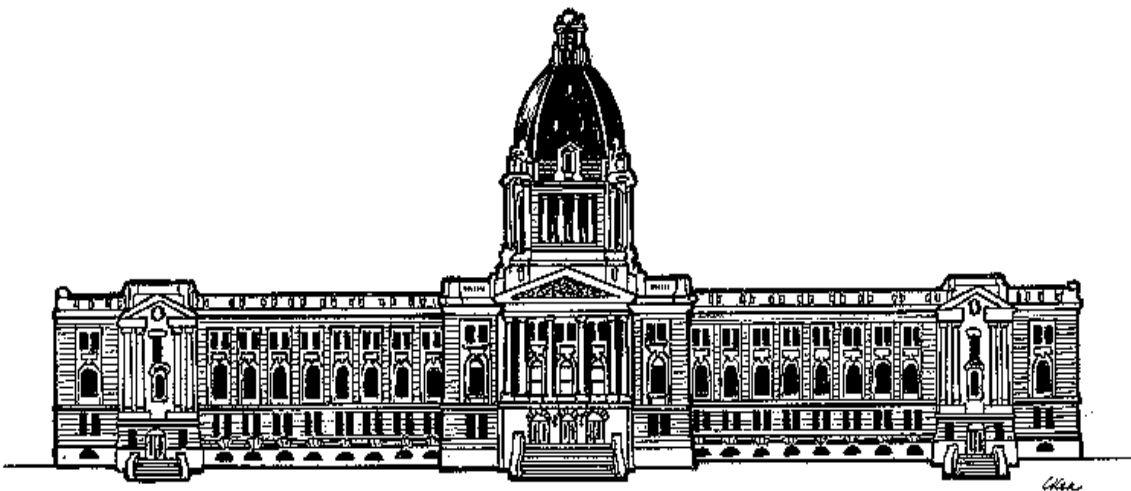




# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON CROWN AND CENTRAL AGENCIES**

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**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON CROWN AND CENTRAL AGENCIES  
2004**

Mr. Graham Addley, Chair  
Saskatoon Sutherland

Mr. Wayne Elhard, Deputy Chair  
Cypress Hills

Mr. Dan D'Autremont  
Cannington

Mr. Andy Iwanchuk  
Saskatoon Fairview

Mr. Warren McCall  
Regina Elphinstone-Centre

Hon. Maynard Sonntag  
Meadow Lake

Mr. Randy Weekes  
Biggar

The committee met at 15:00.

**The Chair:** — Order. I call to order the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies. Before we begin I'll introduce the members of the committee. My name is Graham Addley. To my left is Mr. Elhard. Mr. Chisholm and Mr. Weekes are members of the committee; and on my right is Mr. McCall, Mr. Iwanchuk, and Mr. Sonntag.

We also have other members that will be asking questions throughout the afternoon. The steering committee has discussed the matter, and just from a practical perspective we will presume that leave has been given for members to ask questions unless any member has a concern, which they will raise at that point.

The business before the committee. The committee has received an order of the Assembly dated April 27, 2004 to consider and report back on the estimates for the following departments and agencies: vote 74, Information Technology Office; vote 33, Public Service Commission; vote 53, Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation.

Today the estimates before the committee are the Information Technology Office and the Public Service Commission.

The first item of business is the estimates for Information Technology Office found on page 95 of the Saskatchewan Estimates book. And I recognize Mr. Thomson, the minister, and ask that he would please introduce the officials that he has present today, and if he has an opening statement, just to proceed with that.

**General Revenue Fund  
Information Technology Office  
Vote 74**

**Subvote (IT01)**

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I shall, Mr. Chairman. I am joined today by three of our officials. Seated to my right is John Law, who is the chief information technology officer; seated next to him is Sheldon Biblow, who is the information senior technology adviser; and seated to my left is Richard Murray, who is the chief technology officer for the ITO (Information Technology Office).

I want to thank members of the committee for calling us today. It is a definite privilege to be able to appear before you today and to share with you some of the things that the ITO has been working on, some of the successes of this department, and to share with you some of our vision as to how we can move forward with dealing with IT (information technology) enhanced services to Saskatchewan citizens.

The ITO is a relatively small department in terms of a budget size, but it has been able to accomplish a number of very significant things, not the least of which has been the fact that ITO was the originating office for CommunityNet. CommunityNet, as members will know, is the broadband initiative that this government undertook to ensure that citizens throughout the province, particularly in rural communities, have

access to high-speed broadband services.

Today as a result of the work of the ITO and its partner SaskTel, we are able to say that Saskatchewan is the most wired jurisdiction in Canada. This is a designation that is not something we self-proclaim, but in fact has been identified by Industry Canada.

Perhaps more importantly, we are able to identify in more than 366 of our communities the fact that we have high-speed broadband services. The rollout of the first phase of CommunityNet was done on a wired basis, where we actually had the fibre put out. There are more than 800 schools that have access to the broadband services. We have linked up health centres, municipal offices, and libraries. This has been a tremendous asset in terms of building the economy of rural Saskatchewan and in making sure services are available.

The ITO has a number of other issues that it deals with. It is responsible for the government's Web site. It has provided seed money and direction to other government agencies in the development of more than 50 on-line services and projects. And we have undertaken a number of different initiatives to help move the government into an on-line footing.

This department started out, in many ways, as the — what was euphemistically called — the information highway branch of the Department of Industry. Certainly since that time we have moved on into two main areas of function: one being, dealing with government on-line services to Saskatchewan citizens; the second being, dealing with the industry development functions to ensure that the IT clusters of our province are able to grow.

I don't want to say too much more. I know members will have questions. And of course this is an issue that I know most members are familiar with. So with that, Mr. Chairman, I will welcome questions from the members of the committee.

**The Chair:** — I thank the minister for his opening statement, and I open the floor to members to ask questions. I recognize Mr. McCall.

**Mr. McCall:** — Just very quickly with regards to CommunityNet which, you know, obviously I would concur with the minister. It's quite the accomplishment and quite the valuable tool both, you know, on any number of grounds in terms of education or in economic terms.

What percentage of the population is covered by CommunityNet or would fall under that net? And are there any plans for expanding CommunityNet?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Thank you very much, Mr. McCall. I want to identify that today 74 per cent of Saskatchewan citizens will have access . . . are covered in the broadband areas. It's our objective to move towards 86 per cent coverage. These numbers are unparalleled in Canada today.

To move to the 86 per cent, there are . . . we will need to look at deploying new technology. Last week — I think it was last week; it might have been the week before — we announced a significant upgrade to the SCN (Saskatchewan Communications

Network) satellite services to deal with rural and remote communities, particularly in the North so that they will have better access to two-way satellite.

This is one of the options that we are deploying to expand coverage. And there is a sense now that technology has advanced to the point that we can start looking at new wireless broadband technologies. Incidentally wireless broadband is what we of course use in this Chamber to connect to the Internet here. And so there is a belief that we will be able to expand that coverage to the citizens through a wireless process.

**Mr. McCall:** — Thank you very much. That's enough questions for right now.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Chisholm.

**Mr. Chisholm:** — Mr. Minister, and guests, welcome. I trust you'll bear with me as I will proceed with some questions relating to this relatively new office of government by a relatively new representative in this Assembly.

In the 2002-2003 report it was reported that the majority of ITO clients were internal government departments and agencies, but it was stated that the office is beginning to take on an extended role in the private sector community.

I guess my question is: has ITO taken initiatives in the private sector, and if so in what areas and with what degree of success?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I thank the member for the question. When we talk about our relationship between the ITO and the private sector, we look at it as a partnership arrangement. This is not a case that ITO is moving into a competition arrangement with . . . (inaudible) . . . that the private sector would otherwise use. It is an opportunity for us to partner with the private sector to bring them into dealing with government on-line services.

