



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. Glen Hart, Chair
Last Mountain-Touchwood

Ms. Judy Junor, Deputy Chair
Saskatoon Eastview

Mr. Denis Allchurch
Rosthern-Shellbrook

Mr. Cam Broten
Saskatoon Massey Place

Ms. Doreen Eagles
Estevan

Mr. Serge LeClerc
Saskatoon Northwest

Mr. Greg Ottenbreit
Yorkton

[The committee met at 14:47.]

The Chair: — I'll call the Standing Committee on Human Services to order. Good afternoon, everyone. Before we start, I at this point in time have one substitution: Mr. Reiter for Mr. Ottenbreit.

On our agenda today, we have once again a rather lengthy agenda. Between 2:45 and our early recess at 4:45, we will be considering the estimates of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour. This evening we will then move on to vote 32, Health estimates, and later on in the evening we will deal with Bill 35, The Graduate Retention Program Act.

General Revenue Fund
Advanced Education, Employment and Labour
Vote 37

Subvote (AE01)

The Chair: — We have with us this afternoon Minister Norris, and I see he has a number of officials. Welcome, Minister, and if you'd like to introduce your officials at this time.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, committee members, thank you very much for this opportunity to return before you as we've done in the past. I'd like to introduce Wynne Young, our deputy minister; Mr. Mike Carr, our assistant deputy minister . . . associate deputy minister, my apologies. We as well back over here have Trina Vicq Fallows, acting executive director for corporate services. In behind, Doug Forseth, who is responsible for labour mediation; Mary Ellen Wellsch, here as a policy adviser. As well we have Glen McRorie, responsible for labour standards. We have Glennis Bihun, who's responsible for occupational health and safety; and as well Pat Faulconbridge, regarding our important work on the status of women. Thank you very much again for the opportunity to be here, and I look forward to this.

The Chair: — Before I open the floor for questions, I would like to inform the committee of an additional substitution. Mr. Hickie is substituting for Ms. Eagles. Welcome, Mr. Hickie. Mr. Broten.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Minister, for the time today and for all the officials attending. This afternoon for the next hour I'd like to go through some of the estimates with vote 37 and some of the different subvotes. And so if we could start off in (AE03) on page 30 of the budget document, I have a few questions of different funding items there. But as we start off, I was wondering, Minister, if you'd be able to provide a brief snapshot of what the student debt load in Saskatchewan looks like compared to other provinces and territories in Canada.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, I just want to have some clarifications. Are we working through what was supposed to be Labour first? Or have we shifted to . . . It doesn't, I mean, we can go with it. We'll just bring in some additional officials.

The Chair: — Yes, Minister, I neglected to mention and I'm not sure if all committee members were aware of the change. Ms. Junor, the Deputy Chair, is indicating that they were not

aware that we were going to be dealing with Labour. Have you got additional officials that you need to bring in to discuss Advanced Education, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. We'll have to bring those in. Yes.

The Chair: — They're not in the building?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No. As stated, we anticipated that the first hour was going to be spent addressing issues of Labour . . .

The Chair: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — And then from there the . . .

The Chair: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — And some of the committee members may actually have some agenda. But, you know, we can take a little bit of time and get them here. We can do that — whatever the will of the committee is.

The Chair: — Okay. Apparently there was a miscommunication. The opposition committee members, according to the information that they have received, we were going to be dealing with Advanced Education to start with and then moving to Labour. Mr. Broten is indicating he'd like to enter into the discussion.

Mr. Broten: — The information that we're operating from was the understanding that the first hour would be a wrap-up for AE [Advanced Education] estimates and then the following hour from 3:45 to 4:45 was wrap-up general covering the whole gamut.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'll have to defer to my colleagues who are members of this committee.

Mr. LeClerc: — No, we had it the opposite way around.

The Chair: — Yes. That's the agenda that we have here. Sorry for the confusion. How long would it take you, Minister, to bring the extra officials that you require here? We could perhaps call a short recess.

Mr. LeClerc: — The other option, Mr. Chair, is the possibility that surely you have your members close by that were going to ask questions on Labour?

A Member: — They're in other committees too.

The Chair: — Oh, okay. Mr. Broten.

Mr. Broten: — The member from Northwest might have a point that it might be easier for us to track down some of our members as opposed to bringing officials from outside the building. I'm not sure. But if we were able to adjourn for 5 or 10 minutes, I could go around and see who's available.

The Chair: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — If I could, it's about a 10-minute window

that we would need to get the appropriate officials here as well, so I'll leave it to the pleasure of the Chair and the committee members. We're happy to . . . [inaudible] . . . on either.

The Chair: — What I would suggest, committee members, is that we call a 10-minute recess so that we can put a plan of action into place to correct this miscommunication. I have to apologize for the miscommunication. I didn't realize that we were getting conflicting messages on either side of the House. So let's take a 10-minute recess, and then we will resume shortly after that.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

The Chair: — I will call the committee back to order. We have sorted out our difficulties. Minister Norris has his Advanced Education officials with him. I'd like to, on behalf of the committee, thank those officials for hastily coming over to the committee room. It's very much appreciated. Minister, I would ask that you introduce your new officials that you have here with you in addition to the ones you introduced earlier.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, fellow committee members, thank you very much for the opportunity to continue with the introductions. Raman Visvanathan is taking a leading role for us in areas of post-secondary education. Once again we have — sorry, for the first time — Brady Salloum who works diligently on issues relating to financial elements, especially student financial programming. Reg Urbanowski is here or will be here shortly.

A Member: — He's right behind you.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — It's my keen eye for the obvious that's just paid off here. Kevin Veitenheimer is also here, Tammy Bloor Cavers is also here, Jan Morgan and Erin Brady. And of course as I've already previously introduced, the deputy minister is here as well and that's Wynne Young. And at this stage as long as everyone has a seat when the music stops I guess we'll just continue from there.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Minister, and welcome to your officials. I understand Mr. Broten has some questions for the minister. Mr. Broten.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you very much. As I had mentioned earlier to the wrong people that this afternoon I would like to go through some of the lines in the budget for AEE [Advanced Education, Employment], starting off in (AE03) section on student support programs.

So to start things off in that area, Mr. Minister, I was wondering if you could provide a brief overview of what student debt loads like are in Saskatchewan vis-à-vis the rest of Canada.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Recent data that we have is comparative, '05-06 and then '06-07. And what we see, and we can elaborate here more extensively, but what we can see within Saskatchewan, '05-06 student debt load average was about just over \$5,000. And what we see '06-07 down to about \$4,700. And as I say, there are some . . . we can go a lot more extensively but there's a ballpark. Or we can go through this more extensively, as you wish.

Mr. Broten: — And maybe how does that compare, say, to British Columbia and Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well what I can do is I'll offer you perhaps a Canadian average, and the Canadian average in '05-06 was 11,400 roughly. And again, the Saskatchewan number is just over 5,000. In '06-07 the Canadian average, 12,000, with the Saskatchewan average being 4,700. There would be rough equivalencies from Ontario west with our numbers.

Mr. Broten: — The \$5,000 figure that you provided, that includes government debt and non-government debt? Or debt through a government loan program and debt through a private banking institution?

Mr. Salloum: — It indicates just the student financial assistance debt, government debt. So it's possible that a person could go get a line of credit somewhere else. But that includes only government debt.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. Thank you. Under (AE03) operational support, the funding for that is down from about 4.2 million to 3.9 million. What is the cause for that reduction?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — What we see here is one position was reduced, and that was the rationale through efficiencies, and one position was transferred over to facilities. And that accounts for that reduction.

Mr. Broten: — The one that was reduced, was that a normal retirement that wasn't filled or was that a firing?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — It was a full-time equivalent that had rested vacant.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. The next budget line, Saskatchewan Student Aid Fund, where the amount has gone from 24.9 to about 6.7, Mr. Minister, could you please comment on that sizeable reduction, what explains that?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. I'm happy to do that.

Yes. The issue here was an accumulated surplus, and that accumulated surplus occurred because of a decrease in overall demand. So what had happened is that millions of dollars had accumulated. We found it reasonable and responsible . . . And I'll have Brady comment on, Brady Salloum comment on this in a little more detail. But what we did is, it was very prudent to turn and say, look rather than sitting on this surplus, let's make sure that we're being responsible as far as looking after the public purse. The element on this which is very significant, and that is, there is absolutely no effect as far as the amount of money available to students seeking support.

So what had happened because of the decrease, an accumulation had occurred, responsible management turned and said . . . and that, if I have this . . . that surplus had gone up, that surplus had gone up significantly. And I'll actually, I'll have Mr. Salloum speak to this.

So what we saw was just simply Saskatchewan tax dollars not being invested. So this provided us an opportunity, if you want,

to offer a corrective, again without any disruption or decrease in funds available to students. Mr. Salloum.

Mr. Salloum: — The Student Aid Fund is a special fund, and so surpluses don't lapse from year to year. So we've seen over the past several years that the numbers of students that are applying for student assistance and receiving assistance, both those numbers are down. And they're down to the extent of 10 per cent each of the last several years.

As a result of that a surplus is created, and that surplus, we believed it was prudent to try and eat away at that surplus and leave us enough at the end of this fiscal year so that we'd have in the neighbourhood of 1.7 to \$2 million in that surplus. But again, no student is negatively impacted by that. It's simply there was money in the fund.

Mr. Broten: — Out of that 20-odd million — a little under — that was a surplus, are you able to identify where that has been reallocated, or did it simply go into general revenues, or how did that work?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. What we see is, with those dollars, those dollars were then, if you want, invested in a variety of other programs. So the tuition freeze would be one example where that was utilized. Obviously there's increased investment in the graduate retention program on a go-forward basis. So it was utilized right across the board.

Mr. Broten: — We'll leave that for now. Thanks. On the provincial training allowance, the following item, more or less the same amount — slightly under — I assume that reflects usage rates and not a reduction in the amount.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Exactly. I mean with the labour force adjustment what we're seeing is a slight decrease in demand on that. So it reflects the anticipated expenditures.

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Minister, could you please identify for me the types of individuals that will receive benefit through that provincial training allowance, please.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We'll begin with an average number, probably about 5,000 individuals. These include those seeking basic education and quick skills. I guess the broader sociological question is generally we would see these individuals transitioning from social services. We can see them from First Nation, Métis communities and perhaps other minorities within our community. We can also see some examples here of single parents as well.

Mr. Broten: — These skills training benefit is the same this year from last. Has there been an increase or decrease in the number of individuals seeking assistance through that, or is it status quo because the interest level is status quo right now?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, we see a slight decrease. The number is about 2,600. There's a slight decrease, again reflecting the strength of the economy.

Mr. Broten: — During the election and in your letter from the Premier concerning your mandate and the things you were to do, there was mention of establishment of a Saskatchewan

scholarship fund that would be a matching system. Can you point out where that is in the budget for me, please.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, what we did is, on that one we've designated that on a go-forward basis, so we anticipate that you'll be seeing and the people of this province will be seeing that in the next budget cycle.

Mr. Broten: — So likely next budget for rollout that following year. Okay. I guess my question concerning the earlier amounts where the 20 million went, was there any money set aside out of that amount of cash to cover the Saskatchewan scholarship fund or is . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think what you need to do is you need to, you know, you need to have an appreciation. What we did is we made immediate investments in skills training and education. The scholarship piece is premised on pretty extensive level of co-operation and collaboration with key post-secondary institutions. And so that's going to take some time as far as the rollout.

Again, we're in the first six months of our mandate. We wanted to make sure we got that right. I have to say it's a little bit surprising Saskatchewan doesn't have that. We're delighted. I know there was notion of that that was recommended in the McCall report as far as eventually moving forward with a scholarship plan.

What we've done is simply said — especially on the planning cycle — let's make sure we get this right. Let's make sure that we're working with our post-secondary partners on this and, you know, a notion of taking some of that \$20 million and allowing it to sit idle, that's not in the interest of the people of this province. Our interest is to make sure that that money was being invested in any number of initiatives on a go-forward basis.

So what we have seen is an investment in skills training and education especially relating, specifically relating to training initiatives of over 5,500 new training initiatives. Those are both within institutions and stretching out beyond them — again this notion of a continuum to address issues like literacy.

As well the \$5 million for community-based organizations, those 5,500 positions doesn't touch that \$5 million. So the actual training positions and spots are going to be more extensive than that 5,500.

So no, we weren't just going to allow some monies to sit off to the side. We want to invest those right away. And the key rationale for that is, you know, we've got a remarkable opportunity. We want to make sure that we're sustaining this growth, that we're sharing the benefits of this growth. And the way to do that is to make these reinvestments today. That initiative or investing in those training initiatives won't in any way affect or undermine our efforts to move forward on a Saskatchewan scholarship. That's just part of a planning cycle.

Again, because the election came in November and we were into budget, we wanted to make sure that there was ample time for collaboration, communication, co-operation with our post-secondary partners.

Mr. Broten: — With the Saskatchewan scholarship piece, I recognize that planning is taking place and the post-secondary institutions also need to make, you know, budget considerations if it is indeed a matching program. My question was, or the heart of my question was, what steps, or where might the funding for that program come? If it's a new funding stream, do you see it as it will come from an overall increase to your ministry, or do you see the funding for that scholarship, Saskatchewan scholarship program, coming from other programs where you might perceive there is flex room there?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, and I appreciate the question. As we focus on these estimates, the question actually pertains to future planning, and those questions will be addressed obviously by the officials around me and more significantly by my cabinet colleagues. So we'll, as we move on a go-forward basis, you know, that's part of planning for our future. And I'm happy to say that we've got a pretty strong foundation based on the budget that we've just tabled.

Mr. Broten: — All right. Thank you. So moving on to (AE02), post-secondary education, the line, well for regional colleges. Last week we had a bit of a discussion in the Chamber about funding for regional colleges. Since that time, have you had additional conversations with the association with respect to the level of funding that has been awarded to the regional colleges across the board?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — There are a few elements to this. The letter makes reference to I think three specific requests — that is, a request for a meeting, and there are actually, there's dialogue under way, or just finalizing the date for that. That meeting will take place, I'm anticipating, just after the long weekend. So second request for increased funding allocations for the colleges, and I'll come back on that. And then the third one, the long-term approach to help build skilled labour force within Saskatchewan.

So as I responded in the House, a key element here is obviously, on a go-forward basis, what we're doing is the ADM [associate deputy minister] position is going to be filled. That's part one. A strategy for advanced education in Saskatchewan is going to then come into focus, very keen focus. It's going to obviously be premised on ensuring that we're moving forward with all our partners. So that will address that element, that is, we're going to take care of the ADM position, then we're going to come forward with a strategy. So I think there's great consistency on that third request, on the first request.

Then what we did is we've actually sat down — and this message will be delivered in more detail — actually highlighted the significant increase that's already occurred. So what we've seen for regional colleges and related institutions relates to a 20 per cent increase in funding. We get that down, and we can actually go through this. The base funding as it occurred was about \$37 million, and what we've seen is an increase to 41 million, specifically just to colleges. What we see is \$3.8 million increase on operating funds. What we've seen is an additional increase on skills training of \$200,000.

Now within that operating funds we've also seen basic education increase significantly. And then we've seen a pretty significant increase as well . . . Now sorry, I'm just going to get

this correct here. Skills training, yes, we've got a \$200,000 skill training increase. What we've seen on basic education is an increase. It's embedded in that 1 million, that's of \$1 million. Then we have a capital increase of close to about 1 million . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Okay, perfect.

So, you know, the point there is to turn and say is there a lot, is there more work to be done? You bet there's more work to be done. There's a legacy of neglect that a lot of the regional colleges are feeling. But we think this, this increase got us off to a decent start. Obviously that dialogue is going to continue here within the coming days.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. As I'm sure the minister and everyone in this committee would agree, every post-secondary institution in Saskatchewan plays an important role and all have unique and special characteristics that allow them to get our workforce up and running and educate our citizens. Some might argue that regional colleges are uniquely equipped to play a special role in the labour market as they can, perhaps they have a higher . . . They're a bit more nimble and can react with business and develop programming in maybe a shorter time frame than some of the other institutions that are in the province.

So while I recognize and admit every learning institution in the province is important, where might regional colleges place? If the minister of today was able to cut a cheque and send five of them out across the province, where might regional colleges fit into that ranking list? Because as you know, where economic times are good, surplus is growing every day, there's money to be spread around, how do regional colleges fit into that mix?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well I guess I would challenge the premise of your question. The preamble I think is, probably not intentionally but I think the preamble potentially does some disservice to all the institutions within our province. I think we see some pretty significant initiatives coming straight across the board. Whether we're speaking about initiatives that are, and institutions focused on First Nation and Métis peoples, I think we can turn to our universities and see very, very significant innovations and a degree of nimbleness. Obviously we see successes within the regional colleges.

So, you know, I challenge, I challenge the preamble. I think where you were going is to turn and say, you know, regional colleges probably akin and like other institutions in the province. And the answer is, it's not simply about throwing money at things. This is actually about having a strategy in place. And I know from, at least as reported in the media, the member turned and said, no, we don't need a new system or a structure or a strategy. Let's just pitch more money.

Well let me give you an example. What we've seen in immigration within our branch is a 48 per cent increase in productivity, January to March, before new money was assigned. So one of the questions is, let's sit down with our partners within the post-secondary system to turn and say, let's have a discussion about what the objectives are, what the instruments are, what's the federal government's role — which by the way in the last 60 days or so we've negotiated over \$100 million in federal dollars to come right into Saskatchewan in skills training and education. That stands in stark contrast to

what the last government did on that file. What's the private sector role here? So we're having . . . And obviously then, what's the role of the provincial government?

Another area of this, and it's something that is sometimes missed, and that is some of these institutions have reserves. That is, the investments have been made. And so we also want to turn and turn and say, you know, what is to be done with some of those reserves? Some of them are kept strategically. And some of them are . . . We think we could be, the province of Saskatchewan could be, benefiting from increased investments in skills training.

So that's the significance on a go-forward basis regarding a strategy. That's the significance of actually getting out, and I'm committed to getting out to every one of the regional colleges as well to continue the ongoing dialogue with any number of stakeholders. That's already occurred. So that we can actually have a coherent, mutually reinforcing strategy focused on four or five elements: excellence, innovation. And the innovation isn't just R&D [research and development], though that's certain to be included; it's also programming innovation. Issues of equity and inclusion, which allows us then to further address issues of access and affordability.

Obviously a key term, and it's one that didn't get much attention under the last government, that is effectiveness. And especially for the regional colleges, and I think this was where you were going with your question, issues of responsiveness, especially to local and regional economic needs. So those are four or five pivots that we can turn to that will be informing our work.

And as far as the question, as far as, you know, if I could write a cheque today, the answer is I still wouldn't write a cheque today because we need to do the strategic work.

Mr. Broten: — Moving on to the line, the French Language Institute, I see a decrease of about 350,000. Why is there that decrease, please?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — That's a reflection of a special capital project that was under way '07-08, and so it simply reflects the completion of that capital project. And certainly, you know, this is a significant element of the Canadian character and a significant element of our Saskatchewan culture. And we're certainly happy that the investments, you know, are going to be pretty significant as on a go-forward basis.

On a personal basis I'm certainly happy to be a member of Canada's francophone community. It's something I take delight in. My maternal grandfather's maiden name was Côté. And my young daughter, Jacqueline, who was introduced in the House today, she's in grade 3 at the Saskatoon French School.

Mr. Broten: — Great. So the 350 — just to be clear — the reduction, it's just the completion of a capital project. There's no reduction in a program, a service, or an FTE [full-time equivalent]?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Correct.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. Saskatchewan universities urban

parks, it's the same amount from this year to last. Could you please identify which urban parks are covered under that please?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. There are two. That is, Wascana within Regina, and the Meewasin Authority in Saskatoon.

Mr. Broten: — And the status quo, is that to your knowledge meeting the current needs of the requests and the work that's being done?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — If I understood correctly, are the respective institutions pleased with the status quo? I imagine there are any number of opinions regarding the status quo. So you know, on this — I want to be clear — this is simply the respective universities' share to these parks. So they obviously assumed like several stakeholders, you know, they will, they will make do with the provisions. I think what's missing, if I'm not mistaken, is relating to inflation. So it's a status quo.

Mr. Broten: — Thanks. On the item the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, the increase of 1 million there, could you please identify or give a breakdown of what that 1 million will be used for and how it will be broken down according to capital projects, programming, or administration, please?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure. To be clear what we're talking about is a 50 per cent increase for this institution, which certainly I've received feedback, very positive feedback for this investment, 50 per cent increase. And really what we see is a couple different elements — half a million dollars to allow SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies] to expand existing adult basic education capacity regarding on-reserve delivery by a further 100 seats, and as well we see half a million for additional skills training delivered through SIIT.

Mr. Broten: — On to (AE05) training programs, the northern skills training is down from about 2.4 to 1.6 million. Why is there this decrease?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, what we see is, in this initiative what we saw, there was limited uptake on this. And so certainly when it comes to focusing on the North, we were delighted to be a partner. The federal government came forward with \$15 million, the provincial government over 60 . . . sorry, the federal government over 15 million, the provincial government over 6 million, the remainder of the 33 million filled in by the private sector — a wonderful initiative, Cameco in the lead on the private sector side. And that \$33 million certainly is providing significant uptake. If I'm not mistaken, I think the anticipated number of jobs as a result of the ASEP [Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership] is 750.

A Member: — Over 750.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Over 750.

Mr. Broten: — So the reduction for the northern skills training from 2.4 to 2.6, that's reflective of uptake of the program, or is that a reduction in programming or a change of programming in some way?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — To just reiterate, there was

undersubscription within this initiative, and an example like the ASEP initiative is one on a go-forward basis that certainly has, appears to have more immediate resonance for individuals in the North.

Mr. Broten: — Are you able to please identify which communities the northern skills training occurs in? What populations are accessing this program?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Dollars were spent, would have been spent across the, you know, the ubiquitous wash, as is the case with the ASEP investment. There's going to be a role to played here by Northlands College regarding consultations and helping to target new investments.

The Chair: — Committee members, I've been informed that Hansard is having some technical difficulties, and they have asked us to take a brief recess so that they can attend to their technical problems. It's one of these little glitches, another little glitch that we're experiencing here this afternoon, so while we will take a very short recess and when Hansard notifies us that they're up and have their problem solved, we'll resume. So the committee will recess for a few moments.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

The Chair: — I'll call the committee back to order. Hansard informs us that they've looked after their technical problems. Before I recognize a committee member, I would just like to inform the committee that we have a further substitution. Mr. Iwanchuk is substituting for Ms. Junor. And I believe Mr. Broten had the floor when we recessed, so I'll recognize Mr. Broten.

Mr. Broten: — Do we have to backtrack anything? Or where we left off, was that all captured?

A Member: — Should be.

