



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. Greg Ottenbreit, Chair
Yorkton

Mr. Cam Broten, Deputy Chair
Saskatoon Massey Place

Ms. Doreen Eagles
Estevan

Mr. Glen Hart
Last Mountain-Touchwood

Ms. Judy Junor
Saskatoon Eastview

Hon. Jim Reiter
Rosetown-Elrose

Ms. Joceline Schriemer
Saskatoon Sutherland

[The committee met at 19:30.]

The Chair: — Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Seeing as it's 7:30, the chosen hour for our committee meeting to begin, we'll call this meeting to order. I'd like to welcome all of you for deliberations of the Standing Committee on Human Services. Substituting members tonight, Mr. John Nilson for Ms. Judy Junor. And voting member on this side we have Mr. Cam Broten. On the government side we have substituting for Minister Jim Reiter, Mr. Darryl Hickie, and substituting for Ms. Joceline Schriemer is Mr. Randy Weekes. And we have voting committee member, Ms. Doreen Eagles and Mr. Glen Hart.

Before we begin, we'll be tabling document HUS 58/26 from Social Services, a response to questions raised by committee members on Human Services dated May 12th of 2010. And those have been distributed to committee members.

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

Subvote (AE01)

The Chair: — We are now looking at the main and supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, vote 37, central management and services (AE01), outlined on page 30 of the Estimates booklet; along with the supplementary estimates outlined on page 11 of the November Supplementary Estimates booklet, General Revenue Fund; as well as vote 169, Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, lending and investing activities, outlined on page 162 of the Estimates booklet.

Mr. Minister, would you care to introduce your officials that are with you tonight? And as officials change, if you could introduce yourselves for the purposes of Hansard, and I would welcome you to make any opening remarks.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair and committee members, thanks very much for an opportunity to return to the committee and for the deliberations of the estimates for the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Delighted to introduce once again, Clare Isman, our deputy minister; on my left, Mike Carr, associate deputy minister, labour, employee and employer services; back in behind, Reg Urbanowski, assistant deputy minister, advanced education and student services; Rupen Pandya, assistant deputy minister, immigration services; Karen Allen, executive director of corporate services; Rhiannon Stromberg, senior executive assistant to the deputy minister.

As well we have Pat Faulconbridge here, executive director, Status of Women office; Glennis Bihun, executive director, occupational health and safety; Laverne Moskal, executive director, labour standards branch; Denise Klotz, director, office of the worker's advocate; Peter Federko, CEO [chief executive officer] of Workers' Compensation Board; Fred Bayer, the registrar of the Labour Relations Board. Pat Parenteau is joining us, the director of legislative services. And there are a few other officials, but we can introduce those as we go along, if and as

appropriate, Mr. Chair. And happy to start with the deliberations if and as you see fit.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I will open the floor. Mr. Nilson.

Mr. Nilson: — Thank you very much, a good way to start the morning with your department and now end the evening with your department as well, so I'm happy to see you again. I've got a few questions, sort of in the workers' compensation area, worker's advocate. So whoever's in charge of that, have to help out the minister here, but welcome everybody.

Under the workers' compensation legislation, there's a review that takes place on a regular basis, and I understand that that's going to happen in the year 2010. Could you tell us sort of the timeline for this and how the process is rolling out right now?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thanks very much for that important, important question. Indeed this year we will be proceeding with a review as required.

The process that is unfolding is that letters will be sent shortly to stakeholders right across the province, soliciting recommendations for committee membership. And from there, we anticipate that over the course of the summer, with that feedback, that membership of the committee will take shape. And we anticipate that by late summer, early fall the work will commence.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay, how much money has been allocated for this, and where does it show up in the budget?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — The committee of review process, as consistent with past practice, will be funded through the Workers' Compensation Board. The allocation for that comes through that budgeting stream and, again based on past practice, will be \$250,000.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay, and thank you for that. Who's going to participate in the process? In other words what kinds of people will you get to do the review, and possibly how many are you thinking will do the review? Is it a one-person review or three or five, or how does this work?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Again thank you for the question. Based on statute, the minimum is a total of five, and that would be two representatives from employers, two representatives of workers, and a Chair. And so I don't anticipate . . . again we're going to be sending out the letters here shortly to stakeholders across the province. I don't anticipate going out beyond what's statutorily required.

Mr. Nilson: — Can you give any idea now who from organized labour will be invited because I think there's at least one position that comes from organized labour. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, the intention is here to ensure that there's a balance, and so as we look at five individuals, one Chair, two representing workers. And certainly those letters are going to be going out shortly, and we look forward to receiving feedback, and they'll be going to the major labour stakeholders.

Mr. Nilson: — So I understand from the answer then it'll be two members who represent workers, and they'll be from the organized labour group that you'll get those representatives. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — That's essentially best practised or past practice, but we anticipate that that's going to remain the case. Again we're going to be essentially soliciting feedback and input from stakeholders right across the province shortly in a round of letters that are going out.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay, thank you. I appreciate the comment that the goal is to mimic past practice, and so that should alleviate any concerns that are there.

The last committee of review took place in 2006, and there were quite an array of recommendations. Could you give us a status report on the recommendations from the 2006 review? And I assume you might have to have somebody else help you on this one. It's quite a lengthy report. But I just . . . Oh, or maybe you . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I can answer it straight up; then we'll call on them. The committee of review did report in. Mike, if I'm not mistaken, there were 69 recommendations that came back in. We've made progress on a number of those. And I will just stop, and that way we can begin to address those in a more individualized manner.

I'll just follow through. Through adjustments and alterations and improvements to both policy and procedure, the Workers' Compensation Board has enacted 29 of the 69 recommendations to date.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay. So there's 40 that are in progress or outright rejected. Would that be the way to describe those?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure. And I think as . . . certainly I don't want to interrupt the flow. What I'm happy to do is we can walk through in a little more detail if that's . . .

Mr. Nilson: — Well I appreciate the comments. I'll just ask about a couple that I'm specifically concerned about, and then if there are some others that impact on these ones, well then maybe we can come back to them.

I guess specifically the first one I'm interested in is, has the minimum wage rate for certain workers under section 38(1) of *The Workers Compensation Act* been raised to the levels that were requested in the 2006 committee of review? Oh, it's the maximum wage, sorry, not the minimum wage. Yes.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — As noted, those 29 improvements or actions have been focused on both policy and procedure. The wage rate would require legislative change, and as a matter of course, we have not proceeded on that through legislation. We certainly don't preclude that, but it seems that it would be certainly prudent for the committee to review, to revisit that.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay. Well that might be one that labour would look favourably on, compared to some of the other ones. But another question I have relates to the recommendation around the medical review process. Has that recommendation and

related recommendations been implemented?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, we'll invite Mr. Peter Federko, the CEO of the WCB [Workers' Compensation Board] to join us regarding the medical review process. Certainly there have, there have been some adjustments made and, Mr. Federko, I wonder if you can just walk us through some of the details of that.

[19:45]

Mr. Federko: — Certainly. The legislation provides for the establishment of a medical review panel and lays out specifically what the panel is to address and who ought to make up that panel. The process by which the panel members are selected and the way the questions are posed was the issue that was addressed by the committee of review. And the recommendations with respect to communication to the injured worker, in terms of how representation could be made to the medical review panel, how the members of the panel are selected so that it's truly transparent, is now clearly published in workers' compensation policy which can be accessed online through the WCB website.

Mr. Nilson: — And so that is a response to the recommendation, and sounds as if it's one that should be positive for people so they could actually see what the process is.

Mr. Federko: — Yes.

Mr. Nilson: — How do you determine who sits on the medical review panel?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Great. Thanks very much for your patience. We'll get Mr. Federko to continue in the response.

Mr. Federko: — So the legislation lays out clearly how a medical review panel is to be constituted. So with respect to the appointment of the Chair, the Chair is selected by the Workers' Compensation Board from a list of specialists recommended by the local association. That would be the Saskatchewan Medical Association. So from a list of doctors provided by the Saskatchewan Medical Association, the Workers' Compensation Board selects the Chair of that committee. Other members of the committee are then selected again from a list of approved practitioners by the worker him or herself.