One of the examples that we launched in, it must have been June of last year, was the learning village project into the school system. We have implemented a pilot project that is in partnership with IBM (International Business Machines Corporation) to help bring into, into our classrooms a new learning tool to assist teachers in terms of dealing with unit plan/lesson plan sharing, best practices model to assist them on that, and it will provide a conduit for everything from providing on-line communications between parents and teachers to being able to update homework lists and newsletters.

It's kind of an innovative project. It's one of the things that we believe there is an opportunity to invite the private sector into these kind of new initiatives.

And one of the beliefs that we have — and certainly I have very strongly — is that we should look for ways to use existing government expenditures to leverage greater private sector development in the IT sector. And this is, when we speak about our relationship with private sector, largely what we're talking about.

**Mr. Chisholm:** — Another question. In 2002-2003 report it was stated that by the end of '03 all K to 12 (kindergarten to Grade 12) schools would be provided with high-speed Internet

and distance education. I just wondered where we're at on this, and how far we have to go, and what the plans are to try to achieve any shortfall.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The answer, Mr. Chisholm, is that all the schools are connected. We have 880 schools connected. This includes 85 First Nations schools. We also have 30 regional colleges hooked up. So this has been quite a significant advancement.

**Mr. Chisholm:** — In the health care facilities it was stated that ITO would be providing telemedicine, remote diagnosis, and access to specialists on-line. Has this happened?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The CommunityNet process allows us to have the health facilities hooked up; the ITO itself does not run the service. And what it has provided is, through CommunityNet, the opportunity for health districts to use to varying degrees these options. One of the most advanced health districts in this regard is in fact in your home community . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well yes, it would be. There's a significant amount of use of telemedicine projects.

Much of the work that we do is in partnership with the Department of Health and through SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations) with the health districts. But there are varying degrees. We have not at this point taken an approach to standardizing anything beyond the high-speed Internet access.

One of the issues that is still out there in the community is the need for increasing broadband, to increase the size of it. And we have taken a look and done work with the universities to expand broadband access for them through SRnet (Saskatchewan Research Network) which has helped to expand the bandwidth, which basically means that they can carry more information back and forth. This is particularly important on the research projects, but it's also of some benefit as we look at how to deal with advanced medical issues.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Dearborn, did you . . . I recognize Mr. Dearborn.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Minister, and welcome to your officials today. With regards to CommunityNet and the broadband being accessible to schools and hospitals in certain communities, are businesses and/or private customers able to access that same service if high-speed is not necessarily accessible to the community as a whole?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — When we undertook CommunityNet, the first phase of CommunityNet, we did so in a way to connect up the public institutions first. It was our belief that this was one of the best ways to begin to build the government on-line services.

As we have done that, SaskTel has been very aggressive and very supportive in terms of helping to roll out broadband services to businesses and citizens in the communities around it. There are still some gaps. There are still some communities that do not yet have that access, and there are some communities that are limited because they are not on the wired broadband. I am thinking now about the communities that are served by the

SCN satellite system. There are some limitations there.

As we start to think about what the next phase of CommunityNet is to get us to the 86 per cent coverage level, when we start thinking about being able to build out a wireless system, this will increase significantly — I would say exponentially — the amount of access that citizens and businesses would have.

CommunityNet has allowed us to build out a wired broadband system on a basis that would not otherwise be able to be supported by normal market conditions. This has been a good co-operative venture; obviously SaskTel has had to make sure that its investments are within the CRTC's (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) . . . in keeping with their purview, but the government support has been to allow us to expand this program to the point that a number of communities that otherwise would not be viable under normal market conditions are covered. So I would say yes, there is more to be done but there has been some progress.

Anecdotally I would note that in my father's . . . the community my dad lives in, Shellbrook, this is one of the biggest things that the local newspapers cited as a business advantage to them, was being able to have access to broadband services. And it was one of the things that they had certainly pushed for and were very supportive and very happy to see as CommunityNet rolled into the community, that they were able to have enhanced business opportunities that way.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Thank you for the answer, Mr. Minister. Would the minister or his officials please outline the technical realities around having broadband capability through the wire in certain communities where the general populace and/or business community isn't able to be hooked up. What are the technical restrictions?

And secondly, what are the CRTC restrictions? And what has the government done with regards to CRTC and restrictions relative to rural communities, vis-à-vis lobbying the CRTC for exception to this because of the geographic dispersity? And has the minister had any correspondence with CRTC around that and could he table it for us?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I'm going to ask Richard Murray to comment on the technical aspects. I would say that I have in . . . I have written the federal minister and have written the CRTC on these issues. And I don't have the correspondence here today, but we will endeavour to provide it to the members.

The CRTC . . . There are some difficulties with the approach that they are taking. We have some concern with the limitations that they put on our ability to roll this out on a what I believe to be a somewhat cumbersome and bureaucratic approach that does not recognize effectively how provinces like Saskatchewan — and we're not alone in this; Alberta has similar problems — in terms of how we deal with some of our rural and remote communities where there may not be the ability for us to demonstrate clear market-driven forces that would allow the Internet to be rolled out. This course is an issue that SaskTel is very keenly interested in and has worked with us closely on.

I'm going to ask now Richard Murray to maybe describe to you some of the technical issues that are involved.

**Mr. Murray:** — Thank you, Minister. As we attempted to roll out CommunityNet across the province, we tried to come up with the best blend of technical capabilities at a reasonable cost to try and serve the largest portion of the province that we possibly could.

There are technical restrictions or technical limitations inherent in rolling out broadband or high-speed Internet access. There are limitations in the lengths of fibre optic cables that can be used and limitations in the length of the copper cables that can be used. But nonetheless we've managed to roll out . . . We are second in the world now, only behind the United States, in terms of broadband access and first in the world in terms of cost. And so I think we've accomplished much.

For the future path as we roll along, we are evaluating wireless technologies to overcome some of those technical limitations on fibre. And we've already seen some success in the North. We've just received word recently that in our work with the Prince Albert Grand Council and Meadow Lake Tribal Council and New North that we've . . . are able to roll out wireless technologies to the North. And we continue to evaluate a variety of new technologies to achieve that goal of 86 per cent access to the province.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Thank you for that explanation, sir. I have a number of following questions for the minister and likely for your officials regarding the nature of hardware versus software, and I'd like an outline from your office.

Do you contract out the servers? Do you own the hardware? What is the actual role for the service that you're providing to the province? Who owns the computers at the end of the day? Do you have lease agreements? Are you partnered with the public, private sector? Could you just elaborate on that first and foremost? And then I'll have subsequent questions.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Thank you very much for the question. I have shifted over to the left, which I know members will appreciate. It's unusual I can't be heard in this Assembly, but I guess it's my soft-spoken tone today that's making it difficult to be heard.

This is a very interesting question the member asks. It is a fundamental issue that we need to deal with in terms of the government moving forward in dealing with its IT needs. Each government department uses a different approach to its IT services. We use a distributive network approach. Each department has its own . . . Many departments have their own service . . . servers. They have their own contracts for software. They have their own approach to dealing with a lease.

Just over a year ago, we began the process of talking about how we move forward to consolidate this. How do we get a better handle so we can capture savings so we can have a more standardized suite of services, and that we can have a more consistent approach to dealing with IT services throughout government? Today, we have tried . . . Well a year ago, we had attempted to move forward with an approach involving a partnership agreement with EDS Canada that, at the end of the

day, we decided not to proceed with.

To date, we have moved forward with a new management services council which is working to try and bring the departments together to establish a set of common objectives and common approaches. This is a complicated area.

One of the key pieces that we have focused on has been to improve the area around information usage. So there are a number of things we need to deal with. One is how we deal with hardware demands and renewal, capital renewal. There's a question about what type of software services we need and how we can make sure those services are there. And then, thirdly, how do we deal with information to make sure that we are handling that on a relatively consistent approach throughout government.

So in each of those three areas, we have been moving forward to try and develop a consistent approach across government. This has not been our experience up to now.

It may interest the member to know Saskatchewan has gone through a number of different cycles — the Saskatchewan government — in dealing with these operations. Of course, in the early part of the technological revolution when . . . it would be the late '70s, the Saskatchewan government established a Crown corporation called SaskComp which was a highly centralized approach to dealing with this. That corporation was ultimately privatized and became Westbridge computers which became ISM (Information Systems Management Corporation).

