



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Hansard Verbatim Report

No. 16 – April 13, 2005



Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

Twenty-fifth Legislature

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
2005**

Ms. Judy Junor, Chair
Saskatoon Eastview

Mr. Michael Chisholm, Deputy Chair
Cut Knife-Turtleford

Mr. Lon Borgerson
Saskatchewan Rivers

Hon. Joanne Crofford
Regina Rosemont

Mr. Glenn Hagel
Moose Jaw North

Mr. Ted Merriman
Saskatoon Northwest

Mr. Don Toth
Moosomin

[The committee met at 15:00.]

The Chair: — Call the meeting to order. As outlined in the agenda the estimates before the committee today are the estimates for Community Resources and Employment, vote 36, and the estimates and supplementary estimates for Culture, Youth and Recreation, vote 27.

**General Revenue Fund
Community Resources and Employment
Vote 36**

Subvote (RE01)

The Chair: — The first estimates for the committee to consider are the Department of Community Resources and Employment found on pages 33 to 37 of the Estimates. And the first subvote is central management and services (RE01).

I recognize the Hon. Ms. Crofford and invite her to introduce her officials, and if she wishes to make an opening statement.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Today I almost have with me Wynne Young, the deputy minister — she must be just coming in the door — Shelley Whitehead, assistant deputy minister of policy; Bob Wihlidal, assistant deputy minister, client services; Darrell Jones, assistant deputy minister, housing and central administration; Karen Bittner, director, financial planning branch, budget and financial management division; Phil Walsh, executive director, employment and income assistance division; Gord Tweed, associate executive director, operations and delivery support branch, employment and income assistance division; April Barry, executive director, early learning and child care branch; Marilyn Hedlund, executive director, child and family services division; Wayne Phaneuf, associate executive director, community living division; and Larry Chaykowski, executive director, housing program operations division. And that's the list of who's here today.

The Chair: — Just for the ease of Hansard, when new officials come to the front to answer, could they identify themselves the first time they speak. Now the members are . . . The floor is open for questions. Ms. Bakken.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Ms. Crofford. And first of all I'd like to ask you a couple questions about a case file and how they pertain to Community Resources.

We have received a letter from an individual who has concerns about the custody of a little boy in her care that has FAS [fetal alcohol syndrome]. And she receives funding from the department for his care, \$270 a month. But this child has multiple disabilities that require additional support such as counselling and tutoring.

Her social worker told her that legislation was passed last year that would permit caregivers like herself to access additional money for this child's needs and I'm assuming that it's . . . she's referring to the 2003 amendments to The Child and Family Services Act. The social worker also said that the government is now putting this program on the back burner.

Can the minister comment on the additional services that were to be available for families in this situation and that need this additional support. And are they on the back burner, and if so why? And so how will this lady access extra financial support for this child?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Our officials may provide additional information, but what I'll just say at the outset is, under the cognitive disabilities strategy there is a flexible funding pool that has become available for families. And the issue for us in terms of getting that money out the door has been the appointment of four regional coordinators, who are the people who are actually going to be meeting with the families and assessing their needs with the flexible funding pool.

In the interim I've asked the department that where we have a relationship with a family that we know that they would qualify, that we should move more quickly to do that.

So I'm just recollecting now from your description that this is someone who has a relationship with the department, so that being the case . . . If it's someone who doesn't have a relationship with the department I think it's more likely they would have to wait till the regional coordinators are in place. But if something we already know, I think that we could move more quickly on that. So if you're able to provide us with the name afterwards, we could ensure that someone checks into that for them.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Ms. Crofford. Well the letter indicates that, you know, that they have not been able to access this funding and so is very frustrated because she indicates that not only is she faced with this issue, but there is also, in her words, so many kids out there placed with family or other interested parties which saves putting them in foster care and just wanting, you know, some action taken to help her be able to keep this child in her care. So, if I can pass this along to you and if you could look into it, I'd appreciate it very much.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes we'll do that.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you. I have another individual who is concerned about the clawback to the Canada Pension funds by Community Resources and Employment and I wonder what really is the criteria around this. If a person is receiving social assistance and they also are receiving some payments under the Canada Pension fund; is the total amount clawed back or how is this determined?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again, I'll let Phil Walsh, the executive director of employment and income assistance division answer that, because that's a fairly detailed administrative question.

Mr. Walsh: — My name is Phil Walsh. With regard to Canada Pension Plan it is offset against social assistance benefits dollar for dollar. There are exemptions under social assistance but they apply to earned income . . . employment earnings, and don't apply to income that's not coming from wage sources.

Ms. Bakken: — Would you like to explain that for us, is earned income as opposed to . . .

Mr. Walsh: — Yes there's a category of earned income which would be income from a job or income from self employment that does have some exemption, primarily from employment income that's not, in sort of, the earned category that is, pension income that type of thing does not have an exemption.

Ms. Bakken: — So what would be the amount that can be earned then prior . . . that an individual could earn before pension is clawed back.

Mr. Walsh: — No, sorry there's no exemption for the pensions. The full amount is deducted from the social assistance benefits.

Ms. Bakken: — Oh okay, I misunderstood you then.

Mr. Walsh: — It's the . . . when you have an income from a job then part of that is disregarded from that before it's deducted.

Ms. Bakken: — Okay, and you can still receive some assistance depending on your income from your job before it's deducted.

Mr. Walsh: — That's correct.

Ms. Bakken: — And what is that amount now? I understood that it had been changed.

Mr. Walsh: — It has for people with disabilities, it has gone up by a maximum of \$50. Let me just get that. It's going up. A maximum exemption for a single person with a disability was \$175 and it's now 225; per family it was 250 and now it's 300. That's for families with single people and childless couples.

When it comes to families with children . . .

Ms. Bakken: — Families?

Mr. Walsh: — When it comes to families with children, there's the employment supplement that's available to them. So they would apply for the employment supplement and receive additional benefits that way.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you. This is along the same line, so I'll ask this question at this time as well. It's about another case file. And if a family, and in this case, has two children and they are on social assistance, what would be the total amount that they could receive?

Mr. Walsh: — It would depend on . . .

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I think you need a chart for that one.

Mr. Walsh: — Yes, I do. There it would depend again on the number of adults in the family as well as where they live in the province. But I'll give you an example.

Ms. Bakken: — Well okay, I'll just tell you. There's one adult, two children — both preschool — and live in Regina.

Mr. Walsh: — Okay. One adult, two children, I think that's one of the examples I don't have right here. But I'll give you one adult, one child, and two adults, two children. Would that

be okay? Or can I get you the . . .

Ms. Bakken: — Well is there not a set amount for an adult and then so much added on for each child?

Mr. Walsh: — Right, yes there is.

Ms. Bakken: — If you just give me the actual amount without going into . . .

Mr. Walsh: — Sure, I will.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Just as Phil's looking for that, we did a calculation recently because of a story regarding a single parent, I think, with two children. And in addition to what our department provides, in our relationship with the federal government with the National Child Benefit I think they also received another \$800 a month. That's a little bit ballpark but under the child benefit in addition to the amount that Phil will give you.

Mr. Walsh: — So for an adult with two children, the adult would receive \$205 for their basic allowance. And sorry, did you say which community they were in?

Ms. Bakken: — Regina.

Mr. Walsh: — Regina. For shelter, they could receive up to \$415.

Ms. Bakken: — 415?

Mr. Walsh: — Yes.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Now does that include with the new housing supplement?

Mr. Walsh: — No, that doesn't include the housing supplement. And then through the combined provincial-federal child benefits, they would also receive \$263 for the first child and \$228 for the second child.

Ms. Bakken: — And those, the child benefits, do they come directly from the province or do they have to . . . is that administered and sent out by the federal government?

Mr. Walsh: — By the federal government.

Ms. Bakken: — So you have . . . You do not have anything to do with them receiving these funds?

Mr. Walsh: — No, there's a federal-provincial agreement where we've combined our child benefits with the federal benefits into one payment.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — This was a negotiated agreement between the provinces and the federal government to deliver the child benefit in this way.

Ms. Bakken: — And I think you indicated when I first asked you this, that you asked me where. So is there a difference on how much you can receive depending on where you live in the province . . .

Mr. Walsh: — Right.

Ms. Bakken: — . . . and if so why, and what is the difference?