The medical question, there must be an underlying medical question that is to be addressed by the medical review panel. And that question must be put forward through a certificate that is signed, either by a physician in the province of Saskatchewan or a chiropractor, specifically laying out what the underlying medical issue under dispute is.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay. Thank you. I guess I'm asking these questions because there has been some concern raised about some delays that have taken place in some of the process. I'm not sure if that's entirely accurate. But one of the questions that arises is whether there's sufficient number of people on your list to actually handle all the cases that are coming forward. And so I guess the question is, is that the case? And has that number of duly, sort of certified people on the WCB list gone

up or down, or are you having some problems in that area?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, what we'll do is we'll get Mr. Federko to walk through, in a little bit of detail, some of the relevant data. As a general comment, it's not to say that there aren't questions raised, it is to say that on a relative scale, from within the ministry and within the Workers' Compensation Board, this hasn't been a major source of concern. Again it's not to in any way detract from those who may be asking questions or that have concerns. Mr. Federko, on that, why don't we get you to continue on with some of the details?

Mr. Federko: — Thank you, Minister. The Workers' Compensation Board basically has three levels of appeal or opportunity to have decisions reconsidered. The first level of appeal is an internal process conducted by a group of individuals, seasoned adjudicators and case managers, who are independent from the decision, have not been involved in the original case management or claims entitlement decisions around that particular claim. Based on the evidence and legislation and policy in place, the appeals officers review the decisions taken on that particular file and render decision, either upholding the initial decision or overturning it and ruling in favour of the appellant.

If the appellant is not satisfied with that decision, they have the opportunity then to raise that appeal to the final internal level of appeal which is the board itself. So our board functions as the final internal level of appeal. The board, granted the same powers as Court of Queen's Bench under our legislation, is not necessarily bound by past precedent or by policy and reviews each claim on its own merits and justice and determines again the appropriateness of decisions rendered by that first level of appeal. So they are only reviewing those decisions already taken through the first level of the reconsideration process.

If the appellant is not satisfied with the decision of the board, they then have essentially one level of appeal left, which is the medical review panel.

At the first level of appeal, our appeal department has been rendering decisions between 40 and 45 days, which is either the first or second best in the country. At the board level, we've been running there between 120 and 150 days to render a decision from the date that the appeal has been received — again, in the top two or three in the entire country in terms of those service levels.

The medical review panel, again constituted by the legislation as opposed to the other two processes which are established through policy, is quite specific about the constitution. To my knowledge, we have not had issue with respect to finding qualified practitioners to sit on those panels, nor to actually decide upon the decisions. And because it's a quasi external process, I don't have specific stats for you in terms of what their turnaround times will be.

I do know that the only issue that I have heard around medical review panels is the clarity around the medical question that has been posed to the medical review panel. And that panel of physicians, I know at times has returned the question to the certifying practitioner to gain clarity around it. But I am not certain, or not aware of I should say, any undue delays as a

result of the process itself.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay. Well thank you very much. I appreciate that, that answer. Now clearly, as you've described this process — and appreciate being reminded of the process, I haven't looked at it for a while — but do the workers get very clear, a very clear message that this medical review panel is the final place to go? And if that's the case, what role do the worker's advocates play in assisting people when they go before the medical review panel?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — This is like going on a power play when we have these two gentlemen side by side. Their knowledge is pretty detailed. Mike, why don't we get you — and this is Mike Carr, our associate deputy minister — Mike, why don't we get you to start with the complementarity of the relationship between the advocate? And then Peter, and then into the WCB. And then as Mike approaches the WCB's role there, Peter, we'll get you to comment.

Mr. Carr: — Thank you, Minister. The office of the worker's advocate will participate in assisting workers with appeals at the initial board level. They will also support a worker preparing and presenting their appeal to the internal appeals process within the board.

When it comes to the medical review panel, we will help that worker obtain the appropriate certificate but then, because of the nature of the medical review panel, the worker generally presents their case to the medical review panel based on the information provided by their treating health care professional. And so the advocate steps back and waits for that decision.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Why don't you tell us about how that looks from the WCB side, is that interaction.

Mr. Federko: — When the worker has exhausted their final level of reconsideration and requests the formation of a medical review panel, so the board actually approves the constitution of a medical review panel, but the way the panel is constituted is set out in the legislation. So fundamentally what the board is looking for is clarity around the underlying medical issue that needs to be resolved by the panel.

At the time that the worker requests a medical review panel, there is direct communication that is sent out to that worker advising them of that process, and again a copy of the policy and the fact sheet around the medical review panel is provided. And they are advised that the decision of the medical review panel is final and binding on both the worker and the Workers' Compensation Board. So whatever that decision is, there is not another step, reconsideration. It is binding on both parties.

Mr. Nilson: — So when you get to the most serious hearing, that's the one where the help is step back a bit. Would that be accurate, or is there an encouragement that people get their own advocates of some other kind, or how does that work?

Mr. Carr: — I want to make it clear as to what that medical review panel is. It's not an appeal; it's a medical exam. And so there's a good reason for the advocate to step back and let the worker go through that review by the medical practitioners. That's the intent of that process.

Mr. Nilson: — Just a couple of final questions. I appreciate the answers. How many advocates are there in the worker's advocate program now?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We'll continue with Mr. Carr. We have a complement of nine in the office and, Mr. Carr, if you can walk us through in some detail, roles and responsibilities within that office.

[20:00]

Mr. Carr: — Of the nine, seven of the members of the office of the worker's advocate are advocates. And they're processing and assisting workers through appeals. We also have a role for the executive director who herself is an advocate and will on occasion assist with files. We also have admin support, which is the ninth member of the team.

What's interesting about how the advocate's office is now structured is that there's an intake process. So we have one junior advocate working in the role of doing intake, assessing files, assisting the claimants with preparation. In some cases — in many cases — it's simply a question of gathering information and then providing advice. In other circumstances, the intake officer will interact with the board and the case manager at the board level to discuss an issue that's come up as a way of trying to assist in the information exchange that's required to get a matter cleared up.

If it's more detailed and in fact is something that requires interaction at an appeal, then the matter will be referred to an advocate, one of the seven that I spoke of earlier. And they will prepare a case and bring it forward on behalf of the injured worker.

Mr. Nilson: — Thank you very much. Is there a waiting list to get to use the worker's advocates, or is this intake worker basically to see people as quickly as they come forward?

Mr. Carr: — In fact the process as it currently stands, the advocate's office keeps very careful measure of their own performance. They do tend to do the intake process in about a two-week period. They then are assigning the cases to an advocate within a six-week period from the initial contact. That is a significantly improved measure than has been traditionally the case.

Mr. Nilson: — Are there any plans to increase the funding for this office? It sounds like it's a very important office. And I ask that because I see on page 32 that the budget's actually gone down \$15,000 instead of going up, and it strikes me as this is one that's pretty important for making sure the whole system works.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — And again we'll get Mr. Carr to speak to the details. As introduced earlier, Denise Klotz is the director of the office of the worker's advocate. And you know, we're impressed because she has built in increased accountability and increased efficiency, and that speaks to both the relationship with Mr. Carr and also of course the leadership of our deputy minister. But, Mr. Carr, why don't you walk us through some of those innovations that have allowed for greater accessibility, greater accountability, and some innovation.

Mr. Carr: — As the director of the office of the worker's advocate, Ms. Klotz has done a significant job developing a work plan for the office that has challenged the officers, or the advocates rather, within the unit to consider how they can create efficiencies and more effectiveness in terms of how they're managing files.

As a result of that, Denise is quite comfortable managing the \$15,000 budget reduction as a pressure and being able and in fact to enhance service and outcomes at the same time. So what in fact has been achieved is through the establishment of clear policies for the advocates and clear process in terms of how to handle the file, what questions to consider when preparing a file. We've been able to generate significant opportunities for throughput. And so as a result of that, we think that we're managing quite well on the budget allocation provided.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay. Well thank you very much. I don't have any more questions and appreciate the clarity of the answers and thank you. So I'll turn it over to my colleague.

