but there is also significant expertise in the Department of the Environment, in Industry and Resources, and SaskPower in terms of the issues around climate change, environmental protection, and also specifically around the issues of carbon sequestration.

It's true that there have been a number of groups of aggregators around trying to pull together and pick up carbon credits, wanting to trade them on the open market. One of the problems is that there are no international rules around the trading of carbon credits at this point. And with those rules not being in place, much of the aggregation work that is being done is being done clearly on speculation, and there are some risks involved. Nobody knows what liabilities there are for the people who engage in that, who commit carbon credits. There are certainly risks and liabilities there that, in our discussions with the soil conservation association and with our departmental expertise that say there really needs to be some caution taken on that front.

What I will say is that we are also waiting to see what comes down in the federal budget. Will they be providing additional support beyond the six months interim that has been announced? And if so then the soil conservation association may want to put forward some proposals. There's potential of funding through the ADF [Agricultural Development Fund], the Ag Development Fund, if there is need. But certainly we do see

and respect, we see the value and respect the work that the Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association has done over the years and the levels of expertise that their agrologists have in these areas.

But I think it's . . . Just to flag one more time, there needs to be a lot of caution, given that there are no international rules around carbon credits, trading carbon credits. Yes there is speculation, and there is sales on open market, but there are risks of liability as well. And so we hope the people really, really are aware and, you know, have caution.

[20:00]

As far as a particular aggregator who might be involved, no I don't . . . I could probably find out, but I don't have that knowledge here today.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I think you have made a good case for why we need to have organizations like the soil conservation association fully functional and in operation to provide the information that is required. As I mentioned earlier, with the downsizing in your department, the extension function is minimal, particularly on an in-depth issue like this. This is not something that producers can have a discussion over the telephone. They need to attend meetings, have printed material before them and those sorts of things.

Now you'd said that you weren't aware of who the principals are in the C Green Aggregators. As I'd indicated earlier, this company was renamed and resurrected, I guess, from its sleep mode, I guess, that it was put in last May. And coincidentally perhaps and maybe I'm assuming perhaps it's just a coincidence, it was resurrected right in between the time the two letters of rejection were received. As I said, it's called C Green Aggregators Limited and the principal, the director, at least the . . . yes, the director is one Reg Gross. And I thought perhaps you may have been aware that this company was formed.

Is that just a coincidence or did Mr. Gross have some knowledge that the average citizen wouldn't have because one of the activities that the soil conservation association had proposed to do was to set up a company for this very purpose of aggregating carbon credits with the best interests of farmers involved? And now, we have another company that's set up. And I don't know. Perhaps they have the best interests of producers involved, but they may not have. And it just seems to me this is too much of a coincidence, but perhaps it is, and I would appreciate your comments.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — To the best of our knowledge, it's coincidence.

The Chair: — I recognize the member from Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a couple of questions for the minister, and it's related to the CAIS [Canadian agricultural income stabilization] program. And there's an awful lot of questions from the producers with respect to the CAIS program, and they're having a very difficult time getting answers. Well I would suggest it's not only the producers that are having difficulty getting answers. I sent a

letter to the minister on March 30, and I do not have an answer to that letter as yet. So I guess it's prompting me to ask the same questions in the House. So to the minister, one is I'd kind of like to know his departmental policy on answering letters. As I say, this was sent on March 30.

But my question is going to be on the structure change adjustment initiative related to the CAIS program. And the question that producers wanted to know, is this a federal or a provincial initiative?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Well as the member will know, this is a federal-provincial program. It is designed through agreements with the federal government and the provinces. And so the structure of the program is in the agreement.

With regard to structural change adjustments, which are a part of the program, clearly that process is designed to keep pace with changes in farm size, really structural adjustments that farmers will make. And we have felt, and not just felt but we have seen through the evidence that this is one of the components that is not working well, that it was very, very difficult to keep pace with changes that producers were making. And we have been pressing for a more workable and easier, more straightforward process that would deal with structural change because farmers are changing the size of operations, either up or down, and the structural adjustment should help in terms of adjusting the reference margins according to the structural change that the individual farmer has made.

With regard to letters, we try to maintain a minimum turnaround time of two weeks through the minister's office. But when there are technical questions involved — either to the minister's office or to the department — when there are more technical questions involved, particularly when they demand interaction with the CAIS administration, it can take substantially longer for those interactions to take place and for us to get the kind of substantial responses that some of the letters are asking for. But we do try and maintain a minimum two-week turnaround time.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I know the CAIS program is federal-provincial, but specifically the structure change adjustment, is that a federal initiative, or is it a joint initiative, or is it instituted solely by the province? Or is it every province has the same, or is it done by this province, this province only?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — The structural change adjustment program is national program. It's the same basically across the country. In our case we have a federal administration. The administration handles the process, and with federal administration it is that, that portion that is handled, handled by that administrative body.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Mr. Minister, an awful lot of the issues and problems you identified is because of the structural change adjustment, and I know it's creating an awful lot of hardships as I identified in my letter.

But another question that's come up, and it's a constant question, is about historical margins and issues associated with historical margins. How are they derived is one portion of it.

And how can or why can historical margins use negative margins in planning when producers are not allowed to use negative margins? And historical margins, my understanding from the producers, is done by the province.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — It wasn't clear from the question whether the member was talking about just the general margins, how they're derived. But I'll go over both that plus the constructed margins.

The general margins are based on Olympic average, five-year Olympic average, where the high year and the low year are dropped and that then provides the reference margin. But there are also margins that are constructed that sometimes will be for new people coming into the industry or who are seeing structural change and those are margins that are . . . You look for a benchmark per unit and on that basis you're constructing a new margin for somebody. So if the member could clarify which it is that you're looking for, that would be helpful.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well I'd be glad to clarify. It's on historical margins, and it's in the structure change adjustment format that's put out. And I understand that historical margins are developed by the province, and I forwarded a copy of this with my letter to the minister.