Mr. Walsh: — Yes, the difference relates to the actual costs of rent. The rent costs actually vary quite substantially across the province. So rent . . . We have actually four groupings of communities where we provide different allowances for rent. Regina, Saskatoon, and Lloydminster, for instance are in the highest cost area.

Ms. Bakken: — Okay, I'd like to ask you then a specific question about a case file that I've been working on. And I have a case where I have a young . . . well I'm not sure, I do not have his age. He's worked for 18 years, been employed for 18 years and was laid off from his job, had been on social assistance and receiving it.

He had a tragedy in his family of the death of his wife and has two small children that he is providing for. And because of the circumstances, his rent is far and above \$415 a month. He has two children to look after, and is not able to receive child benefits until he reapplies because they were in his wife's name.

He has been in contact with the department and yet has not been able to secure additional dollars. Yet at the same time, the department has made the decision that they will . . . They've removed his youngest child who is, I believe, 18 months old and put this child in foster care. The father wants to have this child returned under his care, but he does not have enough finances to be able to do that.

So instead of helping this father in the interim until he can be able to receive these child benefits — because the federal government has said you have to reapply for these benefits and it could take several months to receive — he is in a situation where he does not . . . he's not financially able to keep both his children with him.

And so the department is paying someone else to look after his child, but they won't pay him and help him through this very difficult time that he's having with the loss of his wife as well as his child being removed from his home, because he just cannot provide. And he's been trying to secure employment but it was a tragic death and he's had trouble coping with that and has, you know, not been able to secure employment. And they just . . . he just feels that, totally at wit's end because he wants his children with him but he cannot provide for them.

And is there any emergency assistance that can be provided for this family so that they can try and regroup and move on until they can, you know, he can secure income. And so is there some provision for that?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Just from a policy perspective, finances alone would not, unless it was the parent's view, finances alone would not prevent the return of a child. On the other matters of bridging to when this child benefit would be transferred over, certainly the department does work with people on bridging their circumstances. But, Phil, if you want to add a little bit to that.

Mr. Walsh: — Sure. We do have . . . we are able to do some

bridging because it sounds like it's a situation where there are a number of things that need to be worked through with different agencies and we can assist with that. And we do have available some money that could be used to bridge him during this period. And I think it sounds like another question, another case that maybe we should look into and see what we can do about.

Ms. Bakken: — Well I would appreciate this very much because they have been in contact with the department and to date, at least I talked to them yesterday and they still had not been able to have this issue resolved. And so if you would look into that, if I can get the information . . .

Mr. Walsh: — If I could just finish the . . . There were a couple of things that I didn't get to in describing the benefits. In addition the person would be eligible for the . . . to have their utilities paid. So their power . . .

Ms. Bakken: — Their utilities paid?

Mr. Walsh: — Yes, the utilities — power, heat. Sorry, it was the question about what does a . . . Sorry it's a previous question about a single parent with two children. So in addition to the basic allowance and the rent allowance there is also an allowance for utilities.

Ms. Bakken: — Okay, well then that adds another question to this, then, because my understanding was that he did receive 600, it's probably \$620 if you add these two together. And he was not allotted any extra money for utilities and that is one of the major problems. When he paid his utilities he did not have money left for food and even to pay his rent because he had to pay his utility bill.

Mr. Walsh: — Yes, we'll look at the specific case. It may be that they're waiting for some additional information. And then the other thing about this, I had mentioned the \$415 for the shelter through social assistance. With the new housing supplement they could be eligible as well for up to an additional \$89 depending on how much their rent is through the housing supplement.

Ms. Bakken: — Okay.

Mr. Walsh: — And that's just starting this month.

Ms. Bakken: — Ms. Draude would like to ask some questions for a few minutes.

The Chair: — Ms. Draude.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much. And to the minister and your officials, I appreciate the opportunity to ask some questions. Starting at the beginning, I know that DCRE [Department of Community Resources and Employment] actually has the third largest budget within the government spending. Can you tell me how many people right now are receiving assistance through the department?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I want to get an exact number for you. It changes every month so we'll just get this monthly figure.

Ms. Draude: — While you're doing it could you tell me what

the breakdown is a little bit, especially with people with disabilities?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — One thing I can tell you, because I asked this question myself about a day ago, and that's that 48 per cent of the people on assistance currently today have disabilities. The number of cases in March, 2005 is 27,962.

Ms. Draude: — The percentage of those that have children or are single parents?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Okay, we've got two kinds of families — one-parent and two-parent. Yes close to 9,000.

Ms. Draude: — Nine thousand are one-parent families?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — No, are families.

Ms. Draude: — Okay.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — One-parent families is 7,257 and two-parent families is 1,422.

Ms. Draude: — Have you got a breakdown comparing Saskatchewan to other provinces? I had an opportunity a while ago to look at a Canadian breakdown of the services, the monies that were allocated to people on, at that time Social Services, and Saskatchewan was . . . I think it was the third lowest in providing assistance. Do you have those numbers available?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, I think we do have a comparison, just a minute. I would say that you're about right. And one of the reasons why we've stayed at about that level is since we've added the Building Independence program we now provide supports to 10,000 people who never used to be supported by the department. And these would be the low-income working people.

And we've done that to create an incentive to work because before people were actually better off on assistance than they were on a minimum wage part-time job. So we created the Building Independence program to make people be better off when they're working than not working.

And money has been pretty tight for a long time so there wasn't a lot of additional money on benefits. A lot of the money has been directed to both Building Independence for families, which has been very successful and those folks are now about \$6,000 a year better off than they would have been on assistance, and as well to persons with disabilities. And again I gave you that fairly high number of percentage of people who have disabilities.

So we've also put about \$8 million into the disability action plan of which a goodly portion of that goes to things like disabled transit and supported employment programs and those kinds of things.

Mr. Walsh: — Some of the changes that are introduced . . . being introduced this month or starting in May will actually change Saskatchewan's rank. For instance, for a . . . two adults and two children right now, our benefits put us in about sixth

across the country and with the changes we'll move up to fourth. So these changes . . .

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, making progress.

Mr. Walsh: — . . . these changes will . . . and taking into account the cost of living in Saskatchewan versus some of these other places, they compare reasonably well I think.

Ms. Draude: — When was the last time the government actually did a review of the financial needs of people with disabilities that are receiving basic allowance?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Oh, persons with disabilities are one of the greatest areas of improvement because we work directly with the disability community. And every year, I think for the past four, there's been improvements in the disability area, to some area of their . . . both their employment and their income status.

Ms. Draude: — So does your government, or do you have someone within your department that actually reviews it on an ongoing basis . . .

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes.

Ms. Draude: — . . . to determine what's . . .

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, every year items are brought forward for budget discussion and tested against the other proposals. And every year there's been some kind of improvement.

This year there was improvement in the shelter supplement as well as the income that people are allowed to earn without anything being deducted from their cheque, and as well to the basic allowance for persons on assistance. So those were three specifically financial improvements made this year.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, you had indicated that with the new housing supplement there was more money allocated or available to people for the rent. Can you tell me out of the money that has been earmarked for the housing supplement how many of those . . . How much of that money do you expect will go to people on social service . . . in your department?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well I think the number we've estimated for the program generally is about 10,000, 10,000 persons.

Mr. Walsh: — Up to 10,000 families and up to 3,000 people with disabilities. And most of those would be families and individuals who also receive social assistance.

Ms. Draude: — So 10,000. We have 27,900. I guess that's the number of people; that's just not the number of families, so the number of people. So then, quickly, the biggest proportion of the people then that would be eligible for this program are on . . . are receiving assistance. There isn't too many low-income . . .

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Working people?

Ms. Draude: — ... working ... low-income people that are receiving it?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The SES [Saskatchewan employment supplement] clients would still be eligible, and I don't know if Phil's able to give you a number there but ...

Mr. Walsh: — Sorry, I don't have an exact breakdown, but there certainly will be low-income people who are not on assistance who will be eligible for this program as well.

Ms. Draude: — So is it going to be ... the money is available right now so people are going to apply for it. Do you have to apply if you are receiving assistance as well?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, I think it's worth going through this because in the past when we've put increases into the allowance, the minute the people that people are renting from find out there's an increase, they just send out an increase rent notice. So they haven't gotten any better off. And working with the inner-city partnership here and the police and the city regulators and whatnot, they have found that there is just a huge, huge problem with housing quality.