As we have moved through that transition, where there were still a highly centralized approach to dealing with government IT services, what happened was as the PC (personal computer) revolution happened, we saw that individual departments took more of a role in terms of deciding what their needs were. This, as a result, through much of the mid . . . well late '80s, early '90s, led to a number of different systems, number of different hardware types being brought in, different software suites, and a lot of flexibility brought into the system so individual departments could decide what they wanted to do and how they wanted to approach it.

It has meant as a result that we have a number of disparate systems out there. We have a number of legacy systems out there. What we are trying to do today now is to consolidate or at least to make some kind of consistent approach to dealing with these issues, and everything from capital renewal through to the software.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Thank you for that answer, Mr. Minister. The answer raises as many concerns as it does clarifications. First and foremost, with the speed at which the IT world seems to move, chips being able to double their capacity and half their cost in every 90 days, is it wise that the government is trying to take in a role, a direction? What study has been done to not allow departments, as it seems the industry as a whole is moving towards one of two systems, either Linux or . . . Software integration right across the board is something the industry's working towards.

Is it a wise mandate that we go forward through a department trying to centralize this? Are there issues around security? What

is the mainstay — this will just be the quickest way to do it and the cheapest? Or would the, would the departments be able to go forth on their own basis, on their own . . . seeking their own rental agreements and whatnot, not be able to achieve this at the most expedient and cost-effective way for government?

I guess we are talking about something that's very much on the edge. And just to put it in a very philosophical terms, is the government the best avenue for allowing this to occur? And if so, what are the areas of concern around that? Is it privacy; is it security? Or would this better be left department by department and as the technology anachronizes itself and moves forward at the same time, that we get a natural merge there?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — This is an interesting question the member raises. Different departments are at different stages of development as we bring on new programs or different needs that they have. This has spoken, in the past, to why we would want a flexible set of systems.

What we end up with, however, has been a patchwork of different approaches that are taken. We end up with a very disparate set of systems out there that cannot necessarily communicate with each other. I think of the example of when we moved Housing and Community Resources and Employment together. The e-mail services could not be integrated because the systems couldn't work together.

When we take a look at other issues throughout the system, if we were to, say, want to develop a common case management system to deal with the social services, health, justice issues, we would need to think about how we bring those three different departments together into a way that their systems functioned in an integrated fashion. There are a number of different ways of doing that.

What we first need to do is understand what the policy approach is, how we deal with the privacy of the information because government, unlike anybody else in the system, deals with information that is not normally held by . . . should not be available to the private section because it is information that we require citizens to provide.

We then also need to think about how it is that we have in place the information-sharing policies, the privacy policies, to deal with this. I don't think there is any one easy answer to this. What we need to look at is how we can bring together workable solutions that involve the private sector, that meet the government's needs for privacy and protection of personal privacy for citizens, and how we can deal with this in a way that is cost-effective.

The member . . . I don't know that he's asking directly, but what I hear in the question is, is there an opportunity here for us to simply privatize these services? There is a certain degree of private data hosting that is done. The government e-mail system, for example, is handled by a private sector company. But we need to make sure that what we have in place are appropriate security policies.

I think all members of this Assembly are aware of the difficulties that have arisen over the last 18 months and become public in terms of access to information, how civil servants can

use that information. There is obviously a lawsuit currently underway involving city police about this. There was the situation involving the ISM hard drive that went missing. So these are all issues that we need to be aware of.

The more centralized the system is, the greater the government's ability to set the parameters and to control usage. However the cost of that is we lose the flexibility sometimes to meet the needs of individual departments. So what we're trying to do is to strike the right balance that still keeps private sector partners involved, that uses . . . government spend to leverage economic development, that takes into account our needs to protect citizens' information, and to provide the suite of services that the civil service needs to provide public services.

So this is . . . The member is quite right when he identifies that there are a number of different ways to approach this. No company, no business that I have seen yet has come forward with the silver-bullet solution.

**The Chair:** — Members, Mr. Iwanchuk has been waiting on the list for quite some time. He's been quite patient, so I'll recognize him for question.

**Mr. Iwanchuk:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The minister had touched on this area briefly, but I was . . . my question was directed around the security of government IT systems and private information held, and I was just wondering if you could perhaps elaborate on what we are doing in that area.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I'll ask John Law to answer this question as he's been instrumental in pulling together our new policy on this.

**Mr. Law:** — Thank you, Minister. We have actually made some reasonable advances in the area of IT security. It's been an area that we've been working on for some time, one of the areas where we've actually been able to provide some central coordination for all government departments and agencies, not directly through the ITO per se, but in the establishment of standards and processes that all government departments can follow.

So there is a government-wide information technology security policy that has been put in place and has been operationalized and has been revised over the last number of years. It represents a comprehensive set of rules and guidelines for departments to follow in terms of how we manage everything from physical security to the opportunities for us to have to manage the outbreak of viruses of this sort that have been reported in the press.

We've also created more recently a computer or security response team that is a group or a collection of individuals from across government departments and agencies, which have a series of sort of emergency response protocols that they've put in place to deal with both virus outbreaks and a number of the Internet threats that we've read about.

In terms of the kinds of levels of work that have gone on that we've been managing in this area, in our own area these have jumped from about 21,000 in the year 2000 to nearly 140,000 last year — so to give you some sense of the level of activity

that has been involved here.

And the incident-handling procedures and safeguards that we have put in place do give us an ability to respond very quickly, and I would say in terms of downtime or the overall effect that we've had — also because we have the common infrastructure through CommunityNet — we've had a high level of security, relatively speaking, in comparison to many other jurisdictions.

So we have a number of protocols, committees that are in place, and I think a uniform infrastructure that gives us some competitive advantages in terms of our ability to be able to respond here.

**Mr. Iwanchuk:** — Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Dearborn.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, following the questions that I had before about the way to have the hardware, software systems be able to communicate with one another and the best methodology to employ that, has there in the recent past been legislation required across the board for all departments purchasing IT to have common specs to them so that they can talk to one another and we can move forward in the future, that the systems will upgrade?

And not to oversimplify, but with Microsoft Windows, for example, '98 upgraded '96 which 2000 upgraded, etc. And I know that we're not talking . . . That's in micro . . . We're not talking the exact same thing. But it would seem to me that this would be . . .

Has this movement already occurred? Do we have any Acts around this? And would this not be a very good tool for the Information Technology Office to be employing in integrating those systems, without building a bureaucracy around it and being able to thus react at the speed at which the market's reacting which is the fastest of, basically, any industry in the world at this point?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — We do not have a legislative framework to do what the member suggests. However, we do have authority under The Purchasing Act and through a common purchasing program to set standards and establish parameters for purchases. This is one of the pieces that we've been working on through the enterprise architecture exercise of the last two years now, to try and move forward on this.

We need to . . . When we think about government services and IT, what we need to keep in mind is that the government uses a number of highly specialized applications. And so, there are those common ones that we'll use on our desktops across government. Common word processing, we could have. We could have common spreadsheet programs. We have a common e-mail system. Those kind of things, there is an ability for us to develop.

However there will still always be some specialization within the departments. And indeed there will be, in some cases, a need for us to firewall between departments to make sure that that information is not commingled and not readily available across the system. We need to be careful of that.

What the member speaks of is very much the vision that we have to move forward in terms of having some kind of a common approach. We're interested in doing this in a multi-vendor environment.

It is not our desire to have a monopoly built in one way or the other. I get into this debate all the time with the open source community here in the province who, of course, push for us to move away from Microsoft products. Conversely, obviously Microsoft advocates greater penetration of their services throughout the government.

I think it behooves Saskatchewan citizens to have a multi-vendor environment to deal with both the hardware and software issues, and that's what we attempt to do.