For an example, in this particular case it goes back for five years and my understanding is it's done by the province, and it says right at the top of it, historical margins. And it relates to some things that are very, very difficult to understand. For an example, on a forage basket in this particular case in 2002 they had a negative margin, a negative margin that figured in to their whole structural change adjustment. And the province is using a negative margin in this particular case. And that was what the question was. How can negative margins be used by whoever established this historical margin, vis-à-vis a producer that's not allowed to use historical margins or not allowed to use negative margins?

[20:15]

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Given the information from the member's letter, I think we've got focus on where the question is. So if you are looking at a constructed margin and you have a negative margin where the return is below what the farmer would have expected to get, below what it cost him to grow that particular crop, then you've got a negative margin. And this is calculated by the federal administration.

One of the problems . . . And we've asked the federal government to try and address this issue because it creates anomalies then in terms of your structural adjustment. And that is that where you've got a negative margin and the farmer increases the size of the operation, it can decrease the reference margin and vice versa. Where they decrease the size of their operations, it can increase the size of the reference margin.

So we've asked the federal government to address this. And I'm told that where they see it, where they're made aware of it, they do try and make adjustments for the anomaly. And it becomes, I'm told, increasingly complex with the number of operations, the mixture of operations that a given farmer has. So it's one of those areas where there is significant complexity and where we

have certainly been pressing for a change. And as I say, where the federal government is made aware of these anomalies, they do try and adjust for them.

The Chair: — I recognize the member from Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Minister, I want to start tonight by going into the CAIS program and the additional funding or the base funding that you've put in. And if I understand the budget right here and I'm reading it properly, we have a base funding of \$98 million again this year. But I can't find anywhere where the additional funding will be. And I guess my question is, will you be putting in supplementary funding or additional funding for the CAIS program?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — I think the member needs to look at the CAIS program overall and look at what we have been doing. What our figures allow for is full funding of '03, '04, and '05.

The member will notice that we committed to the full funding of '04 and '05 in last year's overall budget. But what we are committing to at this point is to the base funding of 98 million and to reviewing — given whatever the numbers might be by the third quarter — reviewing what those numbers are. And as I have indicated on numerous occasions, I have every expectation that whatever the need and the demand is that, as we have in the past, we will meet that in the future.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, Mr. Minister, I guess especially because we're dealing with estimates here I find it odd that you wouldn't . . . Last year I believe it was \$159,000,100 additional money that you had to put in. And I can't see that big of a dramatic change to this year. Grain prices are very low.

Last year we had fairly high yields in many areas, but the price was very poor. This year . . . I mean our yields; I can't see them being on a provincial basis much higher than they were last year. If we have an average crop, they'll probably be the same or lower. I would say you're probably going to need that much money again.

Why don't we put that money up front? It's only an estimate that we're putting in, but why don't we include it in the budget when we first come out with the budget?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Well first of all I think it's important and I would ask the member to look at the numbers and recognize that the 159 million that is referenced is the funding for two years. It includes '04 and '05 — full funding. And that's the additional funding that was put in. So when we are looking at this, we first of all have moved the agenda ahead about six months by putting the '05 funding in last year. And we are, as I say, we don't know what the numbers are going to be on CAIS yet. The federal government provides some estimates, but we'll have a much better idea by the third quarter, and we will, as I say, I have little doubt that we will fully fund that.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Will you, Mr. Minister, then be providing supplementary estimates in our fall session? We have the short session in the fall. Will we see such a thing at that time?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Well I think again let's just do a quick run by the history. July we announced the full funding for '04. And then it was in the fall that we moved the agenda ahead when we re-evaluated, and we were able to announce the full funding for '05. So for this coming year, our commitment is to have re-evaluated by the third quarter and there is every possibility that that timing might work out with fall session as well.

Mr. Bjornerud: — So can the minister give me the breakdown then. If last year's \$159,000,100 was for two years, what was the breakdown for 2004, and what was the breakdown for 2005 then?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — The incremental funding breaks down like this. For '04 it's an additional 75 million and for the '05 funding eighty-four two. And so that's where you get your one fifty-nine two.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. So say for an example this fall that we have to come up with a shortfall of the same as last year, say roughly \$80 million. Where will that money come from?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Well I think as the member knows that there are certainly a number of factors that will influence what is available in the fall. I mean ultimately, whatever revenues, excess revenues, might come in, it'll ultimately be handled through the General Revenue Fund, will be through that fund of course, dealing with issues like forest fires as well.

So I think basically, we look at it, we say okay; you've got the overall numbers for '04-05. We've got a sense of where this might go, but we're going to have to re-evaluate a number of things, and that will be also what the impact of the new federal budget will be and any changes we see in program.

Now I think we've been alerted, and clearly Minister Strahl has said that we've got case for now, but there may be some adjustments. Well we don't know that; that's what we're living with and so once we've got those numbers, we'll certainly be dealing with this in as judicious a manner as possible.

And I think it's also important to remember the timelines in terms of beginning to put in applications and when the due dates are. The applications for this year are not due . . . personal, I think, is June 15, and corporate, June 30, '07. So we're really well ahead of the time frame at this point.

I think I would like to take this time . . . I've been advised that that was last question, so I'd like to take this time to thank my officials for the work that they do, to thank members opposite for their thoughtful questions, and appreciate the time that we've been able to spend on these estimates. Thank you very much. Thank you.

The Chair: — I recognize the Deputy House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Yates: — I would move we report progress.

The Chair: — It's been moved that we report progress. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Agreed. We will take a short break until the Minister of Health and his officials are able to present themselves within the Assembly. And thank the Minister of Ag and Food and his officials for their time this evening.

**General Revenue Fund
Health
Vote 32**

Subvote (HE01)

The Chair: — The estimates now before the Assembly for the Department of Health are on page 82 in the Estimates book, subvote estimate (HE01), central management and services. I would ask the minister if he could please introduce to the Assembly the members of his department with him this evening.

[20:30]

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much. I'm very pleased to be able to introduce the members of the department who are here. Immediately to my left is John Wright, deputy minister. Directly behind us, Lauren Donnelly, assistant deputy minister; Bonnie Blakley, executive director, workforce planning branch.

