



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Batoche

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Regina Coronation Park

Ms. Doreen Eagles
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Moose Jaw Wakamow

Mr. Russ Marchuk
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Mr. Paul Merriman
Saskatoon Sutherland

[The committee met at 19:00.]

The Chair: — Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to tonight's proceedings. Tonight we have Social Services and first we'll introduce the members. I'm Delbert Kirsch. I'm the Chair. Deputy Chair is Mr. Cam Broten. We've got Mark Docherty, Doreen Eagles, Greg Lawrence, Russ Marchuk, and Paul Merriman. And we have one participating member and that would be Mr. David Forbes.

This evening the committee will be considering the estimates of the Ministry of Social Services, but before we begin, I would like to remind the officials to introduce themselves when they speak for the purpose of Hansard's recording. We will now begin our consideration of vote 36, Social Services, central management and services, subvote (SS01).

**General Revenue Fund
Social Services
Vote 36**

Subvote (SS01)

The Chair: — Minister Draude is here with her officials. Madam Minister, would you please introduce your officials and if you have any opening remarks.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much to the Chair and good evening to you and to the committee members. I'd like to start by thanking the opposition members for allowing us to split these six hours into different segments. We appreciate that very much.

I know we've agreed to spend our first couple of hours on housing, and I'm going to focus my opening remarks on housing, but I'd like to start by introducing officials. Beside me tonight I have the deputy minister, Ken Acton, this side. Housing division, we have Don Allen, assistant deputy minister. Eileen Badiuk is executive director of program and service design. Dianne Baird is executive director of housing network. Doug Schweitzer is the director of housing development and real estate. Representing corporate services, we have Alan Syhlonyk, who is the assistant deputy minister; Miriam Myers, who is the executive director of finance and administration. And we have the Status of Women office represented by Pat Falconbridge, executive director.

We have a separate session booked later this week for income assistance and disability, but we have two officials here tonight in case there is some overlap questions. So we have Bob Wihlidal, who is the assistant deputy minister, and Doug Scott, who is the director of strategic policy.

So as I said, I'm going to start with some discussion on housing. Saskatchewan has been experiencing economic and population growth that's not been seen in decades. With many benefits of growth comes challenges, one of which has been in the area of housing. Our province's growth has created increased demand for housing, resulting in greater pressures on housing supply and on affordability. Our government has not shied away from these challenges. In fact we've made housing a priority.

We've demonstrated our commitment to meet housing challenges head-on through ongoing investments and through the development of programs that are meeting the demands of a growing province. Since November of 2007, in partnership with non-profit groups and the private sector, Sask Housing Corporation has funded a total of 1,924 affordable rental housing units that have been developed or are under construction; 1,439 units have been completed with the funding of \$110.6 million. And as of December 31, 2011, an additional 485 units with the funding of \$63 million are under development.

We've provided assistance to nearly 400 households right across the province to achieve home ownership. And we've helped more than 3,000 households improve health, safety, and energy efficiencies in their homes. To help those with low income who have a place to live but struggle to afford the rent, we have also adjusted shelter rates and rental supplements seven times, based on the average market rent. This means that clients may be eligible for up to 100 per cent of the average market rent and those with a disability are eligible for up to 110 per cent of the average market rent.

I'm going to take a minute to describe the effect of what is occurring in the rental market. As I have mentioned, we've indexed the rental supplement seven times. You may wonder why in our 2012-13 budget for rental housing supplement it is lower than '11-12. The answer lies in the fact that we have successfully increased the supply of rental housing.

Here's an example of the progress in this area. In 2011 alone there were more multi-unit rentals started than in the last seven years of the previous government combined. This increase in housing supply has reduced the upward pressure on rents. The opposition would know the largest rent increases in the last two decades occurred between 2007 and 2008. The average rent increases have steadily stabilized since then, setting at rates that are closer to and becoming closer to inflation. This means that renters need less assistance than we expected when we prepared the 2011-12 budget. And although there's more work to do, it's encouraging to see the progress.

And it's not only in the area of housing where our province has seen progress. According to RBC [Royal Bank of Canada] reports, over the last two decades the affordability of home ownership was under most stress in Saskatchewan in the years 2007-2008.

RBC documents steady improvement in affordability since that time. According to RBC's analysis, ownership costs as a percentage of household income continues to improve in 2011. This improvement has brought the level of affordability back quite close to its long-run average. Combined with the expected income gains as a result of continued economic growth, RBC's conclusion is that affordability, and I quote, "is unlikely to be a factor restraining Saskatchewan homebuyers."

This is critical because I know we continue to have challenges in housing. But the challenges will not be addressed by focusing exclusively on one part of the housing spectrum. They are going to fit together. That's why we continue to build on the actions that have been taken since November of 2007.

In March of last year, we announced the Saskatchewan advantage housing plan. The plan contained five programs to help us increase housing supply and address housing affordability: that was Headstart on a Home, affordable home ownership program, rental construction incentive, Habitat for Humanity partnerships, and investment of \$34 million in rental units.

Headstart on a Home will help municipalities and developers create home ownership opportunities for about 1,000 moderate-income households over five years, with a funding of \$199 million. The affordable home ownership program matches grants that municipalities provide to homeowners and are originally expected to create 600 new home ownership units. The rental construction incentive is designed to help municipalities and developers create new rental units and create opportunities for low-income people to find safe, affordable housing. It was originally expected to create 2,900 units.

Habitat for Humanity is known all over the world for helping people achieve their dream of home ownership. Our government is very proud to continue our very successful partnership with Habitat Saskatchewan's affiliates. In 2011 we expanded our commitment to Habitat for Humanity to a total of \$3.5 million to help 70 families build a place to call home.

Also in 2011, we set aside nearly \$34 million to develop more affordable rental housing units in communities with long-term housing needs and to rejuvenate government funding homes and rental units that would have been lost without major work. The total of 160 units were rejuvenated.

We know that government has an important role to play in building a strong housing environment in our province, but we also know we can't do it alone. In March and April of last year, Saskatchewan Housing Corporation held consultations with about 350 stakeholders, including municipalities, builders, developers, financial institutions, not-for-profit organizations to discuss housing challenges. These consultations culminated in the first housing and development summit, called Building Communities, Building Saskatchewan, which was held in Saskatoon last April. And I know the member was there, and I appreciated that.

The summit brought more than 200 stakeholders together to talk about a range of topics, including local and regional housing needs, investment opportunities and partnerships, housing and development planning, infrastructure, the regulatory environment, and examples of creating creative housing, all with the goal of supporting a full range of housing solutions today and into the future.

Emphasizing the theme of innovation and creativity, our government announced at that time the creation of the Summit Action Fund during the summit in April of 2011, with a further investment of \$6 million to address housing supplies right across the province. The fund was created to encourage stakeholders to come forward with ideas and solutions that were not covered by existing housing programs to drive creative and flexible approaches and innovation in the housing sector. Those in the housing sector responded with enthusiasm to this fund.

The first intake of applications resulted in the selection of four

projects for a total of \$1.16 million in government funding. These projects will (1) provide financial assistance for up to 160 first-time homebuyers in Regina, Saskatoon, and Humboldt, (2) build nine new housing spaces for adults with intellectual disabilities in Regina, (3) develop three new affordable homes in north central Regina, and (4) implement a regional housing action plan to help communities meet housing needs associated with growth.

In the second intake of applications for the Summit Action Fund, our government doubled the funding provided to \$2.7 million for eight projects that will increase the housing supply by 268 units. These new projects will develop local home ownership programs in Pinehouse, providing 10 new home ownership units. It will result in four new rental units in La Ronge, with additional units in future phases. It will help employers offer housing benefits to employees who are first-time homebuyers, resulting in 190 new homes; created 24 new rental units in Weyburn through significant municipal financial incentives; build 13 supportive living rental residences in Eston, freeing up existing single family homes; develop a 12-unit retirement villa through sustainable community fundraising in Mossbank; built a 10-unit home for cognitively impaired adults in Cormon Park; and facilitated the construction of four new basement apartments for low-income residents in an existing building in Melfort.

As you can see by these projects, builders and developers and communities and organizations are coming together and creating solutions to meet our housing needs, and our government is really pleased to work with them in their efforts.

The consultations with housing stakeholders and the housing summit both informed the development of a strong foundation — the Saskatchewan strategy for Saskatchewan — that we announced in August of last year. This eight-year strategy truly represents a collaborative effort by community, industry, and government. It involves the entire housing sector in creating a housing environment where all Saskatchewan people have access to homes that enhance their well-being, build local communities, and contribute to a growing province. The housing strategy was welcomed by players in our industry.

SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] president, Allan Earle, said, we appreciate how the ministry has engaged SUMA and involved our members in the development of the strategy. Your immediate attention to our concerns demonstrates strong partnerships. David Marit, the president of SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities], called the document a bold strategy that looks to the future.

And the Canadian Home Builders' Association's CEO [chief executive officer], Alan Thomarat, said, we believe this is not just a new direction and a sound direction; it is the right direction. The executive vice-president of the Association of Saskatchewan Realtors, Bill Madder, said, the strategy can be part of a new approach that unleashes the energy and resources of all sectors.

Our discussions with stakeholders resulted in the development of five broad strategic priorities contained in our strategy. First of all, to increase the housing supply; improve affordability; support families and individuals with the greatest housing

needs; enhance a strategic planning for housing; collaborate, communicate, and educate.

When we launched the housing strategy, we released the 2011-12 provincial action plan which outlined the key activities our government would undertake in the first year. One of these activities included an additional \$5 million in funding for the affordable home ownership program and the rental construction incentive, thanks to a tremendous response to these programs. As of last August, more than 3,800 rental units and another 850 home ownership units had been approved under the programs, greatly exceeding the number of units we'd anticipated when we announced the programs in March.

Another promise in the housing strategy focused on improving Saskatchewan Housing Corporation's secondary suite program, designed to create more affordable housing options and increase the supply of rental housing. Effective January the 1st of this year, 2012, we made an additional \$2 million available to support the development of another 70 to 100 secondary suites over the next two to three years. Even though we announced this program only in December, the new program had 67 applications by March the 9th of this year, with 14 units of those completed and 13 more under construction. Because of this success, at their March 27th meeting the board of Saskatchewan Housing Corporation decided to use internal resources to devote an additional \$4 million to secondary suites, tripling the program's budget.

[19:15]

As I mentioned earlier, the housing strategy guides our efforts to increase the housing supply and affordability right across the province over the next eight years. And thanks to the support of our industry partners who strongly endorsed our housing strategy and action plan, we've already made progress. Looking at provincial housing starts, which have reached the highest numbers in decades, in 2010 we saw 5,907 starts. That was an increase of 52.8 per cent over the previous year. And in 2011 we saw 7,031 starts.