And so what we attempted to do this time working with the people from the inner-city partnership — again that's the police, the city inspectors, the health, the fire, all of those things — is to try to tie this supplement to the quality of housing. And it's partly an educative process but you also can't get it unless your house satisfies a checklist.

Now it doesn't get necessarily or initially inspected. It's based on you phone into the call-in centre and report. There will be some random inspection and random audit to make sure that that information is accurate. But in fact it's very basic stuff. Does your house have windows? Is the plumbing working? Are there rats? Is there a smoke detector? The kind of things ... Do the doors lock? The kind of things that we would expect in a house we live in.

And we're hoping this will accomplish two things. One is that the renters will become more aware of what people consider to be an acceptable standard of housing. But the other issue is that the landlords will understand that any rental supplement is also tied to quality of housing. And in order to give people the tools to work with, we also have a renovation program that would be available to landlords to assist in bringing ... if the house does not meet standards.

If in fact that is not the option that's chosen, then we ... also based on their ability to move into a higher-quality house, the supplement would be provided as well.

Ms. Draude: — So have you made any forecast on how much of the money is going to be available to landlords and how much of it is going to be available to the people on assistance?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The part that's budgeted for the assistance part is 10 million. I'll have to get Darrell to just let me know, remind me what the renovation program is.

All of that 10 million goes directly to the people who qualify, not to the owner, because again we're trying to, with the

Building Independence, trying to seat that responsibility in the tenant and then have them be able to make some choices and to expect and learn about having a basic standard. Darrell Jones.

Mr. Jones: — We have the budget for the supplement in particular and we've talked about that budget going to \$10 million as the program matures. That's specifically for the supplement.

We've also designed renovation programs that will be delivered through Sask Housing Corporation which will have a separate budget for landlords to access if renovations for health and safety reasons are needed to their accommodation.

As part of the broader HomeFirst strategy, we're anticipating through a variety of the renovation programs we could see up to 3,000 housing units being renovated over the course of the five years.

Ms. Draude: — So how much money is earmarked for that?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I'm trying to just go by memory.

Ms. Draude: — And maybe while you're looking, could you also indicate if companies like Boardwalk will be available ... would they have an opportunity to apply for this?

Mr. Jones: — Certainly any landlord, Boardwalk included, would be eligible to apply for the renovation programming. In terms of the supplements themselves, it's the ... one of the unique features about this particular rental housing supplement is that the supplement is actually linked to the client as opposed to the landlord. So the supplements are applied for by the tenants, and then the tenant works with the landlord if the house doesn't meet basic health and safety, to direct them towards the renovation programs.

Ms. Draude: — The minister had indicated that there really wasn't going to be any baseline to begin with. They were going to do some random audits to determine what the status of the house was and hopefully that it would have the basic needs.

But are you concerned that because there isn't a real baseline that there, that we will still have some substandard or there'll be real inequities?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well again the person does have to report when they phone into the call centre as to the quality of the house. And maybe I'll get Darrell to explain what inspection process would take place.

I'll just mention in Regina and the inner-city partnership, they actually have a schedule of housing inspection. And every Wednesday there's a team that goes out and selects houses within different areas of the city where they feel the housing standards have slid quite badly. They go out, they inspect, and they've been placarding houses. And then our department assists the people whose houses are placarded to move to new housing.

Mr. Jones: — In terms of the inspections themselves, we've reached agreements with the three major municipalities, Saskatoon, Regina, and Prince Albert, to participate in the

inspection process. So it'll be a combination of municipal inspectors as well as housing inspectors within the department that'll be conducting the inspections. And what we've identified is first, the screening that would occur at the contact centre may in fact trigger an inspection, but also on a post-audit basis inspections would be done. As we see the results of the inspections that we're conducting, then we will gauge the quantity of inspections that we would flow out to ensure that health and safety requirements are being met.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I might just add that one of the interesting things is these standards — we haven't developed any new ones — they've all been in place for a long time but there was no enforcement activity. So what's happened now is because the quality of housing stock has deteriorated so badly in some of the high rental areas, this team has put itself together, really, to go out and enforce rules that already exist.

Ms. Draude: — So can you give me an idea then of how many inspectors or enforcement people you have that are going to be doing this job?

Mr. Jones: — What we are undertaking right now is arranging for inspection services with the municipalities. The municipalities have a force of inspectors available to them and they will be utilizing their force of inspectors accordingly. At the outset of this program we're anticipating, of course, large take-up.

So we would see the municipalities potentially diverting some of their resources to assist with this. And also within the housing division, we have a force of inspectors already in place that deal with our ongoing maintenance and modernization and improvement and so forth, of our existing housing portfolio. And so we will be diverting a good percentage of their attention to, on an immediate basis, to deal with some of the front-end volume at the outset to deal with the inspection volume we're anticipating.

Ms. Draude: — When this program was put together, there must have been some anticipation that there was going to be a cost involved in the inspecting and enforcement. So how much of the money that is allocated for this housing supplement was put for . . . has been earmarked for the work that they'll be having to do?

Mr. Jones: — I'm not sure that I have a specific number here today that provides a complete breakdown. By diverting some of our existing resources on a temporary basis, these are resources that we already have within . . .

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The corporation.

Mr. Jones: — . . . the housing corporation, and so we wouldn't necessarily see hiring up new resources there. We would add this. As these inspectors are travelling around the province doing their routine work, we would add these additional inspection requirements on to their duties. We believe that we have the capacity to do that there.

And within the relationship that we're establishing with the municipalities, it will represent some portion of cost out of the dollars we've identified for the total program.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you. Maybe the next time we meet, or beforehand, you could give me an idea of what money is available. I imagine there must be a business plan or an anticipation of cost. So if we could get a breakdown on how this money would be allocated, I'd appreciate it. I think the questions come back to Ms. Bakken.

The Chair: — Ms. Bakken.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you. I'd like to move to another area and ask some questions of the minister and this is in . . . also to do with child custody. And I'd first of all like to ask Minister Crofford, if a child presents him or herself to Social Services and says that he does not want to go home, what action would your department take?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Now you're talking about what age of child?

Ms. Bakken: — I'm talking about a 13-year-old child.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I'm going to get some help here because I know, generally, procedures but I think this is an area where I would want to be very factual. And we have Marilyn Hedlund, executive director, child and family services division.

Ms. Hedlund: — Yes, Marilyn Hedlund. If a child said they did not wish to return home, we would conduct an investigation to determine whether the child is in need of protection. And part of that investigation would be an assessment of the situation and the capacity of the family to deal with the issues that the child is presenting. Efforts would be taken to work with the family to deal with those issues. And if that wasn't possible, to keep the child within the home, safely within the home, we may look at a resource outside the home either temporarily or in some cases over the long term.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you. And that was my assumption, that that was what would take place if this happened. However, as I think several of you in the room are aware, that this . . . I have a case that this has not happened in, where an investigation was not carried out to determine if the child was in need of protection, nor was there efforts, appropriate efforts taken to keep the family together.

And I'm wondering, when this happens and the department fails to fulfill their mandate, what steps does a parent have open to them that they can take in order to correct this wrong?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — If I could just make a general comment first. The places where the Children's Advocate has been critical of the department has not been for the removal of children. It's been for the non-removal of children from circumstances that were considered not appropriate or safe for the child. And it's a very difficult position to be in because if something happens to that child, being directly responsible for the welfare of children in the province, we then have to answer as to why we didn't take sufficient steps to protect a child. So just for that context, I'll go back to Marilyn for a more detailed answer.

Ms. Hedlund: — If there is a controversy between the parent and the department and there isn't agreement on the plan — and

of course the first approach is always to strive to reach agreement — but if there isn't agreement, we would go through the courts. And the parent would have legal representation and so would the department. And the matter would be put before the court. And the judge would review the information and may request additional information and assessments in order to determine what's in the best interests of the child.

So at that point the judge reviews the actions of the department and the information that they presented, as well as other information presented, and considers whether the judge agrees with the department's plan or whether an alternate plan is ruled to be in the child's best interests.

Ms. Bakken: — And what would be the time frame around this being brought to a conclusion?

Ms. Hedlund: — That would vary depending on what information the court requires. And sometimes there is a length of time required to do assessments of the child and the family.

Ms. Bakken: — And what would be the average time that that would be?

