



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Hansard Verbatim Report

No. 24 – May 4, 2009



Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

Twenty-sixth Legislature

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 15:00.]

The Chair: — I'll call the Human Services Committee to order. Once again it's Monday afternoon, and we have a lengthy agenda before us. Between now and recess, the committee will be considering the estimates of vote 73, Corrections, Public Safety and Policing until 4 o'clock, at which time we will then consider vote 5, the estimates for the Ministry of Education.

Before I call on the minister to introduce his officials, I will note, committee members, that we have two substitutions. Mr. Yates is substituting for Ms. Junor until, I believe, until we break for dinner. And Mr. Wotherspoon is substituting for Mr. Broten.

Also, committee members, I believe you have copies before you of a letter from Minister Harpauer providing information as a result of the April 6 estimates. I believe there was a commitment by the minister to provide this committee with the information, and you have that information before you.

**General Revenue Fund
Corrections, Public Safety and Policing
Vote 73**

Subvote (CP01)

The Chair: — So with that, I will call upon Mr. Hickie to introduce his officials, and then we will have the committee ask any questions that they may have of the minister and his officials. Minister Hickie.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well I won't go into preamble today. I'll just directly go into introductions, and we'll go on.

With me today of course — and thank you to the committee for having us this afternoon for one hour — to my left is Al Hilton, my deputy minister. To my immediate right is Mae Boa, acting assistant deputy minister of corporate services. To my far right is Tammy Kirkland, executive director, adult corrections. Directly behind me is Dr. Brian Rector, director of program development and therapeutic services. As well as, today we have my chief of staff, Mr. Rob Nicolay. And I think that's it, and I'm prepared to answer questions.

The Chair: — Are there any questions for the minister from any committee members? Seeing none, I guess . . . Sorry, Mr. Yates.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm going right to the specific recommendations in the report. I'd like to start with recommendation no. 1. The bottom of page 11 talks about a number of initiatives that have been implemented, and one of them is a partnership with the Correctional Service of Canada for training of security intelligent officers. Could you tell me how many staff have gone through this training, how long the training is, and where it's being conducted?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Sure. I'll start off, and then I'll pass it off to you. Well thank you, Mr. Chair. Actually I'm very pleased to report that finally corrections security officers who take the

intelligence training now will be assigned to the SIO position, security intelligence officer. We have now been able to secure seating and space at the federal Correctional Service of Canada training for their institutional preventive security officers that they had in the past and ongoing mentorship training after they get back with the same highly trained officers in the federal system at Saskatchewan Penitentiary.

And we have had one officer attend that already in Cornwall, Ontario at the Correctional Service of Canada training facility that I'm aware of. And he has returned now. And I'll just let the deputy minister go on from there because there has been some logistical issues trying to get the other part of it set up now.

Mr. Hilton: — Yes, thank you. I'm not sure, and perhaps Tammy might be able to help me out here. I think the training is about four to six weeks.

Ms. Kirkland: — I'm not sure of the entire training. The training that our intelligence officers attended so far, I believe, was five days for the initial training.

Mr. Hilton: — So beyond the relationship that we're forming with the Correctional Service of Canada, we're also beginning to develop a relationship with the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police], who also provide training and intelligence in security matters. And we hope to continue to have discussions with the RCMP as well. So we're seeing a relationship develop both with Corrections Canada and with the RCMP.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. The one officer that's been trained, which facility is the individual from? And can you give us some outline of what the five days training involves?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe the individual's from Regina Correctional Centre, but we'll find out for sure. I haven't asked for that from my staff, so we're going to check, but it could be Prince Albert as well. But the individual went for the five days or whatever training in the time was in Cornwall. The detailed course description isn't available right now with the ministry official, but we'll provide that to you if you'd like as well, to a certain level that, of course, we can.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. With the serious incident that occurred in the Regina centre, would you not want to ensure that the first person trained would have been from the Regina centre?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. You raise a good point, Mr. Yates. For some reason, I do believe the Regina individual did go, but we'll check up on that like I've already stated. And we have a new director at Pine Grove, Mr. Eric Walburg, who is in fact a former institutional preventive security officer with the federal system who's now our new director. And he is leading that particular sector of our central office team now on developing protocol, job descriptions and such — moving forward — and training initiatives as well as the mentoring after.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. I want to move on to

future actions that we will be taking. You talk about installing telephone monitoring equipment in each of the secure facilities. You say ongoing, but what type of time frame are we looking at for this installation? What type of new policy regulations and legislation is required to implement, and do we anticipate potential challenges in implementing ongoing monitoring equipment like this in the province?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you for that question. Mr. Chair, the particular Act that we work under will be fully reviewed by the ministry officials, knowing full well that we have had a situation over the years where the Act, and policies that stem from the Act, may or may not actually in fact be relevant any more; they maybe need to make them actually more restrictive, more stringent.

And the case in point is that we do want to look at the issue of monitoring phone calls. Now, knowing full well that we have to look at the major document we take our direction from is the Charter, and then from that document we look down at our own Act, and then from there we look at directives coming from the ministry, then you have institutional operating standing orders and such, that you're very much aware of, I know.

The biggest issue we found with the report from Mr. Peet was that he found a lack of overall training and the requirement for an initiative — much like they have in the Correctional Service of Canada which talks about the law, the fundamentals of justice and Charter requirements, and how that then becomes passed on down through provincial Acts and through directives and such, all looking at the Charter as our most important guiding document.

So that'll answer part of your question. As we move forward, it's going to be ongoing — as it states there — because we are now starting looking at policy review. And there'll be a compliance issue there as well, which ties into looking back up the line, then to the Charter, and back down again to looking at the Act to see exactly if we can do this. We will of course recognize that the security of our institutions and security of the public is still the most important thing under this ministry.

So we will have to look at taking a leadership role and seeing in fact if we do get any challenges as a result of that. We will be consulting with Justice to ensure our policy would not be in violation of any set law that this nation runs under.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. Are you aware of any jurisdictions in Canada where this currently is done and what legislative authority they would be operating under?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you. I will tell you that we have an answer, by the way, in the Regina SIO. I'll talk about that first. It was the Regina SIO that went to the training, so I was right.

Federal Correctional Service of Canada actually allows their institutional preventive security officers, security intelligence officers, to in fact identify and target individuals, inmates, telephone communications. And they also make it very clear that, within the institutions when they visit, your conversations may be monitored in their visits and correspondence area.

So their direction is drawn within their federal jurisdictional requirements, parameters. And they would then say that — I'm sure, if my memory does serve me well, having worked in federal corrections a few years ago, quite a few years ago — that it all ties into the overall operation of the institution for security requirements. And they have to make a very clear statement that to do those monitoring has a relationship and a bearing on a particular matter that impacts the security and safety of the institution.

So having said that though, if there's more to my answer, we'll find it for you. Maybe, Tammy, you want to go a little further with that. You're the executive director of adult corrections. If you want to talk about the Act a bit, and how that would relate to if we make changes to actually do the monitoring for us . . .

Ms. Kirkland: — I can't speak to the specific places in the Act that need to be changed, but definitely we do need to do a legislative review, as the minister has said. We are also doing a jurisdictional review of the provinces and what regulations they work under that allow them to do any more surveillance than we do because I believe there are provinces who have telephone monitoring systems. So we're just in the process through our policy shop of reviewing who they are and what regulations and policy give them that ability.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. Just for information of the minister, British Columbia has been doing this for a number of years and has sustained a challenge on its ability to do so. So it may well be a jurisdiction that'd be worth reviewing.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Sure. If I can answer to that as well. I know that I've also . . . I recall Manitoba's got a very intensive anti-gang strategy inside their prisons. And I believe, in their Act, they allow for monitoring as well.

Having said that, a challenge is going to be . . . It could happen. And the Government of Saskatchewan recognizes that could be a possibility. And this ministry understands that, and I as a minister understand that.

I think it's more prudent to be proactive than reactive. And it's okay to put forth the change, and with the consultations through Justice and looking at other jurisdictions and accepting the fact that a challenge may or may not occur. And if a challenge occurs, we will always take the high road, that we are doing what's in the best interest of the province for the public safety of our citizens and our staff, and to hopefully never see a situation where we lack the ability to gain and gather intelligence in our institutions that has a direct bearing upon the safety of our public.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. I want to move on to recommendation no. 2 now. It talks about, under action that we will take, "develop a simulation exercise aimed at preparing staff and managers across the system to respond to an event similar to" what we saw here in August, and it talks about a time frame of fall '09. Are these going to be exercises that are going to be undertaken at individual centres? Or is this more of a provincial program preparing managers and individuals to prepare to work for emergencies — more like an emergency management training program for managers, or is this something that's going to be done institution by institution?

My concern is the ability to have some consistency in approach.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Good point. Mr. Chair, thank you for that question. I'll let my deputy answer this one because he's had direct information related to this in meeting with the directors of our institutions, and how they feel that this should be best implemented.

Mr. Hilton: — I would say that what we will do is we will do what the experts in the field determine will work best, but it would be, the intent is to be in a position where, in all of our facilities, we would have simulated a kind of an exercise that would be similar to that which developed out of this situation, and to have a consistency of capacity in responding to that across the system.

Tammy, is there something you might want to add to that?

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. Seeing our time, I'd like to move on to recommendation no. 3. I want to have the opportunity to get through all 23 recommendations. Under actions that will be taken, it says, "Review guiding legislation and regulations, Divisional Directives and operational Standing Orders for each facility . . ." and look how they support the mandate. That's been probably an ongoing exercise for forever as new practices and improvements go on. What type of time frame are you looking at to undertake this overall review on this particular exercise?

[15:15]

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you. And, Mr. Chair, I think the issue here becomes that it's much more complex than just going through what we have currently. We have to look back. Again it goes to my previous answer of consulting with Justice to show that we have the proper mechanism to relate the guiding document, which is the Charter, down through the lines of our particular business, how we do our . . . our actions take place based on that, to be in compliance with law.

We also have to look at the issue of having a package developed so we can train staff to understand that, which is what Mr. Peet also talked about in his report for recommendations, is training the staff to appreciate the law and how it actually impacts upon the day-to-day jobs.

So this is all part of multiple recommendations that will take some time. We are looking at building our policy capacity, as it says here, in spring of this year — which has already started — by looking at means and ways to actually have enough people looking at the policy and analyzing what we have currently.

But the other part of it will be ongoing, recognizing that some of these concerns will take medium to long-term to make change because every action that we take now, in regards to policy, has to start with the fundamental concept of the Charter and moving down from that to make sure people understand that. And any change you make has to be vetted out through the central management office staff to make sure that it's all a part of the delineation, through our directives down to our institutional standing operating orders.

So I think what I'll do is I'll give the mike to the deputy in one

second. But this policy review, and the ongoing policy review, won't just be stopped at a certain time either. A part of the central office will be tasked with ongoing review to ensure that we maintain our compliance within accordance to the law, and that we don't lose sight of the fact that every day, things change. Decisions are made in the Supreme Court, and we have to also recognize that we may have to have some fluidity to that exchange as well.

So, Deputy, do you want to follow up with that at all, to some timelines you were looking for?

Mr. Hilton: — Sure. Just broadly speaking, the purpose of the review would be to ensure that our legislation aligns with our legal obligations, that our legislation enables us to do in policy terms what it is we want to do, to ensure that our divisional directives align with our legislative obligations and authorities, and that our operational practices align with divisional objectives. So it's all about setting up a series of screens that ensure that how we do our business is consistent with standing orders, with divisional directives, with our legislation and our policies; and that all lines up with the law.

And as the minister says, I mean there's a big bunch of work that needs to be done at the front end in order to get to a point where those things line up the way they need to line up. But having lined them up once, the process isn't complete. The law changes over time with court decisions. Circumstances change so that policy process or that alignment process is a fairly dynamic one, and one that one has to pay attention to on an ongoing basis.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, I don't disagree with any of that, but one of the things that we heard last session from the minister is he was going to fix these problems that he said had been ongoing forever. And at some point you have to have some benchmarks in order to see whether anything has actually been accomplished — are we actually making any headway?

And so I'm trying to get some sense of what those benchmarks are that I can expect to see 6 months from now, 12 months from now, 24 months from now, to ensure that we are actually making fundamental headway with these recommendations. Without that, I would be hearing, I would think, the same answers a year from now as I'm hearing today. And so I want to ensure that we are making progress on the recommendations over the next two years.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Yes, absolutely yes, thank you. What I'll state is . . . You say over two years. We've already started making changes by having policy analysts actually in place now reviewing the current policy — policies — and working away through those different divisional directives, standing orders and such. So the problem we'll have now is to ensure we have the right kind of capacity level as we start this process.

You will have an ongoing report card in the annual report from Corrections, and within that report will be all of these recommendations. We'll have the actions taken. And every time there is a committee like this, we welcome your questions, and we have no problem being upfront with what's happening. But like I said before, if the process starts, it's going to be ongoing,

and there will not be an end date for this policy review either. Like the deputy said, and I said before, it's going to be ongoing because things change.

The most important thing we have to look at right now is just setting up the policy analysts to do their jobs and recommend back to the deputy through central office staff what things need to be looked at and why, and then go into the entire concept of training because we will not — and do not believe that we should — have policies implemented that we can't somehow have an entire package that can be given to any new staff member or existing staff member to explain to them why we did what we did, and where the basis of the change started.

So the annual report in Corrections will have all these recommendations in them. And you'll be able to see it on an ongoing basis through committee, asking questions to their effect. And we'll be able to answer those for you.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. The next bullet talks about increased policy capacity. How many individuals have been hired into the policy unit since the recommendations come out? And what are their backgrounds and their expertise to develop policy in the area of both the legal obligations and understanding of the environment in which the policies are in fact going to be implemented in?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Okay. I'll let my deputy answer that because it's highly operational.

Mr. Hilton: — The intent is to enhance policy capacity, and both through hiring on a temporary basis, perhaps six months to a year, bring in some outside experts. And that, we're in the process of defining what that team is going to look like. We do have existing policy capacity within the ministry, and they have initiated the process. And, Tammy, correct me if I'm wrong, we've added one additional resource into Tammy's shop to help along that process. And I believe that it's a young individual with a master's level of education.

Ms. Kirkland: — That's correct, deputy. On a term basis, we've brought that individual in and specifically to help us right now, starting to do some of the research around the legislation.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. Move on to recommendation no. 4, as I see our time is moving very quickly. Under actions taken it says "Policy and management capacity will be enhanced to support oversight and compliance with the policy and procedures." And then it goes on to say in the next bullet "Compliance reviews will be conducted as a normal business practice in the Ministry."

To date, what changes have been made in the capacity and to oversee the policies? And secondly has there been, since these recommendations have come down, any compliance reviews in the system?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. What I can tell you is that right now we do know that we had 20 more assistant deputy directors taken out of scope, based on the release of Mr. Taylor's report, I believe, and 20 were not made out of scope. So we're asking for 40, that's as a result of the strike from 2007, the decision was rendered. So that builds some basic

initial management capacity inside our institutions.

So when it comes to overall oversight is that central office has the primary responsibility for the policy change and implementation process down through the lines and chain of command. But one thing we do have in mind is something that has never happened before in provincial Corrections — much like they do in federal corrections — is an ongoing compliance and audit section that will require that central office staff will identify experts and people within the ministry. Operational people as well will attend institutions and community offices and will ensure that we are in fact in compliance with the law and with our own policies and procedures.

One thing that was very glaring in Mr. Peet's report was that some staff don't, they don't follow policy. They don't want to. They say, I go there, I get my paycheque, and I go home. And some people don't think the policy is effective, and they decide not to follow it. So from the director of our institutions, their requirement is to ensure the policy is implemented then followed.

So I can draw back on my federal experience as well — having been involved with audit and compliance teams that travelled the region, western region, to do these, as well as my own institutions at home — that it's a very effective tool. That we don't just do a surprise check, we get the directors the opportunity, give them the opportunity to do an internal review first. And then if they find that they have deficiencies, they're allowed time to address those deficiencies. And then the audit team shows up, knowing full well that they have to report what they've done, what they've found internally as well. From the federal system, that's how it worked.

I quite like that. I believe it gives institutions chances to self-identify, based on an audit tool that's completely in line with policy and compliance, based on the law actually and divisional directives and standings orders.

So on that note, I think we'll have the deputy follow up with that to see if he's got any more to say on the overall capacity, where he would like to see this go involving staff. I've kind of covered it off with some high-level . . . who we'd identify to take place in this. But we'll have a section within the ministry, central office to oversee this as well.