Mr. Broten: — Okay so on (AE05), looking at basic education, could the minister please state what the current wait-lists are for ABE [adult basic education] programs please?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, we think we've got wait-lists right now of about 1,300 people. That's down over the last three years, you said, from about 2,000. And again you know, not surprising given the labour market.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. With the increase in funding for this line, does the minister have an idea or a target as to when he would . . . or a target for reducing that 13 — moreso over, say, the next one to three years? What are the goals for each year?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question. What we're doing is obviously on a go-forward basis we've made some pretty significant investments in this. We're working through a matrix, and that matrix isn't in place yet, and it will help us to identify and determine reasonable and realistic goals. So that's a piece that we anticipate will be coming out over the next six months or so.

Mr. Broten: — So the increase funding when the decision was made to up the amount, did the ministry have a sense for how

many additional seats that would buy?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — How many was that?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. We have an increase of 300.

What I'm interested in and I think probably the people of the province are interested in, what we want to then determine, for example, what we've been able to do in working with our partners on ASEP, we've been able to say \$33 million, over \$33 million. Then we anticipate not only the training spots that that will then provide for, we actually then anticipate the number of jobs, that is, individuals that will be trained and entering the workforce. As I said that number on ASEP is 750. So what we want to do is we want to move to a position where we can begin to turn and say, okay the 300 additional seats that we've just identified that's a reasonable start. But the matrix has to be much more sophisticated than that. We have to measure results.

And that will be again . . . there are areas of continuity and change from the last government, but we want to focus specifically on results and that way we can begin to turn and speak about return on investments.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. So 300 seats with the additional funding, so then is it your expectation that next year in estimates at this time the wait-list number will be 1,000?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know with the dynamic economy that's under way right now, what we can turn and say is we're going to have a system in place so that we can actually walk you through and rather than just simply kind of throwing darts we can turn and say look, this was an area neglected by the previous government. What we're doing is moving forward with a matrix, and we're going to be able to identify not only the investments if you want the input; we're going to be able to get a much better benchmark on what the results will be.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. So next year in estimates at this time do you think the wait-list number will be 1,000?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Actually the question I have to say is peculiar because if we can do this correctly, we'll be able to not just simply identify what the wait-list is going to be, we'll actually begin to turn and say these are the instruments that are working offering the best return on investment.

Mr. Broten: — So are you not willing to state next year at this time what you think the wait-list will be?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — What I'm willing to do is appear before you right now to answer questions regarding these estimates and not blue-sky about a potential wait-list a year from now.

Mr. Broten: — Well, Mr. Minister, the increase in funding is for 300 additional seats for this upcoming year. If the current wait-list number is 1,300, the question about will we be at 1,000 one year from now is very relevant, and it is very tied to the estimates that we are doing right now.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — But the key element here is there could be

other variables. That is, we could see increased applications. We could see, let's say for example, another federal-provincial initiative come forward focusing on northern Saskatchewan for example. That may allow us to do significant work in the intervening months, which again I know the last government, issues like federal-provincial co-operation would be foreign to the last government. But to this government, it's a regular part of our business activity, our public policy activity.

So, you know, what I am prepared to do is turn and say here are the inputs. The matrix was not in place after 16 years of the last party being in power. What we are doing is not only focusing on these inputs; we're actually turning and saying we need to develop a new matrix very similar to what ASEP has identified so that we can begin to say, not only for provincial funding but for federal funding and for private sector partners, to turn and say here are some of the anticipated outcomes.

On ASEP one of the anticipated outcomes is 750 new people working. So are we there yet? No, we're not there yet. We need to get there, but we're making strides and asking questions about the very issue that you're attentive to that the previous government did not make progress on.

Mr. Broten: — See I accept the answer that there are other variables because that is an answer to the question which was very relevant and very tied to the estimates that are going on right now. So thank you. I accept that you're not willing to commit to the 1,000 mark. That's just fine.

So in (AE04), career and employment services, we see client and community support is down by about \$300,000. Could you please explain why this reduction is there?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, that offset mostly had to do with some training activities, that is, in-house training activities and the purchase of hard-copy publications, and we feel we can find efficiencies on both of those matters.

Mr. Broten: — So it's not a reduction in services to anyone?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No, this is in-house.

Mr. Broten: — Okay thank you. Labour market information, under (AE04), is down by about \$500,000, once again, the rationale behind this change please.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, this about the Labour Market Commission. What we see is some reduction. There is significant carry-over that that commission holds, and frankly then with the investment that we're making, we feel that that's sufficient for that organization to carry on its work.

Mr. Broten: — Is this another place, perhaps another spot where Enterprise Saskatchewan would be having a role with the ministry?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, certainly there's some interaction there. Yes.

Mr. Broten: — Has that interaction been formalized yet?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I would categorize the level of activity as

in-depth. That being said, Enterprise Saskatchewan, while the board has come into existence, the legislation has not yet passed, and so you know, it's appropriate as the legislation passes, additional steps to formalize what that will look like will take place. But the level of dialogue and discussion is detailed and in-depth.

Mr. Broten: — So when this dialogue goes a step further and recommendations start coming out of Enterprise Saskatchewan, the information that is provided to your ministry from Enterprise Saskatchewan, will that take the form of a recommendation, or will that take the form of a binding direction that they ought to follow?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You're asking if Enterprise Saskatchewan will offer something binding to my ministry?

Mr. Broten: — Correct.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Oh okay. While we will be attentive to recommendations they may have, that's where we will categorize that advice. We'll consider it strongly.

Mr. Broten: — So the answer is that they are not binding, but you will be attentive to the recommendations.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — That's right. I said we would be attentive.

Mr. Broten: — At what point along the interaction . . . Obviously there's a great deal of expertise within your ministry. People have been working in this area for a long time, people that have developed a lot of experience, have their ideas. Enterprise Saskatchewan will be having conversations about how AEEL [Advanced Education, Employment and Labour] should be . . . things they should implement, things they should look at.

And I recognize that Enterprise Saskatchewan does have representation from the post-secondary sector, but it is also limited in some sense to a few individuals. So at what point in the interaction does the expertise from AEEL plug into what's going on in Enterprise Saskatchewan so that the recommendations come forward are based on the experience and all of the human capital that's in the department or the ministry?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sorry, Mr. Chair. I'm just . . .

The Chair: — I recognize the minister.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. I'm, you know, I'm happy to report that there's a high degree of coordination that will be expected. And obviously there have been some examples of that. And I can also say that I was honoured to be among the first ministers to go in and provide Enterprise Saskatchewan, the board, with a briefing. And I went in just after the Premier.

So I can just offer reassurance — a great degree of coordination, information sharing, co-operation where relevant. And this is, it's part of a very healthy dialogue. Yes.

Mr. Broten: — Within the Enterprise Saskatchewan model as it relates to the post-secondary institutions in the province,

there's also been some discussion about an Innovation Saskatchewan. And now I'm not sure if this is a parallel structure to Enterprise Saskatchewan, or if it's one of the sector committees that would report to Enterprise Saskatchewan.

But clearly Innovation Saskatchewan, as this develops, will have, I would think, a fairly significant influence on the research agenda at the province's universities. So what, I guess asking this, if I was an individual within one of the university communities with a research agenda, with ideas, how is that going to play out where Innovation Saskatchewan through Enterprise Saskatchewan or on its own might be giving direction to the universities on how they conduct their research agenda in areas that they're operating in? And what assurances might there be for the normal peer review processes that take place?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, I appreciate the question. The respective centres of excellence, the respective universities have obviously their own research agendas. And individual faculty members fit within those broader structures and strategies. And the question is actually a very healthy one. We've seen it in other jurisdictions.

But I think the key element here is where can assistance come from increased coordination and collaboration? Can we help connect dots between the private sector and public sector entities?

So it's premised on certainly some models of success regarding innovation that again would be foreign to members of the previous government, where really there was probably some missed opportunities, especially when it came to engaging the private sector and just again helping to ensure that individuals were able to realize that there were potentially additional resources that they may and could be tapping into.

So in no way does it, will it be interfering with the work of this ministry. It's meant to bolster that. And for more details, the Minister of Enterprise and Innovation is probably the best person to chat with.

Mr. Broten: — In your response there . . . I'm nearing the end as there are some other colleagues here who are chomping at the bit. But you mentioned the private sector. Also in the province, there are a number of private vocational schools operating. Could the minister please give his thoughts on, do you feel that there's an appropriate level of private vocational schools operating? You often speak of this training continuum. Where does this fit into that? Are you looking to expand this area? Are these an area where you're looking for partnerships with regional colleges? Do you have some comments on that, please?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure. In category 1 we've got 33. In category 2 there are about 10. And the answer is, are there synergies to be realized? And the answer is, possibly, possibly. But, you know, I think a key element, especially when it comes to some of those private institutions, it's to simply to turn and see what their agenda will be. Obviously they are working within parameters and on business plans that they have to meet their bottom line, and if it's in their interest and capacity to work collaboratively with other institutions, then that makes

sense, as it makes sense.

Mr. Broten: — And my last question, Mr. Minister — Station 20 West, I don't want to debate the merits of it. We're obviously on different sides of the fence on that issue. But I know you and I speak to a lot of the same people in the university community and a lot of people — academics, professors, administrators — were enthusiastic about Station 20 West because it was an opportunity for the University of Saskatchewan to plug into the community in ways that it hasn't been able to do so, or new innovative ways perhaps. So I realize government will no longer have a role in Station 20 but the individuals involved in it are going ahead with a scaled down version.

There may be some type of role for the university community to still play in Station 20 West. It obviously wouldn't be through the College of Medicine. It wouldn't be through the College of Dentistry and SWITCH [student wellness initiative toward community health], some of those initiatives, I don't think. But there might be an opportunity to have some space in there that they lease or rent. Would you — knowing that you've spoken to a lot of the same people I have about this — would you be supportive if the university were to pursue a role in Station 20, albeit in a scaled down way?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well I'm surprised by your question because what you've done is you've just clouded two key elements here, and the key element is you make reference to the university in the latter part of your question, that is the corporate entity of the University of Saskatchewan, and then you make reference to the university community. So I'm going to need some clarification on your question as far as are you asking specifically about the corporate entity of the University of Saskatchewan, or are you asking about free citizens in a free society?

Mr. Broten: — I'm talking about the University of Saskatchewan as an entity, not individuals associated with the University of Saskatchewan. I realize they are an institution that are able to make their own decisions. But as you've mentioned in the past, most are aware of quiet diplomacy that does occur between your ministry and the University of Saskatchewan so . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . well you've mentioned that. You've gone on record stating that. So going on the assumption that there is some flow of communication there just . . . I was tossing it out there to see if that was something that you think would be a good idea.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — How would you characterize that quiet diplomacy?

Mr. Broten: — Actually I'm asking the questions here, but . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'm just trying to get clear definition on a part of your question.

Mr. Broten: — I'd love to talk about this and perhaps this needs to be the topic of another lunch discussion, Mr. Minister, but at this time given our limited time, I would like to give the floor back to the Chair. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — What I will say is I'll say that the

University of Saskatchewan as an autonomous institution will make its own decisions regarding Station 20.

The Chair: — I recognize Ms. Atkinson.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. Mr. Minister, I understand that you have been meeting with the various partners in the training system, and I'm wondering can you confirm that it's your intention to roll regional colleges under the SIAST system?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No. I'm surprised by the question. The answer is no. There's no intention of that.

What there is . . . As we inherited the system, the organization that we inherited actually offers a categorization where consideration is given SIAST and the regional colleges on one stream and universities, federated colleges, affiliated colleges, one associate college on the other stream. And what I have said, and what we'll be working on, is to create greater coherence in that strategy. Saskatchewan is very peculiar that it would have these two streams. And that is, we need to come up with — and what we're going to be working on during the summer — is a much more coherent post-secondary strategy.

Ms. Atkinson: — As you know, universities and associated colleges and affiliates tend to be . . . they educate people, and then people on the other side tend to train people. So I guess as I understand it, you don't see a difference. Is that my understanding of what you just said?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, I'll speak and then we'll get a few more individuals from here. I'm a graduate of a college that at once offered welding and philosophy, so you know, I find the distinction between training and educating, if that's what I've heard correctly, to be . . . actually I'm a little bit surprised in this notion. That is, we can turn to each institution, the University of Regina, the University of Saskatchewan, and turn and say would there not be training components within the College of Medicine? Would there not be training components within the College of Engineering, respective colleges of engineering? When we talk about nurse education, are there not elements of training involved there?

So I think this clear distinction that the member may have, actually the empirical record becomes a little bit more nuanced than has just been offered.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well I guess I'll leave that for people from the professions to debate with you. I don't have time to do that at the moment. But people who understand education would say that there is a difference between education and training. So just so I understand your position, it's not your intention to roll the regional colleges under SIAST or some new creation? So a year from now when we're talking about education and training in the province, regional colleges will still be an entity?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Indeed I think after 16 years of neglect, we can anticipate that they will begin to take their rightful place. What we've seen this year is a significant increase in their budget and yes, they're playing and will continue to play an important part of our advanced educational system in Saskatchewan. Working in isolation? No, not working in isolation — ideally working much more collaboratively and

co-operatively with other institutions within that system, a system that we're certainly bolstering.

Ms. Atkinson: — I think that people in the training system would say that they have been working collaboratively as SIAST, the regional colleges, Dumont Technical Institute, and the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, along with the apprenticeship commission, they would say that they have been working collaboratively and so I guess they would actually, Minister, be quite offended.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No actually, what we can see is, we can see much greater levels of co-operation.

Ms. Atkinson: — Can I finish my comments? What they would say is that they would find your remarks just now offensive, and they do find it offensive that you have said not only in this place but you have also said it to them, that you have great difficulty with what they have been doing and that you plan on doing something different. And so that's why I'm asking you today, because they find that a bit offensive that someone that doesn't understand what they've been doing for over 30 years comes in as the new minister and lays his vision of the world on them. So I guess what I would say to you, Minister . . .

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Point of order.

The Chair: — Mr. Hickie, would you state your point of order succinctly, please?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Sure. We're here to talk about the estimates, Mr. Chair. We shouldn't be having a personal attack on the minister as we see right now happening. It's being directed strictly at the minister. It's being very vindictive in its nature. Talk about the estimates in front of you, I believe . . .

The Chair: — Mr. Hickie, I believe the member is entering into debate with the minister, which is quite acceptable in committee. Personal attacks certainly are not. It's my understanding that the member is questioning some of the policy statements that the minister has made, and as long as it continues in that line I'll allow it. If it becomes personal, I will be terminating the comments in the debate.

Ms. Atkinson: — Nothing with me is ever personal, okay? So you have indicated to the training system in some of your remarks that you don't appreciate what they've been doing for the last several years, and in fact there are several people who are offended by this and have raised it with me. So I wanted to understand, is it your intention that the regional colleges will come under the auspices of some other entity? You have indicated today that they will not. You've said a year from now the regional colleges will still be in existence, but I do say to you, Minister, that I think it's important that you might want to listen to what regional colleges are saying and not come in with your own set agenda.

You tend, you tend I think, to have your own view of the world, and I'm just suggesting to you that you may want to listen to what they have to say.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, I really appreciate the fact that it didn't get personal, that that individual wouldn't have a view

of the world.

Mr. Speaker, here's the challenge . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . No, here's the challenge. The reference, the reference is here's what I've heard through rumours. If the member would care to say which remarks, offered when, by whom, but maybe we don't deal with that. Maybe what we turn and say is what we're going to be doing so there's absolutely no misinterpretation, no spin put on it, is that we're going to be building on the strengths the regional colleges have already exhibited.

That's the element here. And any other element to this as far as where the regional colleges will be playing, obviously what we see from the Premier as far as response to some questions last week is we anticipate probably a greater role being played by the regional colleges.

So this is, this is completely consistent with helping to ensure that we're sustaining the economic growth of Saskatchewan, ensuring that the benefits are being shared with the people of this province. And a notion again, we've seen this before by some of the members of the official opposition, hearing rumours to turn and say well here's what we've heard.

Well actually the dialogue is under way. We're just finalizing when the next meeting will occur, and you know, I'm happy to say that I anticipate that we're going to be building on the strengths and success of this esteemed group of institutions. And the remarks from the member aside, actually it's unfortunate that it comes to this because what we can see is an individual that obviously feels that there could be or should be an agenda. You know, Mr. Chair, she was the minister of Education. She also served in other capacities, most recently Finance, where she could have shown much greater commitment to those institutions.

And frankly the people of this province just didn't see it. So we're just getting started. We're six months in. We've seen a significant increase in investment, and I'm happy on a go-forward basis with the progress that we're making.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well, Minister, I think if you were to review this with some of the officials that have been in your department for a while, there was a very significant investment made in the training system about 18 months ago — when I say training I'm talking about SIAST, the regional colleges, DTI [Dumont Technical Institute], and SIIT — and that money has, as I understand it, come to an end. And as a result there were a number of additional training positions that were created as a result of that money that really allowed people to have the skills necessary to join the growing workforce and the economy.

And one of the things that regional colleges have said . . . and I realize that you indicate there's been a budget increase. But from their point of view, it has not led to additional training seats so that they can train citizens that are outside of the major centres, not in the regions, for those growing jobs in the economy.

But I'm pleased that you've put on the public record that it's not your intention to roll all of the regional colleges under SIAST. And I'll move on to my colleague, Ms. Higgins, who

has some specific questions about SIAST and Moose Jaw. Thank you.

The Chair: — I recognize Ms. Higgins.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Well to the minister, I'm pleased that you value the contribution of the regional colleges in the province of Saskatchewan because I can't say enough about the importance of being able to access higher education and training in your community.

And when we talk about individuals changing careers multiple times, I mean once upon a time it was maybe three times . . . and I believe the number is substantially higher than that now for not just students but also for adult students or learners making a career change. It's ever important to be able to access that educational training in your community, be with your family, and not have that added expense of leaving your current job to access training in Saskatoon or Regina.

And that's part of my question. While we have the universities in both Regina and Saskatoon, we also have a presence of SIAST in Regina and Saskatoon. They play a huge role in communities, the SIAST system, in Moose Jaw and P.A. [Prince Albert]. So a question . . . while regional colleges are beyond the major centres in the province and play an important role there, I can only speak for my community of Moose Jaw that SIAST has a huge role in our community. So a question: what is being done to advance the SIAST — and Palliser Campus is more of my priority — if we can see some of the capital money that was dedicated in this budget to the SIAST system, if we will see any improvement done, any further improvements done, at SIAST Palliser Campus, and if we can expect to see some move towards a bigger variety of course options and availability at Palliser?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. I agree. I mean, this is pretty healthy. In a recent book edited by Rudyard Griffiths, Jessica LeCroy writes, "Education is our most important weapon in fending off the downsides of the global economy." She goes on:

While a multitude of factors affect a country's competitiveness, education is repeatedly singled out as a force multiplier for growth, productivity, and shared prosperity. If a country takes care of the education and skills training of its human capital, all other socio-economic factors of a country are improved — health care, the environment, the control of crime and corruption, as well as national economic performance.

So I certainly, I agree with the premise, the significance. Obviously when it comes to investments, we've seen some significant investments in our budget. SIAST operating funds is . . . [inaudible] . . . 9.2 per cent. And so what we've seen specifically in Palliser, I think we've seen a recent \$4 million capital investment.

As well, I'm really impressed with some of the public-private partnerships that they have, including Alliance Pipeline. That's impressive. Those are the kinds of models that certainly what we've turned and said we want other institutions to be mindful of, that these are successes. That way we can make sure that we're, if you want, leveraging public dollars with other dollars.

So we see a significant role.

Regarding the specific roles to be played by SIAST, obviously the board of governors of SIAST has tremendous influence, as well as the CEO [chief executive officer]. And if I'm not mistaken, on Friday the CEO was just out in Moose Jaw, I think, for graduation. So I know Bob McCulloch is certainly very attentive. He and I are in regular contact, and I appreciate the good work under way at the Palliser Campus.

Ms. Higgins: — While the quote from Robert Griffith was very nice, I don't imagine he's ever written specifically about Palliser Campus. And that was what the question was. Out of the capital dollars that are in this budget, are any of those earmarked to be invested at SIAST Palliser Campus?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The actual allocations, you know, obviously are made within the SIAST system.

For the record, it's Ruyard Griffiths, and . . . It's okay. I know these things aren't important to you, or perhaps aren't as important, but they actually help to contextualize the discussion that we're having here today. And so that is a lot of people from a lot of different vantage points right across Canada and well beyond are actually getting down into notions of this discussion and dialogue. Hence when I read the quote, I made sure that it included notions of both education and skills training.

So what we see here is, within the Saskatchewan context, we see more dollars going to the SIAST system. How those will be allocated we leave in the good, capable, trusting, professional hands of the SIAST board and the leadership. And I'm happy to go and follow up and see whether that allocation is going to be.

Ms. Higgins: — So when you're looking at definite projects then, you don't? You just look through your budget and say, well we'll put this much towards capital, we'll put this much towards project, and however the board of directors at SIAST decides to spend it? There's no coordination? Like when you were talking about coordination between the SIAST and regional college system and the universities and various other institutions, I mean you can't possibly just say, here's an envelope of money that we have kicking around and you do whatever you like with it?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No.

Ms. Higgins: — I mean there must be some coordination. SIAST says we need X amount for capital. It will be dedicated towards this project, this project, this project. We need so much for course development. We need so much . . . I mean you must have that accountability when you do your budgeting.

So I mean, it's just a simple question because we have a concern in Moose Jaw that SIAST Palliser Campus is peeled away here and there. We will lose courses to Saskatoon. But I need to impress upon you that those are important to our community, and it's important to have that base of training and education in our community. And while it may be easier delivered closer to the head office in Saskatoon, or it may be easier for the provincial government to concentrate all of that learning in one centre, I just need to impress upon you that these campuses are very important to our communities, to the

economy in those communities, and also to the citizens that live there.

So I'm just seeking some type of definite amount that is dedicated towards SIAST, and I guess an assurance from you that we are not going to see any courses removed from SIAST Palliser Campus and moved to other places.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I just want to give you every reassurance that obviously we work very, very closely, as I was saying, with SIAST. You know certainly I think one of the pieces that needs to be improved within Saskatchewan, again part of a legacy, there needs to be a capital investment plan within Advanced Education, and that just, it just frankly wasn't in place under the last government.

So we're putting that plan together. We're working closely with SIAST. You're seeking reassurances not only on the capital side but also on the programming side. At the same time, there's notions that the institution should be nimble. And so the answer is we're going to continue working closely with SIAST on any number of initiatives — and there are a number of initiatives that we're working closely on — and I appreciate and will certainly keep my eye on it to ensure that these are being spread right across the SIAST system.

Ms. Higgins: — Well thank you very much. If you do have any further more detailed information about any capital dollars being invested in Palliser, I would appreciate it, or something more specific to the various campuses, I would appreciate it. But right now my colleague has some questions to ask. Thank you very much.