The Chair: — Mr. Broten.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good evening, Mr. Minister, and welcome again to all of the officials. Carrying on where I ended last night, for the first bit I have a few questions on SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies] and then some questions to do with the University of Saskatchewan.

So the first question, there is an order in council 251/2010 providing a grant of 179,166 for the period April 1, 2010, to May 31, 2010. Could you please identify what training this grant will provide?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, we'll just, without being too forward, I'll just ask the member to pose that question again. We were just shifting our officials. We've got Dr. Reg Urbanowski here, assistant deputy minister. And if we could just get that question, it was, if I've got it correctly, it's the \$179,000 grant for SIIT and the outcomes associated with that. Is that correct?

Mr. Broten: — What training is it providing?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. That is, if we've understood the question correctly, that's for the interim operating grant.

Mr. Broten: — So it's not earmarked for a specific program. It's for general operating?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — For April and May. We refer to them as two-twelfths.

Mr. Broten: — So it's a regular thing throughout the year? Okay. For the University of Saskatchewan, switching gears a little bit, there's another order in council 250/2010 from May 5th, allowing the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] to borrow an amount not to exceed 20 million for the period April 1, 2010, to March 31, 2011. For what purpose is that? Is that money or is that permission to borrow?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — That permission focused on the university

being able to borrow sufficient dollars to complete the new student residence. And the payback period — Mr. Urbanowski, if I'm not mistaken — is 25 years? It will be repaid over 25 years. Again that's, if I'm not mistaken, that's 400 beds? It's 400 beds.

That's the first new residence in about 30 years on that campus. It's a public-private partnership. I think one of the members have said it's about the time that he was there. It's a public-private partnership. We were certainly pleased. And again, Mr. Urbanowski, if I'm not mistaken, that was \$15 million that was invested. That was under, initially through the leadership of my colleague Donna Harpauer, Minister Harpauer, and this is consistent with that vision.

I don't know if you've had a chance to, if the members have had a chance as of late to be on or near campus. It would be one of the cranes operating, and certainly construction is proceeding apace and one of three new residence that have been approved. The others opened already. P.A. [Prince Albert] campus for SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute for Applied Science and Technology] in Prince Albert — pleased to see that — and also the recent announcement in Meadow Lake where North West Regional College is also having some new residence built. So this is an important investment. And on a go-forward basis, we were pleased to assist the University of Saskatchewan with this request especially given its reliable track record and, we think, realistic repayment plan.

Mr. Broten: — So the permission to borrow 20 million, that was part of the original business plan that we've discussed here in committee before. This wasn't a change in the initial plan that has been discussed or a change from the initial plan that was discussed? Was the plan all along to borrow that amount?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — This is again . . . and we can go back to the specific dates on those announcements. We were able to make this announcement in relative short order within days of representatives from the USSU [University of Saskatchewan Students' Union] and other stakeholders, including from administration, coming forward with a report and request for progress on student housing. We were happy to do that.

The ministry worked closely with the Ministry of Social Services, and certainly we were happy to make that \$15 million announcement. And there was no surprise here as far as a go-forward plan. Again reasonable, realistic, and reliable would be the terms that we would associate with the financial partnership with the University of Saskatchewan, and I'm sure all the members around the table would agree with that characterization.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. The U of S has also discussed the desired construction of the Gordon Oakes-Red Bear Student Centre, which I believe wasn't successful in receiving KIP [knowledge infrastructure program] funding last time around. What is the status of this project, and then what commitments has the ministry made to it?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — That initiative continues to be a point of deliberation in dialogue between the government more broadly and the ministry specifically. And the University of Saskatchewan continues to, I would say, work on a funding

package on that. I don't want to get into too many details outside the purview of the ministry.

I'll just simply say that dialogue continues. And certainly among the funding capital priorities from the University of Saskatchewan that are addressed on a regular basis, I would say that is a consistent element that's included in those deliberations.

Mr. Broten: — But to date no money has been committed by the ministry for it?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No money's been committed.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. A similar question with respect to the Clarion project facility to house the fine arts on campus at the University of Saskatchewan. Please provide an update on that project and what financial commitments have been made by the ministry, please.

[20:15]

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Certainly. I've been in one briefing with the University of Saskatchewan regarding the Clarion project. That briefing was lead by the Dean of Arts and Science, Jo-Anne Dillon and representatives from that college as well as the central administration were present for the presentation.

It is my understanding that that project — highlighted recently and impressively in *The StarPhoenix* from Saskatoon — that project, as I understand it, remains under deliberation within the internal processes of the university. Mr. Urbanowski, would that be an accurate . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, it's still at a concept phase. And the university continues both its due diligence and deliberation on that, but certainly I've been briefed on it and look forward to hearing more as those deliberations continue on campus.

Mr. Broten: — So it's in a similar situation to the Gordon Oakes-Red Bear Student Centre? It's a . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No, I wouldn't characterize that. The student centre has its roots over the course of the last several years. And I'm thinking specifically now of some of the early work that was done by the likes of George Lafond and others.

I would say the student centre, the Aboriginal student centre, is far more developed and far more further along. I think a word that you used last night, I would characterize the Clarion centre as more nascent, and at this time still the source of deliberation and diligence across the campus community. And again we've been fully briefed on it and look forward to hearing more from the university. But based on most recent deliberations, I would say that remains an internal work in progress for the University of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Broten: — So no funding designated from the ministry at this point in time for the Clarion project?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — There's been no request.

Mr. Broten: — Okay, thanks. In previous estimates, a year ago or so, we discussed the development of a training program for

speech language pathology and occupational therapists at the U of S. Could you please provide an update on the development of those programs?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Sure. I appreciate the question. I was most recently asked this question on January 27th during an address to the faculty within the College of Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan. Sorry, it was January 20th that I made that address. And this is a collaborative piece with the Ministry of Health, and there is a request in, I think, for a modest sum to start. It wouldn't be half a million dollars, not that that's modest.

But we are collaborating with Health, and Health is coming out with a report, my sense, in the fall. And do you have a few more details as far as what that looks like, as far as the collaboration with Health on this? It's an active file for us. And Dr. Urbanowski will offer an update.

Mr. Urbanowski: — So we have had discussions with the Ministry of Health as they develop their health human resource plan in looking at the need for occupational therapists and speech language pathologists. We've also been working with the U of S in looking at where they've processed to. Right now they've got it to the concept stage. They want to go to the next step which would be the accreditation stage and looking at some of the requirements for space, etc., that they have. So we're waiting until we have the health and human resource plan from the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Broten: — Sorry, I couldn't quite hear everything. You're working with the Ministry of Health at this time in developing a plan based on the . . .

Mr. Urbanowski: — Coming up with the health human resource plan in the fall. We're waiting for that to inform us in terms of looking at the program because they've . . . in terms of actual numbers of students, what they perceive to have should be based on some labour market need.

Mr. Broten: — So at this stage it's still in the study phase, in the sense that you're gauging what the need is for speech language pathologists and OTs [occupational therapists] in the province. Then, based on the need, a decision would be made whether or not to create a program at the University of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well the third pillar in this of course, and not surprisingly, relates to the university, and that is there's a formal and thorough accreditation process, not surprisingly. And so the three partners, Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour; Ministry of Health; and the University of Saskatchewan are working together on scope and scale. That is the market side. Also, the actual capacity to house the program, what that's going to look like. These are some of the issues that we continue to address.

This is brought up, I will say, on a regular basis as part of our dialogue with the University of Saskatchewan. I have spoken about it with Provost Dr. Brett Fairbairn and we continue to make progress. My sense is that all parties are satisfied right now with the progress that continues to be made. Certainly we continue to hear from stakeholders. And I'm thinking

specifically of Dr. Liz Harrison; she's been a steady proponent and a solid advocate of this.