To my immediate right is Max Hendricks, assistant deputy minister. And sitting behind him is Ted Warawa, executive director, finance and administration branch. Also in the room and sitting behind us: Rod Wiley, executive director, regional policy branch; Bert Linklater, executive director, regional accountability branch; June Schultz, director, medical services branch; Leslie Grob, assistant to the deputy minister; and Gina Clark, intern student with the department.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. To the subvote, I recognize the member for Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you very much. Welcome, Mr. Minister, and welcome to your officials. I'd like to start off with the questions a constituent concern, but it certainly is a concern that many people that are on waiting lists have.

And this particular situation as I'll outline is a letter written to me from a Mr. Dan Chudyk and concerns himself and his son Kyle who are waiting to have an operation done on their noses. And, Mr. Minister, this gentleman, Dan Chudyk, wrote me because of the concern over the timelines and the delay in their operations.

His son Kyle was seen in December 2003 by a specialist, a Dr. Gore-Hickman, in Saskatoon. And at that time they were told that he was on a 24-month waiting list for this operation. And they were quite concerned about that, but so be it. It was not a life-threatening procedure so that they accepted that.

Their concern was that this 24 months would take this young fellow right into his grade 12 exams and graduations in the June 2006. At 24 months . . . So in January 2006, 25 months later, they had not heard any news about the operation so they contacted their specialist Dr. Gore-Hickman's office, and they

were told that anyone diagnosed in December 2003 is now on a 28-month waiting list.

Early in April 2006, which is 28 months, they still had not heard anything and again contacted the doctor's office, and there they were told that they are now on a 30-month waiting list. So this takes their son to June 2006. Of course, that coincides with the son's final exams and graduation and so they're quite concerned about that and especially when it's a — well, like they say — a 30-month waiting list for a day procedure, they find unacceptable.

And so just a general question, Mr. Minister, is about . . . I mean, a 24- or a 36- or a 30-month waiting list for a medical procedure seems to be totally unacceptable, at any rate. And I would also like you . . . I will send a letter, this letter, over to you, Mr. Minister. If you would look into the situation on their behalf and see if there's anything can be done to speed up this waiting list and get their procedures done in a more timely manner.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much. I appreciate the member sending over the letter. It's useful to have the letter in front of us, and of course I will correspond in that regard. But for the sake of the record here let me indicate a couple of things.

First and foremost we are talking about the ENT positions — ear, nose, and throat specialists. Saskatchewan has always had, for the sake of my colleague here from Indian Head-Milestone, I'll say a challenge in recruiting and retaining the ENTs within the system.

That having been said, two things going forward. Number one, the department has requested of the Saskatoon Health Region in particular to, during '06-07, bring forward a plan to deal with the longer waiting lists for the ENT specialties. This is one specialty area where we do have long waiters.

Secondly we have been making significant progress in regards to our longer waiting lists. I can report to the House today that over the last two years, and thanks to the attention that's being paid to waiting lists, we have almost cut in half the waiting list for all procedures in the province that are 18 months and over. We still have some ways to go. As you can see, 50 per cent isn't 100 per cent of 18 months and over. But that's significant progress in cutting that in half in the last two years. The ENT situation is a part of that reduction of the longer waiting lists.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I appreciate you looking into my constituent's concern because, as he has noted in the letter, that he has never had to go to the point of asking an MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for any help. And he takes it quite serious that it's been such a long time that he has to ask for help in these matters.

Just a general comment. It seems that when we're looking at 30 months waiting list for this procedure on these two individuals — there are other procedures that we hear about on a regular basis — I think it's just unacceptable for people to live in discomfort that may restrict their ability to work or certainly lifestyle to wait on a waiting list such a long time.

I certainly wish you well, and I hope you can do something

about moving these, reducing these waiting lists. But again I just have to say that when people out there that are waiting on these waiting lists, it's a very, very long time when they're looking at more than two years to get a procedure done.

But thank you. Hopefully you will contact this gentleman. And please let me know what the outcome is.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much. I will certainly do that.

I was just reviewing some additional numbers with regards to the longer waiting lists. And I think I should put on the record in that period July to December 2005, which is a period when we were taking a significant look at the long waiting lists and increasing the number of surgeries that were taking place within the system, 84 per cent of patients who had surgery July to December 2005 received their procedures within six months, and 93 per cent received it within the year. That means 7 per cent of people who were scheduled for these types of elective surgeries, 7 per cent of them were outside that 12-month period.

We want to be bringing all of those within 12 months and then work on reducing that even further on the elective side. It's going to require a little bit of work in addition to recruiting specialists and surgeons, anesthetists, and other operating room folks, but increasing our ability to manage the existing operating rooms in the province and perhaps expanding the capacity within the province.

The Chair: — I recognize the member for Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Chair, and good evening, Mr. Minister.

As you may be aware, as you likely are aware, there is a fairly significant problem with a shortage of physicians in the southwest part of the province. I'm speaking specifically of the Cypress Hills constituency because the problem seems to be maybe more acute there than other areas of the province.

The community of Shaunavon is probably short at least two doctors. The community of Climax would like one full-time doctor. There are no less than two from the community of Maple Creek that are in need of being replaced there. There's two in the community of Leader. And the community of Eastend was without a doctor until just recently. They've signed a contract for an individual to come to the community to start practice sometime in the next few months once immigration hurdles are cleared. So out of those half dozen communities, we're probably short close to a dozen medical practitioners when you add them all up.

So I guess the question that arises, Mr. Minister, as a result of the current set of circumstances is, does the department have an active human resources plan that is specifically dedicated to recruitment of doctors?

[20:45]

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much and appreciate the member's patience while I consult to make sure I've got the numbers right. We've got a budget that we're dealing with the

estimates on in the Chamber today in committee, a budget that the government is very proud of, additional money into health care in the province, a significant amount of which is in human resources. And of course recruitment and retention issues are human resource issues within the system.