The new purchasing Act that has been introduced by the Minister Responsible for SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) will allow us to move forward in a number of new ways to deal with using government's expenditures to leverage additional economic development here in the province. And this is an initiative I was happy to lead in my time at SPMC and it is something that I'm very pleased to see introduced in the legislature this session.

But really, the nuts and bolts of us moving forward on this are contained more in terms of policy.

**The Chair:** — Members, I have Mr. Sonntag, Mr. Weekes, and then Mr. Chisholm, and we have about just under 10 minutes. So, Mr. Sonntag.

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you very much. Well I'll be extremely brief. I actually only have one question that is of interest to me today. That is, as Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, I would be interested in having some explanation about the degree of broadband access within First Nations communities.

And I know . . . I should say I know you started down that path in your very first answer, I think it was. But I don't think that specific question was quite addressed.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I'm going to ask Richard Murray to respond.

**Mr. Murray:** — Connectivity to First Nations in the province has always been of extreme importance to us. We presently provide broadband access to every First Nation school in the province.

There was just an announcement Friday from SCN regarding the expansion of satellite. Most of these First Nations communities are very remote and so a good number of them are provided with satellite connectivity. The announcement Friday from SCN pertained to the expansion or the conversion of one-way to two-way satellite to those First Nations, 160 First Nation schools, which will greatly increase the speed that they receive in those schools.

And there was also a recent announcement of federal grant funding to Meadow Lake Tribal Council, P.A. Grand Council, and New North that our office and SaskTel have been working with on a partnership arrangement. And so there will be

significant expansion to the Meadow Lake, Prince Albert, and Stony Rapids, Cole Bay areas, to the schools in those regions as well. And we always as well look toward expanding wireless to the remote health facilities and libraries and communities in general out there. So we've done great work in the First Nations area.

**The Chair:** — I have Mr. Weekes and then Mr. Chisholm in about five minutes.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a question on broadband service. Which communities are not receiving that service?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chairman, I can provide members with a list of communities that have access. It is basically fair to say that every community over 500 in population will have access to CommunityNet service.

There are some holes in the system. And as we think about moving forward to the 86 per cent coverage, we will be able to drive that number down to being every community with a school that has a population of more than 100 will be covered. And if there is no school, a community with more than 200 people population will have it. And so this is a tremendous, a tremendous issue.

Now there are still some, some holes that we need to deal with. The member for — I forget the constituency, it's been renamed — in Mr. Brkich's riding there is an ongoing issue about the satellite connection to the community of Young that we are now dealing with through the SCN upgrade. There is a challenge around the Riverside Estates issue in Saskatoon area that we need to deal with through a wireless solution.

But the approach that we'll be taking with the second phase of CommunityNet, as we move into wireless, will allow much deeper penetration into rural communities, and for the first time will allow high-speed access on the farm, which will be really a tremendous benefit.

So this is the approach that we have taken. It has been one which has had some cost attached to it. I know that my . . . our former colleague, Bill Boyd, used to consider this a laughable program. But it is one that certainly rural Saskatchewan, I think, did not share Mr. Boyd's view or that of his party, that this in fact was an important initiative. And certainly today as we look at communities that are asking for us to speed up our progress, certainly speaks to the importance of this service in rural Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you. I appreciate that list from the minister.

I am just wondering, what's the timeline of completing the process of filling those holes in the broadband service? And what percentage of the population will not be receiving broadband once your plan is completed?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — In terms of the time frame, we are looking at being able to expand from the current 74 per cent coverage to 86 per cent within this term of office. The schedule, it will be somewhat dependent upon . . . We're just working



through now what the rollout will look like to which communities, but that we should have a better handle on within a few months at least for the first year's rollout.

The focus very much in the next phase will be on those communities where there is a demonstrated market demand for it. We need to deal with some of the market-based initiatives in terms of the rollout through SaskTel. The focus in the non-market rollout has been largely in this area that SCN is dealing with, through the two-way satellite and the announcement that Minister Beatty and I made on Friday. But we will have 86 per cent rollout or coverage by the, our anticipation is by the end of this term. So the percentage not covered obviously is 14 per cent.

In those circumstances, this is primarily individuals in very remote areas or areas where there are technical difficulties in terms of providing the service. If members are familiar with the technological limitations that companies like Image Wireless have had as they've done their rollout into rural areas, there are peculiarities as a result of geography that will sometimes end up stranding individual households or communities. These are just technological difficulties that we need to deal with. And obviously in the Far North, in the truly remote parts of the North there would not be coverage. It just will not become viable for market reasons.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I've got a question or two concerning the geomatics governance report that was co-sponsored by ISC (Information Services Corporation of Saskatchewan) and the Information Technology Office. This report was a result of the Gartner Group study recommending appropriate governance model for geometric services within the provincial government. And the report cost just over \$95,000. Half was paid by ISC; half was paid by the IT office.

My question really speaks to how the cost of this report and other reports are determined. What's the criteria? And my point is, ISC has assumed half the cost of this. They provide a service. They have a tremendous debt that we know right now. And the ISC is trying to recoup that loss by charging for their service to the public and to businesses in the province. So I just want to know the rationale of their criteria of splitting up these reports and similar ones across government.

**Mr. Law:** — Maybe I can answer that question. The approach to our sharing of costs on the study on geomatics was related to the responsibilities that executive government has for the delivery of some services directly for geomatics through the government departments that deliver some of those services, everything from firefighting to a variety of the land base services we're responsible for.

In the period prior to the last couple of years, many of those functions were managed on a shared basis between ISC and the government departments, in which many of the core services came from ISC.

The study that was done by Gartner for us was to recommend to us the new governance model that would allow us to decide, I guess on a more practical basis, what the best way of ensuring our services could be provided in terms of splitting of those responsibilities, such that our service levels would be

appropriately managed within the departments that would be providing them.

And in the case of the ITO serving as a co-sponsor, we took this on as one of the sort of core support services that we would normally do in the provisioning of these kinds of services.

And so what we've ended up with is a new governance model that we've actually been able to make good progress on, which more clearly articulates or delineates the responsibilities between ISC and the government, so that there isn't confusion as to who's responsible for what. And it gives us I think, some protocols and some processes that we can follow in order to ensure that those services will be available in the right places at the right time in the future.

**The Chair:** — Order. Our time is coming late and I know there are many members that have further questions so I do appreciate the officials and the minister being here.

And I recognize Mr. Elhard.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the members of the Crown and Central Agencies Committee this afternoon, I'd like to thank the minister and his officials for being here. We appreciate the information and for those of us who are Luddites, we would really appreciate a much more detailed explanation and will ask for those later on but . . . I guess there aren't many Luddites around here; nobody understands the terminology. But nevertheless we'll get to that another time . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh one more joined us this afternoon; he's sitting behind me.

I'd like to move now that we adjourn consideration of the estimates for the Information Technology Office.

**The Chair:** — The member has moved that we adjourn consideration of estimates for the Information Technology Office. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That is carried. The next item will be vote 33, Public Service Commission. And we'll take a brief recess while the officials and ministers . . . be ready for that.

### General Revenue Fund Public Service Commission Vote 33

#### Subvote (PS01)

**The Chair:** — Order. The next item before the committee is vote 33, the Public Service Commission which is found on page 117 of the Saskatchewan Estimates book. And I would recognize Ms. Atkinson to introduce her officials and, if she wishes, make an opening statement.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. First of all, I want to begin by introducing officials from the Public Service Commission. To my right is Wynne Young, the Chair of the Public Service Commission. To my left is Rick McKillop, executive director of employee relations. To my far

right is Clare Isman, executive director, human resource development. And Lynn Jacobson, director corporate services, immediately behind us.

As you indicated, Mr. Speaker . . . or, Mr. Chair, we're here to review the estimates for the Public Service Commission and I want to begin by providing a bit of an overview of our accomplishments and the challenges that the Public Service Commission faces.

The Public Service Commission has a corporate human resource plan that guides us in achieving our goals and visions for the public service. This plan was endorsed by cabinet as a vision for the future of human resource management. And it includes having a talented, innovative, and dedicated workforce; having a healthy, productive, and collaborative work environment; and having a diverse group of employees.