As the member will of course note, investment dollars are put forward on an annual basis, and that is we purchase seats already from the University of Alberta as we continue to move forward. Obviously we would like to see those dollars invested in Saskatchewan and especially as it relates to health care in Saskatchewan. An important element here of course is because we've been able to move forward on the Academic Health Sciences building. And so these pieces fit together and my sense is the pace is consistent with the stakeholder's expectations at this stage. We're working directly and closely with the Faculty of Medicine of course within the U of S structure.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. Well with fewer educational assistants, we might need more of those speech language pathologists in the classroom. Best case scenario, when might the first class of students in speech language pathology and occupational therapy, when might that first class be?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Obviously the purview speaks directly to the autonomy and responsibility of the university, just based on ongoing dialogue with variables that include pace and rate of construction. And again I'm impressed with the Academic Health Sciences building. We see D-wing making considerable progress. I just did an informal visual inspection over the weekend and certainly making significant progress there. E-wing, stretching out onto College, some of those supports are already being put in place. And again we're pleased with the progress, pleased to be able to go ahead with both of those wings, significant construction on that part of the campus. So we've got that variable.

We've got the variable of the accreditation, and that process includes both planning and then the approval process. Then we have the human resource or labour market piece that we're working with Health on, so I would say a window somewhere between two to five years, depending on what that looks like. Again, for our part and from our perspective, funding for the seats at the University of Alberta continues.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Minister. In the Sask Party election campaign platform, there was talk of a Saskatchewan scholarship fund. Is there any funding in this budget for the Saskatchewan scholarship fund?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, we've been able to make some progress on the scholarship piece included in some initial rounds. Obviously the Scholarship of Honour . . . and if I'm not mistaken we would have close to, probably close to 15 that have now been approved.

We've also moved forward with the MITACS [Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems], that is a scholarship for, if I'm not mistaken, about 29 students, focusing on a broad range of programming connecting those students with experiential learning opportunities. So we're making some progress there.

Certainly the experience of MITACS has been helpful. If I'm not mistaken, we came in with just over \$200,000 and we were

able to leverage that up over \$600,000. So that provided us a solid lesson learned. It includes some of the deliberations that we've had with the presidents of the tri-councils — SSHRC [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada], NSERC [Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada], and CIHR [Canadian Institutes of Health Research]. We want to continue to build on that dialogue.

To go directly to the question, we've been able to take a series of lessons learned through these incremental steps forward, and we look forward to moving on that commitment to meet that scholarship need in the future.

[20:30]

Mr. Broten: — So if I heard correctly, the answer is no.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well we've been able to make, I think, important — if incremental — strides on the scholarship piece. But there's certainly room for a far more enhanced program, and we'll be looking for that in the near future.

Mr. Broten: — So you're learning, but there's no money for a Saskatchewan scholarship fund.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well I think it wouldn't be . . . I wouldn't really frame it like that. I think there's been an opportunity to assist in very real, tangible ways through public funds from the province, but funds that we've been able, especially in the case of MITACS, to draw in the private sector as well as to draw on federal funding as well.

Out beyond that, and this is very important, we have moved forward in addition to that to help meet a request. It was one of those really promising developments and speaks to the optimism. We were able to move forward with an additional \$40,000 of which the private sector came forward. And that private sector . . . it's worth probably going into a little bit of detail on this, and we'll get the dates for you. But what we saw in the course of the last 18 months was the private sector coming forward and saying, can we make sure that in addition to focusing on universities, which of course we're pleased to do, but if we envision . . . and certainly this is how we envision post-secondary education, not a hierarchy but a horizon. We were delighted with the private sector coming in saying, we want to make sure that those enrolled and engaged in trades training are also able to benefit from the forthcoming Saskatchewan scholarship. We're going to put real dollars on the table now. Will you join us?

And so we were able to move forward, again some incremental steps forward. We were able to move forward. We invested \$40,000. The first company that came in, the first company that came in was with a \$100,000, a Saskatchewan company committed to helping to enhance skills training and education for students. We . . .

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Minister, thank you so much. I just have a number of items, so I truly do appreciate the information you provided, but if I could move on to another question that'd be great.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I'm in your hands, Mr. Chair. I wanted to

make sure that there was an accurate assessment of the question. Is there more to do? Certainly there's more to do. Have monies flowed? Yes they have in incremental and I would say helpful measure, but there's certainly more to do.

Mr. Broten: — Thanks so much. Graduate retention program, there was a recommendation by Enterprise Saskatchewan to expand the program to graduate students. And I saw an order in council the other day, 261/2010, enacting regulations for the graduate retention program. I take it that was simply the rollout of the initial plan of the graduate retention program as it was first introduced. It's not an expansion of the program to graduate students. Am I correct in that understanding?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, it's a great question. It's a little more complex than the member may perceive.

There are a couple elements to your question, and I will try to walk through this quickly but I want to do so. The enhancement that the member identifies was actually brought to our attention by a student, and I think it demonstrates our continuing interest in and commitment to making sure that we're attentive to needs of students, and we continue to review the program.

The NEPS [nursing education program of Saskatchewan] program, that is the nursing education program, had a fast track component and that fast track component allowed students to essentially take a full load of courses but to shave off — is it a full year? — yes, so to be completed within three years.

So what we were able to do was ensure that students from within that cohort were not penalized for actually doing a full four years' work within a consolidated and condensed program. So essentially they were doing as much work in three years as their peers in four, and we wanted to ensure the graduate retention program recognized their efforts and that we were able to make that adjustment.

My sense is that it's somewhere between 80 and \$90,000 a year — Dr. Urbanowski? — \$86,000 a year that we were able to essentially ensure was accommodated from within the existing program allocation. And as a result we're able to help those students within that transition phase and make sure they were able to receive the maximum benefit of the graduate retention program.

Obviously, and this speaks to the second component of the member's question, we continue to look at options regarding the graduate retention program. We don't do that in isolation.

We have a dialogue under way with graduate students from both the University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina, and that dialogue is interesting. I've been able to participate in one of those sessions. The dialogue essentially has a couple components to it, perhaps not surprisingly. Part one placed on those individuals that are interested in continuing through mostly . . . let's say they're master's program into Ph.D. [Doctor of Philosophy] program, so an academic track. But the other side of this is that we're also picking up strong interest in those that, both at the master's level and Ph.D. level, are then interested in going into employment or labour market tracks. And so we're working with those students and student bodies to actually get a sense of what type of instruments may be of

greatest assistance.

And certainly of course importantly, the broader context, a number of graduate students are benefiting from the graduate retention program, and that is as the program has continued to roll out. And they've graduated from their undergraduate degrees from institutions within Saskatchewan out across Canada in recognized programs from around the world. They can benefit as they proceed through their graduate studies.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. Moving on to some employment questions, I asked the following written question: to date how many individuals have been assisted by Can-Sask rapid response teams?

The response from the minister was as follows. Rapid response services have been offered to the employees of 37 businesses between April 1, 2009, and January 31, 2010. Workers are not required to attend rapid response services or sessions, and attendance is not required.

So an indication of how many businesses, but no answer to the question which was, how many individuals have been assisted? Is the ministry really not keeping track of how many individuals access services on this front?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, I'm glad that the . . . I appreciate the question. I'm glad the member asked the question because, you know, when I first had the opportunity and privilege to going to visit our CanSask offices — and still on a basis as I can, where I can, visit as many as I can — frankly I was stunned that no one was keeping track of foot traffic into these offices. So one of the first things I said was, why don't we do that? So what we're happy to report . . . and we've come up with a whole range of performance indicators, walk-in traffic within these offices, 460,000-plus visits. Now obviously that would include individuals often making multiple visits, and the member may be aware of that.

So the notion that we don't have performance indicators associated with our activities, we have put in place and endeavour to ensure that a culture of continual improvement regarding performance indicators continues. There are a number of initiatives that have helped — if I've got the number correct — more than 4,400 people in Saskatchewan over the course of the last year and especially in that transition to or back to employment, depending on circumstances.