I'm very pleased to say in answer to the member's question . . . there's a couple of things I will say and I'm pleased to say them all. But I'm very pleased to say that this particular budget recognizes the significant needs that the system has for recruitment and retention of physicians. \$500,000 has been set aside in this budget to set in motion a process that will create a recruitment and retention agency for the province. The recruitment and retention agency was one of the recommendations in the action plan for the health workplace released in December 2005. That action plan indicated the need for additional professionals within the system, and physicians are a significant part of that.

The regions have told us that of course it is a competitive world that we are recruiting physicians in, a competitive world that the regions are struggling with to attract to one particular part of the province or another, and the regions have asked the province to assist them in that regard. Our response has been to assist or to begin the process of creating a recruitment and retention agency, and I believe this will be very helpful in the big picture.

Secondly, we have \$2.2 million in this budget specifically targeting the recruitment of internationally educated medical graduates, and also this budget targets primary care initiatives. And of course in your corner of the province, primary care initiatives are very important to ensure the delivery of health care over large areas. This budget contains \$3.9 million in four new primary care projects of which there are at least several on the drawing board for your corner of the province.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess the response you gave is enough to elicit quite a number of other additional questions. The first question that would come, I think, is a result of . . . The answer you just gave is, you're talking about a process that is now established for the ongoing recruitment and retention agency. So, Mr. Minister, can you tell us where we're at in that process? How far downstream are we? Where are we at, and when can we expect that agency to be up and running?

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much. I'd like to answer the member's question with a bit of a preamble by adding to my previous answer about physician recruitment and retention simply because there are initiatives in this budget that go beyond this that I think should be on the record to begin with. And while I'd indicated in my original answer some of the new dollars, I did not indicate the extent of the additional dollars that flow through that are being expended in this year, but have previously been there and are continuing to be there in the current budget.

For example, the new money under physician recruitment actually is only a part of a \$26 million physician recruitment and retention budget that is having some success. In December 2005, the end of the year, the calendar year just passed, there were 1,728 physicians licensed in Saskatchewan compared to 1,626 in the year 2000. That's a 6 per cent increase in

physicians over this period of time that we have been actively engaged in recruitment and retention initiatives.

Some of those recruitment and retention initiatives include specialist bursary programs, specialist enhancement training programs, specialist physician establishment grants. Also on the rural and regional side, we have a family medicine residency bursary program, a rural practice establishment grant, a regional practice establishment grant, an undergraduate medical student bursary program, rural practice enhancement training program, specialist re-entry program, rural emergency care program, locum service — basically rural relief, weekend relief program — rural travel assistance program and rural extended leave program.

These, in addition to a number of other programs, have been worked out in conjunction with the Saskatchewan Medical Association and, as I indicated, are having success at increasing the number of physicians practicing in the province. That having been said, I readily acknowledge that we still have considerable amount of work to do in attracting and retaining physicians, specialists, and other professionals into the province.

Specifically to answer your question, we have a telephone number in place. Today? . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . We are in the process of putting a telephone line in place right now for recruitment and retention agency. We are gathering data of vacancies and needs from the regions, and it is our expectation that the agency itself will be up and running by this fall.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Chair. The list of programs the minister recited in his answer was quite extensive, and if I heard correct I would say at least half of those are dedicated to providing greater medical capacity in rural Saskatchewan. And the numbers of active doctors you indicated is up by nearly 100 over the last five years. But it doesn't seem, anecdotally anyway, it doesn't seem that we have the level of medical capacity in rural Saskatchewan that we'd like.

So I guess, Mr. Minister, in view of the fact that there's more doctors practising and you had put into place all of these programs for rural medical practice, are we succeeding there? Anecdotally I would suggest we're not. But can you give us an indication, Mr. Minister, how we're doing in rural Saskatchewan? I think that's a very important question in light of the numerous vacancies that I have in the constituency of Cypress Hills, and I'm sure that that situation is replicated throughout many rural constituencies.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much. I'm tempted to simply tell the minister that I've heard the anecdotes. I've been in the coffee shops around the province, and I've heard the stories. But I've also been in communities where the shortage is very real, that in this particular piece of land, serving the people that surround that or live within that piece of land, there's a need for a physician.

On a more practical perspective, looking at the entire province, the programs that we put in place are indeed having some success. The number of family practitioners in rural Saskatchewan have increased. The number of specialists, system wide, have increased. And the active rural family

practitioners, from March 2001 to March '06, the numbers that I have in front of me have certainly increased from 211 to 234. So anecdotally we can pinpoint areas — and we'll certainly be doing so now with the recruitment agency's work — of working with the health regions to identify those areas of the province where recruitment needs are the greatest. We will be able to take that anecdotal evidence of there's a need here and target that for filling.

On a practical level province-wide, we know the programs that we've developed in conjunction with the Saskatchewan Medical Association, that those programs have value and are working and can be used in conjunction with the message we send out through the recruitment agency to attract additional family physicians to rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Minister, I appreciate that there's a lot of work that has to be done to compile those figures and bring the information into one cogent document.

You mentioned earlier that the department is currently in the process of seeking information from the regional health authorities to what they know to be their professional requirements, their doctor requirements, and so forth. When you have that information, is that kind of information that will be made available to us, to the public generally?

And I guess the other question I want to ask while I'm sort of on this topic is, from your knowledge now, from the viewpoint of the department at this particular juncture, would you say that the situation that we're experiencing in Cypress Hills with anywhere from eight to a dozen doctors that we're short right now, is that an aberration? Is that a unique situation? Or is it typical of many other rural areas?

[21:00]

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much. Again I appreciate the questions, and I thank the member for patience while I gather as much data to be as concise and as specific as possible.

Two parts to the member's question, the first one about public knowledge. I think that it is important to recognize that human resources, whether we're talking about physicians or other professionals, is a constantly changing circumstance. Whether it's retirements or people whose family have circumstances that require them to move — illnesses, vacations, maternity leaves — any number of factors could influence whether or not there's a vacancy or an additional need created within a specific area.

All of the data with regards to the regions is accessible in one form or another and certainly would be accessible through the recruitment agency because we are actually advertising those positions centrally and seeking people to fill those positions. If people don't know about them, of course, how can you know that you want to be there?