The first goal — having talented, innovative, and dedicated employees — involves a number of recruitment and retention initiatives. Current demographics pose a significant challenge for the public service because the public service is aging and about one-quarter of public employees are expected to retire by 2010. So that in essence is about six years from now.

We have a variety of recruitment strategies in place. We have a student liaison representative, which have been placed at the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan throughout the fall and winter semesters. And this is about enhancing our relationships with student organizations and the various colleges and student placement offices.

The public service has promoted itself at career fairs at 20 different educational and employment-related institutions across the province. And we've also provided over 637 job opportunities for post-secondary education students through the summer student employment program and the centennial student employment program. And these opportunities help students obviously pay for their education, but it also allows them to gain important and valuable work experiences. And we're really proud to be able to continue supporting these programs in the upcoming year.

We're also providing internships and co-op programs, including a new graduate internship program with the University of Regina through the Faculty of Administration. I'm pleased to report that these initiatives have helped lead us to close to 25 per cent of all new hires being under the age of 30. And that's important because our workforce is aging.

The second goal is to have a healthy, productive, and collaborative work environment. And this has involved a number of initiatives. In 2003-04, we brought the development of an employee recognition program forward. It is the first ever Premier's Awards, which were handed out to three individuals and three teams in last June 2003. We also have a Web-based tool kit which was created to assist departments to design and implement their own programs. And this was introduced in April.

The results of the first-ever government-wide employee survey were disseminated, and departments developed strategies to act upon the results and make improvements in those areas where

employees have indicated concern.

We also completed a review of the anti-harassment policy, which led to an updated policy for government departments. We have an educational brochure regarding harassment prevention in the workplace, and this was developed and distributed to employees via the occupational health and safety committees which were in the workplace, and through our human resource branches.

In addition, we provided leadership for succession management activities with a focus on management and executive positions. And planning for corporate executive success was initiated, beginning with employees in classification levels 10 to 12 and management classification levels 8 to 9. And these will be reviewed in 2004-05.

The third goal, of having a diverse workplace, has both challenges and opportunities. Saskatchewan's population is diverse in many ways and we've taken a number of proactive steps to ensure that the public service is representative of the diversity that we find in our province. Our diversity strategies focus on Aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, members of the visible minority community, women in management, and young people.

The Public Service Commission is extremely proud to have introduced the Aboriginal Government Employees' Network and its speaker bureau. And what this does is it brings speakers of Aboriginal ancestry to deliver their message of success to Aboriginal youth throughout our province. And the speakers are role models for young people and hopefully they'll help motivate and build tomorrow's leaders.

With the speakers bureau, the Aboriginal Government Employees' Network members visit schools, first focusing on grade 6 through 9 students, encouraging them to stay in school and to consider a career in the public service upon graduation.

We've also formed a partnership with the University of Regina and the First Nations University of Canada to establish an Aboriginal co-op program. And this program will work closely with Aboriginal management and professional internship programs to create additional links to future employment opportunities in the public service.

We also have the Saskatchewan Visible Minority Employee Association, which develops and implements an action plan that will help identify and eliminate barriers in the staffing process that impact persons from visible minority groups. The Public Service Commission and the Community Resources and Employment department have jointly established a recruitment and retaining persons with disabilities initiative. And this is to help government to recruit and retain persons with disabilities to achieve a more representative workforce and to assist persons with disabilities access jobs and workplace accommodations in the public service.

To encourage youth in the public service, the Public Service Commission has partnered with the IPAC (Institute of Public Administration of Canada) Regina group to develop and host several functions for the new professionals network. And three successful events were held in '03-04 including a round table

on ethics, a presentation on using partnerships to attain success, and various lunch-and-learn sessions. A calendar of events has been developed for employees for the current fiscal year as well.

So we look forward to the upcoming year. We're confident that we will continue to meet the challenges facing the public service, and I would be pleased, along with any of our officials, to answer questions before the committee.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. We are preparing to entertain questions now. Mike Chisholm.

**Mr. Chisholm:** — Thank you for your introduction and welcome to your guests and our guests. As a rookie here, I've got some questions that may be kind of basic.

I'd like to know firstly, how many public service employees we have in the province — full-time and part-time, just ballpark?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — First of all, Mike . . . member, I've had the opportunity to be a rookie too, and from my point of view all questions are important, and I will try my best to answer them.

In executive government the numbers of employees vary, depending upon the season. We have employees that will come into the public service in the spring because they are parks workers, or they are people who work in Highways. They might work in the Department of the Environment. So it varies.

So what I can tell you is that as of March of 2004, we had a total of 10,647 employees, and that would be permanent full-time employees. Oh pardon me. We have permanent full-time employees, 7,728; labour service, 331; temporary or term employees, casual, 1,326; and permanent part-time, 1,262. So that would be as of March 2004, and that would include both in-scope and out-of-scope people.

**Mr. Chisholm:** — That would then normally go up after March till fall, like with those summer type jobs that you mentioned, right?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — It would be highest in July, and I'll just give you the numbers for July 2003. There were 12,397 . . . pardon me, there were 12,383 employees in 2003-04 in July. That would be for that budget year.

**Mr. Chisholm:** — With regards to the last provincial budget and the announcement of jobs that were cut, approximately how many in total full- and part-time jobs were cut? And secondly, has the government determined what the savings will be in this year and in future years?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well first of all this was a difficult budget, as you know, and a number of very difficult decisions had to be made to address the fiscal realities facing the province. And our challenge was to try and find the balance between a tough budget and treating people fairly.

I think it's fair to say that there were just over 400 job abolition notices issued on budget day and that was between executive government and Saskatchewan Property Management

Corporation.

In terms of the final cost — because our employees are protected by collective agreement, they have the ability to bump — we won't know until sometime towards the end of June precisely which employees will no longer be working in the public service.

As well, we had a early retirement program. And the way the situation works is that you have to indicate that you're bumping, and then you can indicate at a later time that you wish to early retire or retire.

So we will be in a much better position to tell you precisely how many people are leaving the public service towards the end of June, and we'll be in a better position to determine exactly how much government departments will have in terms of savings.

**Mr. Chisholm:** — My next question is, could the minister explain the current hiring freeze that we've heard about? And is this applicable to the entire public service or only certain sectors?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — At present there is no freeze in hiring. There are obviously people who were given layoff notices on budget day. And if there are vacancies and if they qualify for those positions, they may be eligible to go into those positions. But we do not have a hiring freeze on in the public service.

**The Chair:** — I recognize Mr. Iwanchuk.

**Mr. Iwanchuk:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thank the minister and her officials for appearing. My question: you have talked about our youth initiatives and . . . but my question would be around some succession planning. And I know . . . And I thank you for answering the question about hiring freezes. It confused me a bit. But could you perhaps expand on how we are . . . the youth initiatives that we've started and the succession planning, and how you see that working.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — What I can tell you is that succession planning is an absolute priority for the province, for the government. We are responsible, the Public Service Commission is responsible to ensure that we have the kind of knowledge and skills that are required in order to meet . . . in order to assist us in serving the people of this province.

And this isn't only a phenomena in the public service; this is also a phenomena in the private sector where more and more companies are recognizing that they're going to have to have a succession planning process if they're to meet the challenges of the economy.

So the government departments, along with the Public Service Commission, it's their responsibility to implement succession initiatives. And in 2002 the Public Service Commission, in consultation with the departments, developed a framework around succession planning. And the framework identifies the Public Service Commission as the agency or the entity that is responsible for addressing government-wide succession needs. And we have a particular focus at that time on senior management and executive management. So departments are

focusing their efforts on lower levels of management as well, along with some key technical skills that are required.

So succession needs have been identified throughout government. We've done a thorough analysis of the demographic data, including projected retirements.

And we've also done this . . . Just on another note, we've also done this for the province, what the situation will look like into the future, because it's not just government but it's also the private sector. So we have someone like Doug Elliot who has taken a look at what the labour market is going to look like into the future and what we will need to do in order to address some of those issues.