And what we'll do is we'll have Mr. Carr walk through a variety of those. Included within those would be some of the work of the rapid response teams. But the rapid response teams don't work in isolation. That is, we also want to highlight our collaboration and co-operation with the federal government on a program that has been profoundly important to Saskatchewan workers, and that is the work sharing program. That's helped more than 1,200 people transition quickly to perhaps a change in employment status, but maintain or retain employment as companies have gone through this transition.

Mr. Carr, why don't you walk through and help contextualize the rapid response teams, and then you can get into some of the details. Because I think the whole, if you want, that bundle of supports that have been offered have made a considerable and

significant difference to the working people of this province and especially those . . . Certainly we know we're not immune, and we know there have been layoffs, but with the lowest, one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country with 12,400 full-time jobs created year over year as Stats Canada has recently just come out, there's no spin on that. That's just straight up — 12,400. It's one of the highest proportions of full-time jobs of any Canadian province. We know that we fared far better in Saskatchewan than other provinces had.

Mr. Carr, why don't you give us the context and then give us a few of the details regarding rapid response teams.

Mr. Carr: — Thank you, Minister. The rapid response teams are, as their name would suggest, a quick response to situations where there's a production slowdown, a cessation of business, or a large layoff in a community across Saskatchewan.

These teams consist of officers from, employment officers from our current employment services branch as well as representatives from Service Canada. On some occasions where there's temporary foreign workers perhaps involved, we involve an immigration officer. And we also involve labour standards officers, and we go out to the workplaces, provide information to the affected employer. We provide support in terms of having them understand what services we can provide to their affected employees, and we then make sure that there is an opportunity for those employees, through information meetings usually sponsored by the employer, to direct those employees to an immediate response based on their individual need.

[20:45]

Now the situation that arises is that they come into a CanSask office and we treat them as we do any other client. We don't distinguish or differentiate between a client coming through the door as to whether they've come as a result of a rapid response intervention or whether they're just a regular client coming through the door.

If you look at the work of the current employment services staff, in this past year they have provided individual services, group counselling, orientation, job search and referral to over 10,300 clients in this past year. They've also, in that same circumstance, developed career action plans for clients, and the total numbers in that process have been 10,665.

In addition, one of the important aspects of our career and employment centres is the maintenance of a job order system through our opportunities . . . with respect to our web-based job posting system. And in that situation, we've posted over 28,900 jobs. In terms of . . . Those are job orders. The vacancies that we posted were actually 55,600.

If you look at the opportunity we've had to work with clients in terms of the general service array, one of the opportunities that we've had is to impact and work with 13,590 EI [employment insurance] recipients in the past year. Of those, 888 were active, current EI clients, and 4,700 or so were reach-back clients. And each of those was provided an opportunity to engage in active programming through our branch and able to pursue employment opportunities.

One of the important aspects of the work that we do in providing service to clients is that on an average monthly basis more than 433 social assistance clients are able to come off of social assistance as a result of an active job search. And so approximately 433 people per month are impacting that service.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you so much for that. On the topic of saskjobs.ca, I know I submitted one or two written questions, so I thank any of the staff present who helped answer those questions.

The minister frequently uses the number of jobs that are listed on saskjobs.ca in news releases and talking points. But when I asked what was the highest number of jobs posted on the website at one time during the calendar year 2009 and when did this occur, I was told that the information is not collected. I received the same answer when I talked about the lowest number of jobs posted at one time.

Why would the ministry not track such information? I would think it might be helpful to see how it might tie into advertising campaigns or different initiatives.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I guess the question as it's posed relates to the purpose of tracking those kind of numbers. For us, this is a live site. An employer can put, essentially post a job and an hour later take it down as it's filled. And so we keep track, as Mr. Carr has indicated, and I think that number was 55,000. We keep track on an annual basis, and we can break that down a bit further. But on a daily basis, because they're live to date . . .

And certainly we're open-minded here. If the member can offer a rationale for why we would benchmark more than on an annual basis, because it's a live site and essentially we can check it now, we can check it in an hour, or we can check it tomorrow morning; those numbers are constantly shifting. You know, we're happy to entertain suggestions.

But the broader question would be a practical public policy question. To what purpose would tracking that kind of data, and especially investing both the human resource and the capital, to what end would that tracking actually help those searching for employment? What we've tried to do is make sure that this tool for working people and for employers — and it's important that it's used and utilized increasingly by both — that its application is relevant mostly for those two segments. But again we're open. I'm certainly open-minded about, if the member thinks there may be some public policy value or a matrix that could be enhanced by having this kind of data. We're open-minded on this. It's just not data that we would collect and expend those resources to do.

Mr. Broten: — In replies to written questions, there was also a reply stating that full-time, part-time, and casual jobs weren't tracked. It wasn't broken down by those categories, so that information wasn't available. I would think that information would be helpful because it provides some more detail about what are the types of jobs available at a given time, what are the needs like, what are the quality of the jobs available. Might that seem like a good thing to record and might that be possible?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — I appreciate the question. Again I approach this with an open mind. It's not to say that it can't be

improved upon. What we do is actually mirror the federal system, and that's a requirement of our labour market agreements and Labour Market Development Agreements, both of which have been topped up significantly — Mike, if I'm not mistaken, somewhere to the tune of about \$27 million? — \$27 million over the course of the last 18 months or so.

And so part of our . . . And the LMA [labour market agreement], LMDA [Labour Market Development Agreement] agreements and instruments actually require very thorough accounting. And so as we've aligned our practices with those of the federal government — not required by the federal government, not in any way to suggest that there wouldn't be a value there, but it is to say on an anecdotal basis — what's occurred is that often those categories or that categorization occurs within the title of specific jobs. But certainly it's something we can go back and look at.

What we've tried to do is make sure that our systems of accountability serve key stakeholders. Obviously the federal government is a vital partner for us, especially when we begin to talk about the additional \$27 million over the last 18 months that have topped up both LMA and LMDA. The difference there being the LMA is for non-eligible EI recipients and the LMDA for EI eligible recipients.

The second stakeholder group, and certainly a primary one for us, obviously those looking for work. And the feedback that we receive is, again it's not that there can't be continuous improvement and we're happy to look at this, but the geographic breakdown — that is, community by community — enables individuals to see geographically what those options are then on a sectoral basis. And that capacity to actually do cross-cutting analysis certainly has, the feedback we've received, it's been helpful.

The third stakeholder, obviously the employers. And there's no doubt about it. SaskJobs is increasingly used by employers as an effective tool. And again the text of the ads or openings, depending on your frame there, often address right in the title as I recall various times that I've gone through it, right in the title.

So not opposed to looking at it, but what we've tried to do is make sure that those key stakeholders, federal government . . . because so much funding is delivered through some vital federal-provincial partnerships that we have — LMA, LMDA. Secondly and importantly, looking at ways to ensure that this is an effective instrument for those workers looking for either new opportunities or opportunities in other fields or other locations, and then obviously the employers. But we're certainly mindful of the suggestion, and on an ongoing basis we'll certainly take that into consideration.

Mr. Broten: — If it was a simple thing to extract that data, I think it would be interesting to know. I'm tying in with the jobs that are also tying into the earlier question about how long jobs are posted. Is it the casual jobs that are staying on for a long time? Is it the full-time jobs that are staying on a long time? And how, when looking at the overall number of jobs available, what is the breakdown? So if it was an easy thing to do, I think that would be helpful and useful information.

I'd like to move on to some questions on immigration at this

time. There needs to be a bit of a changing of the guard there. I asked some written questions also on this, and I'll read out the answers just so they're succinctly in the record of *Hansard* for this committee.

I asked what were the wait times for the different categories within the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program. And for family members, it was 11.4 months with 2,073 applications received. For entrepreneur, it was 9.9 months with 222 applications received. For skilled workers, it was 3.75 months with 1,606 applications received. For long-haul truckers, it was 2.8 months with 91 applications received. For health professions, it was 2.6 months with 335 applications received. For hospitality sector, it was 2.5 months with 437 applications received. For students, it was 2.3 months with 144 applications received. For farm owner-operators, it was two months with 34 applications received.