Ms. Hedlund: — It's difficult to say what an average time would be. Adjournments can be requested by the department, or the parent and legal counsel. It could take some months before the matter is concluded.

Ms. Bakken: — Well I've heard the comments from yourself and from the minister and, you know, certainly children have to be the first priority, but we also need to have a concern about parents and about keeping families together. And in this case that I'm speaking to, that certainly has not been the case and it certainly has not been . . . there has been no attempt by the government to, and by the department to ensure that that happens.

I guess when I look at this, I look at it from a point of view of myself, and as a mother, and I feel that because of what's transpired here that every parent — and I would include children in that — are at jeopardy because of the failure of what the department to take appropriate action in this case. And so this could happen to any parent in this province. And certainly from the observation that I have made, the child has certainly suffered because of this as well. And yet the recourse, as you've outlined, is through the courts.

And the time can drag on for months and at the same time the damage to the family continues, the damage to the child continues — with evidence that there is damage to both — and yet there is no willingness by the department, by the minister to move on this issue and to expediate a conclusion.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I'll answer it. I think one of the things that's important to recognize here is I should not individually be making judgment on people's lives in the province.

There is a process, and in this case it's a court where legal representation exists. People also have access to mechanisms we've set up, that our government has set up in the past, the Children's Advocate, the Ombudsman, to ensure that people are getting appropriate services. They make public commentary on

their examination of cases. I think there's a lot of transparency here and a lot of mechanisms people have to make sure that I am not inappropriately dabbling in the lives of families.

I have to say that our priority in our department is family reunification and when that does not occur, then there is usually some very good reasons for that. So I would just urge people to take advantage of the recourses that we have provided to make sure that my judgment is not the determining factor in the outcome.

Ms. Bakken: — Well, Madam Minister, I hear what you're saying, but in this case and as I have tried to work with you and with your department for going on six months now — this is going back to September and I became involved in December — and because, because of the department's failure in the beginning to address these issues appropriately, which was just outlined to me by your deputy, that there would be an investigation to determine if the child is in need of protection and then that efforts would be made to reunite the family first and foremost: those things did not happen.

And because of that, this is a case where wrongs need to be righted; not to proceed through the process of keeping this family apart and having them a victim of the system and waiting for the court processes. This is not, this has not been handled appropriately from day one. And that is what I have been trying to work with yourself and with your department about, to right the wrongs that have happened to this family.

And it has, I have gone the limit, as has the mother in this case. And yet there is no willingness for any movement on this issue.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The deputy of the department, Wynne Young, has made a personal and professional commitment to follow through on all the issues related to this. And certainly there is the court that's involved. And I think I would be very reluctant, given again the Children's Advocate view of what should be happening for children's well-being, to have my unprofessional decision take the place of a process that involves many people who are used to adjudicating these kinds of matters.

Ms. Bakken: — Well, Madam Minister, do I hear you correctly that you are giving a commitment that your deputy minister will be willing to look at this again or is she talking or are you talking about what's happened in the past? Because I've had commitments upon commitments upon commitments in the past, and nothing has been done to resolve this issue.

Ms. Young: — Without getting into any particular detail, the commitment to look into it was made by myself and the review is under way. It's just not complete yet.

Ms. Bakken: — Well, Madam Minister, as I have said, this started back in September. This family has been split apart since then. The child has suffered numerous . . . or numerous events have taken place which certainly do not speak to the benefit of this child. The mother has been without her son since September.

In the province of Saskatchewan to think that because someone makes an allegation against you as a parent and those

allegations are not investigated, character references are given to contradict this, and those character references are not investigated until the department is pushed to do that — character references which I have copies of, which are glowing, which I wish as a mother that I could have someone write about me — and yet they were totally disregarded. Past history of the person that made the accusations is disregarded, and yet there's been nothing done to try and correct this situation, but now we're continuing to look into it. That isn't good enough.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I can't think of any process that can be an improvement on the process of going before the court and putting your respective case forward. Someone at the end of the day has to make a fair decision based on both evidence and viewpoints of the parties involved and I don't know that we have a process that's better than a court adjudicated process or the Children's Advocate or Ombudsman looking into whether in fact the things that should be done, have been done. And I can't just arbitrarily decide that everyone's wrong and accept one opinion.

If there's anything I've found in the time I've been involved with both a minister and an MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] is that there are two sides to every story. And they must be heard and there must be representation and there must be a fair decision.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Madam Minister. And I couldn't agree more that there should be equal opportunity for both sides to speak. But there are policies and procedures that are in place in the province. And as I have said repeatedly, the investigation to determine if the child is in need of protection has never been carried out, has never been proven that this child was in need of protection. There have been no efforts to keep this family together — in fact, all to the contrary.

This mother has been totally alienated from the system. She has been completely left out of the picture and has been at the will of the department to how she is going to have interaction with her child. And to say the least, I find it appalling and if this is going on, not only with this mother but other families in the province, it's a sad state of what the parents can expect if someone makes an accusation against them. And this is the kind of system that we have and that they are held hostage until they can get to court, which has been adjourned numerous times without their will, and have to wait all that time in order have their child returned to them.

And I would ask the minister again to look at this issue. And if the process, we find the process has been followed, then I would ask the minister to commit to changing the process so that there is opportunity for the parent to be involved; there is opportunity for conclusion of this within a short period of time, not to drag on for what is becoming eight months now.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — If I can just say to the member that adjournments are not always at the request of the government. And I'll just say that. And also at this point there really is no way to resolve it than to finish the court process which then the clear light of day will say whether things were done appropriately or not. But there is no quick fix to this situation.

So again we'll just commit to working as hard as we can do to

get it resolved. But I will just reaffirm that not all adjournments are the request of the government.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Well the only adjournment that was called for by the mother was the last one because she felt that she needed to have some further opportunity to gather information to take to court because of allegations that had been made against her.

And I would hope that the minister would commit that at the end of this, if it has to go through the court system and at the end of this, that there would be people within the department that would have to answer for what went on here. Because this has been a travesty of errors from day one, and there has been no one, no one willing to go back and question the people that were involved from day one. It's been a situation of no one wants to admit they made a mistake. And you know what the mother has said over and over again? I don't care if someone made a mistake; please just let's get this right.

And that's what I'm asking, is that someone has to be held accountable for what's gone on here.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I will just assure the member that if someone has not . . . has breached their procedure on how they should do a job and it has negatively impacted on a family, there are consequences in the workplace that are outlined. And we would certainly hope that's not the case, but again I can't just form an opinion on that. There has to be a review of everything that was done and that's what Wynne has committed to and is in the process of doing.

Ms. Bakken: — Could you give me a deadline of when that review will be completed?

Ms. Young: — Yes. I would like to say within the next few weeks. The problem is this issue is unfolding and so there may continue to be new information. So I'm cautious about saying that there will be a certain deadline.

Ms. Bakken: — Well I guess I have to respectfully disagree that this issue is not unfolding. This issue has been before the department since September and I have repeatedly asked for this to be looked into, have been assured in the past that it would be, and the only thing that's left to happen now is for it to go through the court. There is nothing unfolding except the damage that is occurring daily to this child and to the mother. So to say that it's going to take further weeks is not acceptable. And I would like a deadline of when you're going to give a report on this.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again I have to say that if we were to put a pyramid together of the interests and their order of priority, the child is at the top of the pyramid and all others are below that.

Ms. Bakken: — And, Madam Minister, that's exactly my point, is that the child is at the top of this pyramid and the damage that has been done to this child — not by what I'm saying but by the evidence of what has happened to this child — should have been and should still be taken into consideration, and has not been. And I've repeatedly asked that this child be put in a third party home for his care, for his well-being, if he's not going to

be returned to his mother. That has not happened.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again I am not able to discuss specific cases. And I am as hopeful as you are that the courts will make a very quick determination, as quick as courts are able to move along, and that we will be able to verify once and for all that a good decision can be made for this child.

The Chair: — Mr. Chisholm.

Mr. Chisholm: — Yes, Madam Minister. As was mentioned earlier, the budget for this department is the third largest budget within the government. Over one-half of the \$637 million budget involves transfers of funds to individuals.

As far back as 1996 and as recent as 2004, the Provincial Auditor has expressed concerns re following rules and procedures to assure that only eligible persons receive assistance and that they receive the right amount of the assistance. I'd just like to know, Madam Minister, what steps have been taken to address these serious concerns.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again auditing is an arcane art and it involves following a paper trail related to what can sometimes be a vast array of criteria, at which the end of the day what you verified is whether all the i's were dotted and t's were crossed, but not whether in fact something wrong has occurred.