We know government doesn't build homes. Government programs and government money doesn't build the houses. What our government does has taken a leadership role in creating the right environment for housing development to occur. Industry has stepped to the plate and industry has delivered. A private forecaster expects them to continue to deliver. RBC predicts over 15,000 housing starts in the next two years, and if the breakdown of the CMHC [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation] numbers over the last years is any indicator, we expect to see a larger and larger proportion of these housing starts to be rentals.

But as I have said before, we're not being complacent about the status of housing in our province. We know there are challenges. That's why our government made further investments in housing in this year's budget, the 2012-13 budget. These initiatives will ensure that our efforts and those of everyone in the housing sector will continue to make a difference for Saskatchewan people in need of suitable and affordable housing.

Within this year's budget, our government's support for

housing has grown to \$344 million. This investment will result in the development of more than 12,600 new homes for Saskatchewan people, homes that will offer security, shelter, well-being, and a sense of belonging. Of those 12,600 new units, more than 10,000 are rental units, a 29 per cent increase in the primary rental market.

In the budget we also added another \$2 million for affordable home ownership programs and the rental construction incentive to address the demands for these programs. We are continuing our valuable partnership with Habitat for Humanity and we're providing an addition \$1 million to help another 20 low-income families achieve home ownership. And to develop an additional 200 units in communities with long-term housing needs, Saskatchewan Housing Corporation will invest another \$9.2 million in the rental development program.

Our government also introduced the Saskatchewan first-time homebuyers tax credit, effective January the 1st, 2012 — 11 per cent tax credit on the first \$10,000 of qualifying home purchase, offering Saskatchewan tax credit of \$1,100.

During our consultations with stakeholders last year, we heard that corporate income tax was one of the biggest barriers to development. Our government listened, and with this budget we introduced the corporate income tax rebate on new rental housing. This rebate offers a 10 percentage point reduction in corporate income tax in the rate levied on income earned from construction and rental of qualifying new multi-unit residential rental projects. Funding for this initiative is estimated at \$34 million for the first five years of the program. The initiative is widely acclaimed right across the province.

The mayor of Saskatoon called it wonderful. Moose Jaw mayor, Glenn Hagel, celebrated the initiative as removing the biggest deterrent to building new rental units. Prince Albert mayor, Jim Scarrow, said the province is clearly listening to its stakeholders and is taking action to lead the nation in provincial approaches to housing initiatives.

And it wasn't just the municipal officials who were excited. "We think government is bang on here," and that was Allan Thomarat, the CEO of Saskatchewan branch of the Canadian Homebuilders. Bill Madder of the Saskatchewan Realtors noted on budget day that this lowers the key barrier that has kept private dollars from flowing into the rental market. And as Mr. Madder put it, "this initiative put Saskatchewan in a leadership role nationally."

But being in a leadership role means that your work is never done. That's why throughout this year, we're going to continue to work closely with the housing sector to deliver on our commitment under the housing strategy and action plan. Later this month we'll hold a second housing and development summit which is going to focus on bringing plans to life now. Again we'll bring together key players from communities, industry, and government to focus on planning for housing and how we can make these plans reality in order to meet the housing needs of our people. Later this year we'll announce the '12-13 housing action plan.

I can say with confidence that I believe we're on the right path and that we're seeing results from our investments and

initiatives on housing programs and the private sector's response to those programs.

Since 2007, housing starts in Saskatchewan have averaged more than 5,900 per year, more than double on average the number of housing starts in the previous 16 years. I'm very pleased and proud to be part of our government's efforts to ensure that Saskatchewan people have a place to call home.

Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to give this information, and I'll be pleased to take your questions.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Ms. Minister. And Mr. Forbes is . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Vermette will start. He has just a couple and then he . . .

The Chair: — Mr. Vermette has the floor.

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to the members of the committee that are here, to the staff and the minister, I just want to say thank you upfront. So if I forget to say that.

I have some questions and of course, you know, there might be some good things happening in the province in some areas, and that's great in some of the different areas that you're hearing positive response of people very pleased with some of the initiatives. But I have to also caution that there are areas that are not very pleased with the initiatives, with some of the programs you have chosen to, I guess, cut. And I'll go over those in a little more detail once we go through some of the questions.

So I guess I would just like to know, for the North, what type of housing programs are you going to develop for northern Saskatchewan? And not just the bigger centres like La Ronge, Pinehouse, and I know you mentioned a few of those. I'm just trying to see, like what are you going to do for communities that are struggling? And that's smaller communities that are struggling with overcrowding, and bad. So if you can give me just an idea of some of the targets, communities in the North.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much. And I assure the member that the housing in the North is a very important priority for us, as well as the whole province. In addition to the annual repair and maintenance expenditures, we spend about \$4 million a year in that area. We've invested \$11.1 million to rejuvenate northern social housing stock and using some of the Canadian economic action fund. And under the housing strategy, the entire sector's being engaged to find solutions for our housing pressures in the North.

Right now Saskatchewan Housing Corporation owns approximately 1,400 off-reserve social and affordable housing units in the North, and a system of northern housing authorities manage and operate our rental housing. And between 2007 in November and April of 2012, we've invested \$13.8 million to develop 20 projects, resulting in 93 units for families, 16 units for seniors, and four units for singles. In addition we're investing \$8.7 million for 10 projects currently under construction or development. I can talk about the partnership, home ownership partnerships and the home repair renovations, social housing management training partnerships with the

Northern Lights School Division, and the number of households that are served.

I'm going to ask Don if he has any more, anything to add to this, but I want to assure the member opposite that the concerns in northern Saskatchewan and the housing issues there are something that we take very seriously.

Mr. Allen: — Don Allen, assistant deputy minister for housing and president and chief executive officer at Saskatchewan Housing Corporation. Just two things that I would add. One is the remote housing program which has been suspended while we examine what can be done to make it more effective or, for that matter, effective. It had a design that worked at a particular point in time, is now challenged somewhat, and so we're looking to see what could be done. And there will have to be some consultations with people in the North on that.

The second thing or point that I would like to make is that of the 18 or so million dollars of federal-provincial funding that Sask Housing receives, last year, this year, and next year a portion of it is dedicated to creating new supply in the North. Last year I believe it was \$1 million, and we haven't done the allocation yet for 2012, but we'll be doing that very shortly, and I would expect it would be the same order of magnitude.

Mr. Vermette: — Okay. I want to go . . . You talked about the . . . And I guess the home purchase program was an option for people that were renting from Sask Housing or the housing authority in northern Saskatchewan. There's a number of them. And people that rented for so many years, if their rent was current for so many months, could request to be considered for the home purchase program where maybe they rented 15, 20 years and could be considered to purchase a home. You, as of November 2011, you cancelled that program.

And I'm just curious. Did you consult northern Saskatchewan, the New North, the mayors, the leadership, any of the First Nations members up there who have members who live off-reserve? Did you consult them before you decided to cancel this program?

Because I know people . . . It was very positive, the program, and to all of a sudden just to have it cut, and we've had people in the middle of it that were trying to negotiate buying out the home. And I have to say that some of the housing authority did what they could do to work with the Sask Housing to make sure that those ones that were I guess being negotiated or being considered, some of them have gone ahead, and I know people have purchased them. So again I'll say that, you know, we weren't sure if they were going to, but it sounds like some of them were okay. But some of them will not be if they missed the timeline. They won't be considered, yet they would meet the qualifications — but because you cancelled the program, will not be considered.

So who did you consult? And why have you decided to cut the program without having something else in place or making sure the program was operating before you changed it? Like I'm a little confused with that, and I think other people are kind of concerned that there was no notice. It was just a notice given out and kind of hit people.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you. The rental purchase option was introduced in 2001 and it helped 138 northern households to become homeowners. So 2001 to 2012, there was 138. The rental purchase option was really intended, when it was started it was intended to be offered for three years at that time. So last year we conducted an evaluation of what was really happening, and we've decided to put it on hold. The letters were sent out to people in December for those who had already applied for the program and to those who had previously requested funding. And the letter advised them that the program would be extended to March 31st if they wanted to exercise their option to purchase.

Since that program's inception — and I think this is important to know — because of the length of the tenancy, 53 households acquired units at the net purchase price of \$1. The average net purchase price for the remaining 85 clients was \$12,786. So the question we had to ask ourselves, was that a fair use of money to see that a smaller number of households were going to be given, got a home for \$1 or anywhere up to \$13,000, that it was a matter of saying, how can we choose? This person would pay this amount of money and that somebody down the street would not have it. It's something that we are looking at, and we've told you that there's evaluations taking place. But really the question that has to be asked is, are we picking winners and losers? If somebody can get their house for \$1, is it fair to your neighbour?

Mr. Vermette: — Well I guess to be honest with you, there was a formula used, so to say that somebody got to decide who could pay \$1 and who would pay \$20,000 . . . because I know some have paid as much as 20,000 for their home. I know that for a fact because I've assisted them with doing that.

So I find it odd that there was no formula. Like you make it sound like it was just picked out. One person could buy it for \$1; the next one had to pay 13, 12,000, whatever the average you're using. I just find it a little funny that the department wouldn't have a formula. Because when I talked to some of your officials, I was always told that it would be considered; they would work the formula out and come back with how many years they rented, the amount of money they paid. There was also a northern grant, isolated home — I believe \$50,000. There was different formulas used and it was explained to me that it seemed to have worked well. And people that rented longer actually, obviously would pay less. If some had back rent, that was taken into account and they would have to pay that too. So it did work out well.

So I'm a little surprised that . . . Anyway I'm curious if you'd clear up for me how you were saying you got to pick neighbours would pay \$1. Could you clear that up for me, because I'm a little confused there.

[19:30]

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Yes. Thank you very much. And I apologize if I made it sound like there wasn't a formula, because there definitely was a formula that was used. But I'm just talking on average, depending on how long people would rent their homes. There were some that the average was \$12,786, but there were 53 households that got to acquire their house for the net price of \$1. Yes, it was a formula, and I'm

going to ask Don if he can go into details with that.

Mr. Allen: — Sorry, I don't have the details of the formula, but it is not a very straightforward formula. But it did have to do with the length of tenancy on the main, so the longer someone stayed in their unit and paid the subsidized rent, the lower the price was. And what we had in many cases was tenants who would wait until the price was \$1 before they exercised their option.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'd also like to add that after there was concerns identified about who had accessed the program and became homeowners, they were having difficulty maintaining the property and actually paying taxes as well. So the idea of home ownership involved more than just having the house. It's what we do in going forward. So that was part of the issue that we recognized as well, and as we go forward, we'll continue to look at that.

I know that last year one of your colleagues, the member from Athabasca, said you obviously want to be looking at people that are responsible and doing their part to maintain their home, and of course maintaining their home obviously involves paying your property tax. Well it was part of the issue that we were hearing about. So we had to make sure that people, that not only could they get their house, could they maintain their house? We also know that 21 out of the 138 homes have had to access RRAP [residential rehabilitation assistance program] at this time.