So a bit of a — not a discrepancy — a bit of a range from two months up to 11.4 months for the family member class, is the minister satisfied with the wait times for these different classes?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No, there's always room for improvement here. I'd like to introduce, Mr. Chair, and to members of the committee, Rupen Pandya, our assistant deputy minister for immigration, and Rupen will jump in on a few of these forthcoming questions.

[21:00]

The answer is no, we're never satisfied. That is, it's part of our culture of continuous improvement. What we are satisfied with is the progress that has been made relative to the dates when we came in and the durations that were in place.

And if I can draw on the attention to the highest, it's the one that certainly has our attention, and we continue to make progress here. I think the context is important. For '07-08 — that transition year — that family class category was taking 13.2 months, and so we've had a net decrease of 4 per cent. Again we know there's more work to do.

There are a couple of factors that come in, and we'll get Mr. Pandya to speak to the specifics, but importantly we've seen a pretty dramatic increase in the number of applications. And that's something to be attentive to.

The second element relates to source country. And it is to say that there are some countries — and I'll try to be sensitive as I say this — where due diligence, both at the provincial level and especially at the federal level is given more attention. And that's just the nature of some of the posts and some of the work that we do on an ongoing basis. But, Mr. Pandya, why don't you give it a little bit of context? I've just hit the high-water mark. If you want to go through a little bit of context where we have made gains — and those gains are considerable — and then you can get into some of the variables that you're dealing with.

Mr. Pandya: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Processing times have decreased in all our categories except for one, which is a long-haul trucker category. It has increased by one month or, pardon me, 1.2 months.

We have nominated in 2009-10 3,505 nominations which includes 3,424 skilled worker nominations and 81 entrepreneur farmer nominations, and this exceeds last year's fiscal year target. Total nominations have increased 20 per cent over the 2008-09 nominations, and this is on top of the 72 per cent increase in nominations between 2007-08 and '08-09. So the ministry's exceeded its target which was 3,400 nominations for the current or, pardon me, for the previous fiscal year. Family member nominations have increased 109 per cent between 2008-09 and 2009-10, and that's moved from 784 family member nominations to 1,638 family member nominations.

And as the minister was commenting on, you know, different processing times, so the processing times that we provided in written answers are in fact provincial processing times. There is federal processing times on top of our provincial process. So the province of Saskatchewan will issue a nomination certificate to an individual who has received an offer of permanent full-time employment in Saskatchewan at NOC [National Occupational Classification] codes A, B, and O which are post-secondary education skill trades and our managerial professional class positions.

They will then apply to the federal immigration program. The federal immigration authorities are responsible for health, criminality, and security checks. And depending on where individuals are originating in the world, there is different federal processing times that are associated with applications.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. Is there, with the different categories, the allocation of staffing resources, are they distributed evenly to all the categories? Or is there a priority in terms of which categories might be processed faster than others? How does the ministry determine which pile is worked on, is essentially the question.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We've introduced some, I think, some important innovations, some helpful innovations over the course of the last year. And I'll get Mr. Pandya to walk through what that looks like. The broad categorization is that it's the type and amount of information that's required. It varies category by category. And so some of these are more intensive. A specific example that's easy to draw upon would be the entrepreneur class. That obviously requires some very significant due diligence on the finance side. But Mr. Pandya, why don't you walk us through that, and then I'll come back with a couple of general comments.

Mr. Pandya: — Mr. Chair, it's the objective of the program to achieve six month or less processing time in all categories. And as the minister was outlining, there is in fact differences between our categories in terms of the processing, the amount of processing work involved. And I can give you an example. So in the case of the family members' category, Mr. Chair, there is different requirements than there is under our skilled worker category, and I'll give you an example.

So under our family members' category, we have a subsection which is family member without a job. And so the family member sponsoring, support family in Saskatchewan can actually nominate somebody. And we would have to actually check their bank records to ensure that they had sufficient funds to support that family member through the nomination which is

different than a skilled worker nomination.

We don't have any staff that are dedicated to any one of the specific streams. We pull files as they come in through our system, and in fact we have one processing system across our skilled worker piece. We have a separate processing stream for our entrepreneur category. But the remaining seven categories are all pulled through one process.

We've introduced a new file management process in 2008-09 which has allowed us to achieve a number of efficiencies without additional resources in terms of FTEs [full-time equivalent] or dollars. That file management process involves having files checked and in initial stage for completeness, and after that they move through a series of successive stages through to an immigration officer who would make a decision which is then verified by a manager and then finally the director of the division.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Chair, the context for this as far as level of productivity, productivity and output, between 2001 and 2006, under the previous government, Saskatchewan brought in just 8,000 newcomers, of 2001 and 2006, through both provincial and federal programs. In comparison Manitoba brought in over 30,000 during that period of time.

By setting targets, by ensuring that we had a far more innovative processing capacity, one that also focused on increased accountability especially for those files that were completed . . . There were hundreds of files that were incomplete as we came into office, and that wasn't fair to those that had sent in applications because they weren't sure of the status. It's certainly not fair to our folks. Every day they're burdened, and so we said, the first thing we need to do is address those and set up this new system. It alerts individuals that have sent in incomplete files. We alert them right away; your file's not complete, and as a result we're going to keep moving on to those files that are complete. That was key.

But what we've been able to do is establish targets. They're aggressive. And if we keep that 2001-2006 frame in mind — 8,000 newcomers — through both federal and provincial programs, this year we anticipate that our provincial nominee program alone is going to ensure that we're pushing in close to, in and around 10,000 people into the province of Saskatchewan.

This isn't just about numbers obviously. Our priority relates to our neighbours. We want to make sure that we're helping these individuals feel at home, helping to ensure that they're having successful opportunities within the realm of employment. That's why we've put in place . . . and this is, we think, this is important. It's an innovation that certainly we've received positive feedback from other quarters in Canada. And that is an integrity unit.

And this program integrity unit ensures that both on educational issues . . . that is, sometimes employers and new employees have a series of questions, but often there can be associated problems or challenges. And I shouldn't say often; it happens rarely. But what we're able to do is actually respond quite quickly. We've launched more than 60 investigations using this new program integrity in it. The purpose is to offer assistance to both employers but most expressly the newcomers, thereby

ensuring the integrity of our program.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I do appreciate the answers. Before we get too far ahead, there was a comment made about the new processing process that came in, in '08-09. My question: for the applications that were already in the hopper, before that new process began, are those applications that were in the hopper part of the backlog? Are those being cleared, one? And are they being dealt with before new applications that may be coming into the system through the new process?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, I'm happy to report that what we were able to do is put in place a parallel system to ensure we were working through. And very pleased to report there is no backlog in the SINP [Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program]. We are keeping abreast of our work.

Mr. Broten: — So everyone, all applications are being processed through the new application process? None of the old ones are outstanding.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — That's right.

Mr. Broten: — Again thank you to the officials who provided so many written answers to the many questions I asked on this topic.

For the categories, in crunching some of the numbers based on the number of applications that were received and the number of applications that were approved, the percentage rate for approvals is as follows: for family members, it's a 71 per cent approval rate; entrepreneur, 25; skilled workers, 56; long-haul truckers, 89; health professions, 88; hospitality sector, 64; student, 85; farm owners, 43. So going from a range, the lowest of entrepreneur at 25 approval rate up to long-haul truckers at 89.

The discrepancy in approval rate, is that basically just . . . comes out of the different criteria used, the different evaluation criteria used for each category, and then the strength of the applications to each category?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — In essence, yes, that's the strength. Importantly, and I'm glad you highlighted the challenge in and around the entrepreneurship category. Frankly, as we came in, I'll just say that that category was lethargic. And it was . . . I couldn't believe how low the numbers were that we were working through the system.