And what we did, and what I asked the department to do, was to reaudit the files that the auditor looked at and to check them against whether in fact everything checked out because there's such a wide range of checks and balances that happen. We run them against computer systems from other provinces to see if people are receiving help from somewhere else, against EI [Employment Insurance], against pension, against disability pension.

So there's I guess what I'd call a large number of checks and balances even before you get into the detail of rent stubs and utility stubs and those kinds of things. So for example, an auditor can cite it because a utility stub was missing. That does not mean that that person is committing fraud. It means that a piece of paper was missing that should have been there.

Now when we did the review and reaudited the files, I think the error rate that we found was less than 1 per cent; the error rate, in terms of actual verification of their eligibility, on a very detailed review of those files.

Mr. Chisholm: — Thank you. Go ahead.

The Chair: — Ms. Draude.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, following some of the questioning from my colleague from Weyburn, can you give me an idea of how many child apprehension cases your department is working on right at this time?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Joining us again is Marilyn Hedlund, executive director of child and family services division.

Ms. Hedlund: — I believe that we have about 6,000 apprehensions or investigations a year. And there's about 2,000

families receiving child protection services in March of this year.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, I don't think there's a person in this room that doesn't agree that the most important person in all these cases are the children. But I also know from — and I know that you're aware of the cases that I bring to your desk very often — it seems that we are so busy making sure that we've got the i's dotted and the t's crossed that sometimes we forget that the kids are out there suffering.

And I'm wondering, is your department, with the number of apprehensions that you deal with on a yearly basis, what kind of a process do you have set up so that if somebody feels that there is an injustice going on, that we can deal with it before we get to the court system? So that somebody who's actually thinking about this child and saying, okay I've got open ears, and there's got to be another side . . . as you indicated, there's two sides to every story. We get stuck in a court battle.

And the one that I'm talking about now has lasted for two years. And we have children who have not seen their parents for two years. That family is torn apart. And we have one child that is lost forever to, not just to her family, but to society because she's gone to drugs and to everything else that it takes.

That's totally unacceptable, and I know it's unacceptable to you and to your department. But we don't have a process set up where we can stop it and sit down where we have sane heads, say okay, let's look at some of these issues.

It makes me cry when I think about the number of apprehensions. And when we break it down in a province, in regions within the province — the figures were given to me by your department not too long ago — and in my area of the province it's 25 per cent higher than in the rest of the province. That must send some kind of a bell that says there's something going on there that is extremely different from the rest of the province.

I think that when we have individuals whose lives are going to be manipulated by a system, somebody's got to be able to get in there quickly and put some feeling into it. So my question to you is, is your department working on some kind of a review process where we can get children's needs looked at quickly and not just talk about the criteria that the department has in place at this moment?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Just to start with, there is a small note of hope there. Child protection cases have gone down in the last five years. I think some of the initiatives that we've been putting in place in our government, like KidsFirst and community schools, have increased the kind of supports that both children and parents have. KidsFirst is a visiting program where people go right to the home and offer services to the family.

In fact . . . Again I go back to the only places we've been criticized by the Children's Advocate is where we didn't take a child out of a home when . . . and which has resulted, in two occasions, in a child's death.

So this is a very difficult determination to make. When does

neglect become negligence? When does it become a danger to the child? When does not going to school every day seriously hamper their future prospects? When does not being fed for days hamper their child development? They're very serious issues taking place in the community.

And we are trying to build supports not only directly through the work that workers do when there's something reported, and we do investigate every reportage that comes in and some turn out to be, you know, someone just meddling and some have a foundation. But certainly we've tried to build stronger supports around the families as well with programs like KidsFirst and community schools.

Now that being said, that doesn't mean that every person ever hired to work anywhere is as good at their work as they could be, and nor does it mean that if they make a decision somebody doesn't agree with, that they're negligent. Again it's just very difficult to make these kind of determinations, and at the end of the day our policy is to keep children with their families.

With the First Nations, you will remember that in the '70s, '80s, many children were adopted out from Aboriginal families into non-Aboriginal families. And we were lobbied very heavily by the First Nations that children should remain at least within their community, if not within their family, and so we've been making . . . trying very hard to make that happen as well.

Recently a court case in P.A. [Prince Albert] suggested that there are times when adoption is more appropriate than even extended family supports so that the child can have permanence somewhere. So this is not easy stuff. But I reiterate that there is the Ombudsman and there is the Children's Advocate that actually investigate and look into situations where people feel that services have not been provided appropriately.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, I do appreciate what you're saying and I can see that this is an issue that does bother you and your department. It's not something anybody takes lightly when we've got children that are taken away from their home.

But we also know that the headline of a child . . . of a death of a child when they're under the care of Social Services sends shivers down the spine of every elected person and of everybody that works within the department. But what we don't see is the deaths of children that happen because of what happens within the system.

We have kids that go out onto the street and there are suicides and there are things that happen two, or three, or five years after they've been through a system. We don't keep track of that because that's not . . . probably not possible but we all know it's happening.

So I think one of the first things that we have to do is see if we can't set up a system where the people . . . where we don't just don't rely on the courts just to protect ourselves to do it, but let's get the kids and the parents and the families, everybody that's working hard on it, to say, let's resolve something before we get this far.

And it is too many of it. We have apprehensions that are — you say they're going down — 6,000 is still too many and we have

to do something.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Let me put it this way, it's not too many if the children are in need of protection. It is not too many. There is no number that's the right number. The right number is the number of children that need protecting and those parents deserve the support to be able to be good parents.

And I mean I'm just prepared to get a little bit political for a moment. When you have 100 years of oppression, when you have children taken out of their families before they're 6 years old and put into residential schools, there's a lot of damaged people out there. And certainly First Nations women will tell you readily that one of the biggest problems in some of the community work they're trying to do is for people to overcome their own personal history. So this is not an easy matter, it requires healing programs for some of the adults that are parenting, it requires a wide array of supports, but there is a mediation process. Now I'll let Marilyn explain that.

Ms. Hedlund: — I'd like to also clarify the numbers that I . . . I wasn't speaking to apprehensions so much as investigations. For children in care our average is about 2,900. In terms of mediation and offers of support to the family, our Act, the Child and Family Services Act, includes provision of offering family support services to the family even where a child has been identified as being in need of protection.

So we do have that option initially to work with the family and to provide support services. And that could be services through a CBO [community-based organization] or it could be something like a parent aide going right into the home.

We also have processes to bring together the parties interested in a child, and it could be through family group conferencing where we try to agree on a plan and bring everybody together who has an interest in that child. And in some cases we use the First Nations support of circling where the conference also has a cultural dimension, and again to support developing an effective plan for the child and the family.

I should add that if we have not opened a child protection file we also provide grants to arrange a community-based organization, and families can be referred to those CBOs — over 150 supported through our area — to receive support services.

Ms. Draude: — Could you provide us with some of these CBOs that are available? Or could you provide us with a list?

Ms. Hedlund: — We could provide you with a list, yes.

Ms. Draude: — Yes, thank you.

The Chair: — Seeing no further questions, I'll entertain a motion that the committee adjourn its consideration of the estimates for the Department of Community Resources and Employment, and thank the minister and her officials. Mr. Chisholm.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, and I'd like to thank my officials for their support with various information. Thanks very much.

The Chair: — I'll now have a mover. Mr. Chisholm. Thank you.

**General Revenue Fund
Culture, Youth and Recreation
Vote 27**

Subvote (CR01)

The Chair: — The next estimate for the committee to consider is the department of culture, youth and employment found on pages 43 to 47 of the Estimates and the supplementary estimates found on page 2 of the Supplementary Estimates. Central management and services is the first one, (CR01), and we'll just take a moment to bring in the new minister and her officials.

Thank you. I'll recognize the Hon. Ms. Beatty and invite her to introduce her officials and if she wishes, to make an opening statement.

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to begin by introducing my department officials who are here with me today: Barbara MacLean, deputy minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation, to my right here; Dylan Jones, executive director of strategic policy and youth; Dawn Martin, executive director of culture and heritage; Val Sluth, director of sport and recreation; Melinda Gorrill, director of corporate services. And we also have our co-op student from the Faculty of Administration at the University of Regina, Dana Callfas, who is presently working with Melinda in the department.