So what we've done is we've entered into partnerships with SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology), the universities, First Nations University. We have an active involvement in university co-op programs who are bringing students into government departments to do their co-op education. We've implemented a graduate level internship program for those students that are leaving with skills, particularly in public administration or administration.

And we have the Aboriginal management and professional internship program because we know that the demographics are such that Saskatchewan's a very young . . . it has a very young population. I think we have the youngest population in the country. That young population is made up of a significant number of First Nations and Métis young people. And we need to pave the way so that our workforce is a representative workforce including Aboriginal people, visible minorities, immigrants, as well as people with disabilities. So this is part of our process.

**Mr. Iwanchuk:** — Just one quick question just on . . . You mentioned the demographics and that you had done some work on that. Is it possible that we have some numbers or some indication of the retirements and/or people moving on in the public and private?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — In the . . . I think that yes, we can get that information for you.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Elhard.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Some time ago, I believe a presentation was made at the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy and there were some figures mentioned at that time that caught me by surprise. And correct me if I'm wrong, but I was led to believe or gather from that presentation that the Public Service Commission was expecting a loss of about 40 per cent of their employees between that presentation and the end of the decade.

If I heard the minister correctly, the figure's been estimated today at 25 per cent. Has there been some change or what is the discrepancy attributable to?

**Ms. Young:** — I'll respond to that because I think that was my presentation. If I can recall, the figures I was using was past 2010. I think it had a little bit longer period. And so both figures actually are right. Our projections are about 25 per cent to 2010

and then it continues to climb. And actually I believe the peak is around 2012 — and 2012 to '14 is a peak. And we've done some estimations on retirement, and we believe the average age of retirement to be about age 59.

**Mr. Elhard:** — I guess the difference of a couple of years in there would explain the difference in the figures as well then.

I read with some interest a newspaper article just the other day on the book written by Al Johnson who started, I understand, his public service career here in the province. And one of the comments he made in there was that about the time he came, the government had committed itself to developing a professional civil service. One can only assume that he was suggesting that prior to their coming, there wasn't a professional civil service. Maybe that was his intimation; I don't know.

But one of the things he talked about was how the government aggressively recruited the best people they could from the best schools around the world basically. And I noticed with some interest the plans of the Public Service Commission to recruit rather aggressively from the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) and the U of R (University of Regina). You have recruiters on campus and so forth, which is great. And don't misunderstand me, I think that that's important. But is the Public Service Commission aggressively pursuing the recruitment of strong, capable, talented people from jurisdictions outside the province?

**Ms. Young:** — Yes, actually it's a very good read and helpful to us all to remember. They do talk about . . . Mr. Johnson did talk about the work that they did, and in that time period is when they strongly established the merit principle and the hiring practices that have served us through the many years following. We do focus on . . . Our face-to-face efforts are within the province.

However it's certainly not that we would exclude other universities, but we, for two reasons we haven't found that necessary to be very assertive around that. One is because during the '60s and the '70s there was actually quite a growth in the public service. There was lots of new hiring happening and that's really when a lot of the baby boomers came in and stayed, and they've stayed since. And so there were a lot of opportunities. There were a lot of program growth that happened during that time. So that's one of the reasons; it's just by pure numbers that we needed to go and recruit.

The other thing that I would say that has changed is, in addition to those numbers of recruitment not being as high as they were proportionally, is the advent of the Web because we have — and were the first in Canada to have — a very aggressive on-line recruitment and Web-based hiring system. And we now attract, and our Web site attracts, people from all over in terms of applying to jobs. So we're able to, I think, pick up some strong applications through that means.

We have also got agreements across Canada so that our Web site is hooked to every other public service Web site too. And so that people who are interested in a job or a career in public service can actually easily link and look at all of the jobs that we have. So those things have meant that this is . . . we believe

it's been an appropriate road for us.

It may be that in the next five to ten years as retirements go up, we may need to get more aggressive as we recruit out of province, but certainly our primary focus has been internally.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you. I have to tell you that I was really quite intrigued by your presentation at the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy because it occurs to me that this is a period in which labour shortage is going to be absolutely critical, not just to government but to industry. And given the demographics in the province, given the, you know, sort of the paucity of people in that appropriate demographic right now for hiring purposes, the challenges facing recruitment professionals of all kinds are going to be significantly increased.

So, you know, having said that and having recognized that there's new ways of achieving recruitment, I guess I'm just wondering how we're going to adequately meet the demands of the public service in the short term, in the next 10 years, when retirements are starting to escalate rapidly, and will the electronic sources and will the recruiting activities within the province suffice to meet the need?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — If I might answer because I was a young person leaving university in the mid-19 . . . well later 1970s, and there's no question that there were people that actively tried to recruit young people to the public service. I think I was 22 years old and I was actively recruited to go work in La Ronge for the Department of Northern . . . or DNS (Department of Northern Saskatchewan) I think it was called in those days. And the Blakeney government actively recruited Queen's graduates to the public service. And I have to say that that caused a bit of resentment among people who were here in the province, part of the public service, that somehow if you graduated from the public policy school in Kingston you were somehow more worthy of employment in the public service than someone here.

There are young people that are attending public policy schools across the country. I've certainly met and heard from some of them as the new Minister Responsible for the Public Service Commission. And they are indicating that they want to work in the public service.

There's a young woman that, she is one of the two people in the country that has just finished her first year of a scholarship to Harvard. She is a young woman from Saskatoon. It's her intention . . . She'd like to work in the public service. And there are others.

So I think we're going to have to be extremely nimble in terms of providing young people with opportunities, and that's why the internship program is important, the co-op program is important. There are young people that go out of province to take some of their education, and then they have a co-op program linked to their education and they want to come here. And we need to provide opportunities for those young people. But we also recognize that the government departments have to budget for that. So creating the room to allow those co-op programs and internships to proceed.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. In comparison to

earlier — I don't want to say generations, but earlier years — is the employment opportunities within the Public Service Commission or the public service generally deemed to be as significant and attractive now as it once was? You know I can remember a time when working for the government was considered to be just about the highest calling you could have. And I'm not so sure that's true any more.

What's the experience of the Public Service Commission in terms of their recruiting and the response to their recruiting initiatives?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I'll give you this answer. We had over 6,000 young people in post-secondary education that applied for jobs in the public service — summer jobs. I think that's pretty phenomenal that you have that number of young people from our various educational institutions that are applying.

In terms of people who apply for various positions in the public service, I think I'll let Ms. Young answer that.

**Ms. Young:** — I guess I have a couple of responses to that. The first one would be that we don't have as many jobs to offer. Government has been in a status quo position. So in fact the growth of government in the '60s and '70s is not now there. And so we've actually been off — if you like — off the radar screen of young people for probably a decade and maybe more. Even though there certainly are hundreds of hirings every year, we aren't front and centre as we were in the universities in the '60s and '70s.

That's not a phenomena that's unique to the Saskatchewan government, that's all governments. So I think that one of our jobs, not only reaching out to young people in a general sense, it's really getting ourselves back on their radar screen to again talk about the diversity of jobs, the importance and the benefits and value of a public service. And that's where we've been focusing a lot of our attention.

I should say that we're heartened by . . . Our electronic, the Web site and electronic hiring system that we have, we have an ability to create a database of people who are interested in working in the government. And we put it up about a year and a half or two, close to two years ago, and didn't particularly advertise it, but it's just there. And this is the depth that the Internet goes to. We have approximately 20,000 names and resumés in that Web site. Now that doesn't mean there's 20,000 people that fit the jobs, but that gives you a sense of, I guess, the volume of interest there is. But, of course, it's always, you have to have the right person for the right job. But I think it's encouraging to know at least there are that many people who are interested in public service.