The Chair: — Before I recognize, Mr. Iwanchuk, I would like to inform the committee members that we will be not recessing till 4:55 in order to make up some of the time that was lost due to Hansard's difficulties. I understand there's another committee meeting that will take place at 5 o'clock, and so we need to recess at 4:55 sharply. Mr. Iwanchuk.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — These are labour questions. I was wondering if you could just in three areas in terms of falls, smoking, and cancers, what work is ongoing in those areas in occupational health and safety?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The question as I've understood it relate to issues of . . . and are you specifically workplace, smoking in the workplace?

Mr. Iwanchuk: — In terms of the falls, and I would take that in the construction industry there was work being done on that. I was just wondering where things were at. And in smoking and workplace, obviously workplaces, and any work done around cancer, specifically, probably around in the firefighting.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, on the smoking piece, there are a couple of initiatives linked together. What we're seeing there is we've asked our caucus colleagues to get involved in that, and they've undertaken some significant, important, and helpful work on the policy level regarding smoking in the workplace. We've also then gone back into the ministry and asked the ministry to get out and hold some consultations with various stakeholders across the province.

Again Saskatchewan from the mid '90s for a little while actually played a leadership role in this and then seemed to hit neutral. Other provinces passed us by. And now, if I'm not mistaken, we're just one of . . . at the back end as far as smoking in the workplace. That work is still continue . . . we're getting feedback from right across a collection of stakeholders across Saskatchewan. It's been largely helpful. I'm looking for it to conclude here shortly and as it concludes, we'll come out with a policy statement. So that's the smoking piece.

Then the cancer piece and then the falls . . . okay so much for clarification, we can get you some statistics on falls as well as some initiatives.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — As long as we get that.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Between 2004-2006 about 23 per cent of the time loss injuries in residential construction were due to falls. That's one sector. As a result of this, what we can see is increasing on-site inspections and those now range about 10 per cent. And what we're seeing as well is renewed dialogue and co-operation with the industry to turn and say how can we work together to actually reduce some of those numbers, so both governmental and partnership approach.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — And then cancer.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — On the question of cancer and it's obviously one that we're all, you know, certainly attentive to, it seems that there is still significance relating to past exposure, some of which — obviously as you know — going back decades into issues relating to asbestos.

There's nothing to preclude the WCB [Workers' Compensation Board] from being attentive to or responding to a causal link between a workplace and cancer. I think there are close to 10 cancers already recognized by the WCB. As I say there's, you know, that can be expanded if causal evidence. We haven't seen a lot of causal evidence as far as newer cases on this.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Okay, just okay. Since you said you did not know in terms of this whole issue around designation in departments and the Minister of Energy and Resources and obviously the Tourism minister, they're talking about that in the department, or in your ministry. Is it something that your ministry did without your knowledge? Or who gave the instructions for these other ministries to go ahead and designate employees under essential services? And is your own ministry designating employees as essential?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, and I challenge. The assumption here is if that would've been rooted in a ministry. That request came directly out of the Public Service Commission. And the request came to all ministries to examine this. There, as I've said today, that work is under way. So do we know, do we know what those numbers will be? No, that work's under way. Some ministries have made quicker progress than others on this.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — So just one final so . . . But you stated you didn't know anything about this. I mean, it's your Bill. I mean there would've had to have been some discussion with the Public Service Commission. Did no coordination between your

ministry and the Public Service Commission . . . is that what you're trying to tell us here that . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No, actually I never said I didn't know anything about that. So once again what we've seen here is an interpretation of a Q and A, and then what we see is this roundabout way to come and question the competency of the officials or myself. The answer is, the Public Service Commission's taken the lead on this. We're at arm's-length from it. And it wouldn't be surprising that I didn't know specifics regarding each ministry about what they were reporting. That's, that's the nature of the response.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Not spinning anything, we're just simply asking. I mean obviously this is this ministry's Bill. The Public Service Commission isn't going to act by itself. There had to be some communication too. I mean you know, do you find that so odd?

I mean and I kind of take exception that you would allude that somehow I would think the officials are incompetent here. I mean, a simple question . . . you said you didn't know anything about it — your Bill, the Public Service Commission. We have committees going on. These people are all saying we've designated employees. We have a question. How did this start? Who started it? You say you don't know anything about it.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No, I essentially responded to the question. This came out of the Public Service Commission. It did not come specifically out of our ministry. Was I aware of the specific impetus? Yes. Am I aware of the specifics? No, nor would I expect to be because it's being run through the Public Service Commission. So it's just to turn and say again — you know, the paraphrasing of your question — the Public Service Commission is running this. Each ministry's been requested. They're working at a different pace, not surprisingly, and that's where this issue sits.

The Chair: — Committee members we have passed our recess time. Mr. Iwanchuk, you're done with your questions?

Mr. Iwanchuk: — I thought it was five. You said 4:55. I mean I could go on.

The Chair: — I realize that. But I believe we had an agreement that we would go till . . . Okay great. So the committee will recess till 6:15, at which time we will resume our sitting, and we will be considering the estimates of spending for the Department of Health, vote 32. So the committee is recessed.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**General Revenue Fund
Health
Vote 32**

Subvote (HE01)

The Chair: — Good evening, and I'll call the committee back to order. This evening we will consider estimates of the Ministry of Health, vote 32. We have the Minister Responsible for Health with us in attendance, along with a number of officials. And at this time I'd ask the minister to introduce his

officials please.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. We have a number of officials with us. Seated to my left is Max Hendricks, assistant deputy minister; to my right is Lauren Donnelly, assistant deputy minister; over my left shoulder is Ted Warawa, executive director, financial services branch; and over my right shoulder is Dr. Louise Greenberg, assistant deputy minister.

I can name the other officials that are with us as well: Brad Havervold, executive director of medical services branch; Deb Jordan, executive director, acute and emergency services branch; Donna Magnusson, executive director, primary health services branch; Morley Machin, director of drug plan and extended benefits branch; Roger Carriere, executive director, community care branch; Ron Knaus, executive director, workforce planning branch; Scott Livingstone, executive director, health information solutions centre; Kari Harvey is executive director, capital and regional services; Tyson Martin is assistant to the deputy minister; and Lauren Black, assistant to the deputy minister. That's who we have today.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. I would ask the minister if officials change seats that he would identify them for Hansard. That would be most helpful. And I open the floor for questions. I recognize Ms. Atkinson.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, and good evening, Minister, and to your officials. Minister, you'll know that I have written you in January and then again, I believe, in February about — and then again in April — about a program under SAIL [Saskatchewan Aids to Independent Living].

And this is a machine that has been recommended for use by a pediatric respirologist under the SAIL program. I think I outlined the situation to you and I also sent a description of the machine along with a pamphlet. And the pediatric respirologist, along with the respiratory therapist, have recommended that this machine be available for young children that are often ending up in hospital because they are experiencing breathing difficulties or respiratory problems.

And this is a machine that's basically a cough-assist machine. It helps young children — five-, six-, seven-year-olds — clear their lungs. And I outlined to you a description of what was taking place in my constituent's family where the child had been in hospital in the fall for approximately seven days at a cost of about \$20,000 to the system. And there had been a recommendation that this machine be purchased by SAIL, not only for this family but for other families as well.

And I note that there was some reduction in funding for the Saskatchewan Aids to Independent Living and I was able to read *Hansard* and understand your description of why that occurred. But I'm wondering, given that we have very serious health issues for some young children, and this is a machine that has proven to be efficient and works — it prevents children from going into hospital at a cost to the system and it also allows them to attend school — whether you have given, and your officials have given, any thought to having this particular machine covered under the Saskatchewan Aids to Independent Living program.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Let me just check.

Thanks for the question. We spent \$1.8 million on respiratory equipment already. That doesn't mean that it covers enough, obviously. And I'm familiar with the letter; I've seen it come by my desk. I think we'll probably continue to review this and look at it as far as its effectiveness. I can't say that any decision has been made on it yet, but we've been made aware of it by yourself and we'll continue to look at that.

Ms. Atkinson: — In the letter, and I think it's important that this be explained to you because I promised this mom that I would in person, the letter from the pediatric respirologist indicates that this cough-assist device which was on loan, that the treatment which is done at home so the person does not have to go to the doctor's office, doesn't have to go to the hospital, and I quote:

... has clearly been effective, resulting in increased secretion removal, chest X-ray improvement and decreased respiratory and systemic symptoms. And the most obvious change is that she's recently been able to attend school.

Her previous symptoms had prevented her from attending school and the request from the physician to your department, but I think a copy might have been transmitted to you, was to allow this machine to be covered in order to prevent pediatric intensive care unit admissions.

And I'm just wondering if you could describe for me, given that there are a number of children that have cystic fibrosis and have other chronic breathing difficulties, what process SAIL undertakes when it's determining whether or not a piece of equipment should be covered by SAIL. I understand this equipment costs about \$7,000, this one machine. So if you could just describe that for me I'd really appreciate it, Minister.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I guess there's no real hard and fast rules of a process that has to be undertaken for SAIL to approve or reject any proposal. I think most of the weight goes into what are requested by physicians, you know what the physician has to say. That has a, you know, large bearing on it and whether it increases the quality of life, reduces the number of acute care stays as you have mentioned. Those are all savings to the system. We certainly are more than aware of that.

So there isn't I guess you know a 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 steps to go through before SAIL approves but the request can go in and, you know, start on the process that way. As far as SAIL, you know probably talking to the physician and getting the, you know, for example in this case probably some of the particulars as to how much of a difference it makes in this person's life. But how also it makes a difference in ... As you said, she had seven days with this machine. It's assessing that as much.

Ms. Atkinson: — Right, and ... [inaudible] ... her family because it was on a trial basis. So is this a decision that's made by a panel of people like the drug formulary or is it made by department officials? How are decisions made whether or not a particular piece of equipment, in the case of SAIL, is covered by the SAIL program?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — There isn't any, you know, formulary committee or structure like that. It's more or less determined by department officials. One other issue that comes into play, and just learning, is that with respiratory equipment, if it can be repaired in the province. It gets very expensive when we can't fix any of this stuff and it's sent out of province, so that's another factor that's I guess weighted when the request comes in.

Ms. Atkinson: — So I know that the physician, the respiratory pediatrician, has written. I know that the respiratory therapist has written. Is there anything that this family could do? Because they don't have the machine now. Obviously the machine is not something that this family can afford at the moment. Is there any other information that they could provide that might cause your officials to consider that this machine should be available for this young person?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I think, you know, we'd certainly be more than willing to look into it again. You've written a couple of times and I'm not sure — three times — and I'm not sure, you know, where the responses are or where we have . . . But we can certainly take note of it tonight and look into it and see where that is at. Obviously the physician has made request. That will be in the system and we can commit tonight that we can revisit it and see where it's at.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, thanks. Thanks, Minister. I wrote . . . I think my last letter was April 3 and I wrote a letter on February 20. And then I think . . . or no, February 8 and another one on January 16. So I thought instead of writing again I'd just ask. And if you could get back to me that would be very helpful. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — For sure.

The Chair: — I recognize Ms. Junor.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. The first question I want to ask is totally out of the blue because I think you're going to have to get somebody to answer this. And we've got three hours so I'm hoping you can find the answer for me. This has to do with a cancer drug and a specific question about a specific drug. And it's called Paclitaxel and the drug was previously provided to the cancer agency. It's a drug for ovarian cancer, and it was previously provided by Biolyse Pharma. And the contract with Biolyse wasn't renewed and there's no explanation for why not.

Now the worry that I have and that's been expressed to me is that before Biolyse got the contract we were paying — we as the government and through the department — were paying 180 to \$200 a bottle for this drug. Under the Biolyse contract we were paying \$14.95. Now there has been no indication to Biolyse why they did not get the contract nor can anyone tell them what the cost is that we're paying now. And the new contract started April 1.

Biolyse is a Canadian company and I know SAHO [Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations] has corresponded with Biolyse and said that they are responsible to no one — I'm not sure that was the exact wording; I would hope not. But there has to be some transparency on how these contracts are done because if we've gone back to \$200 a bottle,

that would be a shame given the drug costs for everything, if there's some way to get it for 14.95 and we have not done that. I understand the new contract went to Aspera — A-s-p-e-r-a — which is a subsidiary or a offshoot of Abbott, which immediately made me go, oh, interesting.

So if you can find out for me who got the contract and what we're paying for this specific drug now under the new contract, I'd appreciate that.

We went through the process of how cancer drugs are not in the drug formulary, that process, so that's okay. But this is a specific question about that particular drug. So it may take a bit to find out. So I was hoping we could do it tonight.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — You're right, as far as, you know, it goes through the cancer agency. Although we have three hours tonight I'm not sure that we can get that information to you tonight but we can commit to having it to you tomorrow when we can talk to the people in the cancer agency that need to know. We can certainly commit to having it in a written form to you tomorrow. I just think it would be very difficult to access it tonight.

Ms. Junor: — Okay. So just as an offshoot of that question, when the comment was made that since SAHO bargained or SAHO awards the contracts for these drugs and they don't have to answer to the other checks and balances that we have in place, how are we accountable through the cancer agency for purchases and decisions that are made?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Not on its own, but it also uses SAHO and, you know, this may be the example here, that they're using SAHO to be the purchaser. What we can commit to is tomorrow not only telling you where that drug stands, but giving you a little bit of a, maybe a description or an explanation as to the cancer agency, why that, you know, what they I guess purchase on their own and, you know, what they use SAHO for. SAHO has some standing orders through companies. So I'm not sure in this particular case, but we can try and explain that a little bit better as to the purchasing process either between the cancer agency and SAHO or just SAHO is concerned.

Ms. Junor: — And will that touch on their accountability? How is that relationship accountable to the government? Because we fund the cancer agency.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — And we fund SAHO.

Ms. Junor: — Exactly.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes, I'd be very surprised if that, you know, I mean I'd be very surprised if the wording was quite to that extent and, you know, that SAHO says, we're not really too worried or accountable to anybody. I'd be surprised at that. I mean SAHO is at times a purchasing agent, whether it's for cancer drugs or many other things. Their job is to look at getting best deals, you know, and as far as drug purchasing, they're moving towards, you know, the bigger the block of purchasing, the more power that you have, whether it's a Western alliance moving towards that so that we can try and keep the costs down or reduce them.

It seems more than a little fishy that, you know, anyone regardless of whether you think they're not looking out for the best interests of public money or not would go from — I forget the numbers — but \$14 a bottle to \$200 a bottle. I would be very surprised that that is what has happened here. But we'll certainly agree to look into it.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. Then that kind of ties in nicely with my next set of questions, because I'm interested in the relationship of the department and the minister and SAHO. So if you can explain to the listening audience and those of us gathered here, the role of SAHO and the relationship, how it connects to the ministry and do it in general because then I want to get to more specific questions. But the relationship, the government funds them, and then how does the relationship move along? You have somebody from the ministry on SAHO's decision-making processes? How does that work?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I guess it would be safe to say that they really kind of, SAHO fulfills four major areas: labour relations, payroll, group purchasing, and also they do some advocacy work that we saw in the paper just not very long ago, and they passed resolutions at their annual meeting. It's made up of a board. Representatives from each regional health authority would be on their board. The ministry doesn't have a representative on that board. So you know, SAHO is responsible to the RHAs [regional health authorities] for the most part, and to their affiliates. We fund SAHO through the government.

So that is kind of a first crack at that question. I think there's probably going to be a number more into the different areas, but that's kind of a broad brush of the responsibilities of SAHO. It's really kind of an umbrella group of the RHAs and the affiliates.

Ms. Junor: — You're right, there are going to be more. That's what I wanted though was a general overview. Thanks.

Because I do want to go into the relationship. One of the mandates that you say SAHO has is labour relations. So it has been said many times that SAHO is doing this and we're not going to get involved. But there is a direct relationship between the ministry, and the government through the ministry, and SAHO and bargaining. So I would like you to explain that as well. Because I'm going the direction of the Health Labour Relations Council. I want to know what it is, who's on it, etc. And what its mandate is.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I think maybe I'll have Lauren answer this question.

Ms. Donnelly: — So with respect to the membership, and so SAHO and labour relations takes their direction from the health labour relations committee. The health labour relations committee, you probably know, is made up of the employers. There's four regions represented on the committee; the ministry, there's three individuals from the ministry on the committee; and the CEO or the president for SAHO make up the formal committee.

And then there are some resource supports to the committee as well — the VP [vice-president] of labour relations, the director

of labour relations, and the department. So that's the group that gives the strategic direction to SAHO, you know, both by getting the employer position with respect to operations and the government position with respect to mandate, etc.

Ms. Junor: — So this council or committee — I had it as council. Is it committee or council? I understand that Joe Kirwan from Sunrise Health Authority is the CEO and Mike Shaw, an ADM in Health. Is Mike still an ADM and is he still the Co-Chair of this council?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I can start by answering it, and then if there's more in-depth questions, I may turn it over, but Joe Kirwan is from Sunrise Health Region. The other health region representatives are Dwight Nelson, Maura Davies, and I guess, that would be the three and Kathy Chisholm would be the four and Susan Antosh of course from SAHO. Gren Smith-Windsor is representing the ministry now instead of Mike Shaw. Mike Shaw had in the past and now Gren Smith-Windsor is filling that role as the senior person from the ministry on that council.

Ms. Junor: — So is Mr. Smith-Windsor an ADM taking over from Mike Shaw? Is that what you're saying?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes, Gren Smith-Windsor is the acting deputy minister of Health.

Ms. Junor: — So then explain to me the role of the — I was going to go Mike Shaw, but now Gren Smith-Windsor — his role on this committee at the bargaining table. What does he actually do?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Well as I said is that Gren's the senior representative from the Ministry of Health that certainly attends the council's meeting and takes forward our mandate as far as the ministry, as far as what we would like to see along with what the others have input. I mean and he's the one that would carry I guess our message — which is one message of many because they all have a role to play on that council — our message to SAHO and bring back to the ministry what SAHO, what the council's decision would be as far as moving forward. He would be informing me.

Ms. Junor: — So in actual bargaining is Mr. Smith-Windsor at the table or in a room close to bargaining?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — This is the council, which is not the bargaining unit. The bargaining unit is separate from the council.

Ms. Junor: — I know. But the Health Labour Relations Council — I'm going to read from a letter that was sent to Rosalee Longmoore from Mike Shaw and Joe Kirwan that explains the role of the Health Labour Relations Council to Ms. Longmoore and says that it is mandated by government to oversee bargaining activity in the health sector and to provide strategic guidance to the collective bargaining process. So I'm asking how they actually do that. That includes, are they at the table? Do they see the proposals that SAHO has? Do they have input into those? How does that relationship work?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Well I guess the labour relations council is the one that as I said . . . I mean Gren is our

representative, carries the mandate. They are the one that then talks to the labour relations or to the bargainers to carry the mandate through, whatever that mandate may be. So that's the role of the council is to set the mandate and to set, you know, the direction that we want our bargainers, that SAHO or we would want our bargainers to go.

Ms. Junor: — So it would be safe to say then when a package was presented at the bargaining table, the government, the minister, and the health council, the Health Labour Relations Council would not be surprised at what was in it?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — You know, I wouldn't say that. I mean, the council would know exactly what was in the bargaining package that was put forward, yes.

Ms. Junor: — And I'm going to use Mike Shaw, since he would've been there at this time when the proposals were exchanged or SAHO did present their proposals to SUN [Saskatchewan Union of Nurses]. So he would've seen them and known what they were. So it was no surprise to the government that SAHO was proposing what they did.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes, you know, the council would know what the proposal was. I mean they give broad direction to SAHO. They would have known, you know, for example what was offered as far as wage. They would have a broad general knowledge of what they expected to, for example, get back in the contract. That's certainly been in the media a lot through SUN—the take-aways. They would be aware of those, you know, the direction and the thrust of the proposal put forward by SAHO.

Ms. Junor: — So then it would also be safe to say — because I'm assuming Gren Smith-Windsor would report to you as probably Mike Shaw did, being an ADM [associate deputy minister] and now an acting DM [deputy minister] would report to you — so it would be safe to say that you also knew what was there?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — If you're asking what I knew and what I know of, I was very aware what the proposal was, but not in the detail. I knew in broad brush strokes what was being talked about at the council and what would be put forward in front of SUN in the first few rounds of bargaining. But as far as detail in that proposal, what exactly was asked for, I would not be aware of.

Ms. Junor: — So then SAHO or this council is free to put together what they want? I understand that the mandate is to come from, you know, strategic guidance and the mandate mandated by government, what to put in. So if you just know the broad general terms, how do they get their mandate and how do they get the direction? Who gives it to them?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The direction would be partially through government through the ministry, and through the council itself. As I said, there is a number of CEOs that sit on this council as well that would be putting together the complete package. We would, as through a ministry, give them a mandate. A mandate may be around wages. A mandate may be around other issues in a contract, whether it is take-aways. Through the ministry, as the minister, I would have had an

understanding of the broad areas: yes, this looks good, we can agree on this.

As far as the detail, I mean the contract is, you know . . . I don't know how much you know about the SUN contract now, but there's a lot of detail in that SUN contract. You can talk about one area and maybe have 15 or 16 clauses that are affected in that one area. I may know that. You know, we may be, and through the mandate, looking at a certain area that we want to adjust in a contract; how many specific articles in that area, I wouldn't know.

Ms. Junor: — I understand that. I am looking back just a bit, stepping back a bit so I'm going to look at the proposal which is now off the table, but the nursing advisory process and the independent assessment process which was one of the, probably the most, the one that angered SUN the most, was that proposal. So that coming through from you, you would have seen that?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Not necessarily, not necessarily. As I said the proposal, you know, we have put, as far as a mandate, what we would like to see. That doesn't mean I guess SAHO can't offer up more or ask for more, expecting to get it, I don't know, expecting it to drop off as negotiations go. I mean I certainly have an idea of what the broad mandate is. All the details to get to that broad mandate will vary through SAHO.

It probably wouldn't be wise for me to say we need A, B, and C, and that's all we go to the table with. I mean negotiations are wide and ranging just as, you know, the proposal put forward by SUN is very large with a lot of asks. Do they expect to get them all? No. Does SAHO ever expect to get all the things that they put in their first proposal? Probably not. Do I know everything that they would've put in their first proposal? No, I don't. But do I know the general direction we want that to go as far as a mandate? Yes, I would have knowledge of that. But certainly not all the details that SAHO would put in, and what they think they need to put in to get to a middle point or an agreement.

Ms. Junor: — I think what concerns me the most is that something like removing the IAC [independent assessment committee] from the collective agreement was such a drastic thing to put forward to SUN. It was really sticking your finger in their eye, knowing that that's something that's extremely important to nurses, having gone on strike for it and refined the process through several negotiating processes. It makes me wonder why someone would do that, knowing full well what would happen. And then to pull it off the table, it seems like there are some games being played.

And I understand, I do want to say, on behalf of Ms. Atkinson and I who were in the ministry when SUN was bargained with at one point, that you can't step away from SAHO. The buck stops at you. SAHO, you can't distance yourself from SAHO. SAHO reports to you basically and is an arm of government, funded by government, and fairly well controlled, or fairly controlled by government — not probably enough perhaps, but they are there. And I just wanted to dispel the myth that government and SAHO are walking down two separate paths and one doesn't know what the other is doing because I don't actually think that that's true. And that wasn't a question, I guess. That was just a comment.