And from Saskatchewan Centennial 2005: Olivia Shumski, chief operation officer; Danny Wilson, chief financial officer; and Shawna Kelly, communications consultant. From SCN [Saskatchewan Communications Network], Ken Alexce, president and CEO [chief executive officer]; and Twyla MacDougall, executive director of finance, strategic planning and human resources. And from Saskatchewan Archives, Don Herperger, director of government records branch.

I want to begin my remarks by setting the stage within which the Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation is operating and how it is responding to the environment in a strategic way.

Trends show a significant change in Saskatchewan's demographics over the next few decades. Forty-four per cent of the population in Saskatchewan is either under age 20 or age 65 and older. Our working population is the oldest in Canada, with the greatest proportion being 55 and older. If this trend continues it will place great strain on wage earners who are a diminishing part of the overall population.

However in First Nations communities 50 per cent of the population is under the age of 14. This is especially evident in my own constituency. In the major urban centres, nearly one-half of the children entering kindergarten this year are of First Nations and Métis ancestry. The fact is participation by First Nations and Métis people in the workforce and mainstream economy is significantly lower than the non-Aboriginal population.

Research shows important skills for success such as

interpersonal skills, problem solving and decision making can be learned by participating in sport, culture, and recreation. However First Nations and Métis youth participate in these activities at a lower rate than non-Aboriginal people. This is a major challenge for the department and its delivery partners, and it is a major focus of the lottery review we are undertaking this year.

The department's strategy over the next few years is to respond to the need to help grow Saskatchewan's economy by encouraging higher levels of participation by all working age Saskatchewan residents. By providing policy, research, evaluation, communications, and leadership, and by working collaboratively with our partners and other government departments and agencies, Culture, Youth and Recreation will continue to enhance the province's cultural, artistic, recreational, and social life.

Ensuring Saskatchewan has an attractive quality of life is a contributing factor to businesses deciding where to locate and where talented youth choose to live and work. We will continue our focus on quality youth employment and entrepreneurship and engaging youth in government decision making.

Moving on to some other areas. I want to mention that we are definitely looking at an exciting year in 2005. Government investment in the film industry through the film employment tax credit has contributed significantly to the industry's growth and attraction to Saskatchewan this past year. Production volumes are expected to reach close to \$70 million resulting in more than 1,000 jobs this fiscal year.

Of course, in 2005 Saskatchewan's centennial provides a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to continue to build a positive attitude about ourselves and our future. It's time to celebrate the achievements of the province, its history, and its people, and to showcase our vibrant arts, culture, and sporting communities.

The Saskatchewan Centennial 2005 Office is working with communities across Saskatchewan to help them mark the centennial. To date more than 2,500 events have been registered on the centennial website. A key event in our centennial year is hosting the 2005 Canada Summer Games on August 6 to 20 in Regina.

The Government of Saskatchewan has supported the 2005 Canada Summer Games Host Society with more than \$3.1 million in operating funding to help host and stage this national event. More than 4,500 athletes, coaches, and officials from across Canada will compete. Team Saskatchewan, led by Chef de Mission Ross Lynd from the department, consists of 423 of our province's best young athletes, coaches, and managers. Over 10,000 visitors are expected to attend and enjoy the games. They are expected to generate about \$70 million in economic activity.

Leading up to the games, Saskatchewan will host a major two-day conference of provincial-territorial-federal ministers responsible for sport and the Minister of Health on August 4 and 5 in Regina.

On September 4, we will mark Saskatchewan's official anniversary, when our province will come together to

commemorate the best place in the world to live, to work, to play, and to celebrate. So I see an exciting year for Culture, Youth and Recreation.

I will now take a few seconds to talk about the Saskatchewan Communications Network. SCN contributes to the social, cultural, and economic well-being of the people of Saskatchewan using public broadcast and satellite technology. SCN uses five networks to provide services for public broadcast, distance learning, professional development, CommunityNet, and the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly.

As the CRTC [Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission] licensed provincial educational broadcaster, SCN's broadcast network delivers a wide variety of television programming distributed to viewers throughout Saskatchewan's cable, wireless, digital, and satellite television systems. SCN reaches 90 per cent of the province, has a weekly audience of 258,000 viewers, and services over 3,000 distance learners annually. SCN's broadcast network contributes financially to the development of regionally produced programs that highlight the rich culture and heritage of our region. SCN is also a wonderful resource as we celebrate Saskatchewan's centennial.

That concludes my opening remarks, Madam Chair, and my officials and I invite any questions you might have.

The Chair: — Before I open the floor to questions I'll just ask that the officials that come to the mike to answer questions please identify themselves for the ease of the Hansarding. So, questions? Ms. Draude.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much and thank you, Madam Minister, and to your officials. I look forward to discussion and questions and answers. I'm sure there's lots where I will learn this afternoon. There is very little that you said in your opening remarks that I didn't agree with, starting with your overview of the Aboriginal population and the opportunities here we have in this province. And so many places in Canada and in the States are saying that there's a . . . We have not enough young people, that we have this . . . people like myself that are at the wrong end of the scale when it comes to working.

We have opportunities in this province, but too many times there seems a problem. And I think we have to look at the opportunities and challenges that we have and make some real good fundamental moves, progressive moves for our province.

Madam Minister, just to get started as an overview, in the highlights I see that basically there was an increase in full-time equivalents of 9 per cent or eight positions, and a 20 per cent increase in central services — I guess it was about \$186,000.

Salaries have doubled. There's a 2,500 per cent increase in supplier and other payments, 41 per cent increase in transfers for public services. Under policy and youth, there was really no increase for funding for youth employment. There was a 3 per cent decrease for lottery and community initiatives stewardship. And under community initiatives, there was a 26 per cent decrease in transfers for public services.

So in general, like last year, your department continued to grow at really a much faster rate than the rest of the government. The full-time equivalents increased by 10 per cent, and there's increases of 25 to 30 per cent in key areas. And yet at the same time, there's decreases in transfers in public services and the Community Initiatives Fund. Can the minister provide an explanation for the continued budget increases for this department?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — Thank you for that question. And we'll start with the increase in the FTEs [full-time equivalent]. There was an additional position that was added to the Premier's volunteer sector to assist us as we increase our consultation and communication with the sector on a range of key work plan activities.

There was also an additional position to the cultural operations support. And this was to accommodate the increased workload as far as the status of the artist is concerned. You know, there was more work needed to be done in that area. And also an additional six FTEs were added to assist in the delivery of the centennial 2005 business plan. So those were the increased FTE positions. And I might add with these six positions here, they're not permanent positions.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, I guess maybe I'll get into the specifics and we'll probably answer more of the questions that I had instead of being . . . generally asking, I'll just be specific.

Madam Minister, I'm going to start with the centennial celebration and I know that we had discussed it. We won't be asking a lot of specific questions but there was a letter written from — I think I can say Mr. Hagel, can I? I'm sure I can use that term in this program.

There was a letter written by his office saying that through the Community Initiative Funds that there was the nature . . . there was programs applied for and some of them did not receive funding, and we asked for a list of the applications that were sent out. And I know that on the website we can get a list of the approvals, but what we really would like to see is the number of communities that actually applied for the grants and what their applications were based for, and the ones that were rejected.

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — I'll respond to your question. On the one question you have about providing a list, we're not sure whether we can do it legally or not. So we'll check on that and get back to you whether we can provide that list or not.

Ms. Draude: — Is this a confidentiality issue or why would there be any doubt? I mean if we had the resources, we'd be able to go to the communities and ask them who has applied. So in this letter that I received from Mr. Hagel, he said that these decisions were . . . the centennial office is not responsible for administering this grant and so they forwarded, he forwarded the request for this information to your department. So I was hoping that it was something, a matter of compiling the information that you have received from the various communities around the province and giving them to . . . and opening them up for everyone.

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — My officials are telling me it might be a

privacy issue. So we have to be sure.

Ms. Draude: — Okay. Madam Minister, on the website there's a list of the applications that were successful, so what would be the difference between this list and the list of people who were not successful?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — Just to explain a little bit more about whether we can do this or not. The rules governing the CIF [Community Initiatives Fund] fund are established in statute by the Legislative Assembly and we're not quite sure whether we can provide that list that you're asking for at this point in time.