And what we've been able to do this year because those numbers were so low, as we were going through a series of other innovations, what we've been able to do is put increased emphasis on the entrepreneurship stream. The reason for that is, this is an opportunity for us to create more jobs here in Saskatchewan. And I'll get Mr. Pandya to talk about some of the specifics. It's been very innovative how we've worked through it, and this is allowing for, if I'm not mistaken, well over 100 entrepreneurship files to be processed.

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Minister, if I may thank you for the answer. The question I asked, the answer was provided, so I thank you for that. If I could move on to another topic.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — If I may, Mr. Chair, I just wanted to offer reassurance. The member made specific reference to the low number regarding entrepreneurship. And I wanted to at least offer a snapshot to members and to the public, reassurance that over the course of the last year our system regarding the entrepreneurship stream is far more robust. And we've set up a framework that allows that to be completed in and around the six-month mark now.

[21:15]

Mr. Broten: — Thank you. In a situation where someone submits an application, let's say for the family class, and the application is rejected and the individual who is attempting to sponsor someone to come disagrees with the ruling that has been provided, what appeal mechanism is available to the individual making the application for a family member who is overseas?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — We have an internal appeal process. Again with that culture of improvement and based on feedback from community groups, we're endeavouring to communicate that process. We call it a review process, but it's the same piece. We're going to enhance our communications so that individuals are aware of what that looks like. And Mr. Pandya will walk us through that review process.

Mr. Pandya: — Thank you. Mr. Chair, we have in fact in policy a review process that's been in place since September of 2008. If a foreign worker who applies for our program is not approved and the applicant believes there was an error made in the decision, they can request a second review of their file.

For the second review, the application is reviewed by a different manager than through the first process. To request a second review, the applicant must send a signed letter to the SINP within 60 days of the date of the refusal letter. In the letter the applicant must clearly state where they feel an error has been made in terms of their application review. The second review is based on the information in the existing application, and so any additional information can't be added at this time. If additional information was left out of the file in error, then the applicant will be asked to submit a new application into the process.

If the SINP receives a letter within the 60-day period and the letter contains the required information, then the application will be reviewed by a different manager and the applicant will be notified of the final decision.

Mr. Broten: — Thanks so much.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — If I could, some questions come about, again I'll be sensitive here and say sometimes questions are asked about favouritism or bias. And what we have is a process that ensures that it's another officer actually doing that review or that appeal. And I just want to make sure that's on the public record because that is a question that comes up, and we're able to offer reassurance to those individuals that our due diligence and due process is grounded in accountability and the integrity of our program.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you so much. With the remaining time I would like . . . Thank you for the answers on immigration.

With the remaining time, I'd like to end where we began, on Carlton Trail Regional College and St. Peter's College. With regard to the merger of Carlton Trail Regional College and St. Peter's College, is the minister aware of a transition board?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — There is a . . . Well I want to make sure that it's clearly understood that these two — Rupen, thanks very much — these two institutions have legal autonomy. And so again as they look at what this partnership evolves into, there are independent boards to the respective institutions and there's also an entity, a committee that offers the opportunity for these organizations to have joint dialogue.

Mr. Broten: — And so the minister would describe the purpose of this committee or transition board as joint dialogue?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well let me just put it very, very clearly here. And I find the nature of the questions to be such that we've had some stakeholders call today and ask specifically about what the intention of the official opposition is.

These are respected institutions. They have and continue to serve the interests of students, stakeholders, and communities, especially those in east central Saskatchewan. And we're happy to continue to address through dialogue this process.

But the press release put forward by the official opposition today, echoing some of the words from the SGEU [Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union] release from two days ago that I made reference to, certainly I think missed the opportunity to highlight the significant contributions these institutions have made and continue to make. I think importantly the article that came out today, ran today in both *The StarPhoenix* and *Leader-Post*, highlighted Professor Kobussen in saying that this is an ongoing process. And I want to make sure that that's on the record. That's consistent with what the previous dialogue from last night, from question period today.

Are there, so are there aspects and elements of this dialogue that are dynamic and fluid? Yes, there are. And I just want to, I just want to make sure on the record that it's made aware that the stakeholders are certainly attentive to the perspective, to the tone, and to the, can I say, at least hints or insinuations that have been put forward by the official opposition. And they've been duly noted. So we'll answer any questions you want on this.

Mr. Broten: — We've had plenty of calls too and received a great deal of information as well on this issue. And as I stated before last night in my comments, my concerns are with the storylines coming from different individuals that don't add up, in my opinion don't make a lot of sense, based on information that's been provided by the minister and based on what documentation provides and states.

I ask the minister if he's aware of the purpose of the transition board. Well, minutes from a July 28, 2000 meeting state that, according to the minutes the purpose is to, quote: guide through council, the senior administrators of St. Peter's College and Carlton Trail Regional College the transition process that will create the governing structure, including the creation of a new board of governors, a senate, bylaws, and an organizational

structure for the college formed through the partnership of St. Peter's College and Carlton Trail Regional College.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — It's a key phrase, if I could, the term partnership. I think it was an issue that was addressed last night, and I appreciate being included and informed by those minutes. It seemed to be a source of contention last night, and I appreciate the fact that it's just simply come out.

Mr. Broten: — It was also interesting asking the minister many questions about the strategic partnership last night. And the lack of information that the minister provided on a variety of topics to do with this merger, puzzling in many instances when the minister is not aware of a call for board members to the newly created board for the merged institution. Does the minister know that a representative of AEEL [Advanced Education, Employment and Labour] is on the transition board?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Certainly the ministry has been engaged in the dialogue on an ongoing basis. That's part of that process that I've just quoted.

Mr. Broten: — Who is the ministry representative on the transition board?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — As I've said, the ministry's been involved in an ongoing dialogue. As far as the specific question, to the member, we have had an individual — I'm not going to name officials; I'll just say an individual — participate in a meeting. And that was based on an invitation. And so, you know, the member can continue with his dialogue. Happy to continue to respond to the evolution of this partnership, a partnership that's been in place for 10 years, through various iterations and in evolution.

And certainly the announcement that was made, again quite publicly on July 10th of '09 at the KIP announcement, that is the knowledge infrastructure announcement at the St. Peter's campus in front of, well I'll say dozens; it was packed, probably hundreds of people regarding the partnership and that new partnership. So I mean, I'm not certain if that answers the questions about specific . . . but I'm interested in where this is going.

Mr. Broten: — Well, based . . . My questions, when we asked last night on a number of occasions, the minister said well it's just starting. There was this announcement that the minister refers to and spoke about the day in the gym and how the strategic partnership, using that phrase over and over. And we asked for details. When I asked for details it was, well no decisions or it's very early stages — just starting, just starting, big ifs; all of these question marks and ambiguity provided by the minister on that front.

Well I had the chance today to go through a significant amount of email correspondence. It goes back to last summer and last fall on this issue. And in this email correspondence, it outlines in great detail the financial integration of these two institutions. It outlines how all programming, student services, and IT [information technology] will be merged. The correspondence addresses human resources issues and how the transition board plans to address the challenge of merging unionized and non-unionized entities. It clearly states that the intended

outcome is a comprehensive merger of the two entities. It clearly states that the provincial government has been involved in the process since last summer and the provincial government fully supports the intention of merging the institutions.

So I'm curious. If this is, as the minister stated last night on a number of occasions, that this is an if, that this is a big question mark, discussions are just beginning — when there's documentation that indicates that there's been email correspondence going back last summer for quite some time and in great detail, as well in terms of providing how the institutions will be merged, how unionized, non-unionized environments will be merged into one; how IT services will be provided; how faculty and staffing may occur; how individuals will have a role in choosing who those people will be — to me, it's rather puzzling.

And that for the minister to say on a number of occasions in his remarks yesterday that while this is in the early stages, no decisions have been made, it's very preliminary, and then for that kind of detail to be going back, all the way back to the summer of 2009 and documentation with a number of ministry officials dealing with individuals in that context. To me the problem that I think many people in Saskatchewan are having on a number of fronts is the approach this government takes to consultation to significant issues.

And it's an approach that we've seen on a number of occasions whether it is wildlife protection, whether it is an issue of educational assistants, whether it is labour legislation . . .