I do want to talk about the . . . Unless you have anything to add to that? I do want to talk about the MOU [memorandum of understanding] with SUN because there are a lot of questions about the MOU, more now that the negotiations have started and have basically come to a point where SUN is very concerned that the articles or the issues that were agreed to in the MOU are not appearing at the table, which was their assertion — that they have to be into the collective agreement or else they're not actually going to work.

So to start off with, the MOU was signed between you and Ms. Longmoore. But who actually put it together?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — You had a few comments at the start there that I think I need to respond to. It's interesting in the position that you're at now that you would say that really SAHO is very controlled through government because that was never really what was said for the last number of years — that SAHO was operating on their own; it was independent.

Now you're saying that, really I guess what I can read into what you're saying is we always had control or an awful lot of control, tried to have control over SAHO. That's interesting because that was never, never what was said publicly over the last number of years in whatever the dispute may have been. So that's interesting.

As far as the proposal, you talked a little bit about the proposal put forward by SAHO — and somebody asked, and certainly what it has done to the bargaining process and where we're at right now — but also you mentioned that they had to have known what the reaction of SUN was going to be. And I don't know if, you know, I don't know if they did or not. I think that they felt that they were going to start like a lot of negotiation. One starts to the extreme on one side. The other starts to the extreme on the other side. And we find a common ground somewhere, maybe in the middle or somewhere to one side or the other.

I don't know if they . . . I don't think they intentionally, and that's kind of what you're implying, that they intentionally went after SUN and tried to stick a, you know, tried to stick them with this and incense them. I don't think that was ever . . . It's maybe been the result. And when you're looking back, hindsight's 20/20. You know exactly, you know, what has caused them to react the way they have.

Leading up to it I don't know if they felt that they were being as much of an irritant, SAHO really felt that they were being, going to be as irritating SUN as much as they did. Certainly we understand that the concerns that SUN have, I don't think, again, SAHO expected this to go right on through and that was going to be in the contract. They realized there was going to be drop-offs, there was going to be a number of drop-offs and, you know, some will argue now that they expected too much.

But as I say, you know, I'm usually an awful lot smarter after I've seen the results of something than when I'm trying to anticipate the reactions. I'll use marketing grain. I always know a lot more after the high price is gone when I should have sold than when it's leading up to it. I mean it's easy to sit back and criticize, you know, but that was the proposal that was put forward, never the intent — I believe completely, never the

intent — to irritate and cause the problems that it has.

I think there might have been some problems leading up to that. And you talked about the partnership agreement and the concerns around the partnership agreement. I can tell you the partnership agreement is still strong and there's many, many issues that we're going to be dealing with. Some may go into a contract. SUN has proposed that pretty much everything from the partnership be written into a contract.

You know, they're still in the bargaining process. The nice part is, I think, for all parties, both parties, that if it isn't written into a contract, and some of the stuff may be — I don't know; I'm not at the bargaining table — but if it isn't written into the contract there's another table to go to that is functional and will work and I think will see results. In fact I'm positive we'll see results.

Marlene Smadu, as you know, is the facilitator there. They've had two meetings. Their first meeting was very productive. Their second meeting was fine. The parties are certainly talking and coming to agreement on different issues. There's lots and lots of work that needs to be done there. It certainly isn't over by, I mean there's just a lot of work to be done there.

I would say that if there is one issue, I mean, is timing. I wish we had the partnership, I wish the previous government would've called an election a year before so that, you know, had the people then chose to make a difference, that we could've then been in power to sign a partnership — which I know the previous government tried to do but didn't get it done.

I wish we would've had that opportunity to sign that partnership a year in advance of contract negotiations because an awful lot of the issues that we're struggling with and we'll be dealing with in a partnership agreement, if we had time to discuss them and work through them in good faith like we are seeing at that partnership table right now, if we had a year or better to have worked on that before a contract came up, I think that SUN would be very, very happy with the progress that was made.

They are a little skeptical, and they would like to see it written into a contract because it's written into a contract — there it is. Whereas at a partnership, we're working together, and they would rather see it obviously written into a contract. Had we had, as I said, time to work on this partnership agreement a year in advance, I think you would see an awful lot of the issues that are written in the partnership agreement worked on and solutions found and a lot of positive movement made. Because as I said, the previous government tried to sign a partnership agreement. We know that. We've seen it. It didn't work. We got it done, and right away we're into negotiations.

And it's tough to work at the two tables because, you know, SUN has got a bargaining team and they have a team at the partnership table, and from my understanding they're pretty much the same people. And so it's tough to divide both your attentions between a partnership and a contract.

But I am very positive to say that if in the near future a contract is settled — and there may be some issues from the partnership in that contract; there may be some that aren't — the nice part, the reassuring part for all involved is the table is set up that I

think will be very functional to see through and see the initiatives in the partnership through to successful culmination because that table and that relationship is there.

Ms. Junor: — I bet you thought with that long answer I'd forget my question, but I didn't, and you didn't answer it. My question was: who put the MOU together?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The beginning again. But the memorandum of understanding through the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and the Ministry of Health was drafted through SUN and the Ministry of Health, and I was a part of that, absolutely a direct part of that meeting with the union representatives. There were other people that certainly saw the proposals and had input on the proposals all the way along, including health regions, but it was mainly through the ministry, myself, and the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses.

Ms. Junor: — If I remember correctly when you first signed it, the response from the regional authorities was they had not had any input into what the content was of the MOU. And you're saying they did?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Did I go to all 12 health regions and consult with all 12 health regions? No. But definitely some of the health regions had seen it prior to, had input into it, and as you . . . I don't think any of you were there at the signing of the partnership. Dwight Nelson was there and spoke highly of it.

Ms. Junor: — So your ministry was involved in putting it together. So did somebody give you an idea of the . . . Was there a cost analysis done of the MOU before it was signed?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Not really because there's so many variables. I mean there's no cost built into the memorandum of understanding or the partnership. There are not costs built into it because all of the issues — including vacancies — all needed to be worked on. And that work still needs to be done.

I mean the last time I think we were in estimates we certainly talked about that. There is not a dollar value. There's not a dollar figure put into that because there are so many variables. For example, it talks a little bit about staffing ratios. How do you cost that when you don't know where the ratios are? There's a lot of things that are in there that, you know, don't have an exact cost on it.

But what was really interesting, and I think quite reassuring, when you looked at many of the issues and articles in that partnership agreement and you cross-reference it to a document called "Securing the Future," our platform, you'll see a strong, strong representation in the partnership of what was in our platform that the people certainly had a good view of back in November.

Ms. Junor: — So you said there was no money attached to the MOU, but there was promises made for putting money into a fund by the RHAs and the ministry as of April 1. And I know that the budget put in 60 million from the department to start the fund off, but what have the regions put in as of April 1?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I answered that question the last time we were here, and I'll answer it the same way, is that there are

many variables that go into what that recruitment fund is going to look like. Starting with . . . [inaudible] . . . how you determine vacancies and that is a big issue. I mean there are a number of variables around that and that's the work that needs to be done.

You know, I mean if we continue to be as successful as we have been through the next five or six months as we have been in the previous five or six months in recruiting — whether it's Philippine nurses or graduating nurses here in Saskatchewan or bringing nurses in from outside the province — and are filling many of those vacancies, you know, there'll be virtually no costs. If we are unsuccessful or don't put our commitment behind it, it could cost a fair amount once we determine what a vacancy is and how it looks and how it's funded.

That work hasn't been done and that's what I explained the last time we were here. But what I can tell you is that it's set up to be, if the work is done and we are successful in recruiting and retaining nurses, there is an incentive there for all of us. Whereas I would argue that maybe in the past that incentive wasn't there and as a result we're dealing with the situation that we're dealing with right now.

Ms. Junor: — I guess then since we've had this discussion and your answer hasn't changed and neither has my question, this makes me wonder why you put April 1 in of '08 then for all of it to start, if you didn't have any plan to do anything really concrete with it or any expectations of the districts or regions or authorities to do anything with it.

Why pick April 1 then? That's why the question's come because as of April 1 there was . . . It was a trigger. Something was going to be happening. Money was going to be put, and you did put money somewhere. The 60 million went somewhere. And is it sitting for the committee that Dr. Smadu is running? Is the 60 million being used by that committee and what projects or what things that they decide need to be done or should start with?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — You know, I think I can certainly say that a date was put on it because we knew the urgency of getting to work on it. If you have an agreement like this and say, well we're going to start working on it, I don't know quite when we're going to start working on it, we don't have any timelines, it lingers and lingers and lingers. That doesn't mean that we can't do the work and make payments retroactive if there are payments to be made. If we continue to recruit and attract as many nurses as what we have, there may not be much of a payment to be made.

But why that money was set aside, why we set money aside in last year's budget is to start the process and to show, not only that our new government will talk about it, but will fund it as well. And that's why that was done. But that money is sitting with SAHO and it can certainly be used to cover off some of the fund that is worked off of vacancies.

But as I said, that work hasn't been complete yet. I would have loved to have seen more work done on the partnership agreement before we got to the contract negotiations, and that's why I said earlier in my earlier question, if we could have held the election perhaps a year earlier we would have had an extra

year to work on the partnership and it would be up and running and functioning quite well, I think.

Ms. Junor: — Since you have alluded to the fact that we tried when we were in government to put a similar MOU in place, I do want to comment on that because the things that you have signed into, the agreement that you signed with Ms. Longmoore, have not been costed. But when we were looking at a similar type of agreement, we did have costs attached, and they were substantial, which was one of the main reasons why it wasn't able to be moved on because it was extremely costly. Is there a fire alarm?

A Member: — No. It's the other committee.

Ms. Junor: — So we did look at much the same things and did realize because we took the time to analyze what was going to happen and estimate the cost of it, and it was extremely costly. And I have to say Ms. Longmoore did her job, but it doesn't appear that the department did theirs by not having any cost analysis attached to this or even cost estimate.

When you make the promises that you did, there are huge expectations. And those expectations are not going to come cheap. And you've promised them so there is, I mean there are certain projections of what this would cost. SAHO has said 1.2 billion. And I know when SUN was talking about it before, it was 260 million a year.

So if you're talking about what we saw and what we were doing, 260 million a year was a lot of money which we didn't have. So whether or not we called the election when we did or the year before, we didn't have the money.

Now your government has a lot of money that we left in the coffers and that continue to roll in with all the prices that are going up. So you do have some, there are some expectations that you'll have to deliver. And if SAHO says 1.2 billion, can you say that that's wrong?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I think I'll start by responding to an agreement that you say was in place or could have been in place when you were government. And we heard it in the House, I believe, yesterday when we were talking about some program. And I forget which member was said, oh we were going to do that, and we were going to do a lot of things after the fact.

Now I don't believe that you say that you were costing your proposal as much as you costed it. Who costed the proposal that was put in front of you was SUN. They said it was 260 million. It wasn't your government. You never did come back with another number. You know, it was principles that were in the partnership, in your partnership that were similar to what our principles that are in our partnership. They may look differently, absolutely, but to say that you had done a bunch of costing as far as what a proposal would look like and a partnership would look like, I would certainly take question with.

I think that SUN certainly had an idea of what they wanted out of your government. I would say that you were probably smart not to go at that level because I don't believe the partnership that we have signed would be anywhere close to that.

SAHO talks about a \$1.2 billion but, you know, I don't know where they've come up with their numbers because there are so many variables in this that have to be agreed upon. They haven't been set in stone. It isn't a certain number for patient/nurse ratios. It isn't a certain number for vacancies. That's what I have said to you many, many times, that those numbers will certainly be worked on.

Is it 1.2? No I don't believe so at all. In fact I believe that in another couple of years if we're successful in recruiting and retaining — because retention is a huge part — as many nurses as what we think we're going to do, I think the cost of this partnership will be very small.

What the biggest value of this partnership is and, you know, I defy you to measure it, is goodwill between the two parties which hasn't been in place for many, many, many years.

Ms. Junor: — Well I was at the SUN annual meeting and if you think that there's goodwill there, then you're dreaming in Technicolor, because there is no goodwill there.

The MOU, the expectations that I spoke about have not been met. The members of SUN that I spoke to and that spoke to me clearly expect you to deliver through the bargaining committee what you promised in the MOU. They don't see this as two separate . . . They do not see that. So you can talk all you want about the goodwill. It isn't there.

And I understand clearly about bargaining and I know the relationship that's been there for years between SAHO and SUN. And this set of proposals has gone beyond damage. To put what they did put, and with your knowledge or your department's knowledge, what was put forward has done irreparable damage.

So it will remain to be seen how this falls out. I mean we all can't have a crystal ball and look into it, but given what we all know with the relationships we've had and the experiences we've had, this is not good.

So I think when you talk about the MOU and it being a process that's going to be dealt with through Marlene Smadu's committee, there are certainly things that will have to be done there that don't need to be in the contract. But there are things that have to be in the contract from SUN's point of view. And I don't think they're going to be without a fairly hefty price tag.

So I think if you do get your wish and build on the recruitment that's been started . . . And it was started by our government, including our minister of Immigration who sits right here, set the stage for it in the Philippines. And that work started in November of last year before government changed. Nurses were coming over from that agreement that was done through that department under that minister. So the things that are being done, they will change. They will change how we see people educated and see people come into the province.

I also have a document about education. So I want to talk a bit about the capacity for educating health professionals because that goes to recruitment as well. And I want to ask, the nursing seats that are being proposed here are basically — and I think I asked you this question before — they're basically the ones that

we already had in place when we were government. And how have you added to that in the next three years? Because this budget, I understand, is just fulfilling the promise that our government made.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I'll start by answering, you're right, you asked the question the last time. And I believe I'll answer it the same way as I did the last time, that we had committed that — there was a little over 400 seats when we took power — we had committed to increasing those number of training seats by 300 over the next four years and that will be done.

There is money in the budget this year to follow through with a commitment that you said that the former government said it would do. We've put the money in, and we'll be following through. As I said, we'll be increasing the number of training seats by 700 in the next four years . . . or by 300 to over 700. We're going to increase the number of training seats in the registered nurses' program which, you know, some psychiatric nurses, that type of thing. And we're going to increase it by 300 to make it just over 700. When we came into power, into government, it was just over 400. But there are issues that just . . . you can't do it overnight. There are issues of faculty. There's issues of space, where these education seats are going to be, whether they're going to be in Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert. There's some work that needs to be done on that. It can't be done overnight, but we're certainly well on the way to meeting our commitment in the four years.

Ms. Junor: — Now correct me if I'm wrong. I thought we had committed — we as the NDP government — had committed to 520 not 400.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — As I said in my previous answer, is that when . . . in the '07-08 budget we were at 418 seats. When we came into government, we were at 418 seats. The next uptake was to go to 520. We funded that, and we'll be following through with that by '09-10 and then moving on to make sure that we've committed to the 300 that we said we'd commit to by the fourth year of our mandate.

The Chair: — We are experiencing some interference in our sound system. I'm told that one of the possible sources of that interference could be BlackBerries that are receiving messages. So if someone . . . I would ask that the BlackBerries be turned off, so that we don't experience this further interference. I believe, Ms. Junor, you had an additional question or comment.

Ms. Junor: — I just had an additional comment. So you're funding basically what we had said, up to 520 this year and next year, and then adding on up to your 700 by the end of your mandate.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I think that's . . .

Ms. Junor: — That's 180 new ones. Okay thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Ms. Higgins.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the committee for allowing me a few minutes to ask questions because I'm supposed to be in another committee.

Minister, to change topics totally, regional health authorities, how do they calculate the charges for residents of special care homes, level 3 and 4?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — It is quite complex, and I can certainly read some of it into the record if you'd like, and that may bring some more questions. But first of all, that the fees are set not through the RHAs, but through the ministry. We determine the fee that would be charged, and it of course it goes on on one's income. And so I can read a couple paragraphs, and I know if that doesn't answer it, we can try and go further:

Each quarter all residents' charges are reviewed for adjustments. This increase is based on increases provided by OAS and GIS as announced by the federal government. Increases are equivalent to the percentage increase of these amounts. The minimum charge is \$956 a month, and the maximum charge is \$1,815 per month.

Then it's got, you can see, a summary appendix. So if you want to go further, we can kind of get into that stuff:

Residents pay a minimum resident charge plus 50 per cent of the portion of their income between 1,161 per month and 2,879 per month. The 1,161 is the maximum amount of old age security, guaranteed income supplement, Saskatchewan income plan benefits available to a single senior in a long-term care facility effective January 1, 2008. Based on the standard resident charge of 956, residents retain a minimum disposable income of about 250 per month for personal supplies and drugs.

Now that's kind of a first crack at it.

Ms. Higgins: — Okay. So the formula is based on the Department of Health. There's no difference between RHAs and how this is calculated, right? It's a standard calculation that's done right across the province.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes.

Ms. Higgins: — Now my understanding is that when you're income testing, revenue from line 150 on your income tax form is what's used in the calculation. So it will include income but it does not include assets, right? Is that accurate?

We've run into a number of situations in our constituency office over the past number of months where income splitting . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . No, well because income splitting just come in. And what we're finding is that if someone feels they can save a bit of income tax by income splitting . . . And in the one case in particular one of the partners was just assessed to move into care. So while they had saved \$400 on their income tax, and were quite happy with that, it bumped up the charge for long-term care by the calculations from line 150. So that brings up a number of concerns.

Now lucky enough the couples that we've spoken to have taken the time to sit down and do their income tax and calculate it both ways to see what the difference is for when one of them moves into long-term care. But are you running into that more and more? And do you have an understanding that . . . because my understanding is when the income splitting is done, line 150

is the line that goes up, and that line 150 is the line that's used by the department for income testing. And I would assume this may also be for the drug supplements. And also when you're going into long-term care, that this would make a difference.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — What I can answer is, on the long-term care, is that it's generally line 150 but if, I guess you could say, if a case could be made or if it makes sense that the incomes have to be combined and then split, whatever is best for the resident, there is some . . . so it's safe to say that there is some variance, and it's not just strictly line 150 per person in a couple situation. It's looked at as whichever would be to the best benefit of the couple, to try and hold that cost down. So I don't know if that answers it. We can try and get more information for you.

Ms. Higgins: — So then as long as when the calculations are being done . . . and I know they are always looked at what works best for the couple. But I mean, with some options of income splitting available through the federal government . . . which people are going to jump at it if there's an opportunity to save some income tax. But it may end up costing you more problems along the road. Now I'm sure you can change that year by year, but as long as it's something that the department's aware of and can advise people. I mean, you don't advise them on income tax though.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — No.

Ms. Higgins: — I mean, you can advise them on the various ways and look at the various ways that the cost can be adjusted, or there's a form you can fill out — do any number of changes to make it appropriate for the person who is still living on their own. I understand that. But this has been brought to my attention by a number of people, that it's been a problem and come up rather unexpectedly.

Now of course those that are very cynical say that this was an intentional change of income splitting to cut government's costs in other ways. So that's a worry also. If it's an intentional change that would change supplements or change any type of benefits when it comes to the seniors' drug plan, that's a problem also.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — You know, there's been no changes in this through the ministry, you know. And what I can say is that I know often these concerns will come in to a constituency office. We haven't received many calls on it at all yet, and so maybe they're first checking with their MLA before they come to the ministry; I don't know. But we haven't received many concerns. That doesn't mean that it's not out there.

But the program and, you know, how it works has not changed from . . . I mean I understand that couples may change the way they're doing their finances and income split, but as far as how that affects our program, there's been no changes that would, you know . . . And as you say, you know, I don't know if . . . It's really not the role of the Ministry of Health is to be advising on income tax policy as it affects our long-term care fees either.

Ms. Higgins: — It could be a problem for many couples. I mean we could go into a lot of detail and we could go into income splitting — when it's added, when it's taken off the

forms — but I mean that's, I think, more detail than we have time tonight. So what I wanted to do is move on to another area.

As you're well aware, I've tabled a number of petitions to deal with the expansion at the Moose Jaw Union Hospital. I'm sure you've been listening. You announced in this year's budget that there was \$100 million for capital, and I believe the line was for projects such as the Moose Jaw Union Hospital. Do you still have the same approval process that the former government had when it came to health facilities and projects?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes. The 18-step process is still in place. It starts with some planning money.

Ms. Higgins: — So whereabouts is the Moose Jaw Union Hospital on the approval process?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The Moose Jaw Hospital is . . . We certainly heard about it lots before. It's been talked about for a while, is in the consultation process, so it's in the initial stages.

Ms. Higgins: — What does that mean on an 18-stage process?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — There's 18 steps. The consultation phase is the first process. And it's not just a step; it's five steps within the consultation process. So the very first step is to complete and submit a current facility management plan. So they're kind of working through that and into stage number two, complete and submit needs assessment, and expression of interest for capital projects. They're working through those first two stages of the first five stages on the consultation phase.

Ms. Higgins: — So the consultation phase would be how many steps on the 18-step approval process?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — It would be the first five steps of the 18 steps.

Ms. Higgins: — It would be the first five steps of the 18. So my understanding had always been that the planning done by Five Hills Health Region had been forwarded to the Department of Health for the process where you work through . . . Does the Department of Health, Ministry of Health, believe that the planning is complete and really addresses what will be needed in the health care system, like really fits with the provincial health care system, and does it fit what the projected needs are for Five Hills and other areas within the province? Am I wrong in that assumption?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — They have asked to meet, the Five Hills Health Authority, have asked to meet to go through this consultation phase with us. But we haven't received anything per se as far as, you know, steps one and two as far as completing and submitting a current facility management plan, but that work is being done right now. They've asked to meet with us on that, but that's kind of where it's at right now.

Ms. Higgins: — So then of the \$100 million that is dedicated to capital projects in the Ministry of Health, will Moose Jaw Five Hills receive any funding for the Moose Jaw Union Hospital expansion and renovation project in this budget year?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — We would anticipate that they will

receive some dollars for planning.

Ms. Higgins: — And what does that mean?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Well I think as you're sitting beside the former minister of Health and he knows, certainly knows, you know, there is a long planning stage. We talked about this — was it a week or two ago? — about North Battleford. And there's money has been put into that facility for planning. There's more money that needs to go into planning. It isn't planned in six months or whatever. But money needs to go into the planning process.

I would foresee that there would be some money within that \$100 million to go towards that planning process as the regional health authority and the city of Moose Jaw work through the consultation phase and submit, you know, plans to the ministry.

Ms. Higgins: — So then what kind of dollars are we talking about? And this would be initial planning, or are we getting more into detailed planning and engineering?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I guess it would be safe to say that I think they're aware that there are some planning dollars available there. There's a lot of work that needs to go into it. It's certainly a long ways from the draft table.