Ms. Draude: — And I guess again I would think then that it should be worrisome that the list of approvals were given if the list for those who weren't approved can't be given.

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — We'll have an expert here that handles . . . that works in this area to provide further information. Dylan Jones.

Mr. Jones: — Thank you. It's Dylan Jones, Madam Chair. Just the first piece to clarify is that this information does not belong to the department. I think it's really important just to clarify that the Community Initiatives Fund is a statutory arm's-length tribunal, very similar to the Arts Board. We don't receive the applications. That's the first thing. We don't process the applications. Government's not involved in any way in deciding which particular communities get funded. So that's the first piece just generally.

My suspicion is that there's no problem with giving, with asking the fund to release a list of all the applications. But the question was, would we actually release the application forms themselves. If we're allowed to, and if there's no privacy issues with that, we're certainly happy to provide the forms. At this point I just don't know whether . . . we just want to check, right? So we could undertake . . . but at the end of the day the department can request to the arm's-length tribunal to release the information. It'd be up to them to decide what they wanted to do with that request.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you. I appreciate your comment. And I guess the comment that I would leave you with on this issue is the fact that this money is basically public funds. I mean, it's money that has been determined to give from the legislature to another group. There's issues always about accountability and I hear very often that open and accountable is the terms that we live within. And I would hope that this would continue when it comes to the decision that's going to be made on whether taxpayers can see who has received funding, who has not, and on what term . . . what applications were based on.

Further to the . . . And I guess I'll take you . . . I'm hoping that we'll hear back very quickly because I've also asked for the same information through motions in the House, so I would imagine that within the next few days the decision would be made. So I'm looking forward to it.

Under the Community Initiatives Fund there was actually a 26 per cent decrease in transfer for public services. Can the minister explain why the funding was reduced this year?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — I guess the bottom line in response to your question is that the casino profits are down.

Ms. Draude: — I believe that in 2003-2004, SGC [Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation] recorded a net profit at \$36.5 million. The profits from Casinos Regina and Moose Jaw are split and 50 per cent of the revenues are retained by the government's GRF [General Revenue Fund], and 25 per cent provided to the First Nations Trust, 25 per cent to the CIF. This year those profits will increase to \$38 million.

Mr. Jones: — Madam Chair, the amount of funds that are transferred to the Community Initiatives Fund are determined by statute and as you indicated they're 25 per cent. It's actually 25 per cent less 2 million. Okay? Which is the statutory requirement.

The figure that's in the estimates reflects the most recent projection from the Gaming Corporation as to what they anticipate their revenue will be this fiscal year. But under the statute the actual amount that's transferred to the CIF is based on their actual results. So that number may change over the course of the year.

So there's no, there's no discretion in the framework for government to decide how much it wants to transfer. It's 25 per cent less 2 million under the statute. And the reason it's down is the Gaming Corporation is projecting, you know, a reduction in its profits for 2005-06.

Ms. Draude: — I believe that projection is something we've been discussing and that's regarding the smoking ban and the fact that there's . . . the government has put aside a number of . . . 75 million, I believe, but they have indicated that they are taking that issue, they're looking at that issue for government revenues.

But the people that are banking on . . . the First Nations Trust and the CIF that are banking on these revenues for their programs obviously haven't received any of the funding that the government has put aside for their own General Revenue Fund. Was that something that the minister discussed with the Minister of Finance?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — I think, well, we know that there are issues and there's going to be pressures and these, you know, this is . . . you know, we're looking at different options and we're reviewing and this is something for sure that we will be talking to the Finance ministers and others about. But, you know, it's ongoing.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, when I listened to your opening remarks, and the plan and the vision and the excitement that your department has for this coming year — not just for our centennial but talking about the demographics and how we must be working towards providing a wholesome life for everyone in this province — we actually have a decrease in funding for the culture and sports.

There's 1,200 provincial sports, culture, and recreation community groups who in turn distribute funding to over 12,000 non-profit groups. There are a lot of people are going to be negatively impacted because the funding actually went down

in this area. It's something that I think it not only is a problem for the people that are in business, but in the big picture it's going to affect everyone. And I would be hoping that there would have been something that your department has said to the Minister of Finance that will show him that it is important that a department like this actually receives the funding on an ongoing basis to distribute to people who need it.

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — One comment that I would like to make is that we have, under the CIF we have a very expert and responsible management board of trustees and they have a plan in place. and based on even the revenues, you know, they are ensuring that no programs are going to be cut, that we will fulfill the commitments that have been made.

Ms. Draude: — I have no doubt that the people that are working on this work very hard and are committed to their job, but they can only work with the money that they're given. And so that's the concern that we have, and I'm sure that when there's less money, it's going to be felt right down the line because there's less funds to go out. And in a year when we are celebrating 100 years, it's disappointing.

So maybe I will go on to the youth. And part of the budget highlights was the fact that there was actually no increase in funding for youth employment. Can the minister tell me why there was a \$11,000 reduction in funding to the lottery and community initiatives stewardship?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — Thank you for that question. The officials are telling me that this was a result of reduced consulting expenses.

Ms. Draude: — Okay. There was a 26 per cent increase in funding for youth services for, I believe it was about \$86,000. What is this for? What additional services are going to be provided for this funding?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — I believe my microphone is on. The reason for this is that we're very proud of the Provincial Youth Advisory Committee that we have in place. And there is growing interest by the young people out there to be involved in all levels of government, and this is a result of that. This includes additional costs for youth research, meetings, and so forth.

The Chair: — Mr. Chisholm.

Mr. Chisholm: — Thank you. My question to the minister is regarding salaries. On page 44 of the Estimates it shows that salaries this year are being budgeted at 1.15 million. Last year it was \$528,000 so there's an increase of about \$622,000. But we have full-time equivalency increase of only eight persons, six of which are those positions you said were with the Centennial 2005 Office.

So I guess I'd like to know how we would increase our salaries by well more than double if we're only adding, at the most eight people, perhaps only six. Or what kind of salary increases happened during the year to the other staff?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — In response to your questions, there is the six centennial positions that we were talking about, there was an

additional position under the cultural branch, and we had an existing eight positions, so it has increased from eight to fifteen.

Mr. Chisholm: — From eight to fifteen?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — So it was . . . it has doubled.

Mr. Chisholm: — It is increased by seven positions. Is that right?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — Yes.

Mr. Chisholm: — Well maybe my math's not good but if those seven positions were \$50,000 jobs, just off the top of my head, that's \$350,000. We still have an increase of over \$300,000 in salaries on what was a \$528,000 total salary package last year, which would be 30 per cent, 40 per cent.

Ms. MacLean: — Perhaps, I'll speak to this. What this includes is not just the salary dollars for the six FTE and for the centennial, it also includes administrative money for the operations of the centennial office and it was grouped in that particular line given it's a one-year item and it will disappear from the department's budget next year.

Mr. Chisholm: — Could you give us an idea of then what you would expect that line to show next year? That it was 528 last year, it's 1.15 this year. We're going to reduce by seven . . . six people plus some administration charges that are being charged to that?

Ms. MacLean: — That's correct. So I would anticipate that it will look very similar. In 2006-07 it will look similar to what it looks like in 2004-05. Other than we had one incremental FTE for the cultural policy analyst.

Mr. Chisholm: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Ms. Draude.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Chair. Madam Minister, I'd like to go on to an interesting item that we heard about in the news a while ago and we see in a Lieutenant Governor in Council report that talks about the Tommy Douglas story, Mouseland Productions. We understand that the province . . . that the cost for this film is \$614,400. Who else is funding the production, other than the Government of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — The total budget is about \$8 million and close to \$7 million of that will be spent in Saskatchewan in different areas such as services, crews, catering, construction materials, and so on.

Other partners include the CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation], Telefilm Canada, Canadian Television Fund, and the CanWest western development producers fund.

Ms. Draude: — Can you give me a breakdown of the amount of money each of those have put in?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — We don't have some of the details that you're asking for as far as the other funders are concerned. From the federal employment tax credit, you can apply up to

1.2 million. So in total, 1.8 million of the 8 million total cost of the production comes from the Saskatchewan government.

Ms. Draude: — Can the minister give me a breakdown of that in the near future, the rest of the funding then?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — I can do that.