Secondly, the primary health care initiative falls both within directions from Sask Health but fits needs set out by the regional authorities, regional health care authorities' workforce plans, and therefore that planning information is also available. But it will of course change as circumstances and needs change

within the region. So I hesitate to say that on any given day I'm able to provide a complete status report on vacancies around the province. But that data will certainly be accessible in one form or another.

The second thing about . . . is it an aberration in the Cypress region? As I indicated before, recruitment and retention is an ongoing matter within this province, within the other provinces, within many of the states in the United States. There is a physician, nurse, pharmacist, technologist shortage in most jurisdictions in North America. Some areas have, at a given time, a greater vacancy rate than others and again for any number of reasons that may be unique to that part of the province.

But also on any given day, we can point to just about any region in the province and point to a community where there has been a shortage — or is a shortage — for which the regional health authorities and now the province are actively recruiting to fill. In my own area, the town of Turtleford on Highway 26 has expressed a desire for assistance within Prairie North Health Region for recruiting to fill a vacancy at the hospital in Turtleford.

Those pressing needs of the community are there to be addressed, and now we have additional tools to help the regional health authorities to address those needs.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Minister, the issue of recruitment seems to be widely misunderstood, I would believe or I would suggest, as a result of some of the experiences that communities in Cypress Hills have had recently in their efforts to find doctors to fill the vacancies that, you know, plague their communities. And if I understood your answer correctly, the new recruitment and retention process that you're going to put in place is going to play an active role in the future. But I also am led to believe that as it stands now, each regional health authority is responsible for the recruitment effort within their district.

But what I'm hearing from the communities is that they feel — and I think you maybe alluded to it in your comment about Turtleford — that each of these individual communities feel that they are being obligated by the regional health authorities to undertake the recruitment efforts on their own.

So would you lay out for us, as clearly as possible, who has the responsibility for undertaking recruitment of doctors for these rural practices?

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Again thank you very much. The workforce action plan, workforce action plan released in December 2005, which made the recommendation with regards to the establishment of a recruitment agency, certainly recognized that the current practice of regional health authorities having responsibility for recruitment and retention didn't take into account the different sizes, unique circumstances that each of the regions found themselves in.

When we were consulting on the plan, we recognized that some of the smaller RHAs [regional health authority] were significantly challenged to do the same type of recruitment and retention work that the larger RHAs were able to do. Take into

account the cost of advertising, attending recruitment fairs, website development, lack of a central place for collecting applications, that sort of thing. This sort of called for a centralizing of the process.

So to answer your question, with the programs and the financing that the province has put in place, regional health authorities have basically had the responsibility to do that recruitment. So when the Cypress workforce planning process had to include a piece on recruitment and retention, they were on their own to do that. Sask Health negotiated tools for them to work with. Now Sask Health will help to centralize that process and provide them with greater assistance. Does that answer the member's question?

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Minister, it answers my question partially, and I guess that's part of the problem with this particular topic because the further we go into it, the more questions there are. Does the minister envision the recruitment and retention agency that is hopefully up and running by this fall? Is it the expectation or intention of the government, of the department, that it will take the leadership — it will be the primary source for recruitment and it will be the centralized agency for recruitment purposes — and the applicants that it receives as a result of its advertising will be funnelled out to the different RHAs for their particular needs and desires?

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much. The department, Saskatchewan Health, has taken a leadership position in this regard to create the agency to provide the support and tools. The regional health authorities will continue to manage their plans. Regional health authorities will continue to, well, develop their plans and manage them, but there now will be an additional tool that takes into account the resources and efforts on a province-wide basis to assist them in the work that they need to do.

Mr. Elhard: — Given that model, Mr. Minister, what role will be played by the communities? If the community of Eastend is need of a doctor again when the community of Leader is recruiting is two doctors, what's their role going to be? And will it be as extensive as it has been in the recent past?

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Again thank you very much. I'm a very strong believer in community involvement, whether it's in health care, education, economic development. I'm a strong believer in community involvement, participation from people within a community in assisting the people of a community realize their potential.

The regional health authorities I believe serve this purpose. We have individuals from throughout the region, representing different areas of that region, who sit together, who are collectively making decisions. There's a consultative role that the regional health authorities perform. They meet in different locations throughout the regions.

And I believe that the communities have to continue doing what they've done and participate to the greatest extent that they feel they can in the development of regional health authority plans and in the rollout of those plans through the communities.

[21:15]

So I don't know if I'm addressing the question directly because I don't know what role a number of those communities in the area that the member is referring to, what role they've played in the past. I'm assuming that those communities have been actively participating and would simply encourage them to continue to do that because it's the role of the regional health authority to consult, develop their plan, and deliver that plan, again in consultation with the communities.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Minister, from my experience, recently it would seem that the communities are the agencies that have taken primary responsibility for the recruiting. They have put together local committees and have gone and advertised, have accepted the responses to their applications, have taken the applications to the College of Physicians and Surgeons where they've been vetted for appropriate credentials, and given the results of that vetting. Then they've gone and approached the two or three or four candidates that seem appropriate and have undertaken negotiations to see if somebody would be prepared to take up the opportunity to the community.

And if that's the way it's going to be, I think it needs to be clearly understood by the communities that they have the primacy. It's their obligation first and foremost to undertake the recruiting effort on behalf of their community. If they get some kind of supportive help from the regional health authority or there's some indication from the RHA of the type of doctor they might want of some specialization or other, that's okay. But somebody has to say to the community, look, you're responsible. The RHA is just going to kind of help support this effort, but they're not going to take the lead in this effort. I think that would save a lot of time and a lot of frustration on the part of . . .