There's a scoping exercise, a functional plan of what is needed. This is a very initial stages of the planning for that facility, and so, you know, it could be a consultant — and you know, I don't want to put a number on it because I don't know exactly how much it's going to be — that would start the initial stages, the scoping of what we're looking at, a needs assessment, that type of thing, what is needed in the area. That all needs to be in the initial consulting phase.

Ms. Higgins: — And so what would be normal or traditional for planning dollars on a project of this size, of a proposal of this size because you really don't know what the project is going to be yet then. Is that what you're telling me?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — As I said, there's a lot that goes into it, and it starts with a needs assessment. But it can, you know, it can go anywhere from a \$100,000 on up to 500,000 depending on how long, you know, how far you get into it in the first year. Also it depends on again the size. I mean, we have to decide on, you know, how much space is going to be . . . if it's added on or what are all those factors that need to be looked at. So it varies, but you know, I mean safe to say that it would probably be 100,000 to start with that could grow as the plans and work extends.

Ms. Higgins: — Well then I guess I would ask the minister then when he says this is a priority, what does that mean to the people of Moose Jaw and the Five Hills Health Region?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Well absolutely, yes. We've set it as a priority, and it will be a priority. Can it be done in a year? No. It's impossible to do it in a year. Do we need to start the process? Absolutely.

And you know, if you see — and I'm sure you will see — money going towards a planning phase of the facility, that's

started the process which hasn't happened before. So as a priority, we could talk about a lot of facilities that need to be replaced. We haven't moved in that direction. We haven't started with planning dollars.

This facility, we are moving towards planning dollars which I would show a very significant movement for a new government for the city of Moose Jaw, that it's going in the right direction. Planning dollars have been set aside. I can tell you that when we first looked at a budget of about \$5 million for repairs and maintenance, there would have been no planning dollars for that facility.

We wanted to move ahead with it. We want to move ahead with it, and we've started the initial stages by putting money in towards planning. It goes nowhere if it doesn't have at least initial stages of planning. So that's why I say that it's a priority for our government.

Ms. Higgins: — So when will we hear, of the \$100 million, when will we get a listing of how it's been budgeted and where that money has been earmarked and dedicated towards, and what projects?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Okay. The announcement was made of course of \$100 million in the budget . . . and be looking forward to everybody around this table, all the way around this table, supporting that money that's going towards capital projects. And because it's stemming from a study that was done in . . . I don't know how familiar you are with it, with the VFA study that was done of all our facilities. From that we are going to look at criteria that RHAs will have to follow. I mean we want to set a criteria; it's not just whatever they want to do. There is a criteria based on the VFA study which is really around life and safety issues. We hope to have that criteria up and running to all the RHAs so they can start putting their proposals together by the end of May. So we hope to have the criteria set up by the end of May.

The money for the most part, as I said, there's some life and safety issues that were identified by the VFA report that needs to be, that they need to be looked at immediately — you know, issues around furnaces or chillers, keeping the facilities operating through the summertime so we don't have to cancel surgeries. There's issues in through RHAs with roofing leaking, and that's causing all sorts of damage through the interior. Those need to be looked at. So, you know, as the roof leaks and gets into the building, we have mould issues in some of our facilities. This should be not new to any of you on that side because it was certainly a . . . This has been a ongoing problem. So that's where a large portion of the \$100 million will be going, is through a criteria set by the ministry that RHAs will then submit their projects based for the most part on life and safety issues.

Ms. Higgins: — So then, Mr. Minister, when you stood in the budget speech and said that the \$100 million was for projects like Moose Jaw, that was purely an example, and it wasn't even an accurate example because you're talking about health and safety issues in aging facilities. You're not talking about new facilities; you're not talking about updated facilities. You're talking about basic maintenance. You're talking about roofs. You're talking about furnace. You're talking about ventilation.

You're talking about chillers, which is important. I won't argue that. But then I would say on your budget speech you gave a totally different spin to what the \$100 million was designated for.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — No, I would disagree completely. And you've heard me say already that some of the money from that \$100 million will be going into planning dollars, for example, in Moose Jaw. That wasn't there before. So when we talked about projects like Moose Jaw, absolutely, because if it would have been the \$5 million that was set aside prior to us becoming government, there would have been no money for Moose Jaw. So when we reference projects like Moose Jaw, it will be planning dollars that will go to a project like Moose Jaw as well as repairs to many other facilities that may be in the Five Hills Health Region.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Ms. Atkinson.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. Minister, I want to talk tonight about the report that was presented in Saskatoon through the regional health authority regarding the health status of people living in the core neighbourhood of Saskatoon. As you probably are aware, there are health services that are provided in that area through the Westside Community Clinic. One of the recommendations of this report — I think it was done by Dr. Lemstra — was that certain public health services, dental health services, sexually transmitted disease services, addiction services, mental health services, that those kinds of services start being provided closer to people who required the services.

And I'm wondering what you have planned in the inner city when it comes to providing those services, and can you tell me what the Westside Community Clinic, for instance, can expect in terms of funding increases to expand services?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I can start by kind of referring to the report that you talked about by Mr. Lemstra regarding the inner city and some of the challenges that are definitely being faced there. His opinions as to and ideas as to how we can better deliver services in those areas, and he has some very interesting ideas and I think some ideas that make a lot of sense, an awful lot of sense. But it does come down to . . . we really feel the services that are being delivered there, how they're being delivered, by who they're being delivered, and where they're being delivered, there are a number of factors.

We have in the short time that we've been government been dealing with the community clinic, Westside for example. I've had an opportunity to meet with the RHA and just talk to the RHA as to all the services they're supplying in the inner city because it is kind of an interesting dynamic — the community clinic with the RHA.

I mean, the RHA is responsible for delivering services in Saskatoon and area, but the community clinic is funded separate and is doing their own work, and I think it's really important. And I was encouraged to see, when I met both with the community clinic and the regional health authority, you know, that they both talked about how important it is that they work together, that they don't start duplicating services just because

they both have — they see — a mandate to deliver those services in that area. So there's certainly work between, example the RHA, Saskatoon Regional Health Authority, and the Westside Clinic.

There's a lot of other opportunities and a lot of other partnerships that we have to continue to work with and on, to deliver more services because again, that's what it is all about. And so you know, we're certainly looking at future opportunities through this.

For example, the Saskatoon school board and the issues around St. Mary Community School, you know, there are some services offered there, but the facility is not in very good shape. We're in discussions there, also W.P. Bate School regarding outreach mental health and addictions counselling through the school system. Occupational therapy, nutrition services, additional public health nursing services, nurse practitioner services, exercise and activity therapy, speech language therapy, and additional community capacity-building services — those are some of the things that we are looking at and have started discussions in, in that area. There's certainly lots of need.

You know, we looked at that area and just put on a map all the different spots where services are delivered — and we weren't necessarily worried about whether it was through the RHA, whether it was a community clinic, whether it was through the board of education, but services that are delivered in that area — and there were a lot of pins on that map. I mean it's certainly an area that has the need. But there are also, you know, there are a number of services being delivered there. That doesn't mean they can't be or shouldn't be expanded. I think they need to be. But as far as services delivered, you know, there are a number.

Ms. Atkinson: — So what can the community clinic expect for a budget increase in '08-09 in Saskatoon? What percentage?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — We have met with the Westside Community Clinic and saw their proposal. They're certainly looking for more money. They're looking to be able to offer more services. You know, I'm not going to sit here today, I can't sit here today and say it's going to increase by X amount. We've gone through the budgeting process. Their budget has been set. That's the way the budgeting process works, as you know. So their budget has been set. They are looking for additional funds to be able to supply more services. We can look to see if there's money available for that, but more importantly look for the next year even as to what is needed.

Ms. Atkinson: — So what was the per cent increase in '08-09? Was it 2.3 or . . .

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — So their funding increases are based on their complement, whether it's physicians or whatever. I believe it was 5 per cent on their physicians, 2 per cent roughly on their capital expenditures. There are some outstanding issues around the CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees] contract that has to be finalized. So you know, there has been some increase. I think it would be very tough to come with one exact number because it varies from area to area, whether it's physicians, whether it's nurses, or whether it's CUPE for example.

Ms. Atkinson: — So in terms of regional health authorities, overall they received what percentage increase?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The initial number that we have here, the number that we have is 3.7 per cent for RHAs. But I don't think that tells the whole story because as you know, there are a number of contracts, so there's money for bargaining. I mean contracts haven't been settled. Obviously the SUN contract hasn't been settled, and there's other service providers as well. So it's 3.7 on the base which is . . . but you know, there'll be some variance by the end of the year as contracts come forward.

The other variance too is — which will be looked at, could be looked at very easily as funding — is there's \$100 million that will be going towards capital projects. That capital project, as we just finished talking about, hasn't been finalized. There'll be some, you know, health authorities, depending on the shape of their building, may see a little bit bigger rise, you know, if you compare it at year-end as compared to where we are right now at the 3.7.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well you may not know this, Minister, but the building that the Westside Community Clinic is presently in is bulging at the seams, and there are too many services, I guess, being provided for the size of the space. And I understand that the Friendship Inn next door would like to have the space.

So I'm wondering in terms of the \$100 million that you have allocated, is there any opportunity for the Westside Community Clinic to have some allocation in order to move to a building that could deal with all of the services that they presently deliver? And I'm wondering if that's a topic of conversation that you've engaged in.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I am very familiar with the Westside Community Clinic. I have toured through there. I have met with the board. I certainly, when I was going through there they had a group in the kitchen just dealing with, you know, preparing some food and some life skills issues like that, and it was very tight. Anyway I won't say any more about that, but it is very tight.

And we've been aware of it. The former government was, you were . . . the former government was aware of it. I don't know whether I should say you were aware of it. But there's been issues around space for that clinic for a while. And we're working with them to find more space. You know, I should say they're working to find more space. We'll certainly have a look at that.

They own the building they're in right now, so there's some issues around whether they really want to lease. You know, they've been doing fairly well, they think, and rightfully so as owning their own building. Is that what they want to do in the future?

When I talked to the board, when I met with the board a couple weeks ago, a couple Fridays ago, you know, they were just looking at many different options that were available. And there are some very attractive options, I would say, available for them. It's just, you know, what direction they want to go, whether it's leasing, purchasing, selling theirs . . . You know,

there's a number of variables that have to be followed through.

The Chair: — Committee members, I think it would be an appropriate time to take a 10-minute recess. We've been going for quite a while, and I think committee members perhaps have some issues that they need to deal with. So we'll take a 10-minute recess and reconvene at 8:10 sharp.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

The Chair: — I'll call the committee back to order. And I believe before the recess Ms. Atkinson had the floor, so I'll recognize Ms. Atkinson.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. So, Minister, you can't give us a preliminary figure for the base increase for the community clinics, not only talking about Saskatoon but Wynyard, Regina, and Prince Albert?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The increase is \$677,000 for the four community clinics, is the increase in the budget number.

Ms. Atkinson: — An increase of how much?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — On a base of from 16.978 million to 17.655 million.

Ms. Atkinson: — So the percentage — you're a better mathematician than I am — what's the percentage?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — No. How about . . .

Ms. Atkinson: — Less than 5

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — How about we get that?

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. Perfect.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I just have one other . . . I can talk to you just as we're waiting. I could also mention about the cough-assist respirators that SAIL has recommended that we provide for, initially for patients with the most acute cases that we evaluate. And I think there's some question about usefulness. But you know, you have an example . . .

Mr. Hendricks: — In certain cases they want to monitor the clinical effectiveness of it. So it works with specific patients but they want to make sure that . . . They're quite expensive and they want to make sure they're getting good value.

Ms. Atkinson: — Fair enough. Do you know when there might be an announcement on this or would Dr. Lothian, for instance, who is the pediatric respirologist, would he be aware of this recommendation?

Mr. Hendricks: — Actually it was just sent to me . . . [inaudible] . . . my office and I'll present it to the minister, but we'll probably just announce to the patients who applied for this.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, thanks. That was quick. Very good. Thank you.

In terms of getting back to the Westside community clinic so when you said there were a number of options that they could look at, do you have any examples of what those options are? Because I'm familiar with a group trying to look at options and there isn't a lot of options in that area. Because the one building that might have been available when the family support centre was shut down, I guess, was purchased by CUMFI [Central Urban Métis Federation Inc.].

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The first question regarding space that they were looking at, as I said we met with them I think about a week ago or 10 days ago. And they did mention — it was kind of mentioned in passing — the possibility of leasing space through that building that CUMFI has bought.

That was one option but they also talked about some other options. They didn't name the options to us. She, you know, Cheryl, seemed comfortable or confident that they could find space. Their bigger issue was, you know, can they expand their services. I mean we all know that they can't expand their services in the facility they're in but that was more the discussion. When we did talk about space, I would say that that wasn't as much of a concern to them as being able to supply more services.

And on that the lift for the community clinics at \$677,000 works out to a 4 per cent increase which again cannot be the total number because there are collective agreements that are still to be negotiated, and that will have an impact on their wage. Well it will be wages but on what their total number will be.

Ms. Atkinson: — So I know that there will be some resources and primary services that have not yet been allocated within your ministry. And so I'm wondering, given that the community clinic is interested in expanding services, does your ministry have some flexibility to allow for those expanded services if the space can be found?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The community clinic has kind of had a, I guess, a direction they wanted to go and more services that they wanted to supply. And they had kind of worked up a budget that they would like to see their budget increased by. As you know, the budgetary process has been complete. Our budget is set.

And is there discretionary spending? Not really, unless they fit under money that could be made available through primary health care teams, other programs like that. It wouldn't be necessarily, well here, you know, we have an extra \$1 million to cover the increase in staff that they may want to go, that they may want to increase their facility by, but there is other avenues such as primary health care teams that we could look at that may help cover off some of that.

Ms. Atkinson: — A couple of short snappers to end the evening for myself. First question, do you have any intention or is it in your thinking that community clinics would come under the auspices of the Saskatoon Regional Health Authority or any other health authorities?

This is one you should answer yourself.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — But no, and I was, I was certainly . . . I just, it's always good to hear all the information before one answers. Is that, you know, when I met with the community clinic and I met with the regional health authority and as they were talking both quite openly about not having duplication of services and not, you know, cultivating the same field kind of thing that, you know, they need to work together and find areas that they can certainly supply services each in that area. There's certainly a large demand.

I've met with the Regina Community Clinic a number of times before November 7. So I understand the services that community clinics provide. I also understand the role that regional health authorities play. I think they both have a role to play. You know, is there any plans through the ministry to have them absorbed? I wouldn't think so and I don't believe so, as long as they're working well as partners in conjunction with each other as opposed to isolation.

Ms. Atkinson: — Right. Well I can tell you, Minister, that there have been several occasions where there have been plans to roll the community clinics under the regional health authorities and I think it's fair to say that the previous government wasn't interested in having that happen. So I'm pleased to see that this is something that's on your radar screen.

My last question has to do with the community clinic. If the community clinic were to move out of its space, purchase another building, would you have any difficulty with that?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — You know, I don't see that there'd be any problem with that. You know, they have some reserves. They get their base budget funding from the ministry. And I don't see that there would be any problem. I mean if it was for us to have to buy the building and fund a bunch, you know, there'd be some issues there but I mean if they can do it within their own means I think it would make sense.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Broten.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I have a few questions, not necessarily connected to one another but sort of coming at a few different things.

The first one. In the news not too long ago there was a story about some medical files out on a curb so to speak, files that perhaps should have been taken better care of. And it's raised the issue of the need for long-term file storage, not a new issue but a need for physicians that have a responsibility to take care of the files.

I realize there is the recent signing of the agreement to facilitate the adoption of electronic medical records so over time, hopefully as more physicians go to EMRs [electronic medical records], that that might prevent some of the problems with boxes of files lying around. But at a time when the physician population is aging, people are winding down practices, there are perhaps a lot of files that need to be taken care of properly, is the ministry considering any sort of co-funding with physicians that might help ensure that all the regulations around the safe storage of files are adhered to?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes, you know, it's an issue that when it hits the media, everybody kind of perks their head up because it should never happen, but it does happen. I mean, there's doctors that retire and sometimes don't always look after their records or for whatever reason their records are orphaned. And it is the physician's responsibility, and it's up to the College of Physicians and Surgeons to make sure those physicians know and follow their responsibilities.

There has been a request from the College of Physicians and Surgeons to set up a central repository through the ministry that would collect all these records, and that's a possibility. There's some funding issues there. It does take away, I mean, not that this is a reason not to do it, but the flip side is that it's the responsibility of the physician and now we're taking over that responsibility as a government to properly, not dispose but to look after those files when that is the responsibility of the physician.

And when you think of the number of physicians in the province that have retired or moved out or whatever, and they looked after their files appropriately, and there's a few that haven't, you know it begs the question, should we set up a repository in the province? But that is certainly one of the main reasons, and you touched on it, with going to electronic records. Hopefully that, you know, we don't have the issue of space and orphaned files left in a warehouse somewhere.

Mr. Broten: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — So I guess in short, we know that the proposal, a proposal has been put forward for a while through the College of Physicians and Surgeons. I know we'll look at it and certainly talk more with the college to see whether this is the direction we want to go for sure because it does have a flip side.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. Different topic, on the topic of private-public partnerships, I'm wondering what thoughts or what discussions are occurring in the ministry now. Is this something, P3s [public-private partnership], is this something the ministry is exploring? In what areas and who are you talking to about this? If you are.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — That is certainly, you know, a P3 is certainly something that you hear more about all the time and we certainly heard it here in the province. I think right now because it's in the initial stages, it's more an issue of Finance, you know, what they're looking at. It's not necessarily . . . Health, I wouldn't say is looking at it right now. Or it could be Education, could be Highways. Right now it's still at the upper level, if I could use that term, of Finance as to whether it makes sense, whether it's possible. Because there are, you know, as with everything, some pros and some cons and so I think Finance is taking the initial look into it as to see whether it would fit in the province, whether it would be something that we need to then move down into the various ministries to further explore. But that's where it would be at right now.

Mr. Broten: — So within the Ministry of Health as these discussions occur at the high level, looking at models and whether or not there is a case or an appetite for it, within Health still at the high level, have regional health authorities been

given the go-ahead to start drafting ideas or proposals or entering into preliminary conversations with the private sector?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — No.

Mr. Broten: — Okay, thanks. Another item that has been discussed and brought forward by your party is the patient-first review. And I believe it was . . . Was it 1.5 earmarked for that initiative?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — No, that was for that initiative as well as patient exit surveys and a few things like that. But that is a number to encompass I think there is about three different things in that area.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. Could you please provide us with an update on the progress of the patient-first review? What plans are in place? How that is coming along? I think some of the stakeholders in the health sector are wondering what sort of role they might play and what this might look like and the timelines.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — We're working on it. This issue is taking longer than probably what I thought it would take or what I hoped it would take, but we're working on it. We're scoping out kind of the terms of reference.

What I do know is that you're right — stakeholders are interested and they'll be engaged. Absolutely they will be. I know we've heard from a few. For example, the SMA [Saskatchewan Medical Association] is certainly very aware and forwarded some ideas along that line.

And yes, when we do this, when we, you know, finally hit the ground running with this review, there'll certainly be lots of consultation with all the, with as many health providers and others as we possibly can be. But it kind of, you know, we're looking at kind of obviously scoping it, but kind of the four or five areas that it needs to look at is, you know, around accountability, around sustainability, some issues around transparency, efficiencies. You know, so it's like everything else — it can get pretty darn wide and pretty big. But we're working on that process right now as to, you know, trying to keep it focused in certain areas. But certainly I have in my mind that there will be broad consultation.

Mr. Broten: — So I can appreciate you're hammering out the details and you don't exactly know what it will look like, but in broad strokes can you just give me a basic idea what this patient-first review will look like and maybe a ballpark figure as to when it might begin officially?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — You know, it follows along, I guess, with the platform and certainly that was looked at. And I talked about some of the, you know, the principles of efficiency and sustainability — making sure that the system is sustainable into the future. A timeline would be, I think, you know, we'll probably be done the scoping process in the next month and a half — month to month and a half — and then I need to have a look at it and see if it's what we want to have moving forward.

I guess my thought has been on this, since I was named the minister, that I first thought it would be up and running much quicker. But then I've kind of said to myself, why don't we

make, you know, we cover as much as we can? We're not going to be doing another review for quite a while and, you know, we talked a lot about finding efficiencies. We talked a lot about having the patient-first centred as opposed to maybe the provider-centred first, and so we want to make sure we have the right crack at it.

I know that talking to other health regions that have had people come in and do kind of evaluations, I know Deloitte has been through a number of health regions. You know, you can find out some pretty good information, but we want to make sure that we've got it scoped properly before we just say that, oh we've done it.

Mr. Broten: — So will one person be designated as the head of this review? Will you be designating someone to head up this review and provide you with a report? Is that what it will look like at the end of the day?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — There are options, and that's part of it. I mean it could be one person leading the charge; it could be a three-person committee leading the charge to look at it. We haven't, I don't think we've come to a final decision on that. I've had people suggest both to me, that you need one person leading it or others by committee, has suggested by committee.

You know, I mean, if you look at, for example, the Vicq commission, I guess it was really one person. But he had, you know, there was two or three with him. Also when you look at what happened with school divisions, it was three people that were looking at that. So it varies model to model. And we haven't set our hats or haven't decided on one specific model. But it's safe to say that the work is being done and we're getting closer to that.

Mr. Broten: — So do you foresee a public tour around the province or do you foresee individual meetings with stakeholders? And if there is an interest group, a stakeholder group out there that wants to have a role in this patient-first review, is there a process that they can follow to be included?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I would expect we'd see probably all of the above. You know, I don't see why we would be limiting or eliminating anybody. Certainly not now, we haven't. I don't know why we would into the future. But that work is being done.

You know, I can imagine, you know, I can envision some pretty broad public consultation, whether that's, you know, a public forum. I know that individual stakeholders — whether it's the SMA or the SRNA [Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association] or any of those — will want to probably have a direct opportunity to present to, whether it's a single person leading it or by committee. I'm sure they'll all . . . And, you know, I think all their input will be very valuable.

Mr. Broten: — Will members of the public be able to have their say?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes, I can't see why not. As I said, you know, we haven't set up is it, you know, is it public meetings, you know, right now. And I've had the opportunity to attend a couple . . . This was not in the last five months, but

prior. RHAs have their meetings open to the public, you know, so there's certainly avenues for public to input.

I will say that the few that I was at, I was surprised at how few public showed up to these. But I guess it usually takes a burning issue in a community — or a community being large like Regina or a smaller community — that creates interest. And I guess if none of the public are showing up, maybe those issues aren't quite as burning.

Mr. Broten: — Sure. Well tied into the patient-first review, services are delivered to patients through the RHA structure. Are you satisfied with the RHA structure, or is this an area where you see changes occurring over the coming years?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — You know, we don't have any immediate plans to change the RHAs. Maybe if, you know, after the patient-first review comes back and, you know, they talk about whether there does need to be some structural change, we can have a look at that.