Mr. Hilton: — You know, I could speak to this particular set of issues probably for half an hour, but I don't want to take up the committee's time. Developing a go-forward plan around these two recommendations involves both organizational issues as well as policy issues.

Sufficient to say that one of the things I think that the government's response recognizes is, that as a way of doing our business, we need to build in mechanisms which allow us to ensure that we're doing our business the way we need to be doing it. And that we need to provide that kind of rigour, both to satisfy the senior management of the ministry and the minister, but also to help support our people at the institutional level to learn better and to understand better the relationship between all the different screens I mentioned earlier.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Moving on to

recommendation no. 5, we talk about a “central office crisis information and support situation be activated for major emergency situations.” Who has the primary responsibility in central office for the implementation and management of these major emergency situations? Where does that responsibility lie in central office? Is it with the deputy or is it with the executive director of corrections? I’m just trying to get some sense of where that . . .

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Fair question. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The initial responsibility to set this up of course falls, everything in central office falls to the responsibility of the deputy minister — how he wants to delegate that authority down to ensure that this particular recommendation becomes part of our operation and operating plans moving forward, it’s up to him. But responsibility for this particular oversight falls directly under him, as does everything in central office. He’s responsible for all the office policy procedures that are in place. So that would answer your question, I believe.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you. I fully understand the deputy would have the responsibility for all the functions of the department. What I’m looking for is, who’s going to be the quarterback and going to be responsible for dealing with this issue operationally? Who gets the call if there’s a major incident? Who’s the person that is actually the person in control?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — The on-call executive director would be the one who actually activates it, but I will tell you that the deputy minister will also be fully aware of what’s going on when an incident takes place.

Mr. Yates: — So then the deputy minister would be informed by the executive director and up the chain.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Yes.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you.

Mr. Hilton: — Just for clarity, the on-call executive director, so I might be able to give Tammy a weekend off once in a while.

Mr. Yates: — They would be acting in that position . . .

Mr. Hilton: — That’s correct, yes.

Mr. Yates: — And be responsible for taking that call, regardless when it was.

Mr. Hilton: — Right.

Mr. Yates: — All right. Moving on to recommendation no. 6 then, talks about putting in place and developing a provincial confinement and segregation model, doing some research and developing it. Have we hired — and it talks in the actual recommendation language — an expert policy analyst? Have we hired an outside expert policy analyst to look at this? And at what stage are we in the development of this policy?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. We have not hired the person yet to get this started. Again, it’s been answered by the deputy that we’re starting in the executive director of adult corrections. We have a preliminary research person now

looking at these issues, but this is very specific to the way that provincial corrections has always segregated and confined inmates, which needs to be reviewed. And it’s been done in such a fashion that Mr. Peet informed us that it was quite ad hoc from institution to institution.

And this kind of policy development may not in fact require the full expert from the field. We may have internal experts that can give us a hand who had operational experience in these issues. But recognizing again that we have a particular requirement here to ensure that we are in compliance with the law, but also recognizing that there’s certain parameters that we can . . . and other jurisdictions that do things on a consistent basis.

That’s what the message here is — that we have to ensure that our directors apply this consistently through all of our institutions. And that was one of the glaring situations that Mr. Peet found was not the case after he toured some other institutions, that there is some discrepancy in how this is applied. And that’s why the entire overall policy analysis and final report will indicate and give us direction on that.

[15:30]

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. Will this include a review of the internal discipline processes of the institutions? Will it involve a look at how those are . . . their compliance with accepted practices across the jurisdictions in Canada, and will it look at the independence of that process?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, you raise a very good point. In fact the issue of reviewing that particular disciplinary process is definitely going to be part of this. Recognizing that there are jurisdictions — and I’ll turn to the federal system again because I know it so well — that there is an independent chairperson that comes in and actually decides what kind of discipline will be delegated or relegated down to individuals who do break institutional laws and rules.

So I quite like that. I think that’s a strong message going forward that we’re going to look at that. I think we have cases where we have institutional staff that may in fact sit there on a disciplinary panel who’ve actually dealt with this individual in the past, and that may not be fair to the individual inmate. So we need to look at a different way of doing business and to ensure that we have consistency across again all of our institutions and how we apply that.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. And the time frame to undertake that particular piece of work is talking about the fall of ’09. That’s a fairly significant piece of work. Do you anticipate you’ll actually be able to complete that for the fall of ’09?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that the work that’s already started and some of the actions that have taken place such as consulting with the Public Service Commission, Government Services, to look at how we can act on certain issues regarding contracts and things like that, have taken place already — since as soon as the report was released.

So a very lofty time goal, but it’s there for a reason. Because as a minister, as a government, we aren’t about to take a

recommendation and recommendations from experts that have provided them, such as Mr. Peet and his team, and then sit on them and let them gather dust. That's just not the way we're going to do business. We're not wired that way.

So again the implementation, that looking at the actions to be taken in the fall of '09 means that we may also find we may not be ready to actually fully implement those by fall of '09. But at least we're going to start the process and have it fully investigated by that time. And if things work out right like we think we can, and after the advice from the ministry officials, is that we believe we can do that. So that's a lofty goal. People have to work and work very hard to get that done, but I believe these individuals can and will do that.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. I'd like now to move on to recommendation no. 7 which talks about again issues of some consistency, policy review, and implementation of practices regarding searching protocols. It talks about the review of searching protocols is under way. Who is doing that review? Is it internal to the current correctional system or is it an outsider?

And then secondly, you talk about an inventory checklist that's been introduced and will be implemented across the province. What type of things would be included on an inventory checklist? And who would have control of the inventory checklist, as these things may change daily?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Well I'll answer that. Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's pretty clear that we have some internal expertise in this matter, and we'll use those people accordingly as well, by the way.

The inventory checklist — I think you might be overanalyzing what that means — is that when an inmate leaves a cell, a cell has certain things. It's got a bed, it's got a toilet, and it's got a sink that's operational. And it's got nothing on the walls. It's got maybe a mattress that's not all torn up, a light fixture that's not been tampered with — things along those lines. That's what we're talking about here.

We're not talking about that . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . No. It's going to be what you come into. It's a clean cell. And if there's any operational concerns regarding the clean cell, like the light fixture might not work, maybe there's an issue with the toilet, we'll have that . . . If there's a crack or if something's broken or if a piece of bar has been filed off of something, operationally no inmate can go into that cell until those things have been remedied. That's what the inventory checklist is all about. And that's already begun actually.

Mr. Yates: — Okay. Thank you very much. That's a much easier process then.

Recommendation no. 8 then deals with the ADD [assistant deputy director] positions, out of scope. As we're both well aware, the arbitrator's decision is down. What actions have been taken since the decision has come down in regards to these positions, and what further actions are you taking moving forward?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — I'll let my deputy minister answer that

one because it's all very operational.

Mr. Hilton: — Yes, thank you. And, Tammy, you can add to whatever I might say. The positions are now out of scope. The meetings have been had with the staff directly involved. We have dealt with classification issues. We have dealt with issues related to compensation for overtime. So we're going through the normal processes that's involved in moving someone from an in-scope to an out-of-scope position. The job descriptions having been completed will also now allow us to move forward and hire additional ADDs. Tammy, anything you want to add to that?

Ms. Kirkland: — Actually the advertisement for the positions — because we've had a number of people acting term in them while the scope review was happening — were out and closed on May 1, so applications have come in for those positions and we're moving now to permanent hiring.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. And that's across the entire system, all of the institutions?

Ms. Kirkland: — That's correct.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you. All right. Moving on to recommendation no. 9, it talks about increasing management presence outside normal working hours. And the actions are to undertake broad organizational change and increased management presence after normal working hours. The one is obvious with the change in scope, but what type of broad organizational change is going to occur to assist in addressing this issue?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — I'll have the deputy minister answer that again. He's got some ideas and thoughts on that.

Mr. Hilton: — I will be bringing forward some organizational change proposals for the minister and the government's consideration which would be intended to achieve this objective, but no final decisions have been taken at this point in time.

Mr. Yates: — All right. Thank you very much. And you wouldn't be at this time prepared to share what those might be?

Mr. Hilton: — As a good bureaucrat, it probably wouldn't be a career enhancing move for me to share the options I'll present to the government to this committee, before I've presented them to the government.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. That was the answer I anticipated. Recommendation no. 10, Mr. Chair, talks about dealing with issues around distractions at work units. Have these been implemented?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you for that question, Mr. Chair. We can say that we have taken actions to ensure that staff have been made aware that no material should be in their job, in their particular post. Those kind of things are left for the rest break areas. And currently we are looking at ITO [Information Technology Office] to advise us on how to best filter out access to the Internet, recognizing some of our staff need to have access to computers to do their job. And on that note, that'll be

ongoing. So overall the staff know that there's a requirement not to have personal reading material on post with them.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. Moving on now to recommendation no. 11, talks about a constitutional expert being employed to develop a corrections branch and law course and that there would be, under actions, a dedication of additional resources to implement training in the fall.

A couple of concerns here. One is, if this is such an important issue, why is it going to take nearly a full year from the incident? And secondly, have we in fact hired a constitutional expert to develop this training program or are we going to utilize the program that's provided in, as an example, in other jurisdictions? Because the constitutional aspect of this would be the same across jurisdictions in Canada.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well we do have the most . . . The quickest access is to Justice officials who are constitutional experts, and we'll be looking at them to advise us moving on from this.

I'll take some exception though with the fact that you say this has been a year since this has happened and we haven't done anything yet. Well in March we released the report, and quite frankly some of the findings were shocking. And I'm sure the public, when they read the report, felt the same thing.

I know that we need to look at consulting with people in Justice to work on this issue. I mentioned it already once before. But, you know, this issue hasn't just started now. It's been ongoing. It's been there for number of years, Mr. Yates. And I know you're aware of that. And if you're not aware of it, I find that hard to believe.

So the actions taken by this government in addressing the recommendation will be quite swift in relation to the past actions taken from other issues that have been in Corrections. So I think the implementation of this for fall gives us, well somewhere around that five to six months to look at working on this. And the people in the central office and policy are doing a good job of already looking at that.

With the additional expert hired to do research on this and in consultation with Justice officials, we'll be making a training module for our staff — so to ensure once again that we have the right people training all the staff, whether you're new or existing, to understand how your role is in relation to the law.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. With that I'd like to move on to recommendation no. 12. Under recommendation no. 12, it talks about senior managers to be held accountable for attending critical areas of the facility on a regular basis. And it talks about, under actions, increase visible leadership, role modelling, and information gathering with regular facility tours by senior managers starting the winter of '09.

My question is, is winter of '09 talking about January, February '09 or are we talking about November, December '09?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. That particular timeline — in fact you mention the winter — we're talking January, February, but right now we have . . . Our directors are

aware that, and their deputy directors have to start making a higher visible presence in our institutions and they are doing that right now.

The additional support they're going to get though is that when we have the implementation of the assistant deputy directors working in that management, out-of-scope capacity, that they will then again be accountable to 10 critical areas to ensure that we are having staff in compliance with policy and other issues. So it's started already, but we're looking for the full implementation by the winter of 2009 which should be — you're right — January, February.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. And it talks about actions taking . . . that correctional centre managers will attend regular inmate committee meetings. But there seems to be no reference here to working with staff, regular meetings with staff to hear their concerns as well. I don't know if that's an oversight or just something that's already in place that you didn't feel needed to be mentioned.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Well when the recommendations came from the committee, from the team, based on the findings, they were much more specific in this particular one to talk to inmates about what's going on because we understand that we do have management-union meetings now to discuss issues. So it came to light that the inmates in fact thought that their concerns haven't been listened to, haven't been heard on a regular basis. And that may be the case, and Mr. Peet recommended that we do that, so that's part of the actions moving forward on that.

So staff in fact, you know, the idea here too relates to we need to make sure staff understand the core practices of corrections, that they have to interact with inmates. And the idea there is that the management have to ensure that staff are doing their job as well.

And inmates feel that they need to be listened to. And that's why we're going to make sure that the inmates are actually part of the meetings with the managers of the correctional centres. Now that could come in the full implementation in spring of '09, having the directors and deputy directors doing that, but as time goes on we may look at our eight assistant deputy directors being involved in that process as well so they have a better handle on what's going on in their institutions.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. If we could move on to recommendation no. 13 for a relatively . . . Time's going relatively quickly here. Recommendation 13 has everything to do with training and staff preparedness to perform their duties. My question really has to do with the broader issue of staff training in the sense, is the ministry looking at or are they prepared to look at a model of going back to a longer corrections training program that was once in place in the province back, I guess, prior to the, well, the 1980s? It ended some time in the 1980s.

[15:45]

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Chair. You're talking about the initial . . .

Mr. Yates: — Formerly it was the corrections worker training

program.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Yes.

Mr. Yates: — In about mid-1980s, the program was shelved in favour of outsourced training. And if the ministry's prepared to look at that, and whether or not maybe some partnerships or collaboration with other jurisdictions might make that more affordable.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Yes. I'll let the deputy answer this one. We just were talking that he's got some ideas operationally he'd like to share with the committee on that one.

Mr. Hilton: — Yes. The primary issue here in terms of the action we're going to take is it's all intended to review the kind of training we provide the staff and when we provide it, with a view to ensuring that we're not asking people to do jobs we're not properly training them for.

And I've read some of the briefs and the history; I'm aware of how training evolved from the early '80s to where we are today. So there's going to be a real need in reviewing the whole training issue to understand how we've gotten to where we are, and where we came from.

It's also going to be important to look at the best practices of other jurisdictions and to arrive at some decisions around what it is that our folks need in order to do the kind of jobs that we know that they want to do and to perhaps understand a bit better than we do now what kind of learning plans and development opportunities need to be made available to staff so they can pursue a career at Corrections as opposed to just a job. So there's a big piece of work there to do, and we're looking forward to doing it.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. Do you have any anticipated time frame in which that look or review will be undertaken? Are we talking the next 12 months? Next 18 months? Next six months? It's probably a fairly lengthy process.

Mr. Hilton: — Well certainly it's my ambition to have a pretty good go-forward training strategy in place, with all the questions answered, by the fall. But I also think there are things that we can do in the immediate term at the institutional level — and Tammy can speak to this perhaps better than me — that can identify some obvious shortcomings. And we have additional resources this year to address those.

So there's some short-term issues that perhaps we can improve on and then on a go-forward basis, certainly by the fall I would love to be able to say that I would be well-informed enough to present a new kind of training approach to the ministry. That may be ambitious but certainly worthwhile.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Moving on to recommendation no. 14, talking about having a divisional directive to address critical incident stress management requirements after a serious incident, that again is anticipated to be in place for the fall of '09. Is that something that will be developed internally or will we be looking to other jurisdictions as to best practices across the country?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you for the question. Right now we do have a process in place. I know you're very much aware of this. When a serious incident takes place, there are trained staff right now that can actually respond. I think we have to give it the appreciation that hasn't been there before. That's going to be part of our new divisional directives and policy that we in fact ensure that after every serious incident we have staff trained properly and that we will in fact use them to move forward to assist our staff ongoing.

I think that another issue here is that we have to look at, you know, moving on is that we have to . . . I just got a note that Mr. Rector of course has developed the new CISM [critical incident stress management] policies. So we're already making those things active in our new implementations. So the idea now is to ensure that we follow through with the right staff trained and we maintain that. And again it goes to the compliance issue and auditing, moving down the road, that we have mechanisms in place to ensure that staff are able to not only get the response but we have staff available to respond, to assist.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. Is that going to include the training of additional staff regarding additional capacity to deal with it because individuals may not be available? It's the same type of situation you have with people on holidays or gone, and so on and so forth. And these things are immediate need, more or less immediate response in a lot of cases.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Absolutely, yes. A good question. And, Mr. Chair, thank you for that. We will in fact ensure that we have more emphasis put on that, that we have available staff ready to react when things do happen, recognizing as well that there are staff out there that we may have to look at calling them in as well to assist if it gets to that situation where no one's in the building. But operationally we don't see a reason why we wouldn't want to have more staff trained to be there and provide 24-7 support.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. We'll move on to recommendation no. 15. It talks about the replacement of the corrections management information system, CMIS, which is now well considerably perhaps beyond its life expectancy when it was originally put in place. It talks about ongoing. Do we have a time frame in which we can expect that we are actually going to see the overhaul of this system? And is it going to be, you know, in the next year, two years, five years?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you for the question. Mr. Chair, this particular system will be ongoing, working with Justice officials as well, because both of our budgets have money in place this year to start looking at the retooling of and making a new system that's going to be enhanced and actually replace what we already have. So we're looking at, and if I believe the number's right, it's going to take a few years.