Mr. Vermette: — And I guess, thank you for that. To go a little further then in your talk, now you bring up the RRAP program. And what's the plan with the RRAP program at this time? Do you see it continuing, or are you guys going to consult anyone before you, I guess, cancel the project? Before you decide to change the program, will you consult New North? Will you consult the people that are renting homes to see, and people that qualify to see, is there a better way to do it before you guys just go out without consulting?

And I'm a little concerned that, and the area and why I say that, you might consult some of the other groups down south and the bigger organizations. And that's great. I'm glad you're doing that. I think it's important that you talk to as many people as you can. I'm a little concerned that New North — and it has 35 mayors who belong to it — I will hope that you would use that opportunity to consult with them especially when you're talking about a program for home purchase. And if you're concerned about them paying their taxes, those mayors would have good knowledge of the struggles that they are facing with that, and they might be a good resource for you to use if you're willing to, you know, sit down and talk with the New North and, you know, mayors from that association.

I guess I'm a little concerned with how long will it be before, you know, a new program will come out to help northern people that are struggling, whether it's low income, affordable housing. The overcrowding is huge. I mean it's an issue that's facing a lot of communities.

But I guess when you have a population . . . And let's be honest. Northern Saskatchewan, a lot of people are unemployed, you know. They're living in poverty. The

conditions aren't the same as down south, and it isn't the same reason that we don't have . . . Because there's a lot of opportunity to jobs and everything else. So some of these isolated communities don't have the access to the jobs, but they have the community members living there and calling it home, going to school. So they have to stay there. That's where their families are and they choose to stay there.

So it's very delicate to try to balance out. And some do leave. They get themselves an education and they do leave. But some want to stay there. That's their home and they want to stay there. And it's important to have a home for them whether they choose to live in northern Saskatchewan or the South. People should have a home that's affordable, that's safe for their families.

So I'm a little concerned about where you guys are going to go with the housing in northern Saskatchewan. And I guess that's kind of why my questions are: what's your plan, you know, for northern Saskatchewan? Do you have any ideas at this time where you're going? And could you please reassure me, reassure me?

And I think New North and the mayors, that before you make any changes, that you will consult the people that are going to be impacted. I think that's just a simple thing that people are asking for. They want to be consulted and they want to give input. And maybe it would be good input, and maybe it would help address some of the concerns that have been raised.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you again. And I want to make sure that the member opposite doesn't use the word cancel when that has never been a word that I've been using about the RRAP program. I wanted to assure the member that all of the programs that we talked about earlier, when I went through the housing discussion at the beginning, involved the North. I've had the opportunity to meet with New North and be in the North.

I think also it's important that the member realize that two of the summit action agreements that were signed were with northern communities. Pinehouse and La Ronge have taken advantage of money through the Summit Action Fund, understanding that they are part of who we are. And when it comes to building homes their voice is important, and they have good ideas. The Summit Action Fund had a number of people bring forward ideas, and two of those proposals were two that were accepted. And I was pleased about that.

All of the programs, whether it's the home ownership program, the rental construction incentive, along with the additional incentive that was added this year to developers, are programs that can be looked at in the North.

I understand that there is other issues in the North, and that's why we are ensuring that places like La Loche, La Ronge, Pinehouse, Sandy Bay, Stony Rapids, Wollaston Lake, and various other communities are on our radar list as well.

But as far as the RRAP program goes, it's part of the new federal money that I talked about. And I'm going to ask Don to bring forward, to talk about that issue, please.

Mr. Allen: — So before September the 6th of 2011, the province had no say in the design of the repair programs. They were federally dictated as to what was eligible and what wasn't, how the program operated and how the program didn't. When we signed the new investment in affordable housing agreement in September of last year, that gave the province the flexibility to begin to think about something like the repair programs differently.

And I'm not going to use RRAP hopefully ever again because we're now renaming them. To scoop ourselves, we're going to be announcing in a couple of weeks a new suite of repair programs called the Saskatchewan home repair programs. These programs are considerably enriched. There is more funding available for the rental landlord or for the homeowner to do repairs. They were increasing the income limits, so higher income households can qualify for the repair program than did historically.

So those changes have took a few months for us to work through once we had the flexibility under the new agreement. We had to take them before the Sask Housing board to be approved, and in order to get them out we didn't really do much in the way of consultation. We have heard numerous times, including at this committee a year ago, that our repair programs needed some work because there were people who couldn't repair their homes because the repair programs had limitations in their design.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — And I would just like to comment further. When we talked about consultations, 25 per cent of the consultation meetings that we had leading up to the housing strategy last year were in the North. It's actually 42 per cent if you count Meadow Lake and Prince Albert. So, yes, the voice of the people in the North were part of the people that we talked to as we went forward.

Mr. Vermette: — Well just to be clear, I don't classify those as northern communities. So I just want to be very clear on that. That to me and northern people do not classify, you know, Prince Albert, Meadow Lake as northern communities. Just to be clear.

I guess my last question to you: there are a lot of concerns when it comes to housing in northern Saskatchewan. A caseworker that we deal with for individuals, whether they're renting through La Ronge Housing, whether it's Creighton Housing Authority, I mean, they do what they can do. There's many challenges and, you know, some of it's I guess sometimes you can say a situation that families are put into, situations the housing authority has to deal with, and sometimes I imagine it's not very easy.

We try to work with the housing authorities to make sure that if there's ways of solving some of the issues, we can work with them. You know, my CAs [constituency assistant] work as hard as they can with the housing authority, with Sask Housing, to make sure that if there's issues you try to, you know, resolve them and try to find meaningful solutions so that people have a place to live. And that's what it's all about at the end of the day.

And it doesn't matter playing the politics, but I have to say there are many challenges in northern Saskatchewan facing

families, people living in homes, whether it's affordability, the challenges of 25 per cent of their gross income in northern Saskatchewan. That is a challenge for them. When you're paying utility bills that are higher, whether it's oil, propane, the cost of living in northern Saskatchewan is so much higher, yet they're stuck in the same formula as the South and it doesn't work. And we hear a lot of concerns about that, whether it's issues . . . And maybe there's other areas in southern Saskatchewan that are facing some of the same issues.

So when you're looking at your policies, I guess I would like to suggest to you that you also address that concern. Because I hear lots that is about affordability, so families can afford to make sure their kids have the nutritious foods that they need to go to. So maybe 25 per cent of their gross income is a little high in some areas, and maybe it could be looked at. And I just want to make sure that you understand the concerns that we hear and that's some of the challenges where people have trouble, whether it's . . . I think of the one lady, you know, and she's a senior and she's renting from Creighton Housing, and to hear her story it kind of shocks you to think, you know, you think well it's 25 per cent and you have to pay that but when you look at her other bills and what she lives on, there's challenges out there. And I mean some, yes, can afford to pay it and they do pay the 25 per cent. But for many it is a challenge with the cost of living to live where they are.

So I just bring that up as a concern and again we hope that more houses will be built. The overcrowding in northern Saskatchewan is huge. We know there's other areas of the province that have housing crisis. We realize that because of economic growth and stuff. But these issues we're talking about are not truly about the economics and jobs for these individuals. It's they're overcrowded and sometimes you have 14 people living in a house and some of them, you know, you hear it, they sleep in shifts. So there's real challenges out there and, you know, I think it's important that it's time for it to be addressed, and I think the Conference Board of Canada has shown that on some of the numbers they've put out for northern Saskatchewan. It's alarming and it's appalling to see some of the conditions people are living in. So again, maybe the new programs and when you talk to the leadership in northern Saskatchewan and talk to the community members, you might get some good direction on what would work for northern Saskatchewan.

So I guess to the minister, your officials, I guess it'll be interesting to watch your new programs, see how they're going to affect northern Saskatchewan. How will they help young people and families and kids so they have a safe place, a warm place to live? We'll monitor that. And I know I get a lot of conversations from individuals, and I say we have probably 40 per cent of our case workers dealing with housing issues — people, affordability, and housing and the conditions, and I guess how they feel they're being treated.

Anyway, I leave that with you and hopefully you can work with our leadership. And I wish you well on your programs, and if it benefits northern people, then I'm very pleased and I don't mind giving a compliment when it's due. But I have to also say when it's concerns that we're dealing with in northern Saskatchewan, then I hope you will hear the concerns that we're bringing forward. And sometimes it's not easy, but I don't mind

giving compliments to programs that are working and working very effectively. If you do the proper channels of consulting with the leadership, consulting with the people that are being impacted, I can live with some of the disappointments to a point. But then so can people in northern Saskatchewan, don't expect the world. They just . . .

Again I want to say thank you for giving me a chance to bring up some of the concerns. And if it does any good with your departments and yourself to deal with these individuals and deal with some of the concerns that I've been shared with from people back home, then I guess I've done what I've been asked to do. Thank you, Mrs. Minister.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much to the member. And I do appreciate your words and this is the type of occasion where you can bring up issues that we hear about. That's your job and it's our opportunity to listen to some of the stories from the North.

The member opposite should know that Ken, my deputy minister, and a number of other deputy ministers are going to La Ronge next week and they're going to be meeting with some of the leaders. There will be discussions on a number of issues. But I know that the officials in the ministry that I am proud to represent and other officials as well recognize that northern Saskatchewan is an important part of growing the province. So we will be hearing their words just as we've heard yours tonight.

[19:45]

I'm sure that you . . . I appreciate the compliment that you've given to the ministry for the work that they're doing. They work hard for this area. The programs that we've talked about, including the partnership with Northern Lights School Division and the social housing management training, the home repair, renovation, adaption system programs, they're all ones that benefit the North. And I said earlier that there's more work to do. I know that, but at the same time I can assure you that we're all working hard to make everybody proud to be in Saskatchewan. So thank you.

The Chair: — The next question. The Chair recognizes Mr. Belanger.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Just a very quick couple of questions here, first of all in terms of the assessment and the review of how the housing programs are being delivered in the North. One of the areas I think we need a lot of work on is the whole notion of seniors in general. As we all know, seniors still own their homes throughout the province. In Saskatchewan, the northern part is much the same as the rest of the province, but in northern Saskatchewan, many seniors live on very low income. And when they begin to pay their bills, it's usually rent, heat, food, power, fuel, and about the last place that they, if they have any money left over, it goes to taxes, land taxes.

And I want to make sure that in the event that there is some discussion with the local council, the mayor and the council, and they make an agreement or a contract to address the land tax arrears because I know some of the programs don't allow

the elders to be part of the program if they have land tax arrears. Our office has been working with 15 to 20 different elders from a number of communities, and that's one of the consistent problems that we get is that they're not eligible for RRAP or ERP [emergency repair program] or home adaption for seniors' independence if they have land or property tax arrears with the municipality.