**Mr. Elhard:** — I thank you. I have one final query and it's quite a bit off the topic we have been discussing.

As a result of the most recent provincial budget, there were considerable layoffs, especially in the Department of Agriculture. And in my own constituency we had employees that had 35 and 28 years, respectively, of service — long-time employees of the Department of Agriculture. One was an agrologist. One was not; one was just in the office working with the department. But, nevertheless, had basically committed their

entire lives, working lives, to the Department of Agriculture.

When they get their pink slips, given their level of service, years of tenure — what happens to them? What kind of settlement is offered to them? Is there a special consideration given to people who have that length of service?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — What I can tell you is that we recognize that there are very . . . there were many people who were long-service employees and had spent their entire working life, or most of their working life, working on behalf of the people of this province. So we have attempted to make every effort we can to minimize the impact.

For those people who had enough years of service and their age matches a particular requirement, they are eligible for retirement obviously. And there are people who are also eligible for early retirement where there is a bridging — an amount of money that is paid each month until they reach the age of 65, I believe. As well there are bumping options for in-scope employees. So the more seniority you have, you can bump into other jobs in the province.

People also have access to a re-employment list. So they can go on the re-employment list in case a job comes up where they would meet the qualifications for the job. We also have career assistance of up to \$5,000 for each laid-off employee which will . . . might assist them in receiving some additional training or education. And if necessary there is severance pay available to both in-scope and out-of-scope employees.

I think the other thing is that we have an employee assistance program. And people certainly have access to counselling through the employee and family assistance program. In terms of the very specifics of the program, I'll turn it over to Mr. McKillop who can give you more precise detail.

**Mr. McKillop:** — With respect to the early retirement program, if the employee's age and combined . . . combined age and service totalled equal to or greater than 80, they were immediately eligible to opt to retire on an early retirement basis. If they were members of the old pension plan, the retirement penalties for early retirement were waived. They were provided a bridge benefit to age 65, as the minister had indicated, as well as a retiring gratuity equal to a day's pay for each year of service.

If they were a member of the new money purchase pension plan, their equity in that pension plan was enhanced by 1 per cent, and in addition they then received as well the same bridge and retiring gratuity as members of the old plan.

So in terms of those that were particularly long service, that additional benefit of early retirement was made available.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Sorry. I need to clarify that just a little bit. If somebody qualified because of the combination of their age and years of service for early retirement, would they qualify over and above that for some type of severance assistance or severance package?

**Mr. McKillop:** — They would either have the option to leave the service through early retirement or to attempt to retain

employment through bumping. If they chose the latter and were unable to leave the employment through bumping, they could opt for severance, or they could revert to their rights under early retirement.

**Mr. Elhard:** — So they don't lose early retirement opportunities or privileges if they opt for the other. That's one of the things I wanted to know.

**Mr. McKillop:** — There is a bumping option available to them; they then have a choice to make. Are they going to accept continuing employment in the public service, or are they going to exit the public service? If they choose to exit the public service, they can do so through the early retirement option. If they want to retain employment and there is an employment opportunity available, then once they make that choice then that's the track they're on.

**Mr. Elhard:** — One final question, if I may. If somebody was a fairly recent employee of the department, had two years, maybe less, a year and a half, let's say, of employment and were given their layoff notice, served notice, what are their options? What accrues to an individual in that set of circumstances?

**Mr. McKillop:** — If they're in the bargaining unit, they would have the opportunity to bump. The likelihood of them being successful in retaining employment through bumping, based on their relatively limited service, is relatively small.

So if they're unable to retain employment through that process, the exercise of their seniority rights in bumping, they would be eligible either to go to a re-employment list from which they can await the opening of future jobs in the public service, or they can choose to exit the public service with severance. In the bargaining unit that severance is set out in the terms of the collective agreement and basically works out to a week's pay per year of service.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you.

**The Chair:** — I have Mr. McCall and then Mr. Dearborn. Now, Mr. McCall.

**Mr. McCall:** — Thank you. I guess the earlier questions of the member from Cypress Hills had got me thinking. And actually last Friday I had the privilege of attending the book launch for Al Johnson's book, and he is as spry and as engaging as ever.

And certainly there were all number of luminaries there such as Tommy McLeod and Don Tansley, Art Wakabayashi. It was — Allan Blakeney himself, of course — it was quite the crowd.

And I guess . . . So just to follow up on the member from Cypress Hills' question, at present there is, with the federal civil service, a program designed to repatriate students studying abroad — say at Oxford, Cambridge, you know, these sort of blueblood schools.

I have a friend who works in the PCO (Privy Council Office) and they talk about the bluebloods and, interestingly enough, he's from Saskatchewan. And I always think he'd be a good person to repatriate back to our province.

But I guess my question is: is the minister familiar with the program and have they been watching it to see how it's been working out? And are there any lessons that we can draw from that experience to Saskatchewan as we go about accelerating our, you know . . . And obviously there's a great number of approaches being deployed in terms of connecting the Saskatchewan students.

But those ones who have gone beyond or such as the person that the minister talked about who's off to Harvard — which is of course a great feather in that person's cap — and it would be great to repatriate some of that knowledge back home to Saskatchewan. But anyway, not to ramble but there's the question.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Yes. I am familiar with the federal program and I'm . . . I think one of the things that, when you talk about luminaries in the public service, there is no question that Saskatchewan's had a very strong reputation as having a fine public service in the country. And we have people that have certainly distinguished themselves across the country when it comes to providing public service and good intellect in terms of public policy. And you mentioned Art Wakabayashi who is the chancellor of the University of Regina, and Al Johnson and others.

One of the things that I'm hoping to be able to pursue shortly is trying to establish linkages with various institutions across the country where young people from Saskatchewan are certainly registered and attending, to see if there's a way that we can begin to link with them to ensure that they do come back.

There are . . . I can think of some young people that have left the province that are working in the private or public sector. They're interested in coming back, but we have to make sure that we have the appropriate job matching their experience and their education that would meet their particular requirements.

And when you start to recruit people back to the province, highly skilled, intelligent young people tend to have partners that are highly skilled and talented. So you have to be able to look at offering two jobs in order to recruit people back to the province. And this has certainly been an issue for our universities that are trying to recruit new faculty, because the faculty tend to come with a professional partner.

So this is a challenge. We have — and this is the other part of my job is the Crown sector — we have people that are working with the private sector to determine what kind of private and public strategy we can have to retain young people in the province, but also recruit people back to the province. And we're hoping to see some good work done in that area.

**Mr. McCall:** — Yes. To follow up in a much more micro sense, certainly there are various schools throughout the country and indeed the western world and the world, universe . . .

Anyway not to get too elliptical here but in terms of, I think, of the University of Regina and people taking their master's in public administration there, what kind of cross-fertilization or connections are there at present with that one very precise, particular institution? What kind of connections are there between the provincial government and individuals taking that

course, which is obviously amenable to our broader goals?

**Ms. Young:** — You're referring to the master's of public administration at the university, right? Well yes, there's a few different connections. Certainly we work very close with, closely with them on just regular summer student jobs. They are often our employees in the summer.

We have several of the public servants in both the Crowns and executive government who are actually sessional lecturers there, and that's good from a couple of reasons because we get in front of them and can talk about the value of working for the Saskatchewan public service. So that's been a really, really good connection for us.

And I can also say we are in the last stages of a new program which will be, I believe, brand new to Canada, which is an internship program for the second year of the public admin students in the second year of their master's where they actually come for eight months, eight full months as part of their master's degree, and come in and are shadowing and are partnered up with either an assistant deputy minister or a deputy minister for that time. So we think that's a rather direct connection to get them interested in the Saskatchewan public service. And we're really pretty excited about that; we're close to signing an agreement on that.

**The Chair:** — Thank you.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Madam Minister. And my thanks to your officials for participating with us here today.

My first question — I have five questions, some in various parts — my first question is merely procedural or it should be basic in nature. How many classifications are there within the government and the public sector as a whole, scope and out-of-scope positions?