I think at the end of three — two for sure, possibly three we're looking at if we keep committing capital dollars for this — to have it fully implemented with the new replacement. However we may be able to enhance the current system to help us as well. So I think on that note, there's not much else to actually be said. We've got money dedicated this year and so does Justice, so we'll be moving forward with ITO and the ministry officials.

Mr. Yates: — Recommendation no. 16 deals with relatively the same thing. It's tied very much to the development of the new system.

Recommendation 17 talks about a computerized accountability system being installed at the RPCC [Regina Provincial Correctional Centre] to monitor the staff unit inspections and checks. Is that same system going to be implemented across the entire system, all the correctional facilities?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — That's a good question. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, the answer to that's pretty much a simple yes. If you have a situation where you have — like we saw in this case — a range where staff had to walk down to the end of it, we want to actually look at putting those accountability systems and measures in place. And we'll be looking at that there first. That's why it's recommended here.

But I see a need and the ministry officials see a need to look at other institutions, other units and develop the same accountability matrix, that we have staff that actually are in fact doing what they're supposed to do — checking on inmates on a periodic basis as required — and to ensure that they've actually made their walks. And we'll be rolling that out as part of our new \$9.4 million dedicated this year to increase our infrastructure security systems.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. Moving on to recommendation no. 18, it talks about that high-risk inmates should not be housed in certain units until a security audit has been completed in those units. Has that audit been completed? And if not, when can we expect that audit to be completed?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you for that question. Yes, Government Services did the audit and we're looking at the infrastructure audit as to the structure itself, and are we safe again and can we do that.

However right now we are doing everything in our power, based on our numbers, to not put high-risk inmates in those units. And I believe right now we're using those units only for our very low-risk inmates. So we're utilizing the new Regina unit for the high-risk and recognizing that that is also being looked at throughout the other institutions — that we're trying to keep our most high-risk inmates in the most secure sections of our prisons. But Regina has the most advanced unit available right now.

Of course that recommendation also ties into our expenditure, beginning this year, to build a new remand centre in Saskatoon, that you questioned before in the last committee meeting. And we need to have a facility available that we can keep all of our very high-risk inmates in, and have staff trained to manage those high-risk inmates as well. That's what we're doing now.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. My question has to do with then, is there any negative impact on programming for offenders as a result of not being allowed to be housed in any of the units 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7?

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Well I guess the question was answered last time. We do provide, offenders do get provided, on remand status, their basic programming, intervention levels. So with

that in mind, the programming, even though they may be held in the new units, still has the availability of space for those kinds of interventions, absolutely.

There's no impact except for the fact that we, across the system, like I mentioned last time, lack space in some cases for our most intensive programs which is the classroom setting and dynamic along those ways. Hopefully with opening of the 90-man dorm in Saskatoon, looking at the new remand centre that will be up and running in four years from now, we may take other initiatives as well in the short term to hopefully try to offer up program space for offenders. But right now we're pretty much busting at the seams.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. I have just a few minutes left so I'd like to talk next about the issue of dealing with gang behaviour and high-risk inmates. Really it's covered off to some degree in recommendation 19 and 20, but if you could give us an update as to where you are on moving forward on those recommendations and the particular actions that you're looking at taking as a result.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Absolutely. I think overall, like I mentioned before, is that we're going to have increased counselling from elders and chaplains. That will be the easy one to put into play within this year.

Moving forward though, again it ties to the fact we have some serious concerns and needs related to our program space. So what I think I'll do is that, if it's okay with the deputy, I'll probably pass it off to the executive director to provide some additional answer on that one. But I mean moving forward we have to look at initiatives where we know that we have our security intelligence officers working with our RCMP and city police colleagues that are able to look at some inmates who in fact may want to leave the gangs and we can resource them into the community after as well. So, Tammy, I'll let you follow up with that one maybe on that point.

Ms. Kirkland: — Thank you. Obviously the issue of how you deal with gang members is a fairly complex one and there's a lot of factors around it. But some of the things we've already touched on today — your questions around segregation and classification — are relevant in how we are able to house inmates so they are not at risk from other gang members, and aren't under the influence of those gang members.

The minister spoke to elders and chaplains and counselling. Our response around programming speaks to core correctional practice and on-unit programming which we are providing, which are ways of helping enhance staff interaction with inmates, learning for inmates around changing behaviour, and reduced incidents in facilities, allowing inmates to develop the abilities to distance themselves from gang activity.

We also speak to the infrastructure changes that we are going to be able to make through our new Saskatoon remand centre, which again allows for housing inmates in ways where they are at less risk for that. So all of those factors together enhance our ability to help people deal with gang influence and to remove themselves from that.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much. My final question is

going to deal with recommendation no. 22, pre-shift briefings to be implemented. It talks in the recommendation about briefings in specific units. One of the difficulties I can imagine occurring when you only have unit-specific briefings is that people don't get a full sense of what is going on, the internal dynamic going on in the institution itself which can play a key role in the outcomes or behaviours you may see throughout in any one unit.

So is this recommendation saying that the only briefings that would occur would be unit by unit? Or is there going to be an institutional briefing of new staff each shift coming in, plus a unit briefing? Could you give me some sense of what's really intended here? And I think unit briefings could resort in the continued isolation of information, I guess is the big thing.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you for the question. I think there's twofold here. We have to ensure that . . . Where the information comes from first of all is going to be coming from security intelligence officers, deputy directors, directors, liaisons through other mechanisms, throughout their contacts in the province.

But the assistant deputy directors are the ones that'll be getting their shift briefing away from staff. Then they'll be then told to go to the units and tell the units how it's going to work. So what happens, if for argument's sake if you and I were ADDs, we would know what's happening to each other's units. So we may in fact have an issue where we have a joint briefing that has to go on to our staff. We'll make sure we do that so staff will be fully aware.

But the ADDs will get that initial briefing every morning or every shift and they'll take that information down to their staff.

[16:00]

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, that concludes my questions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Yates. Any other questions for the minister at this time? If not, I believe that concludes our time with the Minister of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing. On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank the minister and his officials for appearing before the committee.

And what we will do is take a short recess to facilitate the change of ministers and officials, at which time we will have the Minister of Education and his officials with us. So we will recess briefly.

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thanks for having us. We appreciate the time.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**General Revenue Fund
Education
Vote 5**

Subvote (ED01)

The Chair: — I'll call the committee back to order. The next

item on our agenda is vote 5, Education. We have the Minister of Education with us. He has some officials with him and at this time I would ask the minister to introduce his officials. The minister and his officials have appeared before the committee on a number of occasions. And so with that, I will ask the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the three officials that are with me today have been with me on each of the other times that we've appeared before your committee. And on my right is Audrey Roadhouse, deputy minister. And behind is Dave Tulloch who is the director with financial planning and management. And also seated next to Dave is Doug Volk who is the executive director of the Teachers' Superannuation Commission. So we have some expertise in this area.

And I'm not sure on the questions that will be directed today, but we did not bring the entire staff and we'll try to ensure that the questions that are asked this afternoon will be answered. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — At this time I will ask if there are committee members that have questions for the minister, and I recognize Mr. Wotherspoon.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the minister and certainly our ministry staff for appearing before what's been many hours of questioning for Education estimates.

My questions we'll start here today focused in (ED04), teachers' pensions and benefits. And last year, in '07-08, roughly \$122.478 million was allocated in the budget towards the budget line on the teachers' superannuation plan, the statutory aspect of that. And I'm interested if the ministry can provide what the actual expense was.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Chair, I can inform the committee that the actual number for March 31, 2009 was \$58.9 million.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So I guess that's a difference of 63, roughly \$63 million from what was budgeted last year. We spoke in this committee with concern that the budget was high last year when we were discussing the estimates and certainly here it's more than twice what was actually spent.

So I guess I would be interested just in a little bit of an explanation for this difference. Why such a large estimate and then such limited spending? And wondering where those dollars have, in fact, then been spent or where those dollars have gone.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — A couple of comments there, Mr. Chair. The fiscal year '08-09, the dollars that are left over — in this case because they wouldn't have been spent — are just that. They're not an expenditure and there is no money that is set aside for anything else. The audited statement will show that when the year-end occurs.

Now the reasons for the changes to the teachers' superannuation funding is that it's very difficult to project the number of retirees and the kind of retirees because there's uncertainty, first of all, as to whether or not a teacher will retire. And you know,

we always go on actuarial studies and projections. And for last year, it's my understanding that for '08-09, we had assumed that 467 retirees would come forward.

Now what happens every time a retiree decides to retire, they bring a pot of money because they have been contributing to the fund and they then retire. The difference that occurs a lot of times is the amount of money that comes with the retirees may vary dramatically, because you may have a superannuate who decides to retire that is retiring with 35 full years of contribution and they'll be very close to \$1 million that this person would be bringing.

From another point of view, a teacher may decide to retire after 20 years or 23 years and their contributions and their accumulation in that fund is limited. And that's what occurs.

We also were relying on an actuarial study, the projections that were done as of June 30, 2007. So we're going to be enhancing that. We're going to be using some more current data. And we believe we're going to be more accurate because it's pretty . . . You know, that is quite a variance when you start talking about the need for in excess of \$100 million and then you find out that those teachers, they either retired in larger numbers and brought more money with them and as a result then it's almost like an inverse proportion: the more people retire, the less money you need because they have brought a bigger amount of money into the fund.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister, for that answer. If we're looking at, I guess, the numbers of expected superannuates here this year, do you have an expectation that you can provide as far as estimate for '08-09, this current calendar year?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Chair, I can indicate that for the 2009-10 budget, the teachers' superannuation plan budget that we have announced, of course, of \$92 million, is based on the assumption of 415, four one five retirees. And we're now, from the actuarial study because it's becoming a little bit more accurate, we're basing it on contribution, an average contribution from each of those 415 retirees. They will bring 527 point 7 thousand dollars with them into the plan. So with that kind of money coming in, then we need to have about \$92 million for top-up.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So last year the estimate for roughly \$122 million was based off of 472, I believe — just if the minister could provide the actual number of superannuates from '07-08. I know it was shared in this committee this time last year that it would sort of be expected that 472 would be retiring. I'm interested in what the actual numbers were.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — We can tell you, Mr. Wotherspoon, through you, Mr. Chair, that the actual teachers who retired last year was 417, and we had estimated . . . The amount of money needed was based on 467. I think I heard you say 472. It's 467, and we were expecting each of those individuals to bring an average contribution of \$364,000. But 417 retired. And the fact is that they must have brought much larger pools of money.

[16:15]

And that's what will happen. If you have a large group of teachers that are in their final, you know, into the 30s of experience — 30, 31, 32, 35 years — and they retire, they're bringing a much bigger pool than even the 527,000 that we're estimating this year. That group of teachers of course will bring a much bigger pool.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. Again last year there was discussion around — and I think maybe you were alluding to it here when you're talking about a new mechanism from an actuarial perspective on how you're studying these circumstances — I know last year there was a commitment to a five-year, what was referred to as a five-year study. Just wondering where we are with that five-year study, if that's been a process that your ministry's engaged with, and if there's information that could be shared with this committee.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Sure. I'm going to ask Mr. Volk to talk about this because this is more of a technical question regarding some of the things that he is now implementing at the Teachers' Superannuation Commission to get us, I think, a little more accurate numbers. So please, Doug.

Mr. Volk: — In the pension plan, we do do an actuarial evaluation every two years. The last one that was done formerly was as of June 30, 2007; that's when our fiscal year-end is for the teachers' superannuation plan. So we will be engaging in another one as of June 30, 2009, as well as that's when we do the financial predictions which is what this is based on, for what we would need for budgetary, for what this superannuation plan would need.

In order to get a closer number to what will actually be needed, we would be giving our actuary greater information and more current information on a more timely basis so we can monitor it. Also what we've done is built a model in-house that we can actually track who retires, what account balance that they have to their credit that offsets the requirement from the GRF [General Revenue Fund], and also to what our monthly pension is so we can see how close we are to our actual figures that is projected by the actuary.

And then when we get closer to year-end — like we did this past year in January — we provided greater information so we could adjust our numbers so it would be closer to the date.

So we're going to be engaging two things. We're going to do a new financial projection, as of June 30, 2009, for the evaluation as well as the projection forward. We'll be working with our in-house model to monitor it on a monthly basis. And then in January 2010, we will be giving our actuary more current information to see where we were at with respect to how much we'd need for the contribution balance from the GRF to fulfill the obligation to the pension plan.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister, and thank you to ministry staff for that answer. These are important numbers certainly as we look forward into the next 30, 40 years of this ministry, because if we look at the costs of pensions and of the unfunded liability that sits within the pensions, it becomes a significant budget line item over the projection of these years.

Of course where we need to make sure we fulfill the

commitments to those pensions. But we also need to make sure that Education receives the dollars that it will need, as we look long term over the next few decades, I guess, is how these pensions will in fact be exhausted, or the ones I guess I referenced — the defined benefit pensions — that have an unfunded aspect to them.

I guess my question to the minister would be, if you're looking at kind of five-year benchmark periods over the next 30 years or so, if you could provide a little bit of what you might have for estimates right now, as far as costs on the pension side?

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Chair, we'll try to explain what might happen over the next number of years because again, as I say, it's a might. Currently, as of March 31, 2009, there are still 1,869 active members. So that's the number of teachers that started teaching prior to 1979. Probably some of them, as indicated, 30 years is just around the corner. They're nearing 30. Some may even, in fact, have many more years to put in before they're eligible for 30 years or 35 years because they chose to raise a family, in the case of many female members, or they may have just put their teaching career on hold for a number of years while they did something else.

So 1,869 active members. And the projection will be of course that by the year 2016, about seven or eight years from now, is when the bulk of those active members will have reached 35 years of teaching experience. So in other words, the bulk will be retired by 2016. So that means that the contribution from the teachers — that amount that I just indicated in a previous answer where we're estimating that over \$500,000 is coming with each teacher — soon as that bulk of teachers is no longer retiring, there isn't that pool of money that comes into the teachers' superannuation plan.

So by about 2016, you're going to start to see a marked rise in the amount of dollars that will have to come from the General Revenue Fund. Now actuarial studies are projecting that in that year, about 2016, we're probably going to need in excess of \$200 million from the General Revenue Fund. It will not be the current \$58 million or the projections that we had for last year; it will be 200 million.

At the same time, another amount of money that is coming to meet all of the pension benefits of everyone who's retired . . . And by the way there are over 4,678 inactive members, means these are people already who are inactive; they're not retired. And of course there are over 11,000 superannuates. They're drawing pension.

So the amount of money that's currently in the teachers' plan is being utilized to pay a portion of the costs that we need to meet the pension requirements, and that's well in excess, this year it's in excess of \$300 million. That's what's needed. Money comes from the current retirees, it comes from the General Revenue Fund, and it comes from the teachers' superannuation fund.

The assets of the teachers' superannuation fund are being used up. And by about somewhere between 2026 and 2030, there are no funds in the teachers' superannuation fund. In other words, I think the question that Mr. Wotherspoon was getting at, it's an unfunded pension liability. There are still going to be many,

many people who are going to be superannuates, collecting a pension that is guaranteed by government.

So by 2031, we will now have the GRF fully funding it because we don't believe there will be any other active teachers who will be choosing to retire by 2031. We think they're all in. We think that of course the funds of the teachers' superannuation plan are currently all used up. So by 2031, we are again looking at a contribution probably about \$275 million.

Now that's just a guesstimate and after that, each and every year it will drop. And I can tell you that by the year 2056 — when maybe some of you younger members will still be around, I don't know that I will be in 2056 — the contribution needed will be minuscule because there may be still some teacher that is going to retire and will be probably reaching that ripe age of 100-plus and will still be collecting pension. But that will be fully funded after, we believe, around 2030. The entire funding of the teachers' superannuation plan will come from the General Revenue Fund.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. We know that there's significant challenges to fund these costs going forward, and that's why it's valued that your ministry is ensuring to review and make sure that the numbers they have from an actuarial perspective are as accurate as possible. And it's going to be a struggle for, I think every committee member in this room, our duration of our careers, to make sure that education receives the adequate funding that it's going to receive when there's such a need just on the side of the pensions commitment. That certainly needs to be fulfilled.

My question would go specifically to the Saskatchewan teachers' retirement plan. Last year 44,249,000 was estimated and my interest is in what the actual expense for this item was.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Tulloch will be providing that information to me right away. One other comment I wanted to make, Mr. Chair, if I might about the plan, and you know, and you've referred to it as unfunded pension liability. We know our actuarial study that has occurred — and we were estimating that for the year 2016 when that last group, that last large group of active teachers superannuate; we estimate that at that time — this study that I'm referring to estimated that the unfunded pension liability was about \$3.6 billion.