So the next step they do is they generally approach the town and say, look, can we go under a contract? And can we actually pay on a monthly basis and show progress towards meeting our land tax obligation, thus satisfying the local municipal requirement for payment of taxes, and that would make us eligible for the programs? Have we had any kind of input as to where that's at with the ministry?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much to the member. And I know that the question that he's talking about today or the question he's brought forward, the issue is something that we talked about last year and in this very area. And that time I was interested in reading your quotes from last year because you said, and I did mention this earlier before you had the opportunity to join us, you quoted that you obviously want to be looking at people that are responsible in doing their part to maintain their homes. And of course maintaining your home obviously involves paying your property tax. So I know that you're aware of that.

And the process that we have in place, this program was set up by the NDP [New Democratic Party] in 2001. And that was, the whole process was something that hasn't been looked at. But it was set up when you were in government. So we have, it's something that could be looked at as we redo some of the programming right now.

Don just talked about some of the new programs that were going to be looked at into the future with the money that's available. I think it's \$9.4 million from the federal government, about \$9 million, that we signed the agreement, the new housing agreement with the feds last September. It was considerably lower than it had been before, but the \$9 million is a lot more flexible.

So we are always aware that spending taxpayers' money is doing it efficiently, effectively, and with good use of the dollars is something that we're looking at at all times. But this \$9 million will be spent in a way that we believe is in the best interests of the people of the province. Northerners are a very important part of it. So as I said, this process has been in place since 2001, and as we go forward, we will be looking at whatever changes make sense.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. Well I want to record for the record in terms of the challenge that I think is important that we address is the whole motion of property tax arrears. You know, they happen in every community. And in the North it is particularly acute for the elderly homeowner where they have a fixed income. Like some of them are living on 11 to \$1,400 a month, and the costs in the North are much greater. So the sacrifice that they make, sometimes the elders do, is they look at the choice of medicine versus heat. You know, I'm not being over-dramatic here. That happens in many places in Saskatchewan. And the North is not immune to it, and it's

probably a bit more susceptible because of the higher costs.

So my point here tonight is that in the review of how the delivery of programs work for northern Saskatchewan, there's got to be some concessions on the property tax arrears issue when elderly people are applying for RRAP or ERP because if they apply for RRAP and ERP and there are land tax arrears, eligibility becomes a concern for Sask Housing.

And I'm not retracting what I said last year because obviously maintenance and property taxes are part of living in a house. I appreciate that as many other people do. But as they make amends and as they make an effort to pay off those property taxes, even though they may be in the 12 to 13 to \$14,000 range because they accumulate over the years, if they make a contract with the local municipality, and say the mayor gives a letter saying we are quite happy that Mr. and Mrs. X are making an effort to make payments on their property taxes, we're comfortable that they'll continue making those payments, is the ministry prepared to look at making them eligible for these RRAP and ERP programs in the fact that they weren't eligible because of this arrear situation? But if they had a letter and a commitment to resolve these matters, would that then make them eligible because they really need the help now?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. You talked about taxes, and I know that that's part of what happens when you own a home. I was very pleased this year that we had a chance to increase the amount of money that was given to municipalities through revenue sharing. I know that the member opposite is aware of that and the opportunity the municipalities have to look at the taxation and what they may be doing in their own areas. I know that the problems or the issues that are in the North are different than they may be in the cities or in the South, but they still are issues that are looked at on a local basis. So to make a program that would be beneficial to the people in the North may be something that their municipal leaders will be looking at as well.

I can just underline again to the member that as we go forward with redesigning of our programs all these suggestions and ideas will be part of the decision as we go forward. And making sure that we're consulting with the leaders in the North or right across the province is what government should and will continue to do.

So the property tax is an issue, but it is part of what people do when they own their own home. I know that there's a pride in owning your own home and many seniors cling to that pride to ensure that they can have what they call home instead of going into a seniors' home. So they . . . It's part of what I recognize as, not as a northerner but as someone who is proud to be in the province.

I know that the seniors' income plan is also something that has made a big difference this year, whether it's from southern Saskatchewan or northern Saskatchewan. The budget is \$24.224 million. It's an increase of \$3.274 million. And so there is benefits that are available to people for our seniors in recognizing that many of them have costs that haven't been looked at for a number of years. I was very pleased to be part of that. So yes to the member opposite, the seniors in northern Saskatchewan are important to us just as the seniors in the

South.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. I just wanted to make sure that you understood that from the northern perspective many seniors that may own their homes, it's a particularly acute problem amongst the senior population. The last thing that they pay for is property taxes, primarily because they live on fixed incomes and these incomes are fairly low. So as they age, as their house ages as well, they apply for RRAP and ERP, but one of the things that prevent them from qualifying for the RRAP or ERP programs is the property tax arrears. So as they address those arrears with the local council, the proposal I have is fairly simple. Will the minister undertake to try and make that policy shift, if you will, that allows those elders, particularly the elders, the opportunity to make arrangement with the local municipal council on property tax arrears, thereby making them eligible for the RRAP and ERP program? That was my question.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — If we would look at some form of a comfort letter, we would need to discuss it with New North and with other areas as well because we don't want to have one group of people who, you know, that couldn't pay their taxes. You said it right when you said that sometimes taxes are the last thing that you would pay, but we don't want to make it troublesome for other individuals as well. So it's the balance that you have to have when you're making these types of decisions. That's the type of discussion that I would like to be having with other people as well because we need to ensure that everyone is treated equally.

Mr. Belanger: — Yes, and that's a fair statement to make because you want to treat everybody as fair as you can. I'm not arguing with that. But the point on the seniors' independence, per se, there is a lot of value in (a) making their homes more safe, making their homes more comfortable, encouraging them to continue with their municipal tax payments, which I think, you know, hard as it is for them on their fixed income, we know that's the right and responsible thing to do.

But a good example is that when you apply for RRAP and ERP, there's a certain time frame in which you cannot sell your house. I think it was 15 years. And if you do sell your house within that time frame, then you have to repay the RRAP and ERP portion. I think it's pro-rated to ensure that you don't, you know, abuse the program by fixing up your house and getting 20 or \$25,000 worth of work done to it and then turning around and selling it a couple of years later. That wouldn't be fair. I wouldn't support any of that because it's not what the intent of the program is.

Now, if you take the land property tax arrears situation to the same underlying principle, that if they did have 12 or \$13,000 in tax arrears, you could make it a condition that because you're eligible for RRAP — now that we made a deal with the local municipal leaders — they can put a provision in the agreement for RRAP that if you sold your home, not only would the RRAP program be repaid, but also the property tax, thereby achieving both objectives yet at the same time making the elders eligible for the RRAP and ERP program on the immediate basis. Would that be an option for the ministry to consider?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm going to ask Don to make a

comment and then I will make a further comment.

[20:00]

Mr. Allen: — The option that you just described, no, that would be very difficult legally for us to go jointly on the title with the municipality. That would represent challenges that I'm not sure would be legally worth the effort.

I will speak though to the Saskatchewan home repair program. You joined us late, so that is a new set of programs. In fact it's one program to replace the 10 that used to be the old suite of repair programs. Under that new program, the forgiveness period is substantially reduced from what it was historically. The emergency repair program will be down to one year. The repair programs will be down to five years at the maximum. So it's going to be reduced substantially from historical. The assistance levels financially are increased, the income levels for eligibility are higher, and the forgiveness periods are down considerably.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. So I guess the last question I would have is the . . . Okay, I understand that from the legal ramifications, you can't incorporate the municipal property tax issue with the agreement on RRAP. I appreciate that. Okay, that's out.

But if the community council, whether it's in Pinehouse or Beauval or La Loche, said, we are comfortable that couples A and B have made arrangements on their property tax; we are confident that we will retrieve our arrears on property tax from this couple so we would encourage your ministry to make them eligible based on this letter that the council is forwarding to you in support of the RRAP application made by couple A and B.

If that is the case, if that was arranged . . . Because collection of property tax is not within the purview of Sask Housing. You do that to assist the municipality in the tax collection process. So that being said, would that make, would that be enough for Sask Housing to make these couples eligible for the RRAP and ERP program? Would that be sufficient? That's my question.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. I'm glad that Don had a chance to explain that with the revamping and re-engineering of the programs, our repair programs, that there's a lot of the pressure taken off that the member had talked about earlier. He is also aware that with additional monies that are available to the municipalities, there's some leeway that they may have to look at something as well. You've offered a suggestion. It's something that can go into the mix as we go forward in designing programs.

But I want to underline to the member opposite that we want to make sure that we're not choosing winners and losers, that we're not going to balance, pick somebody's need over somebody else's need, and that balanced budgets and affordability is something that we are working on all the time, right across government.

So I thank you for your suggestion on that. And we will continue to look at the North as an important part of our growing economy.

The Chair: — The Chair recognizes Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, and I thank my colleagues. Northern housing's very important. And I think the point . . . And I want to say to the minister, the comment you made about the Saskatchewan Income Plan, particularly for senior women I think is an important program. And I think in the North it's a program that, I don't know how Social Services is planning to promote it, but I would really because it's often misunderstood, but I think it's an important one. But I don't want to ask a question about it because I'm here about housing. And I just want to say it was a good discussion.

Quickly on the Estimates book, page 130, I just want to ask about the staffing component. We had a discussion last year. I understand there's about 135, 137 full-time equivalents. What is the plan this year for Sask Housing and its staffing?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, 137 was about two years ago. We had 115 last year, and we are down to I think it will be 106 this year. There is attrition and retirement involved in there. And then the member opposite is probably aware of Living Skies' announcement with their . . . I think it was two weeks ago there was a discussion on the financial people through Sask Housing that were doing work for Living Skies, and they've said they can do it themselves, so we don't need to do it through Sask Housing. So that will take us down to 106. So that will be nine. We're down nine from last year.

Mr. Forbes: — Down nine. So it's 106 this year. And is that meeting the lean goals? Is that the . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — If the member is talking about the workforce adjustment strategy, you know, when it comes to . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Yes.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Okay. Thank you . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Thank you, David. But overall we're not specifically saying it has to be, this number from here has to be that number from there. What we're trying to make sure is that the work that is being done through Sask Housing is effective, efficient. And how can we best make sure that the work that needs to be done for the people of the province is being done? So I feel very assured that the 106 individuals that we have working with us are going to carry out the needs that we have in the housing file.

Mr. Forbes: — Now in some areas there is a lot of consulting happening, particularly in IT [information technology] and that area. Is there much consulting happening in Sask Housing?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Unless the deputy can think of something in a . . . [inaudible] . . . just told me that there really isn't any change.

Mr. Forbes: — Basically it's all done in-house. Okay, very good. I wanted to ask some questions about the housing initiatives that were outlined in the budget summary. And it's on page 66 and in those pages there. And of course the one that got a lot of media attention was the income tax rebate on new rental housing. And the idea around 10,000, the maximum number of apartments or units that can be qualified for this is

10,000, I understand.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — That's a number that we had looked at at this time. Whether it's 9,500 or 11,200, the number 10,000 was one is their target at this time. And we'll continue to look at it as time goes on.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, I see that on page 68. They do use the word maximum of 10,000 rental units will qualify for . . . but you're saying you can increase that if it's going well.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I guess I should have looked at it closer. I know that we talked about 10,000, but I'm sure . . . We'll see what happens, but that's the number that we're working on, 10,000.