**Ms. Young:** — Just in terms of pure numbers, in out-of-scope and managerial positions, there are . . . the range is from level 1 to level 12B so there are 13 levels in the management positions. For the in-scope positions because of our new in-scope plan, we have 14 — I believe, 14 levels — with the possibility of moving to a 15th or 16th if we would need it. So all of the employees are classified into one of those 14 levels.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — If I just might say, member, there used to be hundreds of classifications in the public service so there has been a real . . . through pay equity and design, there has been a tremendous change in the job classification plan in the province.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — I thank the minister for her answer and her official. That's very precise and exactly what I was looking for.

Last year from the public service, how many positions were reclassified? I'll leave this within the boundaries of in-scope and out-of-scope.

I have two supplementary additional questions to that. The first is, of the reclassifications how many went to, were reclassified up to a higher pay scale and how many were reclassified down

to a lower pay scale?

**Ms. Young:** — I can't today give you a complete answer. I can give you that in 2003-04, 1,252 classifications were processed. What I cannot give you is the breakdown in and out of scope. I can give it to you; just not right at the moment. And in terms of which went . . . where there was no change and which went up, I will have to get back to that too. I can tell you that the majority did not change.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Thank you. Could you repeat that for me? There were 1,254 applications for reclassification filed last year?

**Ms. Young:** — 1,252.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — 1,252 — that's just, from the numbers that the minister provided to Mr. Chisholm here from the July total population, that's roughly 10 per cent of the Public Service Commission was reclassified?

**Ms. Young:** — They requested to have their classification reviewed because they felt there was significant changes in their job, and what I can't tell you is how many of them didn't change. I do know the majority would not have changed. But I can get back to you on the number that have moved upwards.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — I'd appreciate that, and this may be difficult for you on my next question, but what was the percentage of the public sector that was reclassified? Just as a basis, and if you don't know that number relative to the 1,252 . . . I suppose it's going to be somewhat difficult for you to answer that.

Could you give me a ballpark, though? I think that it is important with the budget that we've had that we do have these answers.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well we'll get you the answers, so there's no problem there. But I think what the member should know is that the province undertook a major job evaluation program that had to do with pay equity, and so out of that when you begin to implement it, you know, people may not be satisfied with where they end up. And so they can apply to be moved to a different category, and just because you apply doesn't mean you get it. And it can take some time because there is a lot of information that needs to be acquired.

But what I can assure the member is that we will get you the answers to your questions. And we can't answer your last question because we don't know of the 1,252 that applied for reclassification how many actually were successful.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Thank you, Madam Minister, and I have confidence that you will provide that information . . . not to have implied otherwise.

I did have a question which was based on a percentage factor of . . . relative to the federal government and other provincial jurisdictions. I wondered relative to those bodies what percentage of their workforces are reclassified per annum, and how does Saskatchewan match up to that.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I don't think we have access to that

information. We don't have federal-provincial meetings and get-togethers over that kind of information. And that isn't something that I would think would be shared with other jurisdictions. But we certainly are going to tell you where we are relative to the public service in terms of reclassifications.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. I should think that those statistics wouldn't be overly difficult to find, as they're public knowledge from the federal state how many employees there are and, at the end, what the total change in value of being paid out to the public service is on a year-to-year basis. And some of that is due to change in size, but also it's due to reclassification.

I'm wondering if also relative to reclassifications that occurred last year, what was the total incremental cost increase? Would that be able to be provided?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — We will calculate that for you.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. I would have questions with regards . . . Since what I'm asking for is somewhat technical — and I know that your officials will do their utmost to provide us with the said information — I have a concern about what the trend has been in the percentage of reclassifications. And the minister may help qualify this because she spoke of the large requalification that happened through the pay equity. Just on a short question — could you tell me what year that was implemented in?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — It was . . . Initially we began implementation in 1998. And it was phased in over a number of years. And I believe final implementation was done in 2001.

But I can tell the member that there were people — based upon the questionnaires that employees had to answer — there were people that were very unsatisfied where they were placed in the various categories. And there are people that, at times, will apply to have themselves reclassified.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. I'm aware of that. I have a relative that works in the . . . in Saskatoon, and job changes occur. Sometimes workloads change, that sort of thing. I understand in part how the classification aspect is evaluated and whatnot.

What I have specific concerns about with the . . . is that having this had been implemented since 2001, we should see that from that initial restructuring there should be a curve down in the number of incidents of reclassification over the course of a three-year period. It would seem to me that that will start to slow down in and of itself from the effect that's happened from the implementation from '98 to 2001. And I should think by the year 2004 many of those will be dealt with at the preliminary state, possibly not to the effect that individuals would have wished if they haven't received a classification that they have.

But with the public sector zero, one, and one coming across the board, I know that members on our side of the House have great concerns about what the percentage of reclassification will be following this implementation in the collective bargaining process. And does the minister foresee that this percentage change in applications for reclassification is apt to move up or



down over the next year and a half, relative to its historic numbers?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Just for the information of the member, all governments across the country have a mandate that they have when they go into their collective bargaining cycle. And we have had mandates in the past that included zero, zero, two and a half. So what we . . . I think what we will have to do is to monitor what happened in those years with zero zeroes because we have been in a . . . we have not had significant pay increases in the province, and whether or not that's led to reclassification.

But as someone who at one stage of my career did work in the public service, there was a need to implement pay equity because we knew that there was a significant difference between the male wage line and the female wage line. And one of the things that I feel very good about, having been a member of government for the last number of years, is that we have implemented pay equity in the public service because there's no question that women's work was underpaid relative to some other male work. And I think it's fair to say that female jobs . . . that the gap between male wages and female wages in this province has been reduced because of pay equity.

Now I don't know . . . I'll be curious to know about your question. Is it males that are applying for reclassifications, or is it females that are applying for reclassification? So you ask a very good question, and we'll be interested . . . I certainly will be interested in seeing the answer.

I can also tell you this: in 2002-03, 1,828 applications were made for reclassification. This may include . . . this may not be 1,828 individuals. There may be some duplication here. And 2003-4, 1,252.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — I'm sorry, Madam Minister, could you just repeat? It was at 2002 was 1,828. Thank you. I misheard you the first time.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — And '03-04, 1,252.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Right. That's a reduction of almost a third. And I could see from the historical implementation so soon after in 2001 that it would be fair that some medium is going to come out, and we should see a relative . . . the number of applications, all things being equal, should next year somewhere lie between the 1,200 and the 800 it would seem if the current trend continues.

What we would have great . . . There's no way to tell that. I see the minister nodding her head.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — We won't know that, and I'm not sure this shows a trend. In order to look at trends, we would have to go back. I like to look at data from 10 years ago and see what's happened in each of the last 10 years and relative to what's happened with pay equity implementation.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Madam Minister, I would just leave the last question as this: we will have grave concerns on this side of the House if we see massive movement in reclassification relative to the contracts being renegotiated at zero, one, and one — if in fact what the government has said it's going to stick to — and

then through the back door there is massive change through reclassification, and at the same time the costs don't come down.

So I thank the minister. I would hope that the minister will provide the answers to all the questions that I have asked today. And at the end the final question would have to be: what was the cost total around reclassification last year, and what is budgeted this year for a total of reclassification?

So my very specific question is right now is: what is budgeted for an increase via reclassification for wages in this coming fiscal year?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — We don't have that information at hand, but we will certainly get it for the member.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. I want to thank the minister and her officials for attending today.

And I failed to mention this earlier, but it was a good segue when the minister mentioned that she'll provide information to the committee. And the process for that is to provide seven copies to the Chair, and then that would be distributed to the members, so just to advise the minister of that.

And I would entertain a motion to adjourn. I recognize Mr. Elhard.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that we adjourn consideration of estimates for the Public Service Commission.

**The Chair:** — Correction. That's 15 copies that they're requiring.

And the member has moved adjournment of the estimates for Public Service Commission. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That is carried. And I guess we need a motion to adjourn the committee.

**Mr. McCall:** — I so move.

**The Chair:** — Moved by Mr. McCall that the committee stands adjourned. Is that agreed?

That is carried. The committee stands adjourned. Thank you, members.

The committee adjourned at 16:57.