Now the study, as Mr. Volk has indicated, we're starting to see that the actual amount because of some of the things that have happened in the last little while, we're probably seeing an unfunded pension liability of about \$4 billion for strictly the teachers' plan. Now there are other plans that are similar to this and being defined benefits, and there is a pretty significant amount of unfunded pension liability.

Mr. Chair, I can indicate to the committee that the estimate for the '08-09 budget, as I think Mr. Wotherspoon indicated, was \$44.2 million. We don't have everything finalized for March 31 of '09, but I can tell you it's fairly close. And that number will be 46.150. So it's going to be just a little bit higher than the estimate that was in the budget.

And again these are statutory requirements that we pay to the STRP [Saskatchewan teachers retirement plan] of which the

money is then moved into the teachers' fund.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Minister. Just on that note — and I know we've come to the conclusion of our time for the most part — just as a response to that question, I believe the budget this year is \$8 million higher than the 44 million that was allocated last year. If the minister could provide, I guess, a concluding answer here, and that being a justification for this \$8 million increase.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Chair, I can indicate that the member is correct. The estimate this year is 52.2, which again is about \$8 million higher than the estimate of last year and a little bit less than the actual probably will be. We get this number from the STRP people, the teachers' plan people. And they indicate that, based on the higher salaries, based on all of the kinds of things that have occurred within the teachers' pension plan, that the \$52.2 million will be an accurate amount.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Unless the Chair and committee members and minister wants to oblige us for many more hours to come, I think we've reached the conclusion of our allotted time. Certainly I appreciate the time to ask the numerous hours of questions that we have had with the minister and his staff. And thank you to committee members for bearing with us as we have done some important detailing of spending in the Education ministry.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, for those comments from the member. We were pleased to be able to provide information to not only committee members, but of course there are a lot of people that do follow the information that is provided, and especially as the questions of today. There are many teachers of course who are in the old plan, and they realize that it is a government-guaranteed pension plan; it is unlike the STRP. So the questions that were asked this afternoon are very valid to many different people, and we thank the member for the questions.

[16:30]

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Minister. And thank you to the committee members. Are there any other questions for the minister at this time? Seeing none, we have arrived at our agreed time to recess. We will resume our sitting at 7 o'clock, at which time we will be considering the spending estimates for the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour. And until 7 o'clock, this committee is recessed.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

[19:00]

**General Revenue Fund
Advanced Education, Employment and Labour
Vote 37**

Subvote (AE01)

The Chair: — I'll call the committee to order. This evening our agenda consists of the estimates for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, vote 37, and also consideration of Bill No. 73, *The University of Saskatchewan Amendment Act*.

We have this evening with us, the Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour. The minister and his officials have appeared before the committee on a number of occasions in this spring sitting, and so I will ask the minister to introduce his officials. And also, Minister, if you have some officials joining you later on — I suppose you may have some other officials joining you for the Bill — then we can do those in introductions at that time.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, thanks very much. And if I may, I may just offer a few opening remarks as well, if that's appropriate. Great.

Mr. Chair, committee members, I'm pleased to return this evening to participate in the discussion and debate regarding the '09-10 budget. At your invitation, Mr. Chair, I'd like to introduce the officials joining me today from the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour for the immigration portion of the estimates. And we will, as you said, Mr. Chair, have other officials joining us later in the evening.

Many of you will be familiar with Wynne Young, our deputy minister; Rupen Pandya, the assistant deputy minister responsible for immigration; Karen Allen, executive director, corporate services; Linda Smith, executive director, policy and planning; Eric Johansen, the director of our SINP [Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program]; Giovanna Pirro, the director of community partnership and settlement; Kirk Westgard, acting director, program integrity, Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program; Yetunde Oke, the director of policy and program support; Roberta Cross, the director of our entrepreneurship unit. As well we're joined by Scott Giroux and Rhiannon Stromberg from the ministry as well.

Mr. Chair, again I appreciate the opportunity to be here this evening and want to thank you for the discussion last week.

Despite the recent downturn in the global economy and the loss of some jobs close to home, there is still a labour shortage in our province and there continues to be a demand for skilled workers in some sectors. But immigration stretches well beyond the realm of work. It contributes to enhanced diversity within our communities as well as ensuring that these communities are increasingly diverse, dynamic, and richly cosmopolitan. It is vital that we support our economic stability as well as community growth by responding to the talent challenge confronting Saskatchewan.

Our government's approach to confront this talent challenge is focused in three key areas. First and foremost, with an emphasis on Saskatchewan. Out of that, Mr. Chair, it will come of no surprise to members of this committee that we put a special emphasis on First Nation and Métis peoples. You've seen recent investments regarding SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies], GDI [Gabriel Dumont Institute], SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology], the University of Regina, the University of Saskatchewan, among other institutions including North West and Northlands regional colleges.

A second component is that, as we have said previously, we want to ensure we are inviting back our expat community. These are people that were raised in Saskatchewan, have made

contributions to our country and to other communities around the world. We want these individuals and their families to know it's a great time to come home.

And finally, Mr. Chair, we are inviting newcomers from across Canada and around the world to come and call Saskatchewan home. This balanced approach is critical to helping to build a vibrant, skilled workforce for Saskatchewan and to support our citizens and our communities that are increasingly cosmopolitan, diverse and dynamic.

At this time, I would like to share how the ministry's immigration budget contributes to a strong and steady Saskatchewan. During '09-10 we will continue to take a positive, strategic approach to immigration. This year we will unveil a new immigration strategy developed in consultation with stakeholders from across the province. The new strategy is a prudent, practical approach that responds to the province's ongoing demographic and labour needs and will attract economic investment to help build Saskatchewan.

For '09-10, the immigration budget has seen an increase of 27.1 per cent, from just over 9.9 million to approximately 12.6 million. Our increased investment in immigration aims at building communities, helping to reunify families, attracting new entrepreneurs and investors to Saskatchewan, creating jobs and addressing current labour market needs.

The incremental funding of \$2.69 million for immigration includes over \$500,000 for salaries; over \$140,000 for operations; over \$2 million for transfers, comprised of just over 1.4 million for immigrant settlement services, over \$400,000 for the entrepreneurship initiative that you will see coming forward, and over \$85,000 for an expanded and new international education initiative.

The focus will be on the following priorities. Regarding immigration entrepreneurship, an enhanced and expanded entrepreneur program will help immigrants take advantage of investment opportunities, promote job creation and economic growth across our province. New business immigration programs will incorporate as well an Aboriginal immigrant investor initiative that aims to link immigrant investors to First Nation and Métis communities and corporations.

Without getting into excessive details, another component will focus on a succession planning component. Recently the Canadian Federation of Independent Business conducted research that estimates that Saskatchewan will see 40 per cent of independent business owners exit their businesses in the next five years and nearly 70 per cent over the next ten. A new business succession initiative responds to this challenge and grows our province, thereby helping to make sure that we remain strong and steady.

In '08-09 there were 109 nominations under the entrepreneurship category, an increase of 118 per cent compared to the previous fiscal year. And we're just getting started in this category. There is much more to do.

Regarding balanced immigration levels, our provincial nominee program has various key components, some of which are employer-driven. And as such, these elements are quick to

respond to changes in the economy as a result of fluctuations in the labour market. In '08-09 the ministry exceeded its target, exceeded our target of 2,800 nominations by over 100 nominations. For '09-10 we have a new target of 3,400 nominations, or potentially 9,600 new immigrants through the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program.

Importantly, our priority is not numbers. It is about people, our new neighbours that we want to help welcome to Saskatchewan. Before turning to that issue, I will just reinforce that there's a new information database, a new online application processing capacity that we are also working on. This will assist in improving processing times and the quality and completion of applications.

Regarding our goals of insuring that newcomers stay in Saskatchewan, to assist in retaining newcomers — those are our new neighbours — we will be launching a new settlement and integration delivery model to more effectively respond to increased immigration in the province. The ministry has introduced a strengths-based model that will insure mainstream service providers are prepared to address the needs of immigrants who choose to make Saskatchewan home. This new approach will help immigrants living in our communities integrate into our workplaces and become active participants in the socio-economic fabric of our provincial tapestry.

The province invited approximately 10,000 immigrants to Saskatchewan last year, an increase of approximately 5,000 people over the previous year. Additional funding in this area helps to deliver programs and services and build partnerships with other employers that will ensure successful settlement and integration of these individuals and families arriving in the province. Importantly, we also need to focus on a fair, transparent regulatory environment.

Our focus in '09-10 will be to encourage an open and welcoming environment, an environment that creates opportunities to the benefit of everyone; two, fosters innovation; and three, attracts investment.

Insuring that newcomers are protected from unscrupulous third parties, that immigration measures are fair and transparent, these are some key priorities. We will be consulting on options of how to best achieve these objectives in the coming months. That said, regulation of the system through the new program integrity unit will help to protect immigrants against fraud and exploitation and to ensure high standards around fairness and transparency.

In addition the ministry developed a new information resource package for newcomers and temporary foreign workers. These fact sheets provide useful information about employment standards, occupational health and safety, as well as immigration-related issues concerning temporary foreign workers.

As well there will be increased focus on international education. In this area, too often overlooked in the past, our focus is on fostering a collaborative approach to international education. Increasing opportunities for international education, these are increasingly important in the context of both immigration and the future of our knowledge-based, globally connected

economy.

Based on my own experience, but more importantly a much broader literature and community of activity, international education will play an important role in expanding our province's innovation, cultural diversity, economic prosperity, and international trade. Through the establishment of a new international education council, at last we will promote a coordinated approach to international education in the province.

Regarding community based organizations, a portion of this new funding will also contribute to the lift for community-based organizations or CBOs. These funds continue the 7 per cent lift, Mr. Chair, to CBOs announced in fall 2008, as well as a 3 per cent additional lift in the '09-10 budget for a total increase to immigration CBOs of over \$330,000.

In conclusion, as you can see, Mr. Chair, within a balanced and prudent approach set out in the budget, this will be a year of solid investments and initiatives for our ministry regarding immigration. With momentum in our Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program; new initiatives in immigration, entrepreneurship; a renewed focus on international education; and an innovative approach to developing a regulatory environment to better protect newcomers within Saskatchewan, we are in an excellent position to enter a new century of immigration in our province. We look forward to serving the province and to the benefits of a strong and steady Saskatchewan in the months and years ahead.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank you and the committee members, and I welcome the opportunity to respond to queries.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. Before I open the floor for questions, I should make mention that we have two substitutions for this evening: Mr. Forbes for Mr. Broten, and Ms. Atkinson for Ms. Junor.

Committee members, are there any questions for the minister? I recognize Ms. Atkinson.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much. Mr. Minister, welcome to you and your officials. I have a number of questions, and my first question I will ask is, can you advise the committee what the statistics are or the processing times for the skilled worker class, the family category, entrepreneur class, farmers, health care providers, student, long-haul truck drivers, and the hospitality sector project?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure, I'd be delighted to offer the data as requested. What I'll do is I'll call on Mr. Pandya to provide a bit of an overview.

Mr. Pandya: — So processing times have in fact decreased by 24 per cent across all categories. And I'll just read across, if that would be okay. So a skilled worker without a permit, there has been a 52 per cent reduction in processing times from 9.4 months to 4.5 months.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — If I might, when we're talking about decreases — especially for those who may be watching — we're talking about the improvement of times. Go ahead.

Mr. Pandya: — For skilled worker with a work permit, there has been a decrease in processing times from '07-08 fiscal, from 4.6 to 4 months. That's a 13 per cent reduction. For family members, there's been a reduction from '07-08 fiscal, from 13.2 months to 11.7 months, an 11 per cent reduction . . .

[19:15]

Ms. Atkinson: — Excuse me. I just need, I don't need the months or what years. I'm just interested in knowing the processing time. That's all I require.

Mr. Pandya: — The average processing time is 5.2 months.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. For the entrepreneurs?

Mr. Pandya: — It is 12 months for the entrepreneurs, down from 13.

Ms. Atkinson: — 12 months, okay. And farmers?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — If I may, Mr. Chair, I think it is probably beneficial for all committee members — of course I wouldn't want to speak on their behalf — but if we do actually provide the context because it not only provides the snapshot today, but provides the reference on how we've made the processes flow a little more smoothly. So if it's all right, what I would do is ask Mr. Pandya to continue on . . .

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Chair, I only have two hours of questions, and so I have a number of questions. I'm just trying to minimize . . . I'm trying to get all of my questions in, so I was just trying to expedite the situation, that's all. So, farmers?

The Chair: — If Ms. Atkinson and the minister, if you can agree on an accommodation here . . . I understand, Minister, that you feel that some of the answers need to be put in context, so if that is what you feel, I will allow it, provided that it's reasonably brief.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Pandya, you've heard the Chair, and I'll just ask you to continue as you were.

Mr. Pandya: — Certainly. For farmers, there's been a reduction from six months to 5.2 months, 13 per cent reduction.

Ms. Atkinson: — Health care workers?

Mr. Pandya: — For physicians, there's been a reduction from 4.4 months to 3.7 months. That's a 16 per cent reduction. And then for nurses there's been a reduction from 3.9 months to 3.4 months. It's a 13 per cent reduction.

Ms. Atkinson: — Students?

Mr. Pandya: — Students are down from 5.1 months average processing time to 3.5 months. That's a 31 per cent reduction.

Ms. Atkinson: — Long-haul truck drivers?

Mr. Pandya: — Long-haul truck drivers are up from '07-08 fiscal of 1.6 months to 2.8 months. And the reason for that is long-haul truck drivers went to a two-year work permit. In the

past, they had a one-year work permit, so after six months when they applied to the program, we would move them through before the expiry of their work permits. And so, given the longer work permits, I would say that that category has just come to a natural level of 2.8 months.

Ms. Atkinson: — And the hospitality sector?

Mr. Pandya: — There's no data for '07-08. It's a new category, so it's 1.2 months.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. Can the ministry advise me how many applications are in the queue for each category listed above?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — If it's all right, Mr. Chair, what we'll do is we will provide that data to the committee. What we can say is, Mr. Pandya, there's been a 53 per cent increase across . . .

A Member: — Mr. Minister, how many?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — A 53 per cent increase in the number of applications that have been received. And we'll get that data to the committee, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Atkinson: — So the number of applications in each category . . . Well I hear the minister indicating there has been an increase. Can he advise — the increase — whether it's increasing, declining, or holding steady in each of the categories when he's getting other information?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure. We can provide the contextual information as well.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. Can the minister and his officials advise me what the performance or processing goals are for each category?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure. The initial targeting of goals, if I'm not mistaken it was an 85 per cent increase that we established, and that was for the target of 2,800 overall. The broad directive — and we're seeing some progress here, areas that we continue to work at — the broad goal is to bring all categories down within the range of six months.

Ms. Atkinson: — So, Mr. Chair, through you to the minister, so you don't have a performance goal for each category? You have a broad goal? Do I understand? Is that how I understand your answer?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well I would put the goals as being twofold. First, we wanted to ensure that the global goal per year . . . And as I've just highlighted, we exceeded our goal that was for 2,800 applications. We're over 2,900, and so we were pleased with that in our first year as we ramped up. That's now going up — 3,400, Mr. Pandya? And so that's the broad global goal.

Within each category what we've said is, let's continue our efforts to bring each category down below six months. And so some, we're already there and making progress. And for others, we continue on that endeavour. I think this is where some of the initiatives, including the online application process, is going to be incredibly helpful.

So I'm very pleased with the goals that we have set. We've achieved these goals. We continue to be ambitious and optimistic. And at the same time, as we've moved forward with initiatives like the integrity unit — a piece that I might add I was a little bit surprised that wasn't in place previously — to ensure that there were greater protections. Again, not simply focusing on numbers, but putting an emphasis on people — our neighbours.

And so I think we've got our goals there. They are global, and at the same time we can go category by category.

Ms. Atkinson: — How many applicants are exercising the temporary work permit option when they're nominated?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'll ask Mr. Pandya to follow up. The matrix on this, many of the applications actually go directly to the federal government. And so the question, as I've understood it, relates to the applications, and so we wouldn't have that complete data. We can talk about some of the other categories. Mr. Pandya, I'll let you expand on that.

Mr. Pandya: — Certainly. Under the health professions categories, physicians, nurses; under the long-haul truck driver initiative; and under the hospitality semi-skilled workers initiative — all three of those categories — the individuals arrive on temporary work permits and then after six months are converted to permanent resident status in our program or nominated for permanent resident status.