I do know that — and not that this is, you know, this is not a warning to any of the RHAs at all — but every time I look at the map and I see, you know, the different jets and extensions of how the RHAs are formed, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense as far as transportation patterns. I mean we know how we've got to the RHA map that we're in right now. And that was kind of a long process and it didn't necessarily go on the lines of what made sense at the time. I mean that's what the RHAs are. And that's perfectly fine.

It's just that's maybe something that a review will certainly, certainly look at. But you know, when Saskatoon Health Region comes down to Regina Beach and Regina goes up way past Raymore or whatever, there's some really kind of interesting lines that I think if anybody was to try and rationalize why the lines are the way they are, they'd have a hard time because they don't have the community history that was there when regions were first kind of drawn up.

I'm not saying that's what the patient-first review will change that. I'm just kind of musing out loud, when you look at the map there are some, you know, oddities to it. That doesn't mean that we need to change the number of RHAs or anything else. It's just a comment that certainly the patient-first review will maybe come back and say we should even just change the way the borders look for better flow. Yes, just for better flow.

Mr. Broten: — So it's a wait and see right now? Okay.

It's my understanding there were recent changes by the College of Physicians and Surgeons determining where an international medical graduate, someone on a temporary licence, can practise in the province in rural areas. The idea that until they pass the CAPE [clinicians' assessment and professional enhancement] exam process and can progress to a higher level of licensure, they are required to practise in a community with I think it's at least three other physicians in a group practice — not in a solo practice and not even with one other physician.

Given that in many parts of the province, especially in rural areas, there's been a traditional reliance on international medical graduates — thinking of communities like Big River or

Arcola or Spiritwood, some of the spots where it's been hard to keep international medical graduates and keep physicians in those communities. Or I should say communities where it's been difficult to recruit Canadian-trained physicians to those communities.

With these new restrictions which I think most people involved in the process would agree that it's the right thing to do for patient care but it does present challenges for the recruitment of physicians to those communities, what steps is the ministry taking to ensure that those types of communities that have often had a solo or a two-practice IMG [international medical graduate] complement in their community, what steps are being taken to ensure that coverage will be, there'll be physicians in those communities?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — First of all, yes, you're right as far as a proposed amendment by the College of Physicians and Surgeons — would it be an amendment, a regulation? — a bylaw amendment by the College of Physicians and Surgeons to change when a medical grad, a foreign medical grad comes into Saskatchewan, where they can practise. And you're right. Some proposals are three. Does that mean three plus the medical grad or is it two plus the medical grad? That hasn't been passed, so the changes haven't been put into place.

The college of physicians is certainly talking about it. Again there's more consultation that needs to be done. We don't always, haven't always done the best job as far as retaining. We recruit as we said, but we don't always, we're not always able to keep them in some of the communities. And sometimes that's, you know, maybe it would help if they practised in a three- or four-person practice before they moved on, but there's questions as to whether they move on.

But you asked the bigger question is, how do we deal with this? And unfortunately the solution isn't overnight, but it's increasing the number of training seats we have in Saskatchewan. You know, we've been at 60 for an awful long time, and that just hasn't been enough, and we know it hasn't been enough for a long time. Yes, under the previous government we started to move in that direction. We've committed to 100 and by the end of our four years, and that has to happen.

I had the opportunity just this past week on Friday, I believe, spending some time at the university talking to a number of third and fourth year grads just to see what their plans are, what it would take to keep them here. I was surprised that most of them are going to be settling here, but there are some issues that we need to look at and deal with. But you know, if we don't become closer and I'm not . . . The ideal would be self-sufficiency, that we'll train as many Saskatchewan people as there are doctors retiring, you know, and maybe even more because we have to top our numbers up. But until we can do a better job within our own province, training our own people and retaining our own people, we're going to continue to have some issues with turnover in communities.

And certainly I know members around this table are very familiar with the struggle of recruiting into rural communities. And I don't know how familiar you are with it, but I know communities are, you know, almost at times going against

communities because they need to recruit doctors in to keep their facilities open. It's kind of, you know, some dire straits in some communities.

And until we start training more of our own — yes we can do a better job in I think retaining, we've done a fairly good job in recruiting; we can still work on that, do a better job on retaining — but more importantly training our own people to become closer to being self-sufficient.

Mr. Broten: — How many physicians are currently licensed in the province and practising?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — 1,829 licensed physicians. That's family practitioners and specialists. In rural Saskatchewan — and we could probably get into what is the break of the rural physician as opposed to urban — but it's 231 rural physicians.

Mr. Broten: — So you had mentioned earlier — did I understand you correctly? — that you said that the goal of your ministry was to move to a state where we were self-sufficient in the production of physicians out of U of S [University of Saskatchewan]. And tied to that question is, what role do you see for international medical graduates in the, fitting into that mix?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Well I mean obviously foreign-trained grads have, you know, contributed immensely to our province and I don't think we'd ever, you know, ever . . . I can't forever see the day that we'd ever get away from that. They bring a lot of expertise into our province absolutely, but what I do know is that when we're only graduating 60 doctors from our College of Medicine, the smallest College of Medicine in Canada except for Newfoundland who are at 60, you know — Manitoba's been at 100 for a while; of course Alberta's way past that; we haven't been anywhere close — and that I think is reflective in the problems that we're seeing throughout our province and especially in a lot of the smaller communities.

You know, again when I talked to the third and fourth year grads, you know, I was surprised that some from small towns looking at staying in Saskatchewan, you know, some that were getting into family medicine certainly were, you know, very interested in working in smaller communities. They weren't all just talking about Regina and Saskatoon. There's potential, but what you have to start doing is training more of your own and at 60 we weren't anywhere close. You know, moving up to 80 and moving up to 100 is great.

The other area is residencies or postgrads, and we're increasing those numbers as well. Going to a 1.2 ratio is extremely important. It's not enough to train our Saskatchewan students and then have them leave to do their residency training somewhere else because we don't have enough capacity. And so when we're going to increase the number of training seats, we obviously have to increase the number of residencies, not on a 1:1 ratio, but on a 1.2 so we have some capacity to absorb some postgrads from other provinces because we've seen ours leave. We need to have that capacity.

And I think there is the capacity in the province. You know there is . . . You talk to communities, that it doesn't just have to be Regina and Saskatoon. I mean there's other communities

that are offering residency that we can work with to offer residency positions. And I think that only speaks well and will bode well for keeping physicians in rural Saskatchewan if they do some of their residencies in smaller communities, not just Saskatoon and Regina.

So I think it's a plan moving forward that I think, you know, unfortunately it doesn't fix it today or tomorrow or next week or in six months when communities are struggling, but it's a direction that this province has to go, and we're certainly glad to be able to do that.

Mr. Broten: — So you've touched on this, but the College of Medicine's distributed model of education, are you supportive of this model?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — And in what ways, or what assurances can you give to the college as to how you are supportive, and I guess, what money is tied to this support, this feeling of support?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I think I started, I kind of answered that question in my last ramble probably, is that, you know, it's hugely important because although we're short of doctors not just in rural Saskatchewan but also in urban settings, a lot of specialists we have vacancies for, and some will even argue that we don't have enough family practitioners for sure in urban . . . Where we really notice it is in rural communities when we start having to close hospitals because we don't have enough doctors, nurses in some cases, but doctors.

That's why it's so important to have a broader model, you know, such as the community of Moosomin that will accept postgrads or do a residency in that community. Swift Current does. You know, we need to spread that around the province. It's happening now. We see the need for it, and so by increasing the number of residency seats . . . You know, it's worked into our budget this year, and moving forward to get to the 120, you'll see those spread around the province. So that's the commitment that we've made.

Mr. Broten: — My last question has to do with something in my home constituency of Saskatoon Massey Place, and that's the expansion of the Oliver Lodge long-term care facility. And I was pleased to see funding allocated for this. Could the minister please confirm that — I'm looking on the budget summary document on page 67 — the funding that is budgeted for this, is this enough to . . .

First question, when will construction begin? Second question, the funding that's allocated, is this enough to carry the project through to completion? And the third question, does this level of funding satisfy the partners in the Saskatoon Health Region and the good people in Oliver Lodge long-term care facility?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The total approved amount for the project total is \$22.4 million, and we expect that it will go to tender this summer. And the money that is our responsibility through the ministry has been allocated in this year's budget and next year's.

Mr. Broten: — So construction might start in the fall?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes, I guess if . . . Yes, if all works out, it could be this fall.

Mr. Broten: — And to your knowledge Saskatoon Health Region and Oliver Lodge long-term care facility, this is enough funding to complete the project as it is designed?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Well as with every project that is of that magnitude there could be some variables as far as cost. Inflation is built into that at 22.4, but we also know that, you know, the cost of construction was at one point 5 per cent per month. Some people are saying it's as high as 2 per cent per month. So it's tough to, you know, when you're estimating the cost of a project and you're trying build that in, there is always going to be . . . there could be some fluctuation.

The one thing I do know that from all reports . . . And I think it's pretty evident in most jurisdictions when you see the growth that our province is experiencing now and will continue to experience into the future, long future, I believe — some will say it's unprecedented growth in our province over the last, you know, six months to a year — I can't see that subsiding. So, you know, there's huge pressures on construction, but that is the approved budget with inflation built in as best we know it.

So, you know, as far as I know, and maybe you've heard something different but I believe that the RHA and the people around Oliver Lodge are comfortable with the approved budget for this facility.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you for your answers. That's all I have right now.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to ask a few more questions. I know we're nearing the end of our time, and my colleagues have raised a number of the important questions over the last few hours, the last couple of days of questioning here. I just have a few areas that haven't been touched on yet that I think are important generally.

Actually the last exchange raised an issue that I wanted to just address a little bit further, and that has to do with the doctors in rural Saskatchewan. I was waiting for my colleague from Rosthern-Shellbrook to ask the question, but maybe I'll have to ask it for him. Former mayor of Spiritwood used to ask me, used to ask me a lot of questions about when was I going to get a doctor in Spiritwood for him.

I've been very supportive of the work of the Prince Albert Parkland Regional Health Authority and understanding the challenges that are faced in rural Saskatchewan. And I certainly understand the minister's argument about some things are going to take some time. Education is an important part of the go-forward strategy.

But the member opposite used to argue with me, this is an immediate need in Spiritwood. It can't wait seven years to graduate a doctor to come to Spiritwood. What are you saying to the people in Spiritwood today to give them some hope or confidence with regards to the future of physician services in the town of Spiritwood and the potential for opening the

hospital there in Spiritwood itself?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — I'll try and answer the question as best as I can. I will start by saying that the member from Shellbrook-Spiritwood's lobby hasn't ceased at all. It's just at a different level or a different venue, because I can tell the people from Spiritwood and Shellbrook that their member is a very strong lobbyist for his community and has raised the issue with me many, many times.

I've had the opportunity to tour that area. I had a great time with spending some time in Prince Albert, but certainly going out to Shellbrook, going up to Big River, have a pretty good understanding of that area — not as well as Mr. Allchurch, but have a pretty good understanding.

You know, the health authority and the communities are all working to try and attract doctors there. It's been difficult, as you know that it's been difficult. You know, there's money set aside for primary health care teams that can hopefully, you know, that we can hopefully get something like that moving in that area to utilize nurse practitioners more. It's not the whole answer. I'm not saying that's the answer, but it's part of the answer.

But you know, and I will say that, you know, the communities are working hard in that area too to recruit and hopefully work together to try and retain a couple more doctors. You can't keep a hospital open 24-7 with two doctors in the community. And so it's kind of a goal where we want to get to. We haven't been able to find that, we haven't been able to get to that point in the first five months of our mandate, but we'll continue to work on it with the assistance of the colleague from Shellbrook-Spiritwood.

Mr. Taylor: — But what the minister is saying is there hasn't been a new program. He continues to believe in the recruitment efforts of the regional health authority and the community, and he believes in the primary health teams, which is the nurse practitioner working with the physicians in the communities. Those things haven't changed since he's become minister.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — You know, I guess the question was, are you doing anything different than what has always been done? And this isn't the answer for the short term, but yes, we are going to be doing things differently. We're going to increase the number of Saskatchewan-trained graduates. We're going to increase the number of residencies that will help, hopefully in the future, hopefully in the future deal with some of the problems we're seeing in some of the smaller communities.

And I know that work has been done previous, I mean with the primary health care teams. There has always been . . . When you talk to some of the people in the area, there are some issues about how flexible these were. And I know work has been done. They're more flexible now than when they were first envisioned a number of years ago. And, you know, you're the one that can probably answer the question much better than I have. Could there be more flexibility in those primary health care teams? Maybe. I think there could be and that might help in the shorter term. You know the bylaw change that the member earlier talked about, will that help?

You know it kind of goes both ways, but what we need is these physicians to come in and pass their CAPE exam and then stay. It doesn't help to just give them a probation. They challenge the CAPE exam and then leave. So there are a number of those things that we need to look at. Hopefully retain more because . . . and you had mentioned it before; we don't retain as well as we should, and so there's things that we can look at as far as that.

There are issues, you know. I mean communities are working through some of the issues with the doctors. Every situation seems to be a little different. It proposes some different challenges, and we're working with those communities. But you know again, the long-term answer is to certainly have more Saskatchewan-trained grads.

Mr. Taylor: — Okay. Thank you very much for that answer. And while we're on the subject of policy and potential policy changes, last year sitting in different chairs, you were asking me a number of questions that related to out-of-country expense payments, the approval process for out-of-country expenses. And in fact you were quite critical of the way in which out-of-country approvals for expenses incurred outside of Canada were being managed by the then department, now the ministry.

I'm just wondering if in the last five months or six months, you have made any changes in policy about the way in which out-of-country approvals and the payment for expenses are managed within the ministry?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — In the short term of five months, has there been any policy changes? No. Do we look forward to recommendations coming forward as to what could happen, for example, through a patient-first review to make sure that, you know, if we have patients waiting for really some real long periods of time or need services done elsewhere, can we streamline that process? Can we make it more accessible for patients?

I think when the roles were reversed and I was asking a number of questions, it was probably around one particular situation that arose. And you know, maybe things that could be looked at from that perspective, from that example, as to what could have maybe been done better.

But I think, you know, the broad answer is to look at overall how we're supplying care for all of our population. And the ones that are waiting the longest, what can we do? You know, is there something we can do within our own system? Can we work closer with other jurisdictions including out of country? And that's something that we'll be looking at through the review.

Mr. Taylor: — You mention a specific case. And yes, your questions were primarily around a specific case. You in fact had thought the circumstances would warrant a payout. Have you had any discussions with the principals in that case? Have you talked about a settlement, a retroactive settlement in that particular case?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — We, I think it would be safe to say, we're reviewing it; we're looking at it. I haven't had any direct

contact with, you know, the complainant. I know that the Ombudsman was looking at that, that particular case. I don't know when his recommendations will be coming down.

But we're looking at it, and we're seeing what can be done. There were I guess . . . And it was what we committed to do, is to have another look at that and see, you know, whether government should have stepped up to the plate in that particular case. So we're certainly going through that process right now.

Mr. Taylor: — What value would you place on the Ombudsman's recommendation?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Well that's, you know, that's a bit of a hypothetical. We may make a decision before. We may make a decision after. I don't know. What we want to do is look at it from our own perspective first. And I would suspect that we'll probably have that done prior to the Ombudsman, but I don't know that for sure yet because, you know, I don't even know when he's going to be making his report. That isn't certainly going to be the yes, we're doing it because the Ombudsman said we had to, or whatever. He's just making recommendations. That may play a factor if we don't make a decision before that.

Mr. Taylor: — Okay. It comes to mind, certainly during the election campaign the principal in question here, the individual about whom we're referring, was featured prominently in Saskatchewan Party election ads. I'm just wondering if the discussions are related in any way to her participation in those advertisements.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — You know, first of all it won't have any bearing on our decision one way or the other. I mean we're looking at it for the value of the case, not whether she appeared in any commercial. That has no bearing on it whatsoever. I can guarantee you that.

But one thing I am interested in — because I was sitting here trying to think, oh I didn't know that — that you were able to pay as much attention to our political advertisements as you were because I didn't know that. I'd have to look at that. I didn't have any idea that that was the case.

Mr. Taylor: — I've been accused of being observant on more than one occasion.

On another matter, the minister and I and other MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] were in attendance at a very nice function put on by the Canadian Cancer Society here in this building just a couple weeks ago. One of the requests of the Canadian Cancer Society, one of the requests they made to you as the minister had to do with smoking cessation, tobacco reduction strategies, and specifically the sale of tobacco products in Saskatchewan on First Nations or within First Nations communities within First Nations jurisdiction. They brought forward some very interesting statistics about the sale of tobacco products from First Nations communities in other provinces compared to Saskatchewan. And they were asking for some very specific action on behalf of the Saskatchewan government.

I'm wondering if you have, since that meeting, given any thought to the request that they have made. And if so, have you given any thought to lobbying some of your cabinet colleagues — Minister of Finance, Minister of First Nations and Métis Relations — in this regard?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — First of all the question, and just kind of in a broader context, the whole issue around smoking and the reduction of tobacco use in our province is one that, you know, has been worked on for a number of years. We've made, I think, some pretty darn good strides.

It was an interesting meeting with the Canadian Cancer Society to say that we had made good strides; we're starting to fall behind again. Because it's kind of a moving target that you've got to keep up, and we really haven't done much recently. I think from that I do know that my colleague, the Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, is working through his ministry to look at perhaps expanding the areas where people can't smoke, you know, whether it's in the workplace, for example which that never really got picked up on when the legislation went through first. There's a number of issues around that. So you know, I would say that he is kind of leading the charge from that perspective.

Some of the other areas that were talked about — and it was really very informative — and you know, we've looked into it a little bit since, more through the Ministry of Finance because a lot of those were targeted towards Finance. I would agree that, yes they have a direct impact on health for sure. But when they were, the society was talking a little bit about slippage as far as tax dollars and that type of thing, I think the Department of Finance has certainly heard that and is looking at it.

When they talk about you know . . . There was a couple things, when they talked about the increase of cigarettes bought at First Nations outlets. And it was significant. I think it definitely has increased, absolutely. But what also has increased is the number of First Nations convenience stores. You know, maybe it wasn't as accessible. There wasn't as many stores available 5 or 8, 10 years ago.

But I just can think of . . . in the area that I represent and the number of First Nations convenience stores that have opened up and obviously have made tobacco purchasing much more accessible through that venue, that doesn't say that, prior to that, that there wasn't maybe as much tobacco bought. It's through the First Nation stores now, which is really reflective in there. And not to say that that's okay, but there becomes some jurisdictional issues too. But I think, you know, the ministry will be looking at it.

And I think it's probably time that we start looking at making some more moves in that area. As I said, we kind of were precedent setters for a little while, and now we've kind of lagged behind. It's maybe a chance for us to take another look at it and, you know, trying at the very least catch up to the pack and maybe set some new precedent because we all know that it has a huge impact on our health care system. And you know, we want to try and reduce costs. That's a great spot to start.

Mr. Taylor: — And not just the huge impact on the health care system, on human beings as well. And certainly as more and

more young First Nations people are picking up smoking, particularly young women in First Nations community. I think the numbers are rising as opposed to declining in Saskatchewan, compared to other provinces.

But just to clarify one thing that you said, the Department of Finance is looking at it. The Canadian Cancer Society was showing us examples of tax-paid stickers on cigarette packages and changing the number of cartons available to each First Nation purchasing within a period of time. Are those the things that the Department of Finance is looking at, or were you just being general in your comments?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — No, I don't think . . . I was being general. I don't know exactly the areas that they're looking at, but it was very interesting, again the demonstration of what is being done in other provinces as far as what is tax paid and tax exempt just through the packaging. Again I mean I'm not a smoker. I was never aware of that, and I don't know how many smokers would be unless they're from that province, but also the different methods, you know the different products that are being sold. You know I guess I didn't have any reason to have exposure to it. I don't know, really didn't know too much about it, but it was very interesting. But I can't tell you exactly what Finance is looking at particularly. I do know that when you start talking about taxes being lost, that always perks their ears up.

Mr. Taylor: — One last question, national pharmaceutical strategy, ministers from all provinces of all political stripes have been talking with the federal government about national pharmaceutical strategy. What is your take on the current status of those discussions and what role is Saskatchewan now playing on the national stage with regards to the national pharmaceutical strategy?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The national pharmaceutical strategy has been worked on, as you know, for a while. I don't think there's probably been as much progress as all the provinces would like to see, as you know that it hasn't been very well received by the federal government. They don't seem to be too anxious to move in that direction. Certainly provinces are, and some more anxious than others. I think the good news out of it is that, you know, the western pricing is up and is in the process, and that has some real potential, I believe, for savings.

The one thing I can say is that — and again it's been a short while, five to six months, that we have been in government — there was one federal-provincial-territorial meeting planned for the health ministers that was postponed or cancelled due to a number of conflicts for provincial ministers. So we haven't sat down as a group since we have been in government. I have had the opportunity of talking to a number of the provincial ministers — BC [British Columbia], Alberta, Prince Edward Island, a few others — and we've talked about different things. But there hasn't been a really, I don't think you could say there has been a concerted effort just simply because there hasn't been a gathering in the last five to six months.

Mr. Taylor: — Okay. I wasn't aware of that, but that's good. Thank you very much.

The Chair: — Ms. Junor.

Ms. Junor: — Yes, in the few minutes we have left I'm going to try one more time, because I know you tried to give me the answer the other day in the House, about during the CUPE strike, the number of patients per day that were turned away from different services, and you had the answer there and because of procedural things couldn't table it, but could you give it to us now? Patients per day, per service, specify the service — they were turned away from health care at RUH [Royal University Hospital]?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — You know, the question that you referred to — and there was procedural issues in the House that day — but the answer you asked for is the Royal University Hospital for each day, in other words day by day. We don't have that. The RHA doesn't have it.

I can tell you, by service, as to reductions in service and what type of services were reduced. For example, the majority of the clinical departments were unable to provide services such as booking patient appointments, basic reception, confirmation of appointments, pulling of charts for appointments, transcription of services, and non-emergent patient referrals. As job action continued, clinical departments were forced to reduce the number of clinics, because there was insufficient office staff to assist with the arrangements.

So it wasn't, what you would say is . . . Obviously because you would know who these, you know, the area that these people work in, it wasn't medical staff that were on strike; it was people that provide these services, that then we would see a reduction in a number of those services. So it isn't necessarily a patient.

You asked for each day. We don't have that, but we talk about whatever the services in the departments affected, and what were the services or departments that were not affected, and I didn't name those. I could name those. But these are the areas that were affected and some of them quite significantly.

Ms. Junor: — So to say that 400 patients a day were turned away from health care at RUH — there is no basis in fact for that statement.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The number that was used was a quote from the CEO, Maura Davies, that by the end of the strike, that was the impact. And I think she would have a pretty good grasp on that because, I mean, obviously it was the health district that she looks after.

You know we can talk about some of the services and the impact per service and the reduction of, you know, what capacity they were operating under because of the strike, and that extrapolated out — according the CEO of the health region — by the end of the strike, 400 people a day was her statement.