Mr. Forbes: — Why was the number 10,000 picked? Is that an achievable goal? Is it one that seems to meet the needs but will also meet what people are saying they will invest?

Mr. Allen: — Ten thousand was not picked at random. What we did was we looked at a forecasted population growth, the number of households that that population growth represents, and the percentage of those households that we expect to rent. So we looked at what was required and also the history under the rental construction incentive for municipalities, and for that matter for landlords, to construct. And we believe that the combination of the two would have more than a tripling, almost a tripling effect of the one program alone.

Mr. Forbes: — Do you have a breakout of how the 10,000 will go generally throughout the province? How many in Saskatoon, Regina, Moose Jaw, P.A. [Prince Albert]?

Mr. Allen: — At this point we're allowing builders to come to us, landlords to come to us. If we find that it's all settling in an uneven geographic distribution, we can look at it. The 10,000 is a, yes, a maximum. If we look at the rental construction incentive, it's quite widely dispersed. I believe there's nine or ten communities already that have accessed that, so it's not all in just Regina and Saskatoon.

Mr. Forbes: — Now on the rental construction incentive, that's the 5,000 matching program, right? The municipality put in 5,000, or grant 5?

Mr. Allen: — That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And you've had, what? The uptake on that is about 3,900. Is that right?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And now what's interesting about the 10,000 though is you're giving a very much tighter window than the other programs which seem to be over five years. This they have to have their application in before January 1st, 2014.

Mr. Allen: — They have to have their application in before January 1st, 2014 but they have until 2016 to actually build the unit. So there is about still a five-year window. The application is the first step. Construction and occupancy are the next steps.

Mr. Forbes: — In the door. The renters are in the door by January 1st, 2016. Right?

Mr. Allen: — That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Or by the end of 2016.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Can I just mention to David, I think the difference with this program is that the developers, the people will build the homes will build in the areas where they believe that there is a need. So that's why we are feeling very comfortable that the builders will match the needs. So Don has talked about the opportunity to reassess but a developer will go to an area where the supply and demand is there.

Mr. Forbes: — Supply and demand, yes. I'm curious about one of the components and it's under rebate eligibility period, and it's the second paragraph where it says:

Property owners will be permitted to register titles during the development phase at any time during the rebate period, enabling them to convert to condominium units at a later date. Conversions will result in the housing unit no longer being considered eligible rental housing for the purpose of the tax rebate.

So the last sentence makes sense but so in a sense these can all be condos before . . . condos that are rented out.

Mr. Allen: — That's correct. It's not uncommon when a landlord is building a large complex or even a small complex to strata title the individual units to make it easier at some future date to sell them. That's simply how the industry operates and how we've set this program up. The qualifier though is if they do sell them, if they cease to be rental, then they cease to be eligible for the corporate income tax rebate.

Mr. Forbes: — Two questions I have with that. One is, then do they qualify for the rental . . . the RCI, the rental incentive program, rental construction incentive?

Mr. Allen: — That would be up to the individual municipality. Each municipality designs its own rental program and we match it.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So if they go in saying that essentially . . . And I appreciate what you're saying because that is common and we've heard that. But when you're having 10,000, that's quite a big number. And actually people, I understand, now build their apartments so they can be maybe . . . You used the word strata. They already have the titles in place before or they anticipate having the titles a few years down the road. They want the building to be able to be like that.

But I guess I'm curious. How will cities, municipalities plan for this in terms of planning developments? I know within the eight-year strategy, it talked about, how do communities have plans when they think they're building apartment blocks, but they're really actually building condos? And there's nothing wrong with that, but I mean you should know what you're building and you should know what you're planning for because these are not apartment blocks. They're going to be used for rental for hopefully at least 10 years, if not longer, and

if it's a strategy to attract investment, then that's fair enough. But my question is, how do you engage with the municipality to have good planning on this? Because they're not purpose-built apartments, are they? They're not purpose built for rental, or many of them may not be.

Mr. Allen: — I would suggest that every landlord that I've talked to who is building under the rental construction incentive and who has expressed an interest in the corporate income tax rebate program is building purpose-built rentals. They want to do it for a long time. They're looking at it as a long-term investment because that's where the return is over the long term. In the condo market, there is money to be made now without going through the challenge of becoming a landlord. So they're all setting up, many of them are creating property management organizations to collect the rent and do the maintenance because they want to do this for a long period of time.

The other item about the conversion of some of these or some of these being sold, oftentimes, as you know, the in situ tenant is the person who buys the apartment, and we don't want to discourage that opportunity from being exercised if it comes along. At the same time though, the corporate income tax rebate is about creating 10,000 rentals over the course of the next few years because we need rentals in this province.

[20:15]

Mr. Forbes: — But when they do qualify under the RCI program, they are propose-built because for many . . . I can't speak for every municipality, but I know in Saskatoon they do have to be apartments; they can't be condos. They don't qualify for that matching grant if their condo's being rented out for a while. And so those are purpose-built.

But for this, why, why would you have that upfront that you could have this ability to have individual titles? Why not . . . I mean, it can be condo-ized after. But at the beginning, I think for city planning, it would be much easier to plan if you knew you were dealing with apartment blocks, especially when you're dealing with such a large number.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think one of the comments that I heard the most when I became Minister of Housing is that people said we don't build the rentals because there is a disincentive. The tax they pay is a disincentive. What we're trying to do here, and I believe will work, is that people will not . . . they will have the opportunity to keep it as a rental unit because they're not being taxed at the same rate.

So to put these 10,000 units on the market to increase the housing supply gives the developer, the owner a chance to say, this is where I'm investing my money. I haven't heard any of them were saying, well I think I'll go it a quarter of the way through and then sell it. They were saying, this is the opportunity to have the cash flow, the money that businesses must make to operate, and at the same time supply the need that we have in the province.

So it could be that some of them will change their mind, but we believe from the discussions we've had and that I've had with the developers and people that are in the market, that this is

their chance to actually work with the province to build a housing supply that hasn't been there because of disincentive.

Mr. Forbes: — You know, and I'm not disagreeing with the tax break. I think that's a good solution. What I'm seeing, the issue, or what my issue with it is the ability to have them essentially be condos and not apartments first. I have some other issues with them that none of these 10,000 are directed towards any kind of rent geared to income. They can all be luxury apartments. There's no mention about affordable rents with these 10,000. Am I wrong in that?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, the market will tell you that if there's opportunities in a certain rental range and that's where there's the . . . and they'll have an opportunity to make some money on it, that's where they'll be building them. I don't think there is as many people looking for \$1 million apartments as there is looking for something that we would consider affordable, and that's the type of . . . working with the market, working with the demand. And the people that we've been talking to lately are saying this is the opportunity.

I've had, even with the RCIs and the affordable home ownership people, we're seeing some of the housing prices with modular homes and modular apartments, these prices are getting to be . . . are coming to an area where it's in the range that more people can afford. So we can worry about it, or we can base our knowledge knowing that people who are in the industry are there to fill a demand, and the demand is in that area. I believe that that's where they will be.

Mr. Forbes: — You know, but I know that when we talk about home ownership and development of neighbourhoods and city planning, they often talk about mixed neighbourhoods. They like to see mixed levels of affordable homes. But when you're using tax dollars to create an incentive and you're saying a number as large as 10,000 apartments/condos, I think for city planners, you have some issues and say, gee, couldn't some of these have been rent geared-to-income that if somebody is saying . . . Because I know you're saying at least there has to be eight units in an apartment. So you are getting to the point of being somewhat prescriptive, so a fourplex doesn't count.

So if you're going to have eight or if you have more, could you not say to the investors that are doing 200 or 250, can you do 10 per cent, 10 or 20 that would be rent geared-to-income, something like that? Because this is what cities are saying to some people who develop subdivisions: we want to see mixed types of homes in there; we don't want to all see, you know, 500, \$600,000 mansions, you know.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — We always have the opportunity to be more prescriptive, saying this is what thou must do. But at the same time, the good sense in people's mind of doing what they can do to make sure that they are providing a supply of housing that the market needs is what we believe that they will be doing. We've seen rental costs become more in line with the inflation costs, and that's because of supply. I know for the last couple of years you and I have had this discussion. I didn't believe in rent control, still don't. What we believed in is putting units on the market. And I still believe, and so does obviously most of the people in the province, believing that getting the supply there is what is needed to balance out the pressures that we have in the

market.

I was really pleased with feedback that we've had since the budget saying, this is what we've been asking for. Five years from now if something has changed, I'm sure that the market will adjust again. At the same time, we are ensuring that the affordability issues are addressed in a number of areas, and I'm sure we'll get into that on Thursday when we talk about some of the other plans.

But we've talked about rental supplements and indexing and all the things, the rental supplements that we've done. Those are all initiatives that we're doing to make sure that people have a place to live in. It's the desire and goal of our government to make sure that we can have affordable homes for people in the province. This is one of the initiatives that has been appreciated by a lot of people, and I'm looking forward to it.

Mr. Forbes: — I have a couple of questions I want to just ask for some clarifications on. In the winter session, I had sent you some written questions. And somehow the answers didn't seem to match up so if I could get some input from you. And what they were was I asked you: how many affordable housing units were operated by Sask Housing Corporation through its local housing authorities? And the answer back was 3,523. And then when I asked about the 10 major communities — 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16 — 16 major communities, the number only added up to 2,464. So there's about 1,000 or 1,100 affordable housing units out there. I just wondered where they were.

Mr. Allen: — Sorry for the delay. Thank you for your question. There was one error in the questions. The Regina Housing Authority missed some units, so the correct number for the Regina Housing Authority is 654, bringing the subtotal for major centres to 2,798. That leaves 757 in other communities other than the large 14 or 16.

Mr. Forbes: — So I might ask you a written question about where those 757 . . . I won't ask you right now, but in the same, I had the same questions. This one was even more dramatic around senior housing units where in the 16 communities it came up to 5,037, but the answer — this is number 27 — 10,518. So there are about 5,000 in the other 280 housing authorities.

Mr. Allen: — We operate in about 400 communities, in 270 or so housing authorities. The vast majority of the seniors' housing is located outside the major centres and in smaller communities.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. All right. And likewise with the family and social housing, the 16 centres came up to about 2,367, and you advised me there was 4,800 units that were operated by Sask Housing. So that's about 2,500 social or family units. I can understand the seniors, but the social ones are also largely on the outside of the 16?

Mr. Allen: — Well many of the 2,500 would be in the North. We have 1,400 housing units in the North, virtually all if not all of those family.

Mr. Forbes: — Categorized in that area. Okay. So that would be . . . That's good to know. Now do you have a thing, do you have a category or do you describe some of your units as

chronically vacant?