Ms. Atkinson: — I'm familiar with a number of cases where people have come. They've been nominated by the province. They have access to a work permit. They come on a temporary work permit while they're waiting to go through the federal process, and so they arrive. They've been nominated. They land.

And I'm wondering, do you have any information regarding those people? These are people who have been nominated under the immigrant nominee program, so the province has put forward their nomination. They haven't got the approval of the federal government yet to become a permanent resident, so they come here under a temporary work permit. And I'm just wondering if you know how many people we have in the province that are in that situation.

Mr. Pandya: — So in fact we do know that there is 4,378 temporary foreign workers in province in 2008 calendar year. But of that number, we couldn't tell you the number of provincial nominees who've arrived on temporary work permits.

Ms. Atkinson: — To the minister through the Chair: have you had any discussions with the federal government regarding the provision of that information to the province, in order that the province has an understanding of where these folks are and the conditions in which these folks are working in?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — If I may, Mr. Chair, I think the question has some different components to it, and it's a very important question. The answer to the question directly is yes, we are in contact with the federal government — not only in contact, in fact there is greater coordination with the federal government.

Negotiations are under way between our ministry and Service Canada to develop a letter of understanding that will allow the two governments to exchange information on employers who hire foreign workers. So directly, yes.

But the broader question, I appreciate the opportunity to speak about this. I've established the program integrity unit within the immigration services division. This unit was established to ensure that foreign workers have access to information about their rights and responsibilities in Saskatchewan. It's vitally important.

As well, the unit has created a policy and some procedures to review complaints and work with the Saskatchewan labour standards and occupational health and safety when appropriate to ensure the protection of foreign workers. OH & S [occupational health and safety] and labour standards have conducted 150 on-site visits to employers that have recently hired foreign workers. Some of these are educational in nature. Some of these are complaint driven. Joint sessions by occupational health and safety, labour standards, and immigration will be held with immigration service providers on an ongoing basis.

So, Mr. Chair, what I would want to do is yes, we've responded directly, but our steps have gone well beyond this. And in fact we have some new information. And if I'm not mistaken, it's being provided in about 10 languages?

Mr. Pandya: — That's correct.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — In 10 languages to ensure that it has greater accessibility across our province for various newcomer groups.

[19:30]

Ms. Atkinson: — Well, Minister, there has been a significant increase in the number of temporary workers in the province of Saskatchewan, certainly in terms of 2008. And that is a good thing because Service Canada has been much more prepared to recognize the labour shortage that existed in our province.

What I'm trying to, I guess, understand is how do we protect many of those workers? And when I think about your ministry, you have immigration but you also have labour and labour standards. And because of my familiarity with the immigrant community, I am regularly contacted by people in the immigrant community who are here on temporary work permits, and there are some very serious concerns that are emanating in some workplaces in the province — not all workplaces, but some workplaces.

The difficulty in complaining for people is that these are people who want to come to Canada and become permanent residents, so they don't want to do anything to jeopardize themselves and the future of their families. And so trying to manoeuvre their way through the system so that they keep their temporary work permit, they don't get fired by their employer because many of them are working at very low wages, I guess it would be fair to say.

So that's why I'm interested in knowing — given that it's the

province that nominated them, they've come on a temporary work permit because they get here faster because of the problems with the federal system — and I think we need to be able to monitor their occupational health and safety and their wages and benefits that they were told they were going to get when they arrived.

And so that's why — I'm not being critical to the ministry at all — I'm just trying to understand how do we get to the point where the province knows where our immigrant nominees are? And then we put in place services to make sure that what they were told would happen before they got here in fact happens when they get here.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'm delighted to respond. It's an important question and that's again to reiterate the dialogue with Ottawa is around a letter of understanding that's going to allow for that exchange of data, and pleased to see the progress to date.

In addition to that, the steps we've taken — as the member from Nutana knows well — there was no integrity unit within the immigration branch. This is something that we've set up to help foster and facilitate those services. One of the key benefits of the organization of the ministry is that we have our respective ADMs [assistant deputy minister] in very close contact and co-operation on this key issue.

And in fact as we've set up our rapid response teams, a team that's goes out this week — and it's with great empathy and understanding for those that have been laid off and their families — we actually have within that a component focusing upon newcomers. So we have a unit in place. There's greater co-operation between occupational health and safety, labour standards, and immigration, something that's possible increasingly because of the dynamic and because of the coordination of the ministry. We're co-operating with Ottawa, and we've added this service through the rapid response teams.

In addition to this, we have now available in 10 languages materials regarding occupational health and safety, labour standards, and immigration, and these translations occur in French, Spanish, Chinese, in Korean, and a number of other languages.

So what we're attempting to do is, as we're negotiating with Ottawa, rather than standing back simply waiting for the data to come in, we're being very proactive. We're engaged and we're saying, these are the services that are available. As I've highlighted, we've had some degree of success, conducting over 150 on-site visits with employers. Some of these are educational; that is, we feel it's best to get out in front. Some of these are responsive.

And is there more to do? Certainly. Like the member from Nutana, I have some historic familiarity with, as well as an increasing amount of contact and collaboration, with a number of communities across our province. And certainly the feedback I've received is that these steps, while knowing that there's more to do, these tangible steps have already made a difference, a real difference in people's lives. What I would do is invite the member from Nutana, if and as cases arise, as phone calls come, by all means to be in touch as I know you have on some

occasion with my office.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well thank you, Minister. I think part of the dilemma that I face is that the people who contact me don't want me to tell anybody because they're afraid, but they want me to help them stickhandle their way through the process. And when you have a complaints-driven system, then you wait for a complaint to come in. On the other hand, there is a way to be proactive.

And I guess I'm wondering. Let's just use the hospitality sector project. What is the wage that the hospitality sector has to offer a person under the nominee program?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We'll get back to you on the Service Canada standards. I've seen a couple, and the number 14 comes to mind, but we'll actually confirm it.

But let me give some reassurance to all members. We have through our collaboration with the federal government, CIC [Citizenship and Immigration Canada], when we receive complaints, we've worked diligently and successfully to actually have allowance for individuals to be transferred to other positions. So again I will welcome the member from Nutana, if and as there are individual cases, it's with some degree of reassurance to say our track record on assisting those in need is quite solid.

Ms. Atkinson: — I'm familiar with attempting to transfer people from one temporary work permit to another temporary work permit. It does take some time, or it did. Maybe we can get it done in a day or two, but it does take some time. And the dilemma is that when you are here and you're earning \$10 an hour — I haven't run into many in the hospitality sector that are earning 14; maybe they are, but I haven't run into many — so you're earning \$10 an hour, that's with the type of rents that people are paying. I'm familiar with one person earning \$10 an hour whose rent went up \$100, from I think it was \$620 to \$720, for a very small apartment in Saskatoon close to where this person works.

So when you're living or working in a very close-to-the-line kind of position in terms of your expenses, you don't want to really complain too much because you're afraid of losing your job, and then what do you do because you have to be able to pay your bills. So I guess what I'm trying to think about, from a problem-solving point of view, how do we approach this?

Our system is a complaints-driven system where, you know, we hear from people and then we go out and look to see what's going on. And I'm wondering, Minister, is there a way for us, once we get the information from the federal government to know where our nominees are — the Saskatchewan's immigrant nominees — are working, just to drop in and make sure that people are doing okay and make sure that what they thought they were going to get before they arrived is in fact what they're getting when they get here?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — As I've said, with the 150 on-site visits, some of these have been complaints driven. Some of these are educational. Some of these are preventative. Frankly, the letter of understanding that we're negotiating is going to help give us access to greater numbers of people undoubtedly, and I look

forward to helping ensure that that's concluded. So the frame of dilemma is one where . . . I would rephrase it to say I don't think there's a dilemma involved. I think I want to ensure that the expectation we have is that individuals will be treated with respect and dignity, that contracts will be honoured.

If any member of the legislature knows of circumstances that are different, then again through our integrity unit which has a solid track record in the brief time that we've established, that I welcome either a direct call to my office, which we will then direct to the integrity unit, or to the integrity unit directly. There shouldn't be a dilemma, simply a matter of ensuring that the information that is available is then passed on to the officials so that within occupational health and safety, labour standards, and immigration we can actually get people on site to go and have an inspection.

Ms. Atkinson: — Minister, if people were to go out, do they phone the employer ahead of time and tell them we're coming? Do they give them a heads-up in terms of occupational health and safety? Do they give them a heads-up that there's been a labour standards . . . I mean can you describe to me how labour standards, occupational health and safety — maybe even public health which isn't part of the department or the ministry — how do we protect individuals? I guess that's what I'm interesting in knowing. And how do we make sure that if you give them a heads-up that you're coming and you have a complaint and there's only one or two people in the place that are under the temporary work permit, well of course the two people aren't protected.

So I'm just trying to understand your process. So that if we had an ongoing process — when I say we, I say the royal we, Saskatchewan — we had a process where there was regular contact with employers, it was just the normal part of doing business, then I think then people aren't put at risk. So I guess I'm trying to understand how do your processes work because my understanding is that there have been instances where the employer was given a heads-up, and then there was difficulty. So if you could explain it to me, then we can pass it on to people.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure. I can accept there may be complexities. There are a couple of different procedures. If there's a crisis, then we will simply go in without an advanced call, and we've certainly done that in the past. As I've said, out of the 150 activities, the educational activities begin with phone calls, begin with dialogue. So either option is available. But if there's a crisis or a situation that, you know — and certainly this is where we trust in the judgment and protocol of the officials — there's certainly the capacity to simply go in.

[19:45]

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. Well I think we'll move on. But I think it would be very helpful if you could, when you do sign that agreement, if you could issue a news release so someone like myself would know that we can now track these people. I think that would be helpful.

I want to move on. Has the ministry published the immigration statistical report for 2008 yet?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We've just put up the 2007. And the 2008, the data is just being processed. It'll be a number of months. But as soon as it's available, it will be online.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. In the business program, I understand we have a new person that's in charge of the business program that's very good. How long does it take now for the pre-application and invitation letter?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'll just start by saying that there have certainly been some changes that we have put in place, and I'll let Mr. Pandya speak to that. I'd really like to say we're delighted to have Roberta Cross join in our work. She brings a wealth of experience, and she and Mr. Pandya are working closely on this. Things are changing on this. And so, Mr. Pandya, why don't you walk through some of the initial changes. And as I say, we're just getting started — I can come back to that later — but the process.

Mr. Pandya: — Certainly, Minister. Since June 2008, what we have been endeavouring to do is process applications as they come in through the pre-application phase. And the reason is that after six months, we have to reconfirm all of the primary documents relative to net worth for business entrepreneurs. So that means that we're actually processing the documents twice given the past performance standards in the program. So we've been moving to try to process based on the pre-application. So it's about 2.5 months to answer your question specifically.

Ms. Atkinson: — So basically from start to finish, it takes about 2.5 months to do the pre-application and invitation letter, then about 12 months under the nominee program.

Mr. Pandya: — That's correct. So we're down to 12 months. And there's been a slight reduction year over year in terms of the processing time, but that's correct. So once we've done our assessment of the application and we've invited the applicant to come to the province, and that typically takes some time based on that individual's ability to . . .

Ms. Atkinson: — Do you know how we compare to other provinces?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question. We'd be on the mid to high level. That's one of the reasons that we're putting renewed emphasis on this. It was an area that I think, certainly as I've had the opportunity to drill down into it, we have found a number of efficiencies, and we continue to find those efficiencies.

Ms. Atkinson: — This is one area where I know that if you are coming from another country, you have access to capital or you have capital, you go where the shortest processing time is. And I guess that's just the reality.

Now in terms of Ms. Cross — and I'm pleased to see that she has been hired by your ministry — is that program going to be headquartered in Saskatoon?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — In addition to answering your question, certainly the shortest processing time — and that is one of our key goals, is to come up with, you know, within the top 1, 2, 3 processing times, as part of having the best provincial nominee

program in the country — that's just one factor. Certainly what we've heard is that we need to continue to make progress here, and we're going to continue to do that.

The other element is that it also involves a number of other variables. For example the fact that Saskatchewan is leading the country in economic growth — again, not immune from what's going on around us — that has contributed to increased interest within our province. So certainly processing time is one of the key variables but by no means the only variable.

And the answer is, I anticipate, that as consistent with the increasing number of newcomers coming to Saskatoon — 60 per cent of all newcomers settling within Saskatoon — the director's position has been moved to Saskatoon. And we'll be reviewing additional options for increasing service within Saskatoon, just given again the very significant percentages of newcomers settling within that city.

Ms. Atkinson: — So the director's position for the entrepreneur program is going to be headquartered in Saskatoon. Are the department staff or ministry staff associated with the entrepreneur category, are they going to be headquartered in Saskatoon as well?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — That'll be one of the forthcoming elements that we weigh as we proceed here and we can find efficiencies in the program. That's certainly an option for us, but it's not a decision that's been made at this time.

Ms. Atkinson: — Is there still some presence in Saskatoon besides the director's position?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Indeed. We still have three settlement coordinators.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, thank you. Minister, does your ministry track the number of international students in our province by institution?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, we do.

Ms. Atkinson: — And can you advise me how many international students are in Saskatchewan by institution?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure. Now if the member from Nutana will forgive me, we know we're in the midst of early May, and we know that students have finished their exams. During this past year, we have record of 3,656 international students studying in the province.

Ms. Atkinson: — Could you repeat that, Minister.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure — 3,656 this past year.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. And do we track them by regional colleges, SIAST, the two universities? How do we track them?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We track a couple of different ways. Location — again overwhelmingly Regina and Saskatoon but other communities as well — as well as on an institution-by-institution basis.

Ms. Atkinson: — Is it possible when you're getting me the information that you indicated — the number of applications by category in total in your ministry — could you also provide me with the number of international students by specific institutions?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We can provide that. I think the key element here is — and again the member from Nutana would know that, but for others watching — as long those are just in aggregate, to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

Ms. Atkinson: — You can't tell us by the University of Saskatchewan how many international students are there, the University of Regina, SIAST?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure we can.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We won't get you lists. I just want you to know that.

Ms. Atkinson: — Oh no, no, no, of course not. I've been around long enough to know. I'm not interested in their names, just the numbers. And could you tell me how many of those students have off-campus work permits? Would we know about that?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Indirectly I think we can get that either from the federal government or more likely through the respective institutions.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. Now do you know how many colleges and campuses would have MOUs [memorandum of understanding] for off-campus work permits? Because each institution has to have, as a I recall, an MOU in order for their students to work off-campus. And I'm wondering, do all the regional colleges have an MOU? Does SIAST?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Two key elements on this one, and there's been an evolution in the system. So specific institutions began — U of S [University of Saskatchewan], U of R [University of Regina], SIAST — with MOUs. What CIC has done, we've now signed a province-wide MOU, and so in effect as a result, the other institutions are now allowed to do that.

Ms. Atkinson: — Good. Minister, what is your ministry doing to assist colleges and universities to recruit internationally? I know the two universities have quite a sophisticated international recruitment program. I think regional colleges are now starting to work in that area, and SIAST has been doing some work. And I'm just wondering what your ministry is doing to assist those institutions that are not quite as sophisticated in the international recruitment front?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think it's goes out even beyond the institutional capacity, and I'm happy to chat about that too. But I think certainly an area of focus that we've been in dialogue with — not simply with the institutions — but with the federal government, is a broader branding exercise for international education in Canada. And so certainly with that, through that dialogue, we've certainly been encouraged, and now we're in a position to move on the establishment of the international

education council.

[20:00]

And in addition to that dialogue between the province, our ministry, and a number of stakeholders in Ottawa, we've also been in contact with our post-secondary institutions. And so this international education council is going to not simply be a champion of international education, not simply help to coordinate this better — those are two important functions — but, importantly, be a catalyst for actually enhancing the activities of any of the specific institutions. That is, as a whole, we are going to become more effective than our individual parts. It's part of a broader post-secondary dialogue that's under way, ensuring that we can maximize a refocused system.

And so I'm delighted that the stakeholders have come forward, delighted that there is a clear consensus, delighted that Saskatchewan's stepping up, and pleased to be working with the federal government. And certainly the feedback we've received from Foreign Affairs and from a number of other stakeholders in Ottawa is that this is heading in the right direction.

Importantly the international education council is also attentive to the K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] system. And so we're really pleased with that, in order to be able to ensure that there are some tighter linkages, especially regarding the international work that's under way. We know that various systems, and in fact various schools on the K to 12 system, have been doing various types of recruitment. What we want to do is now make sure that it's coordinated, it's cohesive, and this council's going to provide the opportunity to also be catalytic.