It's still going to be difficult to recruit adequate numbers to rural Saskatchewan, but if these communities know that it's their responsibility, then I think we need to decide that and say so tonight because that will help them get their initiatives for recruitment underway.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much. Again I thank the member opposite for his additional information on the activities within the communities. And I do want to express my appreciation to the communities that have been actively engaged in this recruiting process. But I do stress that while I welcome and encourage communities to continue to do that work, the primary responsibility for recruiting within a region is the responsibility of the region itself. And the region's development plan would indicate to communities where collectively there's a sense of the need to develop a primary care facility, need to develop a — I don't think we are doing much of it anymore — single practice or dual practice physician location.

It's a number of things that are very important in the development of a human resource plan within a region. The region has the responsibility to do that, should be consulting with and working closely with the communities.

There's no doubt that when an area has been identified as having a vacancy that requires a filling, that all of the support and effort that can be brought to bear, participation from within

that community is of great benefit. The agency and the province are now serving to centralize and assist in that process, providing opportunities to take the needs of the province as a whole beyond that which the individual regional health authorities can do on their own.

It's like trying to attract business to the province of Saskatchewan. It's hard for the province or somebody in Regina to say this business is best suited for Biggar or Kerrobert or Colonsay. Colonsay, Biggar, and Kerrobert may all believe that's very important for them to be there. But if the province has set the parameters that allows that business to find this province attractive, if a physician finds the province of Saskatchewan attractive, then it's up a particular region or a particular community to then attract that individual to that region for this particular purpose.

So there is a central role that the agency plays. There is a tool box role that the agency plays. Ultimately the human resource planning and the recruitment and retention responsibility continues to lie with the regional health authorities.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, I think you've explained more or less how you believe the recruitment and retention process needs to work. But I didn't hear from you clearly what it is that the regional health authorities are obligated or expected to do as part of their mandate in the recruiting process.

I think the communities of Cypress Hills have found it very frustrating dealing with the regional health authority because they assume that they have a responsibility or an obligation in this recruiting process but the advertising and the coordination and the interviewing has all been done by the community. So if the RHA is the agency that is obligated with this responsibility as you outlined, what are the things they actually have to do? What are they required to do to assist in this recruiting process? Do they have budgets specifically dedicated to this? Do they have people specifically dedicated to it? Are they expected to act within a timely manner, in a timely manner if in fact the doctor that's being recruited for this position fits their overall human resource plan? What exactly can we expect from the RHAs as part of this process?

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much. I want the member opposite to understand when he's talking about the agency itself, that the agency is designed to play both a leadership and a supportive role for the RHAs. The agency itself assists and broadens the scope of what the RHAs do. But the RHAs themselves will have . . . In fact to answer the supplementary questions that were part of the overall question, the answer is basically yes to all of those pieces.

The RHAs have got budgets. They've got staff related to human resources and recruitment and retentions. They are seeking to fill vacancies in a timely manner. The RHAs take the job of filling their — particularly because that's what we're talking about — physician vacancies very seriously.

The system is built, even the primary care model is built around an active participating physician. So putting some resources forward at the RH level, the human resources, administration and in fact pulling the plan together is something the RHAs take

very seriously.

That having been said, we're near the end of a transition period whereby you may remember — it probably is no more than 10 years ago, maybe just a little bit beyond that — a lot of recruiting in this province took place by the physicians themselves. If they were retiring or they wanted someone to assist them, the physicians would, you know, make the calls. And people in the community would get around to support, bringing the new doctor into the community. A lot of that has changed over the last 10 years with younger graduates having a bigger world to move into, adding to the stress that the system feels with regards to physician recruiting.

That's why the primary care model has developed — not only in Saskatchewan but in practice right across Canada, and not just in rural parts of Canada but within an urban environment as well — primary care clinics, the multidisciplinary team approach to ensuring that people have access to care that's not necessarily delivered by a single physician and in some cases that care not delivered by a physician directly.

So in answering the member's question, the regional health authority continues to have the resources and leadership and supportive tools from the province to do recruiting and retention based on the consultative plan that they put together for the region as a whole. When that plan is put into place and communities are interested in facilitating and participating in that planning process, they're a welcome partner within the piece.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the hon. member for Indian Head.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you. I'm going to have to butt in here, so I can get a few of my questions in. I think they probably could have gone back and forth until midnight and maybe that would be all right, I don't know. But it's past my bedtime at midnight.

So I'd like to first of all thank all the officials for being here this evening. I have a number of questions, some of them leading off of what my colleague from Cypress Hills was talking about, and that would be recruitment and retention.

But what I want to ask is, we met again, we met today — as the minister of Post-Secondary Education, I believe, met — with this group of medical students that came from the U of S [University of Saskatchewan]. And their request was looking at student to resident ratio of instead of 1:1, 1:2, and that the whole reason being is to try and keep some of the students here in Saskatchewan so they don't go out of province to finish their education, to keep them here because they felt there was a shortage.

So I would be interested in what the minister's response is to moving from a 1:1 ratio to a 1:1.2 ratio.

[21:30]

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much. I appreciate the question. Earlier today the Minister of Advanced Education and Employment had mentioned to me the meeting that took place

with students. I had indicated to her then, and I will indicate to those who are watching tonight and for the record, that this is a matter that we are taking a look at.

There are differing opinions out there, and we're trying to find the right balance. The students have asked for a change in the ratio. It's the SMA [Saskatchewan Medical Association] . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . The SMA has asked us to take a look at a change in the ratio as well. Yet we have others who have expressed the need to stay within the 1:1.

This is an interesting issue. We think that there is value in changing the ratio. We just want to make sure that we sort of square the circle, as they say, and act after we've had a chance to assess all of the information.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you for that. I'd be interested to follow this line of questioning a little bit further. Just learning a little more of it today and hearing the students talking about some of the other jurisdictions, because that was my question is, how do other provinces deal with this? What are the ratios in other provinces? And they said as high as 1.6:1 in British Columbia.

I then asked, you know, how does it sit with the SMA and the other organizations throughout the province and regarding also the health districts? And according to the students, they listed off a number of organizations, more than I could list off, but a number of organizations that were in favour of this. You say that there are organizations that are hesitant and aren't so sure this is the route to go. I'd be very interested in knowing what the rationale is for that, what those organizations are saying, be great to know who those organizations are.