Mr. Allen: — There is a potential that a unit could become chronically vacant. So if it does not have a tenant in it for six consecutive months, it would then be deemed chronically vacant.

Mr. Forbes: — What kind of scenarios happen where you have a unit that's chronically vacant? Like is it just population, a bad design . . .

Mr. Allen: — Chronic vacancies are down dramatically. I mean they were in the hundreds, if not perhaps even the thousands, 10 years ago. They're down to, you know, much, much fewer, much smaller number today. What happens? It could be that there is no need for that particular type of senior housing in that community in that quantity. So we may have a row of 10 and the community only has a need for nine. So one unit will remain empty for 12 continuous months.

Mr. Forbes: — Do you have a housing policy that opens it up to . . . If it's a seniors' row house and the 10th one is not ever going to get rented out, do you open it up to other people?

Mr. Allen: — First of all, in our existing program every senior is eligible for those. So if any senior, irrespective of income, wants to move into that project, they could do so. If there are no seniors who are interested, we then look at other households who would fit that particular type of structure and that particular type of lifestyle. So the answer, the simple answer to the question is yes, we do make it available to other households.

Mr. Forbes: — And can it be people outside the community, like somebody who is willing to move out of Saskatoon into a smaller town?

Mr. Allen: — Anyone who makes application to the housing authority is considered.

[20:30]

Mr. Forbes: — So how many would there be in the province right now, would be in that category of chronically vacant?

Mr. Allen: — Of the 18,000 units that we own, we estimate that about 2 per cent of them are chronically vacant at any particular point in time. So that would be around 360 thereabouts.

Mr. Forbes: — You know, what's interesting is I have people coming into my office in Saskatoon who are on fixed incomes who are willing to move. There's nothing special — unbelievable — about Saskatoon. I think it's a special place; why would you want to move? But they're saying, you know, I wouldn't mind being somewhere else if it's a matter of place of the . . . some of the things. So that's very interesting information.

The other question I have about some of the written questions I received. You know, Saskatoon Housing Authority has a combined social, family, and other affordable waiting list, but yet they have wait times that are different for social and affordable. How can you do that both?

Mr. Allen: — So what the Saskatoon Housing Authority does is they keep a single list of tenants or potential tenants, but the project has where the social or the affordable housing designation is attached to it. So if a unit becomes available in a social housing building and someone is put into it, then that's counted in the wait time for social housing. If they move into an affordable housing building, then that's counted in the wait time for affordable housing. But the tenants all come off of the same list. The projects where the housing is, is where the differentiation comes.

Mr. Forbes: — But there are two different definitions. You know, I'm thinking about the definitions that Sask Housing has for social housing, and I've taken this out of your annual report. So maybe it's changed. But social housing is rental housing for people with low incomes or people who are victims of abuse. The rent is based on a tenant's income. Whereas affordable housing rental program, rents are set at the low end of the private market rent in each community. So there are two different groups, very different groups. Particularly . . . not only are they different people, but you're also figuring out the rent. So I can't understand clearly, if you're sort of working your way up the list, wouldn't it be easier to have two different, you know, two different lists? All the other housing authorities seem to be able to manage three waiting lists.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I need to comment. You're right. All the other housing authorities do have two separate lists, but Saskatoon has decided that because of the rental housing supplement that it doesn't make sense to them. So that is something that they have. They're kind of unique in that they just have the one list. So it is an anomaly.

Mr. Forbes: — And to me it doesn't make much sense because they're two different groups of people. I appreciate your comment and I appreciate the clarification. The rent supplement could have that. But if you're talking about somebody who's, you know, fleeing abuse, and then somebody is trying to get affordable rent, they're two different categories. And I would think the person fleeing abuse, that that should be a separate, separate list, a very important list.

Mr. Allen: — The person fleeing abuse or violence is given a point rating, so they're scored. There's a very strong likelihood that they're the very first on the waiting list irrespective of what their current situation is or what becomes available. By having them on the same waiting list with the benefit of the rental housing supplement available to them, we are able to offer them either building at a cost that is affordable for them. So we can offer them an affordable project. If they don't want that, if they want to wait for a social housing project — that's where the rent is geared to income — they can stay on the waiting list in that number one position, and we will then go to the number two slot.

Mr. Forbes: — And that's good to hear. And actually I think I remember talking about that with the former director in Saskatoon, about how they would get in relatively quickly.

Which reminds me of my most recent set of questions about the waiting list. In some of the area, towns are having some phenomenal waiting lists of only — and I don't have them with me, so I'm going to go by memory, and if you have them in the

back — but I remember some of the communities have waiting lists like four days. Is that true that you could walk in — and if I'm wrong, I think was it Yorkton — you could walk in on Monday and you'd have a place by Friday?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — This is the information that we received from our authorities. And there is some, there is considerable improvement in wait times. And I'm going to ask Don to talk to you about some of the wait numbers we discussed. And we've been discussing them earlier, numbers that talk like a wait-list of 300 and yet when it comes to the needs-based, it's considerably less. I think the member knows that regardless of where you . . . what your income level is, you have the opportunity to put your name on the list and you can put your name on the list in three or four different areas, and that's some of the discussions we're talking about. And Don can you give some more information, please?

Mr. Allen: — Certainly. So, you know, I'll give you a real life example. In Saskatoon recently, a woman was leaving the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] and came to the Saskatoon Housing Authority and a week later had been approved for a unit.

We'll use the Saskatoon Housing Authority as an example. The March 2012 wait-list for approved families was 134. When we take a look at the point readings, so what's their income, where do they live, the condition of their housing, how many children do they have, do they have children? When we look at that, there are 6 of those 134 in high need. So, you know, with the turnover in the Saskatoon Housing Authority, there's a very strong likelihood that those 6 families will be served in relatively short order. There were another 66 in moderate need, and then the rest of them were relatively low need.

The city of Regina, the Regina Housing Authority, 376 on the family wait-list, 12 of them in high need. And to be in high need, as a family you need to be earning, you know, say \$20,000 a year income or less, paying market rent, and have a child.

Mr. Forbes: — Are you advising the families of their rating when they come in? And I think it'd be a wise thing to advise the families who are high need to say, we're looking after you. But the ones who are in low need . . . Because, you're right, I think I have the numbers in front for Saskatoon. But the answer that you gave me just a couple of weeks ago was that actually the social housing waiting list was 14 months.

Mr. Allen: — I can't speak to the details behind that particular question but . . . or that particular answer. I do know that that's the . . . it's the response we got from the housing authority, and it may be that they are now placing families who traditionally hadn't been placed because their need is relatively low.

When we do evaluate every household, every applicant of their point rating, they are advised of what their rating is and whether that represents a high, medium, or a low rating. Many households maintain their names on the wait-list even though we've told them there's a very strong likelihood that they won't be served.

Mr. Forbes: — Well thank you for that. That helps a lot, and

I'll continue to send these questions in. They're always interesting.

Related to this is, of course, we had a lot of conversation before Christmas about the rent increases for the affordable housing units. Is there one planned for Sask Housing units within this budget year?

Mr. Allen: — The last increase was implemented in early 2012. There have been no notices of increase sent out to tenants, and that means there will not be one for another year.

Mr. Forbes: — [Inaudible] . . . this budget year, right? Okay.

Mr. Allen: — For another 12 months.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. That's very good news. That's good to hear. Now the other . . . I'm going through this quickly. It's amazing how quickly time is . . .

When we were at the summit conference, housing co-ops made a real strong pitch for being part of housing. And I think they're very innovative, and they're a way to go. They're sort of a cross between rental property and condos. I know that some of the communities, and I'm thinking of, we have Rainbow Housing Co-op in Saskatoon. That's a wonderful one. And there's one in the north end of the city here that's a wonderful housing co-op. Several, I think there's 18 or some in the province. Is there any plans to do anything for housing co-ops in terms of helping them develop more co-ops?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm going to comment. I'll ask Don to give some details. But I've had the opportunity to meet with the group, I think, three times in the last year. I think it was three times in the last year. They have some innovative ideas as well, and they fill a need in the province as well. So their discussions are helpful.

We've also had the chance to set up meetings between them and Headstart. We've had the chance to make sure that they are in discussions with other groups as well. So their plans are something that we keep in touch with, and we have a great respect for the work that they are doing.

Mr. Allen: — The housing co-ops have been eligible for our rental development program since it was first announced about 10 years ago. There have just been no housing co-ops that have come forward to access the rental development program to construct or develop new rental housing.

So the earlier comments by the minister of some 150 or \$160 million of rental development, the housing co-ops were eligible for most of that. We are having the housing, the co-operative association participate at the next summit and they're actually presenting and they're doing some work to try to stimulate more activity. As long as we have the rental development program, the housing co-ops will be eligible for that program.

Mr. Forbes: — Now are they identifying any unique barriers that they have as opposed to . . . because co-ops are unique?

Mr. Allen: — What we've been hearing from them is the challenge of getting organized for the purposes of this particular

initiative.

Mr. Forbes: — Good. I think it's a really worthwhile style of community and I think that, I know, I mean, ironically Alberta is very successful with this. There is a person who has presented a few times from Edmonton where it's, you know, a cross between condos, and I know in Saskatoon there is intention of co-housing initiative that I think is kind of an interesting way. So people are making these things work.

The other issue that co-ops are going to be facing is that soon, and correct me if I'm wrong, but a component of the federal government support of it was rent geared to income component keeping their rents lower because there was some financial support. And am I correct that Sask Housing provides some support to keep the rents low in some of the co-ops?

[20:45]

Mr. Allen: — What Saskatchewan did several years ago, a number of years ago, was to improve the subsidy they were getting from the federal government. So we took the federal and enhanced it. What will happen is, as the federal subsidy ends, these organizations we believe will be able to operate at break-even rents because there will be no mortgage on the property, which is a big part of what they need subsidy for is to make mortgage payments, including the principal and the interest. Once those have been retired, they're then just operating the building.

Mr. Forbes: — Good. That's good to know. I have just a real quick question about the strategy and you earlier mentioned that it's an eight-year strategy. So the first year anniversary will be this summer. Will there be a report on the first year accomplishments?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. Yes there will be, and it'll be released at the summit.

Mr. Forbes: — There is some . . . It's a pretty intensive document and I think that it's worth . . . I'm looking forward to that. The enterprise zone was . . . regions, the Enterprise ministry was mentioned quite a lot in the original document. What will be happening now with the scaling back of the enterprise regions? I don't know if it was the regions that were going to be helping out as much as the main enterprise area. If you could speak to that.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — As we go forward there will be, the discussions that will be happening with government making sure that we have all aspects of government covered, whether that's Municipal Affairs — in some form there will be input from the economic development side or from the local areas. We will ensure that there is a continued input from that side.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Well and of course you have a strong partnership with Habitat for Humanity, a very good organization. Are you planning to reach out to . . . Now you have on one project here, not as intensive as you have with Habitat. Will you be working with other groups in the same way you do with Habitat for Humanity?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm not sure what other project the

member is talking about. The work that Habitat does is absolutely phenomenal. We've had the chance in the last four years to have over 70 homes built and providing home ownership for many families, and especially for their children. So the work that they're doing is unique right around the world in lots of areas and we know that there's members from Saskatchewan will go to help build a house in other areas. So whenever we have an opportunity to deal with groups that are making a difference in the province, we will keep an open mind. But I want to use this opportunity to thank Habitat for the work that they do that's made such a huge difference right across the province.