So that's one of the new key elements, delighted to move forward on that here shortly. And I think this is going to allow Saskatchewan to move to really what I think has become an expected norm across the country — coordinated and cohesive — not to detract from the autonomy of the institutions, but to help ensure that there are synergies that can be recognized and realized.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. So in terms of the regional colleges — I know you don't have your post-secondary folks here tonight — but is there any work that's being done with the regional colleges in terms of recruiting international students? Understanding that there is this more federally coordinated process, but on the ground, is there any work being done by the ministry with our regional colleges to recruit students to the colleges?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, certainly Parkland and Cumberland have some degree of involvement and a greater interest. And we're seeing that increase right across the province actually as part of our dialogue.

Another example would be, although indirectly, Northlands with its affiliation with the University of the Arctic. And so the answer is, yes there's increasing interest.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. Now, Minister, I've been thinking about how the federal system has changed, and it has. It's undergone some significant changes since 2008. And now

applicants through this program have to pass a minimum skill test, and they either have to have a job offer, which is similar to the nominee program, or they need a designated skill which is on Canada's training and work experience list or they need to have studied or worked in Canada. So that has an impact upon the immigrant nominee programs all across the country, I suspect.

And I'm just wondering, do we have any sense or do you have any sense how quickly the new federal skilled workers are being processed?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — There are 38 on that list. As the member knows, the average, previously, has been six years, and the goal of the federal government now is to move to one year. We're just in the midst of our first round of these. And if I'm not mistaken, about 430, thereabouts . . .

Mr. Pandya: — That's correct.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We can get you the exact number, have come through as far as applications so . . .

Ms. Atkinson: — In Canada or just for . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Actually just for Saskatchewan. So we, certainly again, we're just in the midst of this. This is kind of our first opportunity for all of us to work through this. But we are seeing, as I say, about 430 files. Those applications have come through, and we're just in the midst of working through them now.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. So we don't know — because it just happened in 2008 — we don't know what the processing time is for Saskatchewan, or do we know? I'm trying to get to a point here. The point is, one of the beauties of the immigrant nominee programs across the country was that it was a much more expeditious way to get to a province, and it also recognized skill shortages. And I'm just wondering, the new program — will it have any impact on our program? That's point number one.

Secondly, you used to go around Saskatchewan, and you would see all these help wanted signs everywhere. That has changed quite dramatically actually. And so that's why I'm interested in knowing the number of applications that we have. Because I can see that initially when the program was getting started, there were a lot of people in the queue. As we process more applications, I'm curious to know how many applications do we have in terms of people coming? Is it mostly under the family category? I'm interested in that. And then what kind of impact does this program have on the province?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Again we're not immune from what's going on around us, but as the source of one reference, the saskjobs.ca website — 6,700 jobs still open. And again that's just one reference point. So certainly, it's not as it was, but Saskatchewan continues to lead Canada in economic growth. So that broader contextual piece is changing a little bit, but perhaps less in Saskatchewan than in other jurisdictions in the country.

The agreement that was reached, the federal government didn't act unilaterally. There was a lot of dialogue that went on. Certainly we were involved in those deliberations. And so there

is a notion of protecting the provincial nominee programs. And so again, still early days, we'll see how this plays itself out, but certainly the agreement is protecting the provincial nominee program. Nothing to date demonstrates that that's going to have an adverse effect on us, but again we're just in the very opening, early days.

Ms. Atkinson: — The new federal program in many respects mimics the immigrant nominee programs across the country, and so I guess that's why I was interested in knowing whether there was any impact on the applications to the SINP.

Now the new Canada experience class, it facilitates immigration for those who are already here. And I'm wondering, is this having an impact on the SINP applications?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I am going to ask Mr. Pandya to expand on this. Obviously we're certainly seeing increasing interest but, Mr. Pandya, why don't you just run through some of the early effects that we're seeing — although at this point my sense is, negligible.

Mr. Pandya: — So that's correct, Minister. So we still continue to see healthy demand for the provincial nominee program, and notwithstanding the changes to the federal immigration system to improve the efficiency of that system, there's a 900,000-worker backlog in the federal skilled worker program. There is six years of processing time.

So the changes and the ministerial list that was introduced post-February 27, 2008, the performance target that the federal government wants to achieve on those is one year in terms of processing, but it's for those 38 occupations specifically. The Canada experience class, of course, applies to students and others in-country and allows them — folks who are already working here — to apply to become permanent residents.

Immigration levels to Canada, the planning levels are between 240 and 260,000 annually, but based on HRSDC [Human Resources and Skills Development Canada], Service Canada, CIC projections, 100 per cent of net labour force growth in the country will be due strictly to immigration by 2012-13 now. It's been pushed out because of the recession.

And the number that you would need to kind of balance out the needs in the economy versus the number of immigrants coming in is around 500,000 immigrants annually. So there's a big gap between the number coming in versus the number we need. So I don't think that we see the changes to the Canada experience class or changes to the national immigration program as competition to provincial nominee programs. The provincial programs still respond to regional needs in a very specific and unique way.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — If I could, just to add to that, importantly . . . And many around the table will know that another change which has helped to facilitate success, especially employment success and settlement success on the experience piece, is that the students now have the option of working in various fields, not specifically the field that they . . . and that has helped provide a little bit greater lateral mobility for students that have just graduated.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. Given all the new programs — so I'm talking about the federal programs and the provincial programs — do we have any idea of the mix of new applicants for permanent residence in Saskatchewan? So we have the federal program and there's a couple, you know. There's the in-Canada one or the Canada experience. Then we have the federal skilled worker; 430 people have come under that. And then we have our own SINP, and I'm just wondering, do we have an idea of the mix in terms of who's coming?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We would have general statistics, SINP and then through the federal program. We can access those and provide those to the committee members.

Ms. Atkinson: — Perfect. In terms of last year, so 2008, you will have statistical information up till the end of December, so the calendar year 2008. Can you tell me what kind of occupations came to the province? Or not came to the province because just because you're nominated in a fiscal year or a calendar year doesn't mean you come until the next year, so I suspect many of the people who came in '08 were nominated in '07. So I'm just wondering if you can tell us, in '08, what kind of occupations did people come to. What countries did they come from? That kind of information.

[20:15]

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, there would be an abundance of data. Maybe I'll just go back. It's not quite the level of detail, and we'll get you a greater level of detail for the committee members, Mr. Chair. But for category, for 2008, for the provincial nominee program, and this'll help set the stage — we'll run through some of these: PNP [provincial nominee program], 3,036 for 2008; refugees, 550; skilled workers, 509; family class, 545; live-in caregivers, 90; entrepreneur investor, 33; and protected persons or those here on humanitarian grounds, 69; for a total of 4,832. Those are some broad baselines.

From 2007, and again we'll be forthcoming on the research on 2008, top ranking: welders, truck drivers, physicians, post-secondary teaching and research assistants, cooks, labourers; and food, beverage, and tobacco processing; farm supervisors, motor vehicle mechanics, those involved in agriculture, and the list would go from there. It gives you a broad sense.

On the countries, we'll just run through: the Philippines, China, United Kingdom, Germany, Ukraine, India, the United States, South Africa, South Korea, and Israel will provide a snapshot.

Ms. Atkinson: — So these are the people who were nominated but didn't necessarily arrive. Am I correct?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well we'll actually see with our latest statistics whether they arrived or not. There'll be a tight correlation.

Sorry. These are landed immigrants. Do we have statistics for . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . We will get you those for the applications too.

Ms. Atkinson: — What I'm interested in knowing, because my

recollection was that people were nominated but they didn't necessarily arrive in the fiscal year or the calendar year that they were nominated in, and I guess I'm curious to know who came in 2008. What did they come to? Just the normal data. So if we can get that, which countries they came from, and so on, perfect. Thank you, Minister.

Now one of the advantages we had, in my opinion, was that we had the family class. And that certainly has led to a number of people moving here from other parts of Canada because we had the family class and it meant that they could bring their family members here.

And I understand that Alberta has now moved to the family class, and I'm just wondering, are there other provinces that have made the public policy decision under their nominee program to include a family class? And so now do we have competition to what was a very good policy that distinguished us from other parts of Canada?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Fair comment. And I think there is a strategic advantage. I still think there is a significant strategic advantage for Saskatchewan based on our economic growth, again not immune to what's going on. My understanding is, I don't know if it's been actually implemented in Alberta but they're considering it. I don't know if that's the case. I think Manitoba's there. I think that's up and operational. And my understanding is that there are three of the Atlantic provinces that are in some stage of consideration, but I don't think through to implementation yet.

Of course Ontario doesn't have a provincial nominee program and that's of interest especially when we begin to look at where those newcomers have settled. And so when we look at British Columbia, we look at Ontario, when we look in Quebec, we certainly continue to see very real strategic opportunities.

I think as the Premier's highlighted in the Assembly, in the fourth quarter statistics that we've just received there were just around 1,000 people, just slightly fewer than 1,000 people that came to Saskatchewan through interprovincial mobility; 921 of those, as memory serves, 921 came from Ontario just in the last quarter alone. And certainly through the opportunity to meet some of those individuals, both on the ground, in Ontario, and here within the legislature, my sense is the advantage that we have, regardless of where other provinces are relating to the family class category, not to in any way take away from it, does really relate to the strength and buoyancy of our economy. So that's just a little bit of feedback, some statistics that we've seen.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well, Minister, I know that our family category is known far and wide in Canada. And all you have to do is get in a taxi anywhere outside of the province and they know about the family category, and they're quite prepared to tell you that they have relatives that have moved here to take jobs or start businesses, but — I'm talking about the immigrant community — they've come because they want to bring their relatives. So I don't, you know, I think it'll take all kinds of different efforts to keep the province moving.

I'm interested in any information we have on retention rates of people under the SINP and how we're doing there.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure. The data that we have — it is dated — it's 2006 census, 80 per cent retention. Certainly one of the reasons we're moving forward on the modernization of data processing is that we'll actually be able to incorporate this significant element into our ongoing activities.

So I would say, certainly we're seeing this; anecdotally I'm hearing as many success stories as ever, as far as the retention. It's what I might call people bouncing into Saskatchewan instead of moving out. I think we're making some progress here, but the answer is that's certainly on our priority list. And I think it's going to take the establishment of the new data systems. My sense on that is somewhere in November, by the end of the year, we should have that up in operation.

Ms. Atkinson: — Congratulations. The ministry staff will understand what I'm saying as congratulations.

The other thing that I'm wondering about, is the ministry going to follow Manitoba's lead and require consultants to deposit a \$10,000 performance bond?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think the question and the response is that remains a work-in-progress, whether we follow any specific policy instrument from another jurisdiction. I think certainly what we've heard over the summer — and if I'm not mistaken, more than 300 stakeholders — is that there is a need for an increasingly regulated environment. And so what the specifics are on that, we don't want to catch anyone off guard. We're going to continue with that dialogue, but I see moving forward along the lines of making sure that there's greater accountability, making sure that there's greater transparency.

And we've also had this discussion around the fed-prov-territorial table because one of the challenges — and I think you'll appreciate this — is we've seen what I call bad apples that may be working in another province and then suddenly just simply jump provincial jurisdictions. And so there has been a notion that we've talked about, maybe a bad apple list that we all co-operate on, so something out beyond just simply looking at a provincial patchwork of regulations. Maybe there's a way that we can actually stitch together some broader initiatives. But on the specifics, we're looking at a far more regulated environment. I haven't come to any decisions on any specifics.

Ms. Atkinson: — So given that we have developed a very, you know, I think a sophisticated immigrant nominee program in the province, we have a number of categories. We have lots of newcomers that are either here or coming. The bad apple list — how do we make sure that various immigrant communities know about the bad apple list, and then what do we do to protect them from the bad apple list?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — It's an excellent question. It's part of the dialogue that we have, and it's so very important that various newcomer communities would have access to that. In addition we also need our small- and medium-size businesses to have access to that because we've certainly had our share of those stories as well, with the best of intentions.

And so I will just simply say, based on our last federal-provincial-territorial meeting, I was pleased that the

discussion came up. I don't know what that looks like on a national basis.

Certainly as we're looking at it here, ideally I don't think we would go to a bad apple list. Ideally what we would be able to do is incorporate, perhaps on a website, those that have some level of — and I'll use the term very loosely — some level of authorization or approval. And probably within the provincial set that would be focused on a very positive list. These are entities or individuals.

But on the national, as I say, it's a very early time in that discussion, but I was pleased that there was a consensus around the table that that's certainly a frustration.

Ms. Atkinson: — Minister, is the province still getting a number of people under the nominee program from Ukraine and coming as welders? Are there still a large number of people coming through the Kiev labour centre?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The answer is yes. And in addition to that I would say, certainly when I had the opportunity to be on the ground, not simply welding, but multiple skill sets. And we were there — I don't know; about a dozen employers were there with us, maybe a few more — and so it provided me an opportunity to speak with the employers as well as to meet some of the individuals that were interested in coming.

[20:30]

So I think the two questions are distinct. Welding is certainly a subset but the broader interest from Ukraine, I would say, expands well beyond that. And we had the opportunity to sit down with Canada's ambassador to Ukraine; a very fruitful visit. Obviously the Deputy Premier, Minister Krawetz, given his work here in the province over several years, he's playing a lead role in helping to foster that relationship. He's just been recognized with a national award from Ukraine. And so, you know, that dialogue continues, but I think it's safe to say, certainly expands out beyond any particular skill set.

The Chair: — Committee members, I believe this maybe would be an appropriate time to take a short recess. So if the committee is agreed, we'll recess for a short break.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, if I may and most especially for our officials that are here late into the evening tonight, I just . . . Are we coming back? Again it doesn't matter to me; happy to do it. Are we coming back to speak more about immigration?

The Chair: — Yes.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Okay.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

The Chair: — I'll call the committee back to order. We'll continue with the Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, and I believe Ms. Atkinson has the floor.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. Minister, the service outlet in Saskatoon, is it still at the CanSask centre, and is that where the

director of the entrepreneur program is going to be located?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We have the three at the service outlet are still there, and new offices are being established at Innovation Place.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. Now I want to talk about settlement, and there has been a significant increase in the number, in terms of transfers to the settlement agencies and other organizations. And I'm wondering if you can give us a breakdown of what settlement agencies, up until now, and other organizations are receiving in terms of funding increases or new funding.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You will recall last year we had a lift to 7 per cent. That's been built into this budget, plus there's a 3 per cent lift, and so the Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Agencies, from here . . . This is going to take a little bit of time. I'm just wondering if there's a way to actually just distribute some of this data to the committee.

Ms. Atkinson: — There certainly is. Can we have a combination of both? Just give me a bird's-eye view of what we're looking at in terms of some of the changes in numbers, and then distribute it.

[20:45]

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure. I think we can do it quicker by that breakdown, and distribute it to the committee members because it will take up the rest of the time, I think, just on that list.

Brief overview: 1.466 million, incremental increase for settlement and integration services includes just over \$1 million for immigrant settlement and integration services, just over \$330,000 to reflect the 7 per cent CBO lift effective October 2008, and an addition 3 per cent, as I've said, '09-10. There would be new monies for program increases regarding inflation, and those would be in and around \$50,000. And there would be a \$25,000 lift regarding some fed-prov pieces. And there's a bird's-eye view, but we'll give you a breakdown.

Ms. Atkinson: — Minister, have there been any consultants that have been hired to assist with any of the work in the immigration branch, outside consultants?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes. They would be considerable in number and range.

Ms. Atkinson: — Could you provide that information to the committee?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure. We can do that.

Ms. Atkinson: — Great. Thank you. Minister, has there been any increase in terms of English language training support for workplace-based training or regional colleges or any of the settlement agencies? And has there been any money put into what I would call more advanced English language training in order to help people who have credentials move into various occupations that they were educated or trained for in their home country?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think the question's an important one, but the context is too. We've seen provincial funding on settlement go from about 5.4 million to 6.9 million, and on settlement and integration, 26 per cent increase. We've seen federal dollars go from about 5 million up into 8. That is, as we are getting busier, we're seeing increasing settlement dollars flow from Ottawa.

The context for this is important. We have 2.6 million in this year's budget for the ESL [English as a second language] piece, plus we have additional dollars for the enhanced language training programs, physicians and other professionals. And, Mr. Pandya, what would that amount be?