Ms. Junor: — So do you have what you would have tabled in the House the other day? Do you have that document?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Yes, I do.

Ms. Junor: — Would you table that with the committee?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Sure. We have no trouble tabling the

copy. It's just that I've written on it a little bit. We could provide a clean copy as soon as we possibly can.

Ms. Junor: — Sure. Thank you very much. My last line of questions would be on SHIN [Saskatchewan Health Information Network], the health information network. Given the importance that we've heard almost everywhere about electronic health records, I see in the budget book on page 90 that there is a decrease in funding to SHIN for this year. Could you explain that, please?

Mr. Hendricks: — At the end of last year SHIN had actually a surplus of \$24 million which was basically deferred revenue which was held over from projects that we didn't quite complete last year. As well, at the end of '07-08 we were able to advance some money to SHIN to address specific priorities, including some issues raised by the auditor but also to lever some additional Infoway dollars. So this year the total spent for SHIN, not just GRF [General Revenue Fund] revenue — there's \$19 million of GRF revenue — but \$39 million that's going to be spent by SHIN including Canada Health Infoway money and money from other sources. So we don't see any slowdown in SHIN's projected projects for this year.

Ms. Junor: — So given that this has been going on for a long time . . . I think I was on the initial board of SHIN when it started. That would be about '93 . . .

A Member: — That's not that long ago.

Ms. Junor: — Truly it isn't, I guess. So you're saying that the projects that they've undertaken, do we have an end target in sight for when we would have an electronic health record in all of our province as we envisioned it when we first started it?

Mr. Hendricks: — Well first of all I'll say the key elements of the electronic health record . . . we started with the pharmaceutical information system, and that is actually in place. We're going to be adding e-prescribing. We've introduced RIS/PACS [radiology information system/picture archiving and communication system] in Cypress this year. It was the first region to go film free, and Saskatoon will be following shortly. Our plan is to take it to Prairie North and Five Hills in this coming year. We're also planning on introducing or trying to expedite the introduction of the laboratory information repository so that family physicians have access to lab results.

There are many layers on this, and we're also in the process of actually building the overarching framework that will keep all this information together. We have said that we're confident that we'll have some workable form of an electronic health record by 2010-2011. I don't see that as changing. We're under a lot of pressure from the SMA because we have an electronic medical record agreement with them, and certainly they're pushing to have it done. But I think the reasons are clear why we as a province want to get this done as soon as possible.

Ms. Junor: — Keeping on with SHIN, there has been some criticism of it being in-house, being done in-house entirely. And has there been some thought to . . . I know I've had people approach me that said if we had given it to a provider who does this, they would've been able to do it already, and plus at a

reduced cost. I've also had people suggest that it should be going into IT [information technology]. It should be going in to the general IT department of government rather than stay as a stand-alone department, a stand-alone area within the ministry. Do you have comments on those two issues?

Mr. Hendricks: — First of all SHIN actually, most of its work is done by consultants; it's outsourced. And we've put our plan, you know, we've run it by Canada Health Infoway, and they've actually endorsed our plan and approach and our pace at completing projects as being one of the best in Canada of all provinces, that the amount of money being spent in other provinces on HER [electronic health record] development compared to Saskatchewan is significantly greater if you look at it on a per capita basis. So I think that if we look at it we're doing a pretty good job.

In terms of it going to the central government, Information Technology Office, that's not really within their purview. In fact SHIN, HISC [health information solutions centre] is a much bigger operation. It supports 22,000 users. Its budget is larger. It's a much bigger operation than the ITO [Information Technology Office].

Ms. Junor: — I know that there was some discussion at one point of having SHIN move out into its own building and, you know, almost becoming a different entity, which I think was a bit worrisome that it would get kind of away on us. So I'm hoping that it continues to stay focused and not sort of make another little kingdom in the health department.

I think it needs to keep focused on getting us our electronic health record because I still have experiences in the health system with my children and grandchildren where the communication is really poor. And you think in this day and age, why can't you have your X-rays beamed from Regina to Saskatoon? Why do you have to get them done again? That's still happening. And I think that we need to . . . I hope we can move fairly quickly because I know '93 doesn't sound like a long time ago, but it is taking a fairly long time to do this.

I think, Mr. Chair, I have a couple of other questions. One is about . . . I said that was my last one, but it's not twenty to yet, so I have one more. The health ombudsman that was talked about in the Sask Party platform, could you give us some idea of what your plans are for that, your thoughts are, targets, progress?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — The Office of the Ombudsman and the health ombudsman that we talked about, we've looked at, you know . . . There's a couple of different examples and variations that that office or that role could take. We don't want to create a whole other office, per se. We think that we can probably work within the Office of the Ombudsman but have a health ombudsman.

But we're working with the Ministry of Justice on that right now because they have the legislation, I guess, around the Ombudsman's office that, you know . . . We're not sure how that's all going to work together, whether we have to reopen the legislation and create a specific piece of legislation to house a health ombudsman or whether we can have a separate . . . or not separate but a person that looks after health cases within the

Office of the Ombudsman, that just specifically deals with health cases.

When we talk to the present Ombudsman, he feels he can certainly have the space and absorb that, especially when . . . He talks about, you know, dealing with a number of health cases right now, but he doesn't have any researchers, more or less, or any person specifically in charge of that.

And that's certainly maybe a direction that we could go, that it would be a person specifically that would look after health cases within the Ombudsman's office, or a health ombudsman working within the office of the current Ombudsman. But we're dealing with the Ministry of Justice right now to see how that can work most effectively and efficiently without starting a whole other infrastructure.

Ms. Junor: — Would you envision that ombudsman would be reporting to the Provincial Ombudsman?

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — That's the way, if the model the way we kind of have it in our minds right now moves ahead. And you know, that's the decision that we make, then yes, they would report to the Provincial Ombudsman. But he would have, you know, he would just look into health cases as opposed to right now, according to the Ombudsman; he doesn't have anybody that's specifically in health, but we would certainly move in that direction.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. I'd like to thank the minister and his officials for five hours of Health estimates. I appreciate the answers, and I look forward to some of the information that you've promised that we weren't able to get tonight — in particular the Paclitaxel question that I started off with. And I do appreciate all the details, and so do my colleagues, and the time that's been spent here. So thank you very much.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you very much for the questions. And the range of questions sometimes when you say you're going to sit for three hours and answer questions or, I remember from being on the other side, have to pose questions for three hours, it was a little intimidating.

But I also want to thank all the officials that are surrounding me here today. I always knew that I was always envious when I sat on the other side to have all that expertise behind the minister then. It was intimidating, but it's sure nice to have them behind me now.

So I want to thank them for all the help that they have provided especially tonight, but even more importantly over the last five months.

The Chair: — Committee members, we will take a short recess to facilitate the change in ministers and officials.

When we resume, we will deal with the last item on our rather lengthy agenda today, that being Bill 35, The Graduate Retention Program Act. So this committee stands recessed . . . or 34, sorry, Bill 34, sorry.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

Bill No. 34 — The Graduate Retention Program Act

Clause 1

The Chair: — I'll call the committee back to order. I should correct a statement I made prior to recess. It is Bill 34, The Graduate Retention Program Act. We have with us Minister Norris, the minister responsible. And he has some officials with him and I would invite the minister at this time to introduce his officials, and if he has a few opening remarks with regards to Bill 34 that he could go ahead and make his statement after he's introduced his officials.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Great, thanks. Mr. Chair, and committee members, I'm delighted to be here this evening. Wynne Young is our deputy minister. Raman Visvanathan, the acting assistant deputy minister, with me as well. Brady Salloum, executive director, student financial services is here. And Erin Brady, the director of strategic initiatives within the student financial services arm is here with us as well.

Thanks very much for the opportunity to join you this evening. As everyone knows, Saskatchewan is thriving. Opportunities for graduates have never been brighter. Obviously we need to make sure that we're retaining our youth. The people of our province know instinctively that the youth of this province are vital to our economic future and the strength and vitality of our communities.

Bill 34, The Graduate Retention Program Act, is the most aggressive youth retention program in Canada. We promised it in the 2007 election campaign. We announced it in our '08-09 provincial budget and now we're delivering on this promise.

As we know, attracting and retaining young people is critical to the long-term growth and prosperity of Saskatchewan. From across Saskatchewan and around Canada and well beyond, we want young people to participate in and succeed across our post-secondary education and skills training system.

This initiative, the graduate retention program, is seen as being instrumental in helping to encourage students not simply to complete their programs and to graduate, but to ensure that they stay and thrive here in Saskatchewan.

This program provides a financial incentive for graduates to stay and work in the province once their post-secondary education or advanced skills training is complete, and importantly, it will help to support the efforts of our post-secondary institutions as they work to recruit students from both within and outside of the province. This piece is increasingly important as we've seen recently that both the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan are focusing increased attention on recruiting more initiatives, recruiting more students through various initiatives across Canada and around the world.

The program offers seven years of rewards, seven years of tax rebates, for actual tuition paid. I'm confident, Mr. Chair, that after seven years of working in Saskatchewan, these young people will opt to ensure that they continue with their homes and their families and their friends right here in Saskatchewan. Their commitment to Saskatchewan will likely be reflected in

their lives and reinforced by their successes.

Mr. Chair, diversity is our strength. It is the basis for securing our future. It is the strength of our communities. We have success stories, skilled immigrants filling and finding jobs, creating opportunities in communities as they arrive in our province. Many of these and other newcomers arrive with families, with children in school, children who soon will be selecting their own post-secondary path.

As well and increasingly importantly, what we see is more opportunities for First Nation and Métis peoples right across the province as they engage in various educational institutions, whether it's SIIT, First Nations University, SIAST, the Dumont Institute, University of Saskatchewan, the University of Regina, or others.

As shown in research conducted by Professor Eric Howe of the University of Saskatchewan's department of economics, an average Aboriginal — that is First Nation or Métis — woman who does not obtain her high school diploma could expect to have a lifetime earnings of less than \$100,000. With a high school diploma, that number increases to approximately \$300,000. If she attends but does not necessarily complete university, she can expect to have an earnings of over \$1.2 million in her lifetime. Similarly Professor Howe's paper, *Education and Lifetime Income For Aboriginal People in Saskatchewan* shows that a First Nation or Métis male will add \$1 million on average to his lifetime earnings by finishing university compared with not completing high school.

Professor Howe has made clear within his paper that the way forward within Saskatchewan is to ensure that we're investing in Saskatchewan, that we're investing in our young people, that we're investing in education.

At present there are thousands of training and education opportunities in Saskatchewan. The recent number I've seen is 67,000. We have funded our post-secondary institutions with \$564 million this year, an overall budget increase of 11 per cent. This delivers on the government's commitment — our commitment — to provide a base for learners to get the skills and knowledge they need to fully participate in the economy. The goal here is to ensure that as many people as possible in Saskatchewan are able to meet their full potential so that our province can meet its full potential.

It also provides, that is, through our budget for the graduate retention program, a major incentive to keep our skilled young people right here where they belong — at home. Under this program the provincial government will rebate the actual tuition individuals paid, up to certain maximums. This program is for journeypersons, certificate, diploma, and three- and four-year undergraduates who have graduated from Saskatchewan's post-secondary institutions from 2006 onward.

It also covers graduates from out-of-province health education programs where Saskatchewan purchases seats. These include optometry, the University of Waterloo; occupational therapy at the University of Alberta; orthotics and as well — what's that? — prosthetics, there we are, prosthetics, at British Columbia Institute of Technology; denturists at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology; nuclear medicine at the Southern

Alberta Institute of Technology; respiratory therapists at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology; sonography at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology; and MRI [magnetic resonance imaging] training at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology.

The government has also announced its intention to develop an expanded eligibility list that will focus on graduates with credentials that align with the province's labour market demands. The expanded list will provide Saskatchewan employers with a competitive advantage over other jurisdictions to recruit talent nationally to help fill this province's most pressing labour market shortages.

The graduate retention program provides a refundable income tax credit to rebate up to \$20,000 of tuition fees. The maximum tuition rebate per program is dependent on the program from which the student graduated.

Once fully implemented in the '09-10 tuition, '09-10 year, the tuition rebate maximum will be as follows. Graduates of one-year certificate and diploma programs and journeypersons will be eligible for tuition rebates of up to \$3,000. Graduates of two-year certificate and diploma programs will be eligible for tuition rebates to \$6,400. Graduates of three-year undergraduate university programs will be eligible for tuition rebates of up to \$15,000. Graduates of four-year undergraduate university programs will be eligible for tuition rebates up to \$20,000.

The new graduate retention program or GRP is available to new graduates as well as those who graduated in 2006 and 2007.

And at this point it may be appropriate just to add that we will be coming forward with a minor amendment, and that is just to take care of some housekeeping that is necessary as part of this transition and legacy piece. And we can talk about that in more detail as we go.

We anticipate that many post-secondary educational institutions in Saskatchewan will apply for the graduate retention program certificate on behalf of their graduates. Graduates who study at an educational institution which is not applying on their behalf can then apply to the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour to have the certificate issued. We estimate that approximately 9,000 graduates per year will receive the graduate retention program certificate.

Regarding its administration, graduates will be issued a certificate from the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour indicating the maximum rebate amount that can be claimed. Graduates will be required to attach this eligibility certificate and all applicable tuition receipts to their Saskatchewan income tax return. The Canada Revenue Agency will then use the tuition receipts and eligibility certificate to establish the graduate's total rebate entitlement.

Based on the entitlement amount, the Canada Revenue Agency will calculate the individual's rebate payment for each taxation year during the seven-year entitlement period. Tax refunds will be made each year and these will be provided as long as the graduate files a Saskatchewan income tax return for those years. The cost for '08-09, the program is expected to reimburse \$12 million in tuition costs to graduates.

Mr. Chair, this program encourages lifetime learning. In essence, a student can take advantage of the graduate retention program more than once, up to a maximum lifetime benefit of \$20,000.

We are determined to both increase the number of people in Saskatchewan and increase the education and skill level that the people of this province have. This is absolutely essential, Mr. Chair, as we look forward to competing much more successfully and with sustained growth in the global economy, in the national economy, and in our regional economy. The graduate retention program will attract more people to our fine post-secondary institutions and encourage them to stay in Saskatchewan to establish and succeed in their careers.

Many of our young people left Saskatchewan in the past decades. In fact, we know between 2001 and 2006, net loss of 35,000 people, out-migration from Saskatchewan — many of those young people. What we want to send is a strong message to ensure those people are welcome back in Saskatchewan, or over the decades, their children and grandchildren are welcome back to Saskatchewan. There are opportunities here — career opportunities and educational opportunities — that these people can now succeed in ensuring that our communities and our economy both are thriving.

This is a powerful recruiting tool for Saskatchewan employers. That is, as we begin to see how various employers are going to meet their talent challenge, we're working to ensure that Saskatchewan is positioned appropriately to meet its talent challenge. Mr. Chair, thank you for this opportunity to again appear before this committee, and I'm delighted to take any questions or answer any queries that may come along.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Broten.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. I have a few questions. I won't keep us here until dawn, but I would like to cover a little bit of ground. Before we get into some questions concerning the operation of this program and so on, just in your initial remarks you made the, restated the claim that this is the most aggressive in Canada. And I was wondering what other jurisdictions within Canada you've looked at.

I know in the Manitoba program, I believe a similar rebate program, has a \$25,000 amount that is rebatable. And I also know that, I believe, it's open to students from outside of the province if they attended a post-secondary institution that's recognized by Canada Revenue Agency. And perhaps you could just share a little bit of information on . . . I'm fine with you making that claim. I'm just curious what areas have you looked at, or how you can back it up, substantiate it.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Certainly. Happy to do that. We'll walk through this. We'll give you a snapshot of Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia as three representatives.

What we see here, if you want to go to Manitoba, they're looking to . . . Their start date is January 1, 2007; ours goes back January 1, 2006. So we see it's more inclusive. From here we see income tax rebate of 60 per cent of eligible tuition fees paid after January 1, 2004 to a lifetime maximum. So what we see there is a 60 per cent range — that's in Manitoba. Cash

rebate of up to 50 per cent of tuition fees out of New Brunswick; \$1,000 reduction in Nova Scotia personal income tax in 2006 and then 2,000 as it moves into '08. Ours, what we have is \$20,000 tax rebate. From there what we see is — I'll get Raman to give me a hand here — the Manitoba income tax payable 10 per cent of eligible tuition fees. And is that a maximum?

Mr. Visvanathan: — Yes, they get the lesser of that in any given year, what they paid. So in Manitoba the amount claimed by the individual is the lesser of a number of amounts. It's a non-refundable income tax credit so they would only receive the benefit to the extent that they had tax payable, so it's the lesser of the amount of tax payable or 10 per cent of the eligible tuition fees or \$2,500. So in order to claim the maximum amount at \$25,000, they would claim that back over a 10-year period. And again the amount of tuition refund is 60 per cent versus the 100 per cent up to the thresholds in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — From there we see the lesser of \$2,000 or 50 per cent of eligible tuition out of New Brunswick. In Nova Scotia we see a flat \$2,000 back. Within the Saskatchewan model what we see is for the first four years, 10 per cent eligibility. Then that goes to 20 per cent for the subsequent three years. That's how we're able to take our lump sum.

Again maximum financial gain to the graduate, the lesser of either \$25,000 or 60 per cent of eligible tuition in Manitoba; within New Brunswick it's 50 per cent of eligible tuition fees up to a maximum of 10,000; again the flat rate in Nova Scotia of 2,000; in Saskatchewan that's up to 20,000.

And what's significant in Saskatchewan is to help encourage lifelong learning, so if an individual, let's say, goes into a two-year program, goes through that program and graduates, and they say actually they want to continue on, they can go back into up to a maximum of \$20,000 over the lifetime. So what we've done is actually tried to build in lifelong learning right within the Saskatchewan model.

And then on a carry-forward basis there are a few different pieces across there, but what we see in Saskatchewan, this really isn't applicable as it's refundable income tax rebate. And what we see again is there's two years in Nova Scotia, lifetime in New Brunswick, and 20 years over in Manitoba.

So what we've been able to do, I think, what we can summarize here is we're able to achieve very, very competitive rates with one of the fastest turnarounds in Canada. And what we see here is 100 per cent, so it's based on that, that we're able to make that claim and live up to the promise of the most aggressive initiative in Canada.

Mr. Broten: — And for eligibility, is that the same across the board?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — There's variations across the board on that one.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. That's another factor too. In the Saskatchewan program, why was seven years chosen for the rebate period?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The piece here really relates to the establishment of either building on ties that pre-exist or for those newcomers that come into Saskatchewan, go through our post-secondary institutions, and then put down roots here, and it was felt that seven years is an appropriate period of time for pretty significant roots to be built up, whether that's through friends, family, or commitment to career.

Mr. Broten: — I had a chance to read the amendment that was provided this afternoon, and in your opening remarks you referred to it as a housekeeping piece?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — In your own words for the committee, could you please describe what this amendment accomplishes?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, you bet. The piece here is that as we were going through due diligence, we noticed that there had been an oversight, and I'll just refer to them as some different programs. The first initiative was between 2000 and 2006, and there's an acronym that we can use on that one. That was program number one. The second program, a graduate exemption that the previous government brought forward — both of which the previous government brought forward — that began, if I'm not mistaken, January 1, 2007. Then as we were shifting, what we saw was that there had been an inadvertent error or oversight going back to that transition from program one to program two. We were able to catch that.

The oversight is significant in the sense that there was some question regarding the authority to go back and honour the certificates going back to 2000. And so what this does is just quite simply just turn and reinforce or remove any outstanding questions that existed regarding the legal authority on those earlier certificates. So it's simply housekeeping. It was a matter of offering some clarification on this.

Mr. Broten: — It's my understanding that the program here in Bill 34 will be introduced gradually over the coming years. What is the rationale for doing this in that manner?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — As far as the phase-in?

Mr. Broten: — Yes.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Okay. We'll walk through this. Actually I'll ask Raman to actually walk through this. The key here is that we'd also made promises to honour the existing program . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . That's right — the '06-07 graduates. So as that's being drawn down, this other program is being ramped up. So you can see these, if you want, the two programs, they're crossing and we just wanted to make sure that that was a smooth transition. Raman, why don't I get you to go through in some detail what that thing looks like.

Mr. Visvanathan: — Sure, thank you, Minister. So just on the graduate tax exemption program that was brought in last year, graduates from 2006 and 2007 year will get one certificate of \$10,000 and they can claim that on their 2007 tax year — the year just past. For the new program, graduate retention program, there is some transitional provisions for — and there are four different categories of programs — one-year certificate,

two-year program, certificate or diploma, three-year undergraduate, and four-year undergraduate programs.

For students graduating in the 2006 and 2007 year, the benefit for the one-year program is 3,000; for the two-year program or equivalent is up to — and in all cases, it's up to the maximum because it's actually based on the amount of tuition paid — up to 3,200; for three-year undergraduates it's 5,000; and four-year undergraduates, 5,000.

For the current year, 2008, one-year programs will have a maximum of up to 3,000 — sorry, that's certificate and journeypersons, I should have added — 3,000 for 2008; for two-year programs, 6,400; for three-year undergraduate degree programs, \$10,000; same amount for four-year undergraduate programs, \$10,000.

In 2009, the one-year certificate and journeypersons is 3,000; for two-year programs, 6,400; for three-year undergraduate degree programs, 15,000; four-year undergraduate degree programs is 15,000 as well.

In 2010 the maximum benefits will be available to graduates: 3,000 for the one-year programs; 6,400 for the two-year programs; 15,000 for the three-year programs; and \$20,000 for the four-year program, undergraduate program.

Mr. Broten: — So I understand the gradual implementation. What is the rationale behind the decision, say, for 2008 grads not allowing . . . Why are they eligible for, say, 10,000 at the end of the day while a grad in 2010 is eligible for 20,000?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — It's just consistent with that notion of a phase-in. Essentially from where we are today, on a go-forward basis it's a two-year phase-in for the degree programs. The one-year and two-year programs are essentially off and running. By next year I think the third-year program is up and operational, and then from there it's just the fourth-year program that phases in. And especially for the four-year program, that's consistent with this transition as we're dealing with four-year cycles. So two years from now we'll be up and operational at full capacity on that.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. So say there's two siblings in a family, and they start . . . John and Jim, they're both doing a four-year undergraduate degree. One starts a year before the other one, so the one finishes a year before the other one. At the end of the day, say, if one graduated 2010 and one graduated in 2009, even though they both, each of them paying tuition for four years over that period of time, one would be eligible for \$20,000 to be rebated, and one would be eligible for 15,000 rebated.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, the one sibling would maximize that upon graduation. The other would have 5,000 left to maximize over the course of, in this case, his lifelong learning initiatives.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. So that difference between John and Jim . . . Or I guess the reason that you're staggering the rollout is that basically due to the financial resources that are available to you through the budget process, you're ramping it up over a number of years as you are able to receive more funding through the budget to fully deliver it.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. What we've seen is as we're transitioning out of the tax exemption program into this one, there's a phase-in and certainly prudence, fiscal prudence that people of Saskatchewan have come to expect. That's a feature, sure.