We had the opportunity last week to go to Nipawin to have the very first Habitat build sod-turning in rural Saskatchewan and it's phenomenal. The input that they have and the volunteers that are already coming from right across the community to help build this house and support the family was encouraging for all of us that were there. So I know the member is appreciative of the work that they do as well, so as government we will continue to support them as well as we can.

Mr. Forbes: — Well thank you. I have many more questions but those were the main ones, the big ones I wanted to get out of the way. And we'll have more time over the next while to have further conversations with this. So I know my colleague, Mr. Broten, has a couple of questions. So I want to thank the officials for their answers. I appreciate them and the clarifications. Housing is hugely important and we're all working to make that work, so thank you very much.

The Chair: — The Chair recognizes Mr. Cam Broten.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good evening to the minister and the officials. I have a couple of questions, or a few questions, and they're not directly related to housing but the minister is here and the relevant DMs [deputy minister] or ADMs [assistant deputy minister] I think are here to answer the question, so . . . My first question is, what is the ministry's policy on civil servants working within Social Services who would like to run for election at a municipal level or as a school board trustee? Does the ministry have a policy on those individuals who may choose to do that?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you. I am advised that we will be following all the rules of the public service guidelines.

Mr. Broten: — Have any requests within Social Services for civil servants working within Social Services been made in the last year? A prior approval request for an individual to run in a municipal election?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, I understand yes, there was one.

Mr. Broten: — And what was the outcome of that request?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — It was determined that it could be a conflict of interest.

Mr. Broten: — The minister stated in her earlier remarks that the Ministry of Social Services follows the guidelines of the PSC, the Public Service Commission, with respect to these

types of requests. Is it the minister's view that they have applied the guidelines within Social Services the same as other ministries of the provincial government? My question essentially: is it the same standard for individuals in Social Services as it would be in Environment or AEE [Advanced Education, Employment] or Health or whatever the case would be?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I would believe so.

Mr. Broten: — There is a case that you mentioned, though, the case occurring in The Battlefords where there was a civil servant who requested leave, or requested permission to run in a municipal election at a by-election, for a by-election that was occurring in The Battlefords. And the request was made. He was being pre-emptive and going through the proper channels as the PSC outlines for running in a by-election in The Battlefords.

And the request was made, and it was denied by the ministry because it was an appearance of a conflict. And I know, my view is that civil servants within the province have, are skilled individuals, care about their communities, and may want to in fact run for elected office. We've had individuals do that at the provincial level, for example, and I know members would appreciate that.

Maybe I'll just read a little bit of correspondence that occurred with this particular case. The individual filled out the proper forms and so on. And then there was an email that was sent from the individual's supervisor, I assume up the chain of command.

There was an email that was sent from the individual's supervisor up the chain of command. And the supervisor's recommendation said in the email, "In view of this information and my discussion with Donna, I would recommend supporting Steven's request. Again I'm not confident . . ." Basically there was support at the individual's supervisor's level that any possible conflict could be managed appropriately.

A little bit of background on the information just — as I will ask for a comment on the position right away — is that the supervisor provided a bit of background for this individual, and he works within corporate services I believe within The Battlefords. And so this was for a fall by-election that was occurring in The Battlefords, and this correspondence is occurring in July, so a little bit ahead of the by-election. It said:

Steven's term CPC position with MSS ends September 25/11. Steven's name remains on re-employment list. Yesterday I got confirmation from . . . [a person] at PSC that they will be offering Steven the permanent CPC position in the North vacated by . . . [an individual]. Effective August 8th, Steven will be responsible for the MSS CBO program in the North (north of Prince Albert and North Battleford), and will not include any CBOs from North Battleford. As part of the CPC team, he will provide cover-off to the other north CPC positions, but I could ensure that he would not cover off on the North Battleford caseload.

So I believe . . .

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Chair, I would like to call a point of order on this. I don't think this has anything to do with the estimates we're dealing with tonight with Social Services. It's Public Service Commission, and I think those questions were dealt with in estimates the other night.

The Chair: — Yes, Mr. Broten?

Mr. Broten: — In responding to the point of order, this is about civil servants within the Ministry of Social Services. These are the estimates for Social Services, and this is about policies and procedures that affect individuals working within the ministry. So I think it's very relevant to the issue at hand. And we had just closed off housing questions, and we're doing some stickhandling with another critic coming from the upstairs for the second portion of the evening, so it's an appropriate time to ask the questions, in my opinion. I'm giving a little bit of background because it is a bit of a complicated matter but it's completely relevant to the estimates that we're look at this evening, as has been the practice with estimates for many years.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — The estimates have everything to do with finances and nothing to do with policy. So I would disagree that this is an appropriate line of questioning. When the Estimates book comes out, we're talking about the monies that are spent by government.

The Chair: — I would have to agree with the minister. And we have got a couple of minutes to 9 anyhow, so we will have a . . .

Mr. Broten: — Well . . .

The Chair: — Yes?

Mr. Broten: — I would simply state that with individuals in the civil service, I think the . . . Whenever anyone runs for city council and if they are elected at a municipal level, there are possible conflicts, but that's on the elected individual to declare a conflict and to act accordingly, and that's the trust that people put in elected officials, including . . . And it's the faith that we have in civil servants to do their job well, which they do very well in Saskatchewan.

So I think in this one situation, the ruling that was made by the ministry in not allowing this individual to run, I think it is a problematic position because of the skills and the willingness to serve that someone in the ministry may want to have at the municipal level or for . . . in a position for a school trustee, for example, positions that aren't full-time and wouldn't cause one to leave their employment. And I think if we did a survey across all levels, all municipal governments within the province, we would find individuals employed in the civil service who are managing any potential conflicts in a reasonable way, whether they're with . . .

The Chair: — Okay, I think we've made the point and I think we've ruled on it that it's not admissible with the budget right now, so keep the questions to the budget. And we'll have a 10-minute break and then we'll continue.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you. Before we go, can I thank the housing officials that are with me tonight. They are very dedicated individuals who have worked hard in an area that has

had a lot of challenges in the last number of years, different challenges than there were there in the previous number of years, and I appreciate their work and their dedication. They have been open to new ideas, brought forward new ideas, and are part of the government that's appreciating the new . . . the changes. I can't say enough to them for their support and I think that everybody, all the citizens of the province are benefiting from them. I believe in their professionalism and the work that they are doing and, as a government, we appreciate them.

[21:00]

The Chair: — Thank you, Madam Minister. And we have a 10-minute break, health break.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

The Chair: — Welcome back, everyone, and we will continue. And we understand that from the opposition side, Ms. Danielle Chartier has the floor.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm just going to introduce the people I have with me and just make a few comments. I want to thank the opposition member for allowing us to split this time up, and we know we have six hours. And we're, this is the child and family services.

I have with me, tonight we have the deputy minister, Ken Acton is still with me. Joining us from child and family services, we have Louise Greenberg, the associate deputy minister; Andrea Brittin is the executive director of service delivery; Wayne Phaneuf is the executive director of community services; Natalie Huber is the acting executive director, program and service design. And representing the corporate services, we have Al Syhlonyk; Lorne Brown is the executive director; Miriam Myers is the executive director of finance and administration. And the status of women, we have Pat Faulconbridge.

[21:15]

I'm going to just go very quickly through an idea of what we've done in the last year because to the people of the province it's important to understand.

We know that there was challenges in the child welfare system. So overall the total number of children involved, but the ministry continues to decline from 4,890 in March of 2009 to 4,649 at the end of December. More importantly, the number of children in direct care of the ministry has declined by 15 per cent since 2009. And as a comparison, child caseloads went up, grew by 53 per cent between 2000 and 2007.

We're engaged in the process of implementing a new electronic case management system to replace the system that's been in place for more than 20 years. We have permanency planners and Family Finders planners in a joint effort with First Nations and Family Services, and we're placing more children with extended family members. As of December 2011, we had permanently placed 610 children with extended family members. That's a 54 per cent increase in the number of children being placed with family. We know that we have some progress, but we know that the work that we have done, it needs

to be continued. We've implemented a number of changes to improve training and support for foster families, and I'll go through that later if you'd like.

Our province is recognized nationally and internationally for implementing the PRIDE [parent resources for information, development, and education] model for foster families, as well as for our child protection and child care workers at the First Nations Child and Family Services.

Through the Saskatchewan child and youth agenda, over the first two budgets we have put \$74 million invested right across government in things like transforming the child welfare system, First Nations education and employment, FASD [fetal alcohol spectrum disorder]. And as a result of that, we have the ministers that sit together, now seven of us, that are breaking down the silos across government. We know that we have more work to do, but we've done things in the last year, like we have 40 new pre-kindergarten programs that have been supported in 23 communities. We have 750 per cent increase in direct client services for children with autism. We've introduced the FASD family support program in Saskatoon that's improved school attendance for 26 participating families. And through the community mobilization project in Prince Albert, we've seen a 14.7 per cent reduction in crimes, 15 per cent reduction in crimes against persons, 10 per cent reduction in emergency room visits, 12 per cent reduction in public prosecutions, and 32 families that have been diverted from the Ministry of Social Services intake, and 8.9 per cent reduction in police calls for services.

The child welfare transformation is about working differently with First Nations. It's about prevention and it's about renewal. We've signed historic letters of understanding with the FSIN and the Métis Nation to work towards a goal of having a better child welfare system. We've had contracts signed with three First Nations and family services agencies including Yorkton Agency Chiefs and Peter Ballantyne to ensure that we have a new approach to deal with our First Nations. We're working with Ranch Ehrlo on a pilot project for five treatment foster homes and with the ranch to support children with high needs.

We have the Aboriginal child welfare court workers, a pilot program in Regina, and we also have community-based organizations that keep families together like the 601 Outreach in Saskatoon, the Society for the Involvement of Good Neighbors in Yorkton, and FoxValley Counseling Services in Regina. And they've been contracted to provide intensive family supports.

In the budget this year, the money our government is investing in the child and youth agenda will enable us to continue the work. The total budget for child and family services for 2012-13 is \$205.9 million. That's a 5.6 per cent increase over last year, and that includes the funding for the children's special allowance to ensure that families impacted by the federal legislation don't incur hardships.

We're investing nearly \$3 million in the new structured decision-making tool to help front-line workers. We've increased funding for intensive family supports to \$2 million. We're investing \$2 million to new services provided by CBOs [community-based organizations] for therapeutic foster

children, foster care for children.