Mr. Pandya: — It will be cost shared with the federal government but the amount will be \$389,000 approximately that will be shared. Up to 65 per cent of those funds will flow from the federal government to the province and that's each year for two years.

Ms. Atkinson: — And this will serve how many individuals, do we think, on a fiscal year basis?

Mr. Pandya: — So we anticipate that the ELT [enhanced language training] funds will serve about 160 clients and the ESL funds in general, the increase in the ESL funds, will fund 500 clients annually.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, thank you. My final question — maybe not quite my final question but close — you were contacted by a colleague, as I understand it, where there have been some Filipino nurses that came here under a temporary work permit. They had to pass their exams in order to be nominated by the province. They have not been successful and it appears as though they're on their way home.

Are there any arrangements being made that perhaps there is some alternative jobs that they could do, given that we do have alternate jobs that could be available to them? And when people don't complete their exams and if they're going to be sent, you know, sent out of the province, they have to leave the country, do they have to find their own way home or does someone help them with their expenses to go back home?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The great news is that 80 per cent plus have passed their exams on the first attempt. We're just delighted with that. There have been some — and a working number would be seven — the health regions in conjunction with our ministry are working to have those individuals placed elsewhere. And there is one person that has asked to go back to the Philippines.

And it's my understanding that appropriate steps have been taken or are being taken on our end to ensure that the financial burden of that is taken care of. I don't think that has occurred yet. I don't think that individual has returned but that process is under way and I don't think there's any hesitation about helping to take care of the financial aspects of it.

Ms. Atkinson: — I'll pass it on to my colleagues. Finally, Minister, we only have a few minutes. Can you just give me a little more information on the integrity unit that you have in your ministry? What exactly does it do? How can members of

the legislature use the unit — I don't know if that's the appropriate word — but access the unit when there are integrity issues at play in the immigration process?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The last question first. The integrity name, the moniker, was one that we wanted to have reflected in the title of the work and that is the work of the ministry but also the broader spirit within which these individuals are here. And so we said, look, this is about ensuring the integrity of a broad social contract, if not their specific contract. So we wanted to ensure that that was reflected within. What I'll do is, actually I'll turn this over to Mr. Pandya to work through and then I'll come back on the final point about access points.

Mr. Pandya: — There's currently three staff. The unit was created in August 2008. There's a director and two officers. Those officers and the director have undertaken investigative techniques training in Manitoba and they work with the fraud protection unit of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Canada.

The unit doesn't have legislative authority to undertake investigations per se. But what they do do is review concerns that are raised by either recent newcomers and/or employers or others that are brought to the attention of the unit. And they will review those cases to determine if there is, first of all, an immigration issue that needs to be investigated. And if there is sufficient information for them to believe that that is the case, they would refer this to the federal government, which under the *Immigration Refugee Protection Act* has the authorities to, of course, conduct investigations through the Canada border security agency and the RCMP.

If there is a labour standards issue, there is a protocol in place to work with both labour standards and occupational health and safety to identify what the needs of that particular immigrant and/or employer are relative to those issues in general.

The unit is of course working on the development of the informational and educational that the minister referred to earlier, so the fact sheets on immigration frequently ask questions on OH & S and labour standards. That information's being made available through agreement with the federal government — all temporary foreign workers that will enter the province. And in addition there's a card that has contact information for both OH & S, labour standards, and the program integrity unit so that should a newcomer have any sort of question or concern, they can dial in and it's a dial-in number.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I guess to do that as far as contact points, easily done through my office, easily done through the deputy minister's office, or easily done directly with the integrity unit, and Mr. Kirk Westgard is the lead on that. And so again, you know, we want to invite not just members of the legislature — although we certainly want to make sure the invitation is extended — we want to make sure that people across the province are aware and attentive to this. And our track record is, as I say, we've been busy — over 150 site visits — and the officials have done some very, very good work that have truly helped to improve the lives, futures, and fates of individuals here in the province.

[21:00]

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Chair, we're just about at the end but I would really appreciate it if some of the materials might be sent out to MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] across the province because all of us have newcomers in our constituencies, and it's information we can put in our constituency offices. I often put information in my constituency window. If you have a poster or something, I think that would be a good thing to do in the name of public service, if you could do that for us.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — And I've been the beneficiary of some of the notices you've put up in your window as our family walks by. No, we're happy to do that, especially as these multi-language sources are available — happy to make sure that we get those distributed as well. Yes.

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Chair, I want to thank the minister and all of his officials for the evening. I appreciate the information very much.

The Chair: — I believe that concludes our discussion of vote (AE06), immigration. We will now turn our deliberations to issues dealing with employment and labour. And, Minister, I believe you have some new officials that will be joining you shortly, and once they are in their seats, perhaps you could introduce your new officials.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, you know, it'll come as no surprise. As our officials are making their way home for the evening on a very late shift, as others come in, I would just invite the members of the committee to maybe offer them a hand. I know it's a long road for these officials, and I appreciate it.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Chair: — Minister, I see your officials are settled and ready to provide you with the information you would request. So would you please introduce the new officials that have joined you.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Certainly. The batons have been passed, so to speak. Again we have some continuity. We have Wynne Young, deputy minister. We have been joined by Mike Carr, associate deputy minister for employee and employer services; Daniel Parrott, the manager of labour standards; Glennis Bihun, executive director for occupational health and safety; Jan Morgan, the executive director for career and employment services. And Linda Smith is staying; Scott Giroux is staying; Karen Allen is staying; and Rhiannon Stromberg is also staying. And so for those individuals, thank you for your patience.

And I also see Pat Faulconbridge here as well, and Pat is doing some really important, helpful, tremendous work as it relates to the office of the Status of Women. We just had a consultative session on Friday; we're going to have another one here soon. And I just want to make special attention to that office and the good work that's under way there.

The Chair: — I will open the floor for questions. Minister, if you require some of the officials sitting behind you to join you

at the table, would you please introduce them for Hansard purposes. And I recognize Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. I just have few questions around the minimum wage. And it went up on Friday to 9.25 an hour, and that was a good thing. And that's the last of the three stages, so we are into that next stage of what happens.

Now there is a Minimum Wage Board in existence right now. And will it continue in its present stage? Do you foresee a change in that board at all?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think the context, we're happy to have fulfilled promises made by both parties. And so we're delighted to move forward on that, on 9.25. This is one of the highest minimum wages now across the country, and as far the fate and future of the Minimum Wage Board, we'll certainly wait to see. But I anticipate that the board will come forward with, as it's mandated to do, will be forthcoming with a report this year. And I look forward to receiving the work of the board.

Mr. Forbes: — They're required by the Act, *The Labour Standards Act*, to report at least once every two years, so the two-year anniversary would be this November. Do you know, have they been meeting? Are they preparing a report for you at this present time?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Certainly there have been some key aspects of dialogue under way. Mr. Carr, you've taken the lead on some of those discussions. We wanted to have this third tranche of the minimum wage put in place. And now on a go-forward basis, that's right, they will be reporting this year — the board will be — and look forward to having that dialogue continue.

Mr. Forbes: — The thing I think many people — and of course there was an article in the *Leader-Post* on Friday — a lot of people are talking about did this reach the low-income cut-off, the unofficial poverty line in Canada? In the whole issue around indexing it, I know in 2007 when we had started the first of the three phases, that the intention was to get it to LICO [low-income cut-off], and that therefore we could index it and it could be predictable and in small amounts.

A couple of questions: do you know is it at an appropriate level for LICO? I know LICO is based on different sizes of communities. Is it at the LICO that was established in 2007 for this? And what are your thoughts around indexing it?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think it's safe to say that the options are under review. Regarding the specifics on LICO, I don't have that information available tonight. Again, we can certainly endeavour to get that information to the committee members.

Mr. Forbes: — I think that would be helpful. I know it's an interesting dilemma when you use LICO because it's a national standard, and of course it's based on the consumer price index for Canada; it's not based on the Saskatchewan CPI [consumer price index]. And last year of course our CPI was three times the national average, basically because of housing.

So there's those little things you have to figure out, but when we start on this process down the road, at the beginning we

have to agree about what the direction we're going. So I think it would be helpful for us to have that, how close are we to that. And of course the inflation, particularly in housing, I know has settled down, and so next year's minimum wage increase could be very minimal. And I think that's what people are hoping for — to get to a point where it's predictable and everybody agrees at the beginning of where we go with this.

And so I'm wondering when you're talking about options, what are the kind of options that you have been talking about? What would be the kind of things that people should be thinking about, from your point of view, when you determine a minimum wage?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think the frame is probably the most important or significant component of this. And the frame is that the work that we're doing, the analysis we're doing, is taking a cross-jurisdictional perspective across the country. And so that's the frame, and the work is still under way.

Mr. Forbes: — We know, in going by the story but it's, you know, I've seen the reports from CFIB [Canadian Federation of Independent Business]. And Marilyn Braun-Pollon was quoted in the *Leader-Post* as talking about better ways to improve the standard of living, of course, for low-income workers. And of course that's true, and both parties have done the tax cuts and that type of thing, and child care and housing are all part of it. But we know that there's been many groups who've talked about a training wage. Would you ever consider going down a training wage, that road?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — On the last question, I think what I've said before this committee is it would be unlikely at this stage. But, you know, again I'm certainly not ruling it out. But I would say a training wage would be unlikely.

But the broader question, I think, speaks to some of the vitally important steps we've taken regarding affordability. And we can talk about how the Minister of Finance last week put out a news release entitled, "Many happy returns," where over \$700 million in total tax savings became available to the people of this province. And I think that's a vitally important component of making sure that the affordability piece . . . Certainly the minimum wage, which we've just increased, is part of that but there are other components.

For example, the average weekly earnings in Saskatchewan, up by 3.5 per cent over February, 2008 — average weekly earnings now in Saskatchewan, a record \$804. Second largest growth in wages in the country and third highest average weekly earnings across the country, that provides us again with a bit of a snapshot to have this discussion.

So the work is under way — the lowest unemployment rate in the country, strongest job creation growth, 80,000 people taken off the tax rolls. We've had initiatives for seniors and for students; for those with low incomes. And so the debate, an important one, is one that's framed with I think some very, very aggressive action. I'm sure you'll agree the opportunity for 80,000 people in the province to be taken off the tax rolls has pretty significant implications for those individuals and their families.

So the work on minimum wage continues.

Mr. Forbes: — And I appreciate that. And I'm glad you reminded me about the number 80,000. But I have a question: how many people now are on minimum wage?

[21:15]

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Twelve thousand, the last figure that I've seen.

Mr. Forbes: — When would that last figure have been?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — That's based on 2006 Stats Canada data.

Mr. Forbes: — My concern — and I hope this not the case, so I hope you and your folks are keeping track of this — as minimum wage goes up, other wages don't go up in the same amount, and you actually catch more people. That's a fear of minimum wage going up, is that more people end up on the minimum wage because people aren't increasing it. And if that's not the case, then that's very good news. And so I hope it stays about, I think it has been about 12,000 for a few years. And actually I do think wages are going up, so that's a good thing.

But I wanted to ask you a question about that 80,000. You reminded me of that because I did write the Minister of Finance a series of written questions. I hope the number is 80,000, and I don't mean to be argumentative over this, but I'm curious about where did the number 80,000 come from? And if you have that answer right now, that would be great, but if you would make a commitment, if I were to write you a letter to say where are these 80,000 people?

Because I believe that sometimes we put those numbers out there, and when I ask the minister in the written questions they said, well the fact is we do not know how many people are paying income tax in Saskatchewan. You know, the lag time between when the federal government delays their money to us, that it's really pretty hard to estimate 80,000 this year would not be paying income tax. I hope that's an accurate number, but I'm curious about how did you come up with that number when we're at least two or three years behind?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'm just going to refer that to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Forbes: — So no commitment to . . . if I were to write you a letter, and you would . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I would commit to forward to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Forbes: — Finance, and he'll probably give me the same answer — that he can't give me the answer. And I hope it's 80,000, but I know that it was a good announcement.

Then there was some targeted income tax reductions, which we were glad to see. But I also think that there is a commitment in government, no matter which party or whoever, to be accurate on the numbers. When somebody says, where did you get that number from, we should be able to come up with that number.

And it's one that, particularly in my riding, where I know when we reduced income taxes, and 50,000 people went off the income tax rolls, and a big chunk of Saskatoon Centre is no longer paying income tax. And now I'm thinking even a bigger chunk of Saskatoon Centre is not paying income tax, which is good news, but I still see poverty. I still see a lot of the issues that they face, and so minimum wage and all of that is a huge issue.

But getting back to the training allowance, you said that you're not too much in favour of that. I don't think I'm overstating that, is that right?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'm sorry. The word I just heard was training allowance. What I heard previously was training wage?

Mr. Forbes: — Right.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'm sorry because we are increasing the training allowance. We've indexed that.

Mr. Forbes: — Sorry. Training wage is what I meant, sorry. And so you're not too much in favour of creating a training wage. Is there any particular reasons for that?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think more broadly, and we can drill down on this, but broadly speaking I think that would relate to recruitment and retention, and then there is certainly the element of individuals. There are still plenty of opportunities out, and at least based on feedback I'm receiving, it's a relatively academic — without in any way being pejorative — its relevance isn't resonating, is how I may phrase it.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I'm glad to hear that. And I know that when I've talked to particularly young people, they get anxious about that right away because they see they're doing fair work, and they just want to get paid a fair wage for that. And if it's selling a hamburger, whatever, they're not selling half a hamburger; they're selling the full thing. And the person paying the price that . . . So I appreciate that, and I hope that it sticks.

So thank you for that. I know my colleague has a few other questions about this.

Ms. Atkinson: — My questions have to do with how young do you have to be in order to work in a retail store? Let me just give you an experience.

Last Friday night, I was at a local retail store, a large one. I was with a friend who grew up in Europe. And two fairly short boys, with the store shirts on, went running by with a bunch of product, big boxes — and when I say short, I mean short. And so he said, how old are you two? The answer was 12. They were going in and out of the warehouse of this store. And he said to me: Pat, can people in Saskatchewan work when they're 12 years old, and what about occupational health and safety and so on? I said, well I don't think they can.

But I guess I'm asking you, Minister, can you be 12 years old, maybe 5 foot 1, obviously a boy — not a man or an older teen or a mature looking teen, but a boy, small, slight — working in a retail store, running around stocking fairly big product?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well I won't comment on five one; I was five one for a long time. The answer is, and I couldn't believe this either, the answer is, in Saskatchewan — and it's one of the reasons that we've launched these consultations — there is no minimum age of work in most sectors. And it's been a policy gap for a long time; it's been long-standing. And so that's one of the reasons that as we begin to look at these specific sectors that we're looking at, we're doing this pilot right now of 15-year-olds under certain conditions.

Ms. Atkinson: — So, Minister, can you work in a restaurant and be 12 years old?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No, that is one of the ones that's covered. The question that prompted this so . . . But you can help pump gas and serve someone a muffin. And as of right now, there's a policy gap. So that's one of the reasons we're moving forward with consultations. I think they're just about to wrap up. We've heard from stakeholders all across.

Two key questions. We said, one is the pilot because the issue between 16- and 15-year-olds, which frankly a good discussion to have, because we've said the pilot is 15-year-olds, and then we put some restrictions on those.

But the broader questions that we've asked in the consultations, and I'm certainly of the opinion we ought to have a minimum age in Saskatchewan. And we've done a bunch of comparative work as far as what looks like the range across the country, roughly speaking. And Mr. Carr will be able to weigh in in detail. But roughly speaking, from about 12 to 16 is that range.

And Saskatchewan, we're sitting here frankly as a pretty significant anomaly. And so in key sectors of our economy, there are no regulated age limits. And I think, and certainly the view of the government is, we want to hear from the people of the province because, in my estimation, that's a pretty significant policy gap for the very . . . [inaudible] . . . occupational health and safety, for labour standards, for frankly WCB [Workers' Compensation Board]. But out beyond that, for the fact that they probably ought to be in school.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well this must be . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure, okay. Yes.

Ms. Atkinson: — You know, just support their parents . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — And I don't want to draw it out, but other jurisdictions have come up with in addition to saying some minimum or setting some minimum age criteria, they've also come up with some conditions. And so for example those underage can't work late in the evening, which makes some good sense, provisions for rides home. And there are list of instruments that they've looked at.

So we're looking at this very question right now. I hope that we're in a position here within — I don't know — four to six weeks to actually be able to report, to say, these are the stakeholders we've heard from; these are the numbers; this is the consensus.