Mr. Broten: — With the economy doing well and the surplus growing, is there a possibility that your ministry might fast-track the implementation as more funds become available so that John and Jim could receive the same amount when they finish their four-year degree?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, we're pretty satisfied with the rollout as it occurs. You know, I think one of the key elements here is when it comes to the Saskatchewan financial framework it's important to recognize that, you know, there's quite a bit of work left to be done as far as fiscal prudence and debt repayment. And so life is not just simply about the expenditure side, though that certainly is a key element of making investments, but also making sure that we're chipping away at that debt.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. In your opening remarks you spoke about how a certificate will be issued to the student or the graduate once he or she is eligible. I think it's section 3(1) where it states that the applicant can request to the minister to be eligible for the program.

So just a process question. Most students that are attending post-secondary institutions in Saskatchewan, are these certificates automatically mailed to them through their post-secondary institution? Will that be an automatic process?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Again we anticipate that, as it's been done in the past, most of the institutions will do this automatically. It'll be an internal process for the students and it'll be a matter of course. What we've done is simply said in case there are any hiccups regarding the institutions, the students can have direct access themselves.

Mr. Broten: — Has it been the norm with the grad tax exemption program, the certificates that are issued, are most institutions automatically doing this? Do you foresee this to be a problem or will it be pretty standard?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Most institutions do this and we don't envision any problems. Just to elaborate a little bit further, what we envision is a check-off system; that is as the students are graduating they just check the box and the institution then acts on their behalf.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. In our last committee, or the last time we spoke about this, it was some time ago — 5 and 6 have been consuming the activity of this committee for a while. It was back on April 10 in the Human Services Committee in this room. We talked about the list of the out-of-province programs that would be eligible. And on the website as of today there were the eight that you listed there off the top.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — In that discussion, as indicated in *Hansard*, we had a fairly lengthy discussion about how the other

out-of-province individuals that would be eligible, how that process would be determined.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — And through that process, it was stated by your ministry that it would be done through the ones . . . There's the ones that are listed here. The additional spots that you guaranteed were the spots where Saskatchewan is purchasing training seats out of province in that program. And in those situations anyone who accesses that program would be eligible. That was my understanding.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — Is speech language pathology one of the . . . Do we purchase seats at U of A [University of Alberta] in speech language pathology?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No, we don't have seats purchased there.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. So the eight that are listed on the website, those are the standard . . . To date, those are the only ones that are firmed up.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. Also in that discussion we talked about the process that these additional people would be deemed eligible.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure.

Mr. Broten: — And I recall that there was a number of agencies or a number of players that were identified that would be involved in this process.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — One was Enterprise Saskatchewan. VPs of health regions was identified as another one. Educational institutions — universities, SIAST. Also the Labour Market Commission was identified as another individual that all this information would be gleaned from these people and come up with a list or recommendation, I assume.

And we talked about the timeline that this would occur, and it was a 30- to 60-day timeline.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — For the firming up of this list.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — That's right.

Mr. Broten: — So it's been 25 days or so.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — And could you please update the committee on what discussions have taken place with those groups that I identified and how that process is coming along? I guess I ask the question, as students are making plans for the fall, as

they're . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure. No, no it's . . .

Mr. Broten: — Planning their life. It would be handy for them to know if they're going to be eligible for this program at the end of the day.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. No, certainly we've made significant strides as far as methodology. We're just finalizing that stakeholder list. It's likely to be expanded. And we certainly have an aggressive timeline on this. And we anticipate by, certainly into June we'll have a pretty solid foundation of data from which to work from. So I think we're on track. We're on time. And it'll be rolling out here in the coming days.

Mr. Broten: — And so all that information . . . So you're thinking June 1, you'll have the list concrete?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No. I don't think it'll be June 1. It'll be in June.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. So April 10 — so two months from that date. Okay.

What about with that group of people that will be discussing and providing a recommendation to you? Time back to an earlier discussion we had in the afternoon about the role of Enterprise Saskatchewan. Are all of those groups that we listed, is their advice listened to equally or is there a first among equals in that group? My question is, does all the information from those other groups you listed — the VPs of the health regions, the Labour Market Commission, and so on — does all that information feed into Enterprise Saskatchewan or are all of those individuals providing a recommendation to you that you look at? How does that work, please?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. We'll obviously be working with Enterprise Saskatchewan, but we've identified an external consultant, very well known and respected across Saskatchewan, on this front. And you know, the clear instructions are that, you know, he's to go out and get input from these various organizations. We will weigh that input as, you know, we look at labour market pressures, and obviously we'll appreciate the feedback that we get.

It's actually quite straightforward. I'm impressed with, as I say, the pace and the progress that's being made so far. I think we're on track and anticipate being on time. And, you know, the weight that is given, the methodology is pretty clear. We're going out to speak to stakeholders across Saskatchewan to see what labour market pressures they face.

Mr. Broten: — So are you able to tell the committee who this consultant is?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, negotiations are under way right now, and I just, I don't think it would be prudent. Within some days I anticipate that it'll be public.

Mr. Broten: — So this individual obviously has not started working on this project. You're still contracting with that person or in the negotiations for a contract.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well the notion of work . . . I mean if you have a dialogue, and an entity or individual begins to frame how they may address a series of questions, some level of effort has been made. But as I've said, negotiations are under way and I anticipate they'll be concluded here shortly.

Mr. Broten: — So has someone started working on this file? Has someone been hired as a consultant? But I don't understand. If the person has begun working and begun developing his or her plan how they're going to do this and even had some initial discussions with people, are you suggesting that there's no contract yet in place to officially hire that person as the consultant?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I want to be clear. No external stakeholders have been contacted yet. What we've done is we've gone through an internal process, and we've had some dialogue with this individual. As I say, it'll be an individual that everyone certainly is, most people are attentive to as far as key elements of this kind of work in Saskatchewan. And that contract is being finalized, and then the work will be under way. But obviously some initial dialogue — I went to the specifics of your question — some initial conversation with the individual have occurred. Yes.

Mr. Broten: — Yes, well fair enough. That only makes sense that you would describe the task at hand before you hired the person. Just I thought there was some initial consultations going on with stakeholders.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No. It will be systematic. It will be done pretty thoroughly.

Mr. Broten: — So is Enterprise Saskatchewan one of the groups that consultant will consult to or with or does the consultant report to Enterprise Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. No, this comes right back into our area of responsibility. We're the lead ministry regarding the graduate retention program. What we've done is we've said obviously we're going to move forward. This initiative is meant to help attract and retain our young people in Saskatchewan. This program, if you want add-on, the platform-plus component is that we're also going to use it to help address some of our immediate labour market needs. So no, this is the leadership under Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Mr. Broten: — So I guess I'm just looking for clarity as to what this methodology is that you speak of. If you've had initial, more than initial discussions with this individual, if you're close to signing on the dotted line with him or her to do the consultant work . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — You must also have some idea of what the methodology looks like other than just stating there's a great methodology that we have to do this.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — So this consultant will be hired that will speak to the stakeholders in the area with the labour market, all the

other things. Is Enterprise Saskatchewan one of the groups that he or she will be in discussions with? Because on April 10, Enterprise Saskatchewan was, I think, the first agency that you listed that would be, have a role in determining who these additional eligible recipients would be.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. I guess the language, the clarification on language, we can go back to *Hansard*. But certainly we're going to be seeking feedback and input from those around the Enterprise Saskatchewan board. I mean these are industrial, labour, First Nation, and advanced education leaders from across our province. And these people have some pretty keen insights about how to make sure we're sustaining our growth and how to make sure that we're sharing the benefits of this growth with the people of Saskatchewan, especially in areas of labour market demand.

Mr. Broten: — When the individual's name is provided to the public . . . I assume this will be an order in council, the hiring of this individual.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No, I wouldn't anticipate that. I mean this is contract work.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. Will the methodology be provided as well, or is it simply just the name of the person that's doing it?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'm curious about your methodological questions. If you hire, if an entity hires an individual to get some work done, if you hire a group to pave a highway, part of the discussions obviously relate to methodology, but a lot of it relates to outcome. So the methodology is one component; the finished product's another one.

If there's something more explicit about methodology that you're looking for, then I'm happy to address your question. But I actually don't understand the nature of your question. Are you looking for a methodological matrix? Do you want me to kind of highlight that and spell that out for you?

Mr. Broten: — No, please. Please, no. But I guess it's just simply, there's a lot of people that would like to be in this program or to be eligible for this program because it's obviously a benefit to them. There's a lot of people that are required to study out of province for a variety of reasons.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure.

Mr. Broten: — Early on, when we spoke on April 10 . . . I'll move on from this point soon.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure.

Mr. Broten: — But early on, when we spoke on April 10, it sounded as though there was a fairly clear plan as to how this was going to happen because you listed individuals, you gave a timeline. So to me that indicated that there was a clear strategy at that time behind . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — What you were doing.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I would . . .

Mr. Broten: — So I guess it's just really about an issue of transparency. The people that want to be deemed eligible for this program would have some curiosity as how the eligible people will be determined. So I don't . . . You don't need . . . I'm not on the attack here. I'm just simply looking for transparency for the people that might want to access this program.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — It wasn't attack. I thought it was an invitation, and we can start walking through some methodological questions.

No, the key, the key element here is that, you know, we anticipate 9,000 people per year, 9,000 people per year are going to be accessing this. What we're talking about . . . So the overwhelming majority will already have very clear ideas and understandings regarding who's eligible. What we're dealing with from there are some additional programs that will help to meet some specific labour market requirements of Saskatchewan.

So, you know, I want to just give every reassurance that those studying in Saskatchewan, most especially those in the purchased seats as well, you know, 9,000 people per year we anticipate are going to be coming forward. What we'll be coming forward with in the coming days and weeks is just some clarification on some additional out-of-province programs.

The key here is we want to make sure that our institutions — because it's a good question — that is, what we hope to find out as well is, should we be having a look at some of the institutional initiatives under way? These questions were raised earlier on today. Is there an opportunity to make some specific reinvestments in specific programs? So there's a bit of a balance here.

Under the previous government's program, that is, people from across Canada could apply. Fine. That's a policy option. But what we actually want to see is, before you get too far out in that area, are you beginning to see some specific uptake within some specific sectors that your own institutions probably should be attentive to? And so that's another area of this as far as on a go-forward basis. So obviously it's about individuals, but it's also about getting a bit of a snapshot on specific movement within that labour market.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. Thank you. A couple questions to do with the calculations for the different levels of the criteria involved with what one is eligible for. How are the maximum rebates amount for the various different levels of education calculated? So I guess I could assume a few things. But how did you come up with the figures for the different programs as mapped out on the chart?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. Yes. These are based on some, on approximate values per year. And so, Raman, if I'm not mistaken, it's about \$3,000 a year for SIAST and about \$5,000 a year for university tuition. So what we did is, is that offered a couple of quick baseline points for us as far as reference.

Mr. Broten: — So that obviously applies to the levels for the

different levels of education and also the completion years. You simply took average tuition amounts for the different programs and then multiplied it out according to how many years one was in the program.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. I have a few . . . As we are in our constituency offices and out in the community, we come across situations of people and I've had a few conversations with different folks about how they might fit into this program. So I was hoping I could run some of these by you and get your take on them, please.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure.

Mr. Broten: — So the first one — so I present this clearly I've written them out here — I received a specific question from a Saskatoon student. He has just completed a four-year undergraduate degree at the University of Saskatchewan, but he will be leaving the province for two years to complete a master's degree. His intention is to return to the province following completion of that program. Based on your ministry's rebate implementation schedule, if my constituent were not leaving to complete a master's program, he would receive a maximum rebate of \$10,000 because he graduated this year. To break that down, he would receive up to \$1,000 this year and for the following three years and then up to 2,000 in 2012, 2013, and 2014.

If he leaves for two years and then returns to Saskatchewan following completion of his graduate degree, does he qualify for any of the remaining tuition rebates for the outlying years for his undergraduate degree?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Great. Thank you. Yes, he or she would only miss the first two and then would catch up upon return.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. So in a sense if they leave, they don't press pause because he or she would lose the eligibility for those years that they are absent from the province, but if they come back during that seven-year window, they're eligible for the remaining years from seven years from graduation date.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The complication here and it's a very good point, that is and I, without getting into specifics — though I'm happy to get into specifics; if you'd like to forward the letter or contact information, we can actually contact the individual — the key here is, would the individual still consider Saskatchewan to be home? That is, would the, would the filing of income tax and is this permanent residence still in Saskatchewan? If that's the case, then the process continues and in fact there wouldn't need to be any years missed.

And we did that purposefully for that very reason. A lot of people will do their undergraduate degrees here. They'll go on for a year or two of either graduate work or professional work; come back. But as long as Saskatchewan remains their permanent residence, then they have an option just to continue on. That is, you know, we anticipate that they'd spend summers here and, you know . . .

Mr. Broten: — All the normal requirements for a student that

is studying away but maintaining residency in the province.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. Thank you. Another person I have heard of has a daughter who's completing studies in speech language pathology at the University of Alberta because such a program is not offered here. Her daughter would like to return to Saskatchewan to work here following completion of her studies.

This individual was concerned when she looked at your ministry's website and saw only eight out-of-province programs listed, and speech language pathology was not included. Why is speech language pathology being left out, and is it possible that it might be included in that group? One could argue that . . . Well I think they're in the same bargaining unit as occupational therapists and providing similar services to a lot of the types of individuals that are in that list of eight.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, the significance of that list of eight, as you refer to it, that is, those programs that Saskatchewan has pre-purchased seats. And so again I'm happy to speak with the individual or his or her parent.

The process we're going through, this consultative process that we're now going through as far as getting input from various stakeholders will help us to refine that list. So at this stage I wouldn't rule it out at all. It's just to say, the reason for the initial aid, those are purchased by Saskatchewan. And the program that you're making reference to does not have purchased seats by Saskatchewan.

Mr. Broten: — Thanks. You can see my rationale behind the questions concerning methodology with respect to these types of individuals that have a lot of similarities to programs that are in, and people that just happen to be on the wrong side of the fence, or you know . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I wouldn't say . . .

Mr. Broten: — The side of as speech language pathology as opposed to occupational therapy.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well the key here, the key single criterion is purchased seats by Saskatchewan. And then from there, as far as going out and engaging, the key here is that we're going to go out and make sure that we're addressing some of these key labour market questions. And my sense is people will be pretty impressed with what's going to happen.

Mr. Broten: — Okay. Thank you. My last situation here that I'd like to run by for your input. A student I met on campus at the U of S raised some concerns with me about the lack of a recruitment focus in this program. Some young people have left to study elsewhere, and the vast majority of them are left out of this program. And there are also many people across the country that are looking and examining their options for where they want to establish roots and a career, and this program doesn't necessarily include those individuals.

So at a time — which I know this is in tune with your own personal philosophy — a time when our province is wanting to attract individuals with a global perspective, a national

perspective, you know . . . Say you have a great student that did fantastically well in high school, received a scholarship to go to the University of Western Ontario . . . well I guess they're not necessarily paying tuition if they received a scholarship, but for whatever reason they go out of province. But they're a bright light. They want to come home.

What are your thoughts? Is this a concern for you that we're not including those types of people in this program? In a sense, you know, it could be seen as not encouraging those that want to go away, learn from other areas in the world, and then come back to Saskatchewan and contribute.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, the emphasis here is to the recruitment focus. Again it's to address the most immediate concern, and that really was, you know . . . What we've seen is either students graduating from high school and simply opting to leave the province for the skills training or education they require because that's where their networks and their job opportunities they saw. That's one.

The second is that what we saw out of various programs . . . And we can go into areas specific to the respective schools of business. We can go to some areas of engineering as well as a number of other professions, and you know, what we see, what we have seen is students quite literally graduating and leaving. And so the key purpose here is to make sure those individuals have very powerful incentive, twofold: one, through this retention program; but two, that the economic growth, they can actually see their future here, they can envision it.

The third element, and this is increasingly important for our universities, because of the hollowing out — that is, the out-migration that has defined Saskatchewan quite clearly over the last 30 years — we have at once one of the oldest and one of the youngest populations in all of Canada. What we lack, we have a missing middle. That is, a lot of those individuals left Saskatchewan. What this is meant to do . . . And the consequences of that are pretty significant and pretty clear and can be empirically traced. So it's something like 1,000 fewer high school graduates this year than there were last year. And that begins a precipitous decline. And I can get you the precise numbers.

For our post-secondary institutions, most especially right now the two universities, what we're seeing are drops in enrolments. So what this instrument is used for is to turn and say, we need to attract more undergraduate students to our universities.

And the universities can now use this as a mechanism to turn and say to that individual, instead of going to the University of Western Ontario, why not stay here in Saskatchewan? Why not stay here, study here? We've got great quality education going on here. This is a great opportunity. And for the very reasons that we've just talked about, actually reverse that piece: stay in Saskatchewan; do your undergraduate degree in Saskatchewan. And then if you want to go away for a couple of years, you can go away for a year or two of graduate work, keep your permanent residence in Saskatchewan, and not even miss a beat.

So really what this is, is to ensure that we're helping our institutions. It's not just the individuals — that's profoundly important — but we're helping our institutions. The institutions

are going to need support as they go out on their recruitment missions. We see that.

And I'm impressed with . . . Obviously it was a very important week last week as we see a new university president at the University of Regina, Professor Timmons, and the reappointment of Professor Peter MacKinnon as president at the University of Saskatchewan. I mean in one week we've . . . You know, this is very, very significant. And certainly the feedback that I've received is they're encouraged by any instruments that can be utilized by the institutions regarding recruitment.

In fact President MacKinnon was just asked — it's recorded in the media — about plans for increased recruitment activities. So this is an instrument. I think this instrument is much more effective, especially for our institutions as well as our young learners, and the fact that it's integrated right from journeypersons up to four-year degrees, from my vantage point this is an impressive instrument that is going to be one of those tools used to help address the enrolment crisis that we could face unless we begin to make very significant progress here.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. So I get their attention piece and the benefit that it might play for universities. I guess the question and the case study here was more about, or the example was more about how it might play into recruitment issues as well. So as the program gets up and running, as we see the uptake, and then also as resources become available, is it your desire or hope to be able to offer it to an increasing number of individuals who study out of province, or do you see the recommendation that will come from this consultant as to the number of people that are eligible outside of Saskatchewan as a fairly fixed group? Or is this something that you see will be evaluated yearly?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, I see it being evaluated. I don't know if it'll be a yearly evaluation. It'll be a regular evaluation. And the key element here is, that way it's dynamic enough to actually adjust to labour market changes.

And so we can, you know, we'll be able to get an initial start on this. As I say, 9,000 students anticipated. You know, most of those know right now who they're going to be as soon as we pass this Bill. We'll do some work regarding out of province to help meet some labour market needs right now. And we see this being reviewed regularly to ensure that this program serves as an instrument that helps meet Saskatchewan's labour market needs.

Mr. Broten: — Well, Mr. Chair, I think that eats up about my one hour. I told you it was going to be less than one hour, so I'll stick to my word. And thank you to the minister and his officials.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Broten. Are there any questions from other committee members? Seeing none, we will proceed to vote the Bill. Clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 8 inclusive agreed to.]

Clause 9

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Allchurch.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I propose amendment for Bill No. 34, An Act respecting a Graduate Retention Program and repealing The Graduate Tax Exemption Act:

Clause 9 of the printed Bill

Amend Clause 9 of the printed Bill by adding the following subsection after subsection 3:

“(4) Notwithstanding the repeal of *The Postsecondary Graduate Tax Credit Act*, that Act, as it existed on December 31, 2006, continues to apply to the following extent:

(a) if an individual graduated on or before December 31, 2006 from a program of post-secondary studies that qualifies as an eligible program pursuant to *The Post-Secondary Graduate Tax Credit Act*, and if the individual otherwise qualifies pursuant to the Act, the individual may apply for a tax credit pursuant to the Act for the taxation year in which the individual graduated from the qualifying program;

(b) on receipt of an application mentioned in clause (a), if the minister is satisfied that the individual graduated on or before December 31, 2006 from a program of post-secondary studies that qualifies as an eligible program pursuant to *The Post-Secondary Graduate Tax Credit Act*, and if the minister is satisfied that the individual otherwise qualifies pursuant to that Act, the minister may issue a form to the individual certifying the amount of the tax credit allowed, calculated in accordance with section 4 of *The Post-Secondary Graduate Tax Credit Act*, for the taxation year in which the individual graduated from the qualifying program; and

(c) if an individual obtains a form or certificate from the minister pursuant to *The Post-Secondary Graduate Tax Credit Act* to which he or she was not entitled:

(i) section 6 of *The Post-Secondary Graduate Tax Credit Act* continues to apply to the recovery from the individual of the amount of any tax credit that the individual obtains based on the minister’s form or certificate; and

(ii) for the purposes of subclause (i), the interest rate prescribed in the regulations made pursuant to *The Post-Secondary Graduate Tax Credit Act* continues to apply”.

I so move.

The Chair: — Mr. Allchurch has moved an amendment to clause 9. Will the committee take the amendment as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Is the amendment agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Is clause 9 as amended agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

[Clause 9 as amended agreed to.]

Clause 10

The Chair: — Clause 10, coming into force. I recognize Mr. Allchurch.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, I propose amendment for Bill No. 34, An Act respecting a Graduate Retention Program and repealing The Graduate Tax Exemption Act:

Clause 10 of the printed Bill

Strike out Clause 10 of the printed Bill and substitute the following:

“Coming into force

10(1) Subject to subsection (2), this Act comes into force on assent but is retroactive and is deemed to have been in force on and from January 1, 2008.

(2) Subsection 9(4) of this Act come into force on assent but is retroactive and is deemed to have been in force on and from January 1, 2007”.

I so move.

The Chair: — Mr. Allchurch has moved an amendment to clause 10. Will the committee take the amendment as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Is the amendment agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Is Clause 10 as amended agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

[Clause 10 as amended agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: An Act respecting a Graduate Retention Program and repealing The Graduate Tax Exemption Act. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Agreed. May I have a member move that we report the Bill with amendment? Mr. LeClerc. It has been moved by Mr. LeClerc. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Committee members, that brings to a close our agenda for today. It was a rather lengthy agenda. I believe we made considerable progress today, and the only outstanding item that we need to deal with is a motion of adjournment. And I would recognize . . . Minister Hickie moves that we adjourn. But before we do that, I believe the minister has a couple of short, closing remarks.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Short, closing remarks, just as we look at the hour, I would offer sincere appreciation for the officials here but also those working in the legislature that have allowed us to go about our duties tonight. So I just would ask if the members would join me in saying sincere thanks.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Chair: — With that I would like to thank the committee members for their diligence and good work today and this committee stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 22:56.]