But if that isn't forthcoming, then what is the rationale of those organizations or the department not to move on this as quickly as possible? Because it does deal with the very issue that the member from Cypress Hills was talking about. Recruitment is one thing, but retaining who we have trained is another. And this is a large step, I would suggest, to that very piece is retaining who we are training.

So I guess my first question is, what is the argument as to not to move to this from the organizations that you had mentioned?

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much again, and I appreciate the request to elaborate on the answer because I think it is important. One of the other sides of this story, one of the other associations that have provided us with some information are the . . . it's the association of faculties, Canadian Faculty of Colleges of Medicine. Sorry, I can't even read my own writing here.

The rationale essentially is that there is a tendency for grad spots to be in the specialties and less in family medicine. In a province like Saskatchewan where we are looking to recruit and support medicine in rural parts of the province, we need to make sure that we've got the balance between family medicine and specialists. There is no doubt we do need specialists retained in this province as well. It's finding that balance that's critical.

And as a result of that, we're reviewing the requests which we,

as I said earlier, tend to believe has some value, with the cautionary approach that the Association of Canadian Faculties have suggested to us and not wanting to move too quickly. That may, in fact, cause us more problems in rural Saskatchewan and not fix some of our problems in rural Saskatchewan, which is a focus that we'd like to stay on.

Mr. McMorris: — That's an interesting answer because we had that very same discussion earlier this morning with the students. And they were saying that — and again this what they had to say regarding that very issue — that although a number of years ago that was perhaps more the case that pre-grads were going more into the specialty area and not as much into the family medicine, but what they've said, over the last two years especially, is that at least 40 per cent of the students were choosing family medicine and 60 per cent in the specialty which is the mix that I think most provinces were trying to strike.

The other thing that was interesting when we look, kind of just talking and questioned a little bit more, the opportunity, if you went to a 1.2 ratio, is that those residencies that you are adding — that's 20 per cent increase — could be targeted towards family medicine. In other words, if that's where we're finding shortages in rural Saskatchewan or all of Saskatchewan but in particularly rural Saskatchewan, if you targeted those students coming out into residency spots, under residency spots that are targeted towards family medicine, you would then have a better opportunity of not controlling but directing grad students into areas that we feel that we're short.

And I think that was the very point. So that if you feel that you're short in a certain area, this is an excellent opportunity to move people into, whether it's family medicine or if it's a certain specialty, but in this case, family medicine, which they said the numbers are increasing with students going into that area. But this would be another way of enhancing that. So I would be interested in your comments on that.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Again thank you very much for requesting elaboration on this. I think that there may be a bit of anecdotal evidence that students bring forward in terms of the numbers. We'll have to take a look at the numbers that they were presenting and how the pieces all fit together.

Saskatchewan currently already reserves 40 per cent of our spots for family medicine. There's the reserve component that's created there, and of course Saskatchewan recognizes that we have a better chance of retaining our people if they're Saskatchewan born and raised, if they've got some ties to our communities. So this is one of the reasons why we are looking at this. We're taking it serious. We don't want to close the door on the issue.

And in fact I can probably argue that we have moved in that direction already with the creation of four new IMG [international medical graduate] spots and two specialist re-entry spots. It's an additional six over and above the 60 spots that already exist. So six out of 60 is sort of 10 per cent.

In any case, we're not closing the door on the issue. We are trying to understand the arguments and finding the balance that's just right for Saskatchewan. The students make a good

argument. We feel that there's some value there, and we'll continue to look at this.

Mr. McMorris: — I think there's one final question in this area, and we'll move to something else. But you had mentioned that there are 60 seats, and you'll be moving to 80 in the future, so you're going to have to increase the number of residencies automatically.

But going to 1.2 at this point, starting now, would start to build towards that capacity that is going to be needed in the future. So I'd really suggest then . . . I mean I don't know all the ins and outs of it either, but it just made an awful lot of sense that you would start building towards a building capacity now so that you can meet the demand in a few years when the seats are at 80 and there'll be that many looking for residency spots. So just a final comment before I move to another subject. I don't know if the minister wants to comment on that.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Just a repeat of my answer previously. We haven't closed the door on this. We're willing to look at it. The program offers us opportunities to look at it and to make some changes should the balance work. So we'll continue to do that.

Mr. McMorris: — Well we will be certainly looking forward to hearing from the department on the progress in this area.

What I want to move to now though is some of the issues that we have been raising in this House in a little different atmosphere over the last couple of weeks and especially the issue that came up today regarding the case that was raised in question period. And there are a whole lot of questions around that, and I think that'll probably eat up most of the time that we have left.

But the one question to begin with is, could you please explain to me the policy of the department as far as paying for out-of-province medical care.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much for that question. There's no doubt as we've learned today that there is some confusion amongst members of the public, in fact members of this Chamber, about what the policy is with regards to out-of-province care and financing.

[21:45]

Let me make this as simple as possible for the record. There are, for all intents and purposes, only three areas where prior approval is deemed necessary for . . . There are only three circumstances in which prior approval is deemed necessary for payment. Almost all health care services are available without prior approval outside of the province of Saskatchewan in hospitals, etc. The three areas that I'm talking about, you do require prior approval are MRIs [magnetic resonance imaging], bone density scans, and cataract surgery.

There is a very specific policy in this regard when we're dealing with those three areas where prior approval from the medical services branch is required. The request for the procedure must be submitted by a Saskatchewan specialist. The request must demonstrate that waiting to receive the service in the province

could be potentially detrimental to the health or well-being of the patient and also that the patient is unable to gain access to the service in Saskatchewan within a required time frame. In certain circumstances when a patient has been referred to an out-of-province specialist, that out-of-province specialist may request prior approval for an MRI as part of his or her clinical investigation, and in most cases those are approved by Saskatchewan Health.

Mr. McMorris: — So that is interesting. I don't believe very many people including myself knew that was the case. So any person that is on a waiting list here in Saskatchewan that says, no this is way too long for me, can just go out of the province without any approval.