I would like to highlight the work . . . the grade 8 class from

Wymark probably has done some of the most interesting policy work on this issue in Saskatchewan. And it's thanks to their teacher who said, what do you think about this issue? And they were then given a writing assignment and research assignment, and I've seen some of them. And you know, I just applaud the ethos of the teacher and the work of the students because they put their heart and souls into those papers, and delighted to have those papers and the work of that class become part of the consultative effort.

So that's one of the reasons that these consultations are going on. In fact we just came forward with some additional advertisement because we were at modest, shall I say, modest feedback, and I said, well let's spend a few more dollars to actually make sure people understand and know that these consultations are under way. Because I agree with you — this is a very significant policy gap. So happy to have that on the record and I think it's a very legitimate question.

Ms. Atkinson: — Right. Well I certainly understand the work ethic. You know, young people, you know, can hardly wait until they can earn some money and all that sort of thing. But I was actually thinking, I'm not sure this is safe. I'm not sure it's safe because it's a very large place in Saskatoon with lots of heavy boxes that could fall on kids and these guys were pretty little.

I knew that there was a consultation going on. I must admit, Minister, I thought it was about the restaurant industry. So it's a much broader consultation than that.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — That's right. That's part one, but the broader context essentially with the focus on the five sectors, including the service industry, that's where most of the attention from the media and others went. But the broader policy, I think, is probably far more important or as important, and it relates to, you know, this is a policy gap in Saskatchewan and issues as fundamental — parental consent.

You know, we need to do a better job. Mandatory work readiness training, occupational health and safety — you know, before someone starts, regardless of age, do they have that? Maximum hours of work on a school day, maximum hours of work during a school week. And that's certainly what we've come to on the 15-year-olds. And then the requirements of supervision, and your example is one where essentially peer supervision of those who are energetic but perhaps not as experienced. So those are the very questions we're asking.

[21:30]

Ms. Atkinson: — They were having a lot of fun, you know. They were having a lot of fun. I didn't see a lot of supervision.

A Member: — They just got a raise too.

Ms. Atkinson: — Maybe, yes — May 1. Anyway well that's good. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, members, and Minister. That concludes our time allotted for consideration of estimates.

We will now move on to the last item on our agenda for this

evening, and that is Bill No. 73, *The University of Saskatchewan Amendment Act, 2008*. And as soon as the minister has the appropriate officials with him, we will start deliberations on Bill 73.

Bill No. 73 — *The University of Saskatchewan Amendment Act, 2008*

The Chair: — Minister, I'd ask you to introduce the officials that will be assisting you for consideration of Bill No. 73.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Certainly. Once again, Mr. Chair, committee members, Wynne Young, our deputy minister; Mr. Reg Urbanowski, assistant deputy minister, advanced education and student services; and I think Rhiannon Stromberg is continuing to endure and demonstrating great patience.

I do have just a few very brief remarks, Mr. Chair, if and as appropriate.

Clause 1

The Chair: — We will do that. We will consider clause 1, short title, and I'd invite you to make those comments, Minister.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Bill 73 is a result of the request from the University of Saskatchewan seeking some modernization and updated legislative provisions regarding the university. I should contextualize it. We had received proposed amendments for the University of Regina, and I don't want in any way for people to be wondering about that. We were then asked by the incoming president, Dr. Vianne Timmons, to just simply provide her — she and her team — with some time to actually review those. So I anticipate in the coming weeks or months to hear back from Dr. Timmons about proposed changes to *The University of Regina Act* as well. But on this one what I might do, Mr. Chair, is just walk through key changes as outlined in the Bill.

Regarding the visitors in office, that historically dates back to medieval England. Its duties are not set out in the, I guess, the equivalent of common law. Within our system, the Lieutenant Governor is identified, and this has just resulted in some issues. Some of these issues are then delegated to the Court of Queen's Bench, and I guess it would be best characterized as resulting in, on occasion, uncertainty, confusion, procedural complexity for both the complainant and the university. And so the first amendment will simply eliminate the position of the visitor. And without in any way dismissing the historical significance of the position, just simply the intent is to streamline and make more explicit and transparent procedures and processes.

The next one, the existing legislation regarding the chancellor selection locks the university into a chancellor selection process that has become . . . I guess certainly it has raised some questions in today's environment and we can get into that. It essentially replaces a voting procedure with a joint board-senate search committee led by the Chair of the board and composed of three senators and three board members whose recommendation would come forward for final ratification by the university senate. And so this is one and Mr. Urbanowski will lead us through. We've certainly seen very minimal participation on this element and there are a couple of other issues so I'll just continue.

Board term limits. Existing legislation establishes a two-term limit for members of the university's board of governors. The university has indicated that it would like to see this extended to a three-term limit and that is to provide a greater sense of continuity. Often it would take a term for an individual to come up to speed on some of the complexities; the second term, really begin to hit their stride and as they've begun to become more familiar with the institution and the processes and procedures, that two-term limit is seen as inhibiting some of the experience, insights, and expertise that would be gathered around a table. We thought that was very reasonable.

Regarding just some housekeeping, Bill 73 also includes some minor housekeeping changes which do not change the original intent or substance of the Act. First the existing legislation refers to the extension division which has been discontinued by the university. Second the existing legislation also includes the names of a ministry which has since been changed. And so what we would like to do is remove the references to the extension division and change references to the Ministry of Finance instead of making reference to the department.

In my opinion, and certainly this shared by our government, these are common sense changes. They meet the need of the University of Saskatchewan — indeed they were identified by the University of Saskatchewan — while being mindful of the importance of safeguards that serve the public interest. And happy to begin a dialogue just regarding Bill 73.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister, for that brief explanation of the Bill. Are there any questions for the minister? I recognize Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you. I have some questions around, I think it's section 8, the visitor aspect. And I didn't realize too much about this role until, you know, when we speak in the House. And I had asked that the library do some research on this for me, and got to know this position and what their role is and how important actually the role of some sort of independent body to adjudicate some concerns or complaints within the university community.

So I was curious of a couple questions. One, through your consultation process, were staff or students, were they consulted about the fact that there would be no longer the role of the visitor available to them?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Both undergrad and graduate student executives were consulted and contacted on this.

Mr. Forbes: — What were the results of their . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — They, based on the information we received, concurred that this step was a helpful one.

Mr. Forbes: — Was that through a letter? Was it your ministry that made that contact or was it the university who made the contact and is relaying that to you?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Yes, it was through the university.

Mr. Forbes: — So the university consulted and said they've consulted everybody within their community, so everybody's

on board. So you, in fact . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I wouldn't say that. I mean what we've said is with specific reference, we made mention of the graduate students and undergraduate students. As far as the notion of everybody, you know . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So who were they? Who did the university say are on side? So it's the student body's on side. But we don't know whether the staff is on side — the professional staff, the teachers.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I don't know.

Mr. Forbes: — Is that a concern?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Oh, I don't think it's an issue of overly concern to us at this stage. You know, the provision is one that I think you need to understand within the university. This is not the only means of appeal or oversight. There is a number of mechanisms put in place that would be used far more regularly.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I am concerned about that because I know and through some reading — and I don't have the papers with me — and I do believe it was Trent University or Queen's where they go rid of the visitor. And then a complaint . . . They wanted to get rid of one of their colleges. There were three colleges at this particular university. And this apparently went quite a ways up the court system. The issue was, because they had just got rid of their visitor, they had to go to the court system and that was a really unfortunate process because the visitor was the usual process of having an independent third party rule on these things without getting involved in a court system.

So you had mentioned earlier that in fact some things had gone to Court of Queen's Bench? Some of the complaints?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Let me just begin by saying that the AUCC [Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada] has said that Saskatchewan remains an anomaly, that there certainly are a number of options and instruments available to individuals.

Mr. Forbes: — Who's AUCC?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

Mr. Forbes: — Would they be the administrators or would they be the professors and teachers?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — This is a body representing over 90 institutions.

Mr. Forbes: — But it is made up of the institutions. It's not the professors' professional organization, is it?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Right. What you should know is the board at the University of Saskatchewan has a faculty representative on that board.

Mr. Forbes: — I would imagine that they go by majority rule

too though, right, do they not?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I don't think we'd judge or pry into the decision making around the university board. I mean if you're . . .

Mr. Forbes: — I didn't bring it up. I didn't bring up the board.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Actually you just asked.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, I asked a question about something you had said about the board.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure.

Mr. Forbes: — For more information about . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — About the decision and decision-making processes of the board of the University of Saskatchewan. And the answer is, as an autonomous institution the board would take its decisions under its own counsel.

[21:45]

Mr. Forbes: — And my concern is, within a community, that when we pass legislation as a government representing the people of Saskatchewan, that when we're dealing with such an important institution as the University of Saskatchewan and removing a process to ensure that there's fairness in how you deal with issues of dispute, that there remains processes that are fair that deal with disputes and that everybody understands with their eyes wide open as they move forward that these are the new processes. We're moving out of the old ones, into the new ones, and everybody agrees. But if many people would probably not know an awful lot about the role of the visitor because it is . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I think that's accurate, which I think I speak . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . No. Well let me just roll through, Mr. Chair, if I may.

There are guidelines for academic conduct, the authority of which approved by the university council; student appeals on academic matters, again authority of the academic council; student academic dishonesty rules, university council; standard of student conduct, non-academic matters, the senate, most recently 2008. There are a number of instruments and processes available to individuals across the university campus, across that institution.

This is a dated and complex instrument that does not provide certainty for individuals and so it's actually to help ensure greater transparency, greater capacity for individuals, including students, to understand the processes that are in place. And so when an organization like AUCC says yes, you know, this is a bit of an anomaly, what I wouldn't want and I'm sure you don't imply that this instrument would be the only avenue available to stakeholders. That's just not the case within that academic setting.

Mr. Forbes: — And that's not what I imply at all, or wish. And if there's a more effective, more effective process and I'm not sure if this is . . . And I guess one of the questions I would ask:

is this the last resort? Is the visitor usually considered the last resort in terms of appeal? Is there now a new last resort, and are people aware of that?

One thing I guess I am reluctant to hear is that now really the last resort is the court system, and that more and more concerns or disputes at the university will be going into the courts as opposed to internal dispute processes that were in place prior. And the unintended consequences now that we're going to see people going to courts — students and staff.

And I don't know much about the visitor. So I'm not the advocate for the visitor. But I do think that I want to make sure that everything is fair as we move forward because once we do this and the visitor is gone, that there's got to be a good dispute mechanism.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — There are several in place. As the Lieutenant Governor, who's identified as the visitor, doesn't actively perform the duties of the office, instead the requests as of recently have been referred to the Court of Queen's Bench. So by individuals going to the visitor, they're actually going to the court.

And certainly the instruments that are in place — the academic conduct, the appeals on academic matters, the academic dishonesty rules, and the standard of students' conduct in non-academic matters, having been invited to be involved — and I won't get into specifics — I can certainly attest through personal experience the processes are very thorough. They are certainly peer-inclusive. The standards of deliberation are among the highest that I've ever seen or been involved in. And so simply addressing the visitor issue, again, the reassurance is: the processes are in place to address outstanding issues.

The appeal to the visitor has provided uncertainty. It's provided a degree of complexity. And in recent years, as these have been appointed to the Court of Queen's Bench, the legal realm becomes involved.

And so certainly we concur with the University of Saskatchewan: it's time to modernize this to ensure that stakeholders better understand the processes that are in place.

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Chair, to the minister.

The Chair: — Ms. Atkinson.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. The last time I recalled this matter of the visitor, there's a student that had a dispute with the College of Engineering and that student went through a number of processes. And I think this is what led to the university wanting to do something about the visitor. Did that student not win his position at the courts?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Again the risk on making a comment is (a) we may be talking about two different cases. There is a case that remains before the courts.

Ms. Atkinson: — This is the case of an engineering student that wasn't successful. Anyway, it took years.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — And that's . . .

Ms. Atkinson: — That's the one I'm talking about, who went to the visitor, used all the processes. I think I experienced this as the minister. And my understanding is that this student won at the court. Am I correct? Mr. Urbanowski will be familiar with this because this has been going on for some time.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Again I hesitate to comment. There is a case still before the courts.

Ms. Atkinson: — Is there a case that involved the visitor but it ended up at the court where the student won? I'm not talking about the case that's still before the courts, but where the student was successful.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'm very hesitant to weigh in because in fact I'm not certain the case that you're referring to has been resolved.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. Now herein lies the difficulty. Is there anything in *The University of Saskatchewan Act*, in law, that allows for a student to take the process to some place other than the court to deal with a decision of the university? Is there a process in the legislation with this amendment?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well this piece as it exists with the visitor actually takes it into the courts. I mean that's the de facto; that's what is happening now. There are a number of processes in place with a series of very significant checks and balances within the university structure for students to make appeals.

Ms. Atkinson: — I understand that. I'm just wondering, is there anything in the legislation? I know that there is in *The Education Act*, for instance. If a parent is having difficulty with a child who has a disability, there is an outside process if the school board can't accommodate it or whatever. I'm just wondering, Minister, now that this section is being repealed, my understanding of the legislation, *The University of Saskatchewan Act*, is that there will be no external process written in law, in the Act, for students for example who've gone through all of the various processes of the university, they still can't resolve it to their satisfaction. Am I correct?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The issue is not written in the Act but the recourse to the courts is available.

Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. Is this student that has, I guess, been an advocate for himself for several years now, finally went to the visitor, now before the courts. My understanding was that he . . . I think he's a constituent of yours. Is this amendment, this repeal, as a direct result of his, what I would call, tenacity?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — This or any other case has not been raised as any part of a rationale for modernizing this piece.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thanks. My next question has to do with the appointment of the chancellor. I will put this on the public record for those who might want to be interested in this for the future. This is one section of the amendment to *The University of Saskatchewan Act* that I oppose. And I oppose it because, as a graduate of the University of Saskatchewan, I appreciated the opportunity to be able to vote for the chancellor of my university.

And I recognize that there are institutions across the country that have gone to this insular approach to electing the chancellor, choosing the chancellor. But I think that we should be trying to encourage more democracy when it comes to our various institutions.

Now some people will argue that the number of people who have been voting for the chancellor has been declining. I can say as someone who graduated from the university in the late 1970s, I have voted for every chancellor that we have at the university and I think I have been able to vote for some great chancellors.

And I would say, Minister, that I realize that democracy costs money. And I would think that when we moved away from sending out ballots to people, where now you go online and you vote — and I don't think the university has all of our emails and so on and so forth — I think that this has contributed to a decrease in the number of people who are voting. But I think this is really, this is a disappointment. And I'm speaking as a graduate of the University of Saskatchewan with a couple of degrees and as someone who has participated in the election of the chancellor.

You know, the university has elected John Diefenbaker, Peggy McKercher, Tom Molloy, Sylvia Fedoruk. You know, I think the people who have been part of the university, graduates of the university, have made some really good decisions. And I think it's unfortunate that the university, I guess for cost reasons, is now going to this process where the board and the senate . . . And we don't all, you know, not all of us get to be on the board or have an opportunity; not all of us belong to the senate. We're not going to have a chance to participate.

I've expressed this to people at the university. I think this is driven by the board. I think it is because there were people that were requesting this in the past. But I think it's disappointing that people who are part of the university community, who graduated from this very fine institution, will no longer have an opportunity to vote for their chancellor.

I understand the rationale but I think that as legislators we should be doing as much as we can to encourage more democracy and more participation and I'm not sure this section does.

So I won't ask you any questions. I know you've been asked by the university to do this and as a former minister, I know that there's a lot of pressure to amend *The University of Saskatchewan Act* and to do what they want because it is a separate, autonomous institution. But I really do think that we should be vigilant about ensuring that our legislation that is a product of we, as members of the legislature, promotes as much democracy as possible at a time when democracy seems to be decreasing in the world.

You don't have to respond. I just wanted to put it on the public record.

[22:00]

The Chair: — Are there any other questions for the minister? Seeing none, we will proceed with the Bill. Clause 1, short title,

is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 17 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: Bill No. 73, *The University of Saskatchewan Amendment Act, 2008*. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. I would ask a member to move that we report Bill 73, *The University of Saskatchewan Amendment Act, 2008* without amendment. Ms. Eagles so moves. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. That concludes the agenda for today and this evening. I'd like to thank the minister and his officials for being with us this evening. And seeing that it's prior to 10:30, we would require a motion to adjourn. I recognize Mr. LeClerc.

Mr. LeClerc: — Don't we have to vote the supplements off?

The Chair: — We will do that next week, Mr. LeClerc.

Mr. LeClerc: — I move we adjourn.

The Chair: — Mr. LeClerc moved that we adjourn. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That is carried.

[The committee adjourned at 22:02.]