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Labour legislation? Would you like to talk about labour legislation? I'm delighted to talk about . . .

Mr. Broten: — Where there's a decision made, where there is a decision made . . .

The Chair: — Members, members.

Mr. Broten: — I have the floor, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Mr. Broten, I know you have the floor. But as I've reminded members before, as long as the conversation is civil, we'll bypass the Chair. But if it isn't civil, then we'll have to go through the Chair in interest of time.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, there are a number of instances where the approach that this government has taken . . . two issues. There's been one where there's a clear decision made early on. There's an approach, a trajectory determined by this government, and then consultation and true debate and transparency is after the fact the decision has been made.

And in my opinion based on the correspondence, the information that I have received, that is the case here. And for the minister to come in last night to say everything is preliminary, it's a big if, we don't know what's going to happen there . . . And then for very detailed information to be provided, to me it doesn't add up, and that's my concern.

[21:30]

As I said before, it's not with the credibility of a university, with a college — whether it's St. Peter's, whether it's Briercrest, whether it's Horizon, whether it's any of the regional colleges. It's not a criticism of those groups. It's a criticism, Mr. Minister, through the Chair, of the approach this government has taken to transparency, to being frank and open with Saskatchewan people, and telling it like it is because that isn't the case in this situation.

So my question to the minister, through the Chair: if everything is so preliminary, why all of this detailed conversation through email going back to last summer?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — You know, Mr. Chair, I'm surprised that the member has a photographic memory because he's offering apparent quotes from last night. And I don't frankly recall the notion or phrase preliminary. So for the record, if he can demonstrate or provide documentary evidence, empirical evidence that that frame was used . . . What I've said — and I've been crystal clear on this — the partnership that has evolved over years between these two post-secondary educational institutions is a grassroots initiative, a grassroots initiative that came from these respective organizations and from within the community. As quoted in the paper this morning, and I'll quote from *The StarPhoenix*:

Both colleges serve a similar area and demographic and have worked under an informal partnership for at least 10 years, said Glen Kobussen, the CEO of Carlton Trail and the president of St. Peter's College.

About 20 months ago, representatives of the two schools met to discuss amalgamating under one name.

Okay, there's the discussion. These discussions have included senior levels of management. They have included respective boards, the provincial government, staff, community, and other stakeholders. This is all on the public record: "In large part we're located down the street from one another . . . It's not a government-led initiative, this was an initiative led by our two respective boards." There is reference here from one of our officials about:

The provincial review is expected to take place during the next few months . . . "We have to do our due diligence to ensure that public policy and government objectives for post-secondary systems are going to be taken into account . . ."

For now, the colleges are being governed by their respective boards, as well as a "transitional board" [or this committee] to work toward . . . [this amalgamation].

This is a direct quote: "There has been no legal merger, and should the change not go ahead, Carlton Trail will seek another CEO."

We've worked to ensure that the record is clear — the due diligence that will be undertaken by the ministry is not done out of the blue. There has been consultation. We've had officials invited to meetings. What we have said is, let's make sure that we're respecting the wishes of the grassroots communities. In this case those include the institutions. One of our sole criteria

in our objectives is to going to be helping to ensure that we're serving the interest of students in southeastern Saskatchewan. This builds on that partnership that's already been in place, that is, university credit courses available through Carlton Trail offered through St. Pete's.

So this notion that decisions are made . . . We're open-minded. We actually, unlike the members of the official opposition who seem to want to stifle innovation at the grassroots, remain out of touch with rural Saskatchewan, and frankly have a dismal track record when it comes to supporting innovation and creativity of the inter-institutional type and increasing co-operation and capacity building.

We're moving forward. This has been led by the grassroots. Our dialogue and deliberation has been ongoing. Our decision-making is just getting under way. It'll be informed through extensive consultations.

Again we think this is completely consistent with best practices. We've been completely consistent, open, transparent, available for the parties, and now going out to a range of stakeholders to hear from them to ensure (a) they understand what some of these options are. And I want to reiterate from *The StarPhoenix*, there is "no legal merger. And should the change not go ahead, Carlton Trail will seek another CEO" — far from a *fait accompli* that the member's insinuating has already taken place.

Instead of congratulating these two institutions, what we see is actually, frankly — and I'm surprised at this — an inability to actually see the progress that's being made. And frankly I think the public record is pretty clear on the perspective of the opposition, especially when it comes to the press release that was put out today quoting privatization.

Mr. Broten: — I know we agreed to finish. I'll answer the minister's question about where information was stated, and then we'll probably have more opportunities to discuss this as well and move to voting off estimates.

The minister asked where "preliminary" was used. It wasn't preliminary. I apologize.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — No, no problem.

Mr. Broten: — On page 1151 of *Hansard*, on three occasions — on 1156, on page 1157, on page 1160 — the minister is quoted as . . . I don't have, I forgot the *Hansard* in my office. The minister is quoted as saying "started" or "just getting started." I think a fairly common definition by a person on the street when asked what preliminary means, it means started or just getting started.

So with that, Mr. Chair, I thank the minister and all the many officials here for the answers that have been provided this evening on a variety of topics as well as the written answers that were provided to written questions throughout the course, the course of the previous months. And I thank committee members for their time as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Broten. With that, committee members, we are ready to vote. The first vote is 37, Advanced Education, Employment and Labour. It's on page 29. Central

management and services, subvote (01) in the amounts of 22,382,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Student supports, subvote (AE03) in the amount of \$101,470,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Post-secondary education, subvote (AE02) in the amount of 591,930,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Immigration, subvote (AE06) in the amount of 12,836,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Labour force development, subvote (AE16) in the amount of 102,938,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Labour and employer services, subvote (AE17) in the amount of 12,098,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Status of Women office, subvote (AE14) in the amount of 435,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Labour and employer . . . oh sorry, back up here a little bit. Major capital asset acquisitions, subvote (AE08) in the amount of 7,580,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Amortization of capital assets in the amount of 1,997,000, this is for information purposes, and no vote is necessary.

Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, vote 37, \$851,669,000, I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted for Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2011, the following sums for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour in the amount of \$851,669,000.

Ms. Eagles. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Vote 37 agreed to.]

General Revenue Fund

Lending and Investing Activities Advanced Education, Employment and Labour Vote 169

The Chair: — Committee members, we'll move to vote 169, Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, outlined on page 162, lending and investing activities, of the Estimates booklet. We'll now take questions from committee members. Are there any? Seeing none, Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, subvote (AE01), loans to student aid fund in the amount of \$42,000,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Advanced Education, Employment and Labour vote 169 for \$42,000,000, I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2011, the following sums for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour in the amount of \$42,000,000.

Mr. Hickie. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Vote 169 agreed to.]

General Revenue Fund Supplementary Estimates — November Advanced Education, Employment and Labour Vote 37

The Chair: — We now move to supplementary estimates. Committee members, we will now consider supplementary estimates vote 37, Advanced Education, Employment and Labour outlined on page 11 of the November Supplementary Estimates booklet, General Revenue Fund.

Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, vote 37, \$28,350,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Be it resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2011, the following sums for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour in the amount of \$28,350,000.

Mr. Hart. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Vote 37 agreed to.]

The Chair: — That concludes tonight's estimates. I'd like to thank committee members, the minister, and his officials for coming out tonight as well as the legislative staff, the Clerks, and Hansard for the proceedings and tonight's meeting.

Mr. Minister, do you have any closing remarks?

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Well as usual, Mr. Chair, I just want to say how much I appreciate the time of the officials from the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, from the Workers' Compensation Board, from those here within the legislature that have enabled and allowed us to proceed, and certainly appreciate the opportunity to appear before again the committee.

I would like to follow up. I was remiss; I should have done this earlier and tabled documents that were requested last night. Happy to do that now and they can be shared with the committee members if and as appropriate, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. We'll be tabling those documents officially tomorrow. With that, thank you again and thank you to everybody watching at home. I will now entertain a motion to adjourn. Mr. Weekes. This committee now stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 21:43.]