And I guess the other issue that came to mind when you were talking about that, we're talking about out of province; what about out of country too? So you know we probably have reciprocal agreements with other provinces, but when you start travelling out of province, quite often it can be down in the States. So maybe I'll ask that question first before I get into the different examples of people waiting on lists and going out of province.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — I'm very glad the member asked that particular question because I realized that I did neglect to use the words within Canada in my response to him earlier. So add to my response that medical services are covered by Saskatchewan Health within Canada, with the exception of the three areas that I talked about. But any service requested or received outside of Canada must be done so with approval of the medical services branch. So only within Canada is the prior approval not required except in the three instances in which I had outlined.

Mr. McMorris: — So for example in the case that was brought up today with baby Paige, when they went to Edmonton there was some, you know, wondering whether they needed prior approval. They absolutely did not need any prior approval even though, I guess, one . . . well I guess maybe I'll correct that then. In one case they did look for a bone density scan, but there were many other tests being done. So I mean they're going to Edmonton, and they're going through a battery of tests, and one of them happens to be a bone density scan. That wouldn't have been covered, but they would be fully covered for everything else automatically without asking any questions of the specialists, the GP [general practitioner], or this government.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Again thank you very much. I'll speak in very general terms because I still value the privacy of the individual patient and the family. I do not have the approval to speak about the specifics of the case that occurred today.

There's a difference between a nuclear bone scan and a bone density scan. They are different procedures. Nuclear bone scans are completely covered. Stollery Hospital in Edmonton is part of our normal referral process, our reciprocal agreement with the province of Alberta, all of that stuff. A bone density scan is done primarily for osteoporosis purposes, and it is not covered.

Mr. McMorris: — So we don't have to talk about particulars; we'll use a hypothetical. A person that just didn't seem to be getting the treatment or the satisfaction that they wanted and

they had a crying child for, you know, a number of days and weeks, should know or we should be able to tell them automatically, if they're not getting the treatment they want here in Saskatchewan or they think is satisfactory, should automatically or can automatically go out of the province, no questions asked. And it will be covered, their medical expenses will be covered. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — I think one of the things that we have to keep in mind is whether you're in Saskatchewan or elsewhere, specialists generally act on the referral of a physician. A patient in Saskatchewan deals with their family physician who will refer them to a specialist in Saskatoon or, if that specialist is not meeting their needs, that physician has the ability to refer to other specialists and those other specialists fit them into whatever schedule that they are working with.

So it's very important for Saskatchewan residents to continue to work with their family physicians — the first line of contact for their or their children's health. And basically, on those types of referrals, the circumstance that the member opposite outlines, perfectly correct.

Mr. McMorris: — So in a situation that we've just witnessed today with perhaps the fact that there was no specialist available to see this person, this child, they should either wait a couple of weeks or three weeks to see a specialist here in the province or get out of the province and get care immediately, which is the case that happened in Edmonton and there should be . . . there was no questions asked. They don't have to go through any prior approval from this government.

I think you can go back to different cases, whether it was the one last week where a person was waiting 12 weeks to see an oncologist. I guess the next thing that we would say then is you should go and see if you can't get in and see an oncologist that much quicker in another province. Because when you're twice the national average, for example, first visit to an oncologist, maybe we should recommend that they be out of the province and see one quicker. Just as in the case today, they went out of province to Edmonton to see a specialist and saw that specialist within 24 hours as opposed to the three-week wait that they were suggested to have here in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — I see we're running close to our time here. I'll try to be brief, but I'll also try to be as full in my answer as I can, not only to help the member opposite but all of those who are listening or read this report later.

Let us keep in mind that the case that we're referring to today . . . none of us know all of the details or the circumstances that affected that particular case. That's why I've asked the deputy minister, working with other professionals in the field, to do a full investigation and report back to me on what it was that took place there.

Whether or not the services that the family in Humboldt required were available in Saskatoon or in Saskatchewan or whether they were required to go out of province is a part of that investigation. Were those services available here, were they available in a timely manner, and how was that information communicated . . . is something that we will be examining.

On oncologists we must remember again that oncologists are very much specialists. Even in Saskatchewan, you don't knock on the door of an oncologist and say I need to see you; can you fit me in? There's still a referral process that occurs. And on oncology, just as in these other matters, we have reciprocal agreements with the other provinces. We will cover out-of-province care. Often cases it's more expensive than that which is delivered in the province of Saskatchewan. But we have agreements, and we will pay for that care. When we're dealing with oncologists, they are specialists, and there is a physician referral required.

Mr. McMorris: — I think, you know, we don't need to get bogged down with specifics at all whether it's a case that happened today or what happened last week. I think the very principle of this whole issue is that, if you don't feel that you're getting the service you need or are willing to wait to see the specialist, I realize you just don't go knock on a specialist's door. But if you don't feel that you're getting the service you need in a timely manner, automatically you can go out of province if you feel you can get into a specialist in a different province quicker.

The case today . . . And it doesn't have to be that case; it can be a hypothetical case where a person is waiting longer than they think that they think they should to see a specialist, can go out of the province without any questions asked. And that's the question. We don't need to get into the specifics of the case today. It's just a simple yes or no. I can go out of province. If I'm the one that has to wait three weeks to see a specialist and I think that's too long, I can automatically go to another province and request hopefully to see a specialist in a more timely manner.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — In the interests of clarity, the answer is yes, except MRIs, bone density scans, and cataracts.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, I move the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

The Deputy Chair: — The Government House Leader has moved that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — That is passed. This committee stands adjourned.

[The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.]

[22:00]

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

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you, Madam 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? I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Next sitting of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — Next sitting of the House. I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Madam Deputy Speaker, I move this House do now adjourn.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 22:01.]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EVENING SITTING

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund — Agriculture and Food — Vote 1

Wartman.....1305
Bjornerud 1305, 1314
Hart1305
Huyghebaert.....1312

General Revenue Fund — Health — Vote 32

Taylor.....1315
Weekes1315
Elhard1316
McMorris.....1320

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hagel1308

GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN

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Premier

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Energy Conservation
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