Ms. Draude: — I appreciate it. So \$1.2 million on top of the 614,400 will come from the film tax credit. I notice in information that we received before the budget that SaskFILM . . . that the government was urged to implement an increase in Saskatchewan film employment tax credit to increase the percentage from 35 to 45 per cent. Did this happen in the budget?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — To respond to that, there is a review of the film industry that's going on right now so that didn't happen in the last budget.

Ms. Draude: — So then the 1.2 million is 35 per cent of the wages that are being paid for this film. Is SaskFILM involved in this project?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — Could you explain your question in a little bit more detail?

Ms. Draude: — The organization SaskFILM, are you . . . is that involved in this story at all, in the Tommy Douglas story?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — Dawn works in this area so I want to get her to elaborate instead of writing a note to me here.

Ms. Martin: — Dawn Martin with the department. SaskFILM is involved in the project to the extent that they are the administrator of the sound stage and the film is actually using the sound stage. So they're involved to that extent. They've not provided any direct funding. SaskFILM also operates as the film commissioner for the province in terms of scouting locations and that kind of thing. So to the extent that they provide that kind of service to all productions, they'll be providing that service to the Tommy Douglas film as well.

Ms. Draude: — Can you tell me how many hours the sound stage will be used on this film?

Ms. Martin: — We can get that information for you, but I don't have it with me.

Ms. Draude: — So then I understand that this is sort of an umbrella so there is no breakdown of the actual cost of the sound stage or of SaskFILM within it, or is there in the business plan of SaskFILM the amount of money that they have projected to be spent on this film?

Ms. Martin: — Well they won't be spending any money directly on this film.

Ms. Draude: — But there's personnel involved and there's time involved and the stage is involved, and whenever you do a business plan that's kind of part of the hourly cost.

Ms. Martin: — Well they would be receiving revenue from the

project for the use of the sound stage.

Ms. Draude: — So then how much money will this film pay the sound stage then?

Ms. Martin: — I'll have to get that information.

Ms. Draude: — Okay. Okay, I appreciate that. Is the film on budget?

Ms. Martin: — I don't know, to the extent that it's a private enterprise, I mean we can ask them but . . .

Ms. Draude: — Okay. I know that it was indicated in a press release that the anticipated date of completion was the end of December, do you know if it's — if it's on time on budget?

Ms. Martin: — The end of December 2004?

Ms. Draude: — I believe it's 2005.

Ms. Martin: — Well I know it's still shooting. I think that it actually revised its production schedule, just because it took a while to get some of the financing in place.

Ms. Draude: — Is it going to be broadcast on other television stations besides CBC?

Ms. Martin: — CBC has the first rights because of the licensing that it's . . . that's part of the financial structure of the picture. And so CBC and their financing is a license to air. So to the extent that once that runs out then there will probably be efforts by the production company to distribute it more broadly.

Ms. Draude: — So any funding that would be received if it is aired on another station, that would be additional income that would go to who?

Ms. Martin: — According to the financial structure right now, to the company and to whatever partners have equity positions in the financial structure.

Ms. Draude: — Are all the actors members of ACTRA [Alliance of Cinema, Television and Radio Artists]?

Ms. Martin: — The film I do know is operating fully within the rules of the ACTRA agreement. That doesn't necessarily mean that the film uses all ACTRA actors. There are some very large crowd scenes that require the use of extras and according to the rules of ACTRA, the first ten of each day have to be ACTRA members and then beyond that they can actually move outside of ACTRA. And that's right according to the collective agreement.

Ms. Draude: — Are most of these actors, actresses, artists, are they Saskatchewan people? The lead actors and actresses and the supporting actors and actresses, are they Saskatchewan people?

Ms. Martin: — I don't have a breakdown of that. For example, I know that the lead actor playing Tommy Douglas is not a Saskatchewan resident. He's actually from Toronto. But to the extent that the film employment tax credit is a credit against

Saskatchewan labour, except where Saskatchewan labour isn't available, then there's an opportunity to bring in people from the outside. But I would estimate that the vast majority of people associated with the film are Saskatchewan residents.

Ms. Draude: — When the film tax credit is applied for, there must be some way to break down who is a Saskatchewan resident, who isn't a Saskatchewan resident, and again it would be a matter of the accountability to ensure that these people fill that spectrum. Is that information going to be available?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — I have additional information here.

Ms. Draude: — Okay.

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — Of the 70 cast members, more than 50 are from Saskatchewan, and there will be about 2,500 extras that Dawn was talking about a little earlier. So those are not the full time, just extras for crowd scenes and so on.

Ms. Draude: — Okay. Has any of the film been shot outside of our province?

Ms. Martin: — I'm sorry?

Ms. Draude: — Has any of the film being shot outside of Saskatchewan?

Ms. Martin: — I believe that they've actually shot some exterior scenes at the House of Commons in Ottawa.

Ms. Draude: — Is the post-production being done in Saskatchewan?

Ms. Martin: — As far as I know.

Ms. Draude: — Okay.

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — I'll add to that, some of the shooting where it's happening. Dawn's mentioned the sound stage, several Regina locations. Filming will also occur in Claybank, the Pense area, Kannata Valley, Moose Jaw, Briercrest, and Gravelbourg. And like Dawn has mentioned, several scenes will also be shot in Ottawa.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you. I know that there is extensive communication and promotional requirements as part of this order in council. The cast and crew are . . . will autograph still photography for display at the centennial events and the Premier and Legislative Secretary responsible for the centennial will receive personalized copies. Has this happened yet?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — The information we got is that the crew's pictures were done last week and will be available shortly.

Ms. Draude: — Okay. Shirley Douglas and Roy Romanow and Ed Broadbent have agreed to mention Saskatchewan Centennial 2005 in any commentaries that they author for publication. And I'm wondering if this . . . Have you had any comments about this being . . . making this very political?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — From my understanding, they're still negotiating.

Ms. Draude: — Negotiating whether they're going to do it or not?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — Yes.

Ms. Draude: — Even though it's part of the order in council. Okay. How much did the PR [public relations] component of this cost?

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — That information is something we'll have to follow up with.

Ms. Draude: — I neglected to ask you one question about the actors and actresses. Have any requests for extras been made to local or provincial organizations and, if so, have any donations been made to provincial organizations as part of the production?

Ms. Martin: — Madam Chair, as I understand it, the ACTRA collective agreement that we talked about in terms of the extras provides that, where you need to have large numbers, film production companies can recruit through non-profit organizations. And the people that actually perform have the option of having their honoraria go to the non-profit organization, and it's a mechanism for fundraising. And indeed that's a big part of how they've managed to recruit the large numbers that they need. And as I understand it some donations have already been paid. But the big part, the big crowd scenes are yet to be shot so most of it hasn't happened yet.

Ms. Draude: — So in these big crowd scenes there would be . . . The money that would be available if people decide to, instead of giving a donation that they decide to get paid, is there a film tax credit on that money?

Ms. Martin: — It would be the cost of labour. I'd have to . . . I haven't actually looked at the detail of it. I would have to take a closer look at it.

Ms. Draude: — So the organizations that have received funding so far to date, can you give us a list of those organizations?

Ms. Martin: — I'd have to get the list from Minds Eye.

Ms. Draude: — I appreciate it. And now, I just have one other question on this, on the film. And I know that part of the order in council is the accountability issue and, of course, that's something that all taxpayers always look at.

And I see that under monitoring, Mouseland shall submit to the minister an outline of the projects established under the terms of the agreement within three weeks of signing the agreement. So have you received an outline of the money that will be spent from MPI [Mouseland Productions Incorporated]?

Ms. Martin: — Yes, we have.

Ms. Draude: — Okay. I don't know if that's something that would be available or not, so I'll leave that up to your discretion. Do you want me to just leave it for today? Okay.

The Chair: — Seeing no further questions, before I say thank you to the minister and her officials, I would also like to ask

that any information that's being shared be shared through the Chair for the whole committee. And thank you very much.

I'll now entertain a motion that this committee adjourn its consideration of estimates for the Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation.

Ms. Draude: — I'd like to do that. Before I do that, I really would like to thank the minister and thank your officials very much for your help. And I do . . .

The Chair: — You move?

Ms. Draude: — . . . adjourn.

The Chair: — Thank you, Ms. Draude. And now the committee will . . . Since it's only a few minutes before five, I still need a motion to adjourn. And Mr. Harper will do that. Thank you very much.

The committee is now adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 16:58.]