We have \$1.5 million to help build capacity for First Nations case management; another \$1 million to be invested in visitation, supervision, and transportation for children in care families; \$400,000 to support the upcoming review of the child welfare legislation. And we'll continue to work with the Family Finders.

We are going to reunite . . . For the \$350,000 in Saskatoon, we're partnering with Egadz to ensure that mothers can be reunited with their babies. And we've annualized funding for 30 child protection workers to address the immediate pressures right across the system.

To the members, the work that we're doing in the child and welfare system is one of the most important things we can do as government. And to ensure that our children grow up to be healthy individuals is our goal. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Cam Broten would like to open with a few comments.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just before Ms. Chartier carries on with the line of questioning, I just want to make one statement on the record in regards to a ruling that the Chair made prior to the break. In the ruling that the Chair made prior to the break . . .

The Chair: — The Chair made a ruling, and it is over. And let's continue. We won't go back on that one. It's past now. Ms. Chartier has the floor. Ms. Chartier, continue with your questions.

Mr. Broten: — I'm simply asking for one minor thing. I'm not asking to go down this path of this line of questioning in the least bit. Make one statement, 30 seconds, I think that's only fair in democracy, and then Ms. Chartier can carry on with the evening.

The Chair: — Okay, continue. But make it short.

Mr. Broten: — I would request the Chair to provide the committee with a written ruling saying that policy questions are not allowable questions within the committee. This is a very clear departure from what is the track record when it comes to general estimates after the budget. Supplementary estimates are more narrow, but this is not, so before we carry on for the . . . well in the coming days I would ask the Chair . . .

The Chair: — Mr. Broten, as I have told you before . . . I've been here, this is my ninth year. And I've been on both sides and that's the way it's done. And if you're not happy, that's your problem, but that's the way it's going to be. Ms. Chartier, you have the floor. Ms. Chartier has the floor . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Sir, you have been asked to be quiet and Ms. Chartier has the floor.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just have to wrap my head around here. I just came from Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport estimates here, so back . . . a different hat on here at the moment.

I wanted to start actually with persons of sufficient interest. We've talked a little bit about that in the House, and I know that in my constituency office I still continue to get calls and have been trying to figure out the ins and outs with respect to the changes to the children's special allowance, which I know, Madam Minister, you just referenced that part of the increase in the budget is so those impacted by the federal changes don't incur any hardships.

So I think my first question, I know that now families aren't able to apply for the federal money, the children tax benefit, the universal child care benefit, and the disability benefit directly. And I know, as I understand it, the ministry is now the body that applies for this money. So what I am seeing in my constituency office is basically people, persons of sufficient interest haven't been kept whole. They still don't have the amount of money that they had prior to these changes. So my question is, is the ministry for each child, say the child is eligible for all three amounts, and the family member would've gotten it previously, is the ministry now receiving that same amount? Is that clear, sorry?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To Ms. Chartier, I know that she is conscious of a short amount of time, so I'm going to let Andrea go directly to the question. And if you have something really specific, Andrea can answer that for you. And then this is about the children, so we will continue on.

Ms. Brittin: — Hi. Andrea Brittin, thank you. In the past, prior to the federal government changes, the caregivers were eligible to apply for the child tax benefit. Now of course they're no longer eligible to apply for that. So I think if I understand your question correctly, you're asking for those families who are eligible for the full range of benefits, what portion of those are now coming over to the ministry. Is that the question?

Ms. Chartier: — Yes, sorry. It's been a long day here.

Ms. Brittin: — Well it is a complicated matter.

Ms. Chartier: — So yes, the question is, the money that used to go to the families is the same amount coming from the feds to whatever agency — and in this case the ministry — that would have gone to the families.

Ms. Brittin: — The families were eligible for a range of benefits depending on their income level, and so the families would have gotten a range of benefits. Now the ministry applies for the children's special allowance and receives a flat rate for that. It isn't dollar-for-dollar what the families would've gotten because each family would've been eligible for a different amount based on their income. And the ministry does not request income information from caregivers, and so we were unaware as to precisely which caregiver got which, you know, what amount of money.

Ms. Chartier: — So in the past obviously then it's based on income. So you have a flat rate that you're getting per child. So the flat rate in some cases will be lower for some and higher for others than it would've been for the family.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — It wasn't a flat rate. It was based on income. And the federal government knew what the income

was, and we don't necessarily know what their income was. So we've got these range of programs that we've got to make sure that we are filling what they had before, knowing what we have as needs of the child and the services that they require.

Ms. Brittin: — Would it be helpful if we went through what we did in response to the change?

Ms. Chartier: — It would, but I think ultimately . . . And as you said, it's a complicated matter. And I have families who have less money than they had prior to this change, and not just because they are no longer eligible for the GST [goods and services tax] as well. That's a separate issue, but obviously it was based on income for families. And so what is the federal government basing the amount . . . What are you getting for each child? And if, let's say, hypothetically a family was receiving 298.50 for the child tax benefit, the family was getting this directly, would you be getting the same amount?

Ms. Brittin: — No, not necessarily.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Ms. Chartier, I know that this issue is one that has been difficult for all of us. What the ministry has tried very hard to do is to meet with everybody on an individual basis to see what needs aren't being met and where the difference is. So I would encourage you to continue to do what you have been doing, to contact my office — and Andrea will give you some further responses right now — but contact the office to make sure that the needs of every family, of every child is being looked at.

We weren't consulted by the federal government when they made the changes as to how they were going to do it, and even comparing what we have to other provinces isn't necessarily, isn't easy to do either because nobody has . . . The system isn't based on like assessments and needs. So as a province, our goal . . . And we're starting to see that what the federal government is allowing isn't what the cost will be to the province.

And that's not the question right now. The question to us is, what's happening to the children? So we'll give you further information, but I encourage you to continue to talk to us so that we can ensure that families are looked at.

Ms. Chartier: — I think that that's actually part of my concern, is that we've been trying very hard to connect people with the ministry, and on many occasions people have run into a bit of a brick wall. One individual who has six children with her will actually have about \$1,300 less than she did, prior to the changes, with the six kids. And she now has just heard she will get the disability benefit, but that still leaves her considerably less.

So I think the problem, the problem with doing it on a case-by-case basis . . . How many families did you say? Six hundred and ten children with families?

Ms. Brittin: — There are 2,500 children living with extended family resources.

[21:30]

Ms. Chartier: — Twenty-five hundred children. I don't know

where I found that 600 number. So the 2,500 children, I think the struggle here then is that's — I don't know how many families that accounts for — but that's a lot of individual phone calls, and not everybody has necessarily the skills or the capacity. They have less money, and some of them will come to their MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] or will go to the Children's Advocate and do something about it. But the problem with doing it on an individual basis is not everybody will seek out help.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, we're going to supply some more information right now. But I would like to, I would like to meet with you or maybe even your assistant to make sure that you have as much information as possible, and also to know that you can come to our office and we will have individuals, somebody in the office that will be able to talk to you. This isn't something that I want to have happen, and you don't want to have happen. We have to make sure that we're looking at this quickly as possible. I appreciate the fact that we're not trying to get political on this. What we're trying to do is provide the needs, provide the money for the children.

So Andrea can you give her an overview so anybody else who might have questions will be able to understand it, and then they can continue to call.

Ms. Brittin: — So in response to the changes that happened, we increased the monthly maintenance rates for extended family caregivers so that they are now equal to what a foster parent receives. There were also some families who had children who were eligible for a disability benefit. And so for those families, the ministry now provides the payment of \$208.66 for those families where the children were eligible for that disability benefit.

Where families were receiving . . . There's a universal child care benefit. Families can now receive a special need through the ministry to provide for daycare services, that sort of thing. So for those families where that range of additional benefits is not meeting their needs, we have asked that they come to us, and we're meeting with them. And we have met with a number of families already and been able to assess their additional needs and been able to provide some special needs to bring them up to par with what they had been receiving in the past.

But we do recognize that there are some families where they have a number of children or where there is sort of additional needs for these children. And so what we are looking at right now, and this is going to be a policy directive that is coming forward, and it is around a grandfathering clause for some of those families. And so they would need to meet with us. We can establish what they had been receiving in the past and determine what we can do to bring them up to the rate as a grandfathering policy.

Ms. Chartier: — So all those 20 . . . Sorry, good memory but it's short here. There was 20-some hundred families or individuals, those children will be eligible for the grandfathering?

Ms. Brittin: — Yes. I think it's important to note though that there were a number of families that, with the changes that we made, are coming out financially ahead of where they were in

the past. And so while there are some families — and you've described some of them and we certainly met with a number of them — that are now receiving less, there are a number of families that are receiving more. So I think we need to make sure that we're clear that not all families were negatively impacted by the changes because the ministry was proactive in increasing the maintenance rates.

And so what we weren't able to establish prior to this legislative change, this federal change, is how many. Because again we don't gather income information for families. So ahead of time, we weren't able to establish which families would be coming out ahead, given all of our changes, and which families would be receiving less. We had to simply wait until the legislation was enacted and then have people come forward to us. And so we've been responding as quickly as we can to those families coming forward.

Ms. Chartier: — So you don't know then, yet at this moment, how many people came out positively?

Ms. Brittin: — No, we don't.

Ms. Chartier: — I think the problem comes in that those who would be most impacted would have been those with the lowest income because they would've received the highest child tax benefit and disability benefit. Well the child tax benefit is where the discrepancy would've been. So it's those who would've been the lowest earners who would've suffered the most on this. But I still am concerned that not everybody has the fortitude or wherewithal to approach the ministry. Or even with respect to this grandfathering, how will that work then?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think that what we're saying is that the workers will be aware that they all have individual caseloads, and they know their families, and they will be given the message that we should be talking to them. It's not like 2,500 families . . . First of all, they're not all negatively impacted, and they're not all going to have the minister's office, but they do have somebody that's working with them. And that'll be the message that continues to be sent to them is that we need to be looking after the children in our care.

The member, Ms. Chartier, should know that we . . . I want you to know that we will not be receiving this money from the federal government and the amount that we will be paying out. And that's not what we've been asking for right now. Our goal is to make sure that we can accommodate the children. So through our discussions, through the ministry, through the caseworkers, the message will continue to be sent that we need to talk to the families.

Ms. Chartier: — Herein lies some of the struggle because in trying to iron this out, my assistant has talked to the CRA [Canada Revenue Agency]. She's talked to our MP [Member of Parliament], and other MLAs have talked to their MPs. And so the story we're getting from the feds anyway is that the money is there and is being transferred. And so what again that I think really would make this picture much more clear for me is a formula. Or what are the feds using to get money to the ministry?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think the question I've been asking all

along too is, how did they arrive at this amount of money? And that's the question that we've been asking to the CRA and other individuals as well because we don't know. We don't have the information that they have. So we will continue to work with the families and then on the other hand work with the federal government or talk to them to let them know about our concerns.

But right now this is going to be . . . I have been asking all along: can't you give me something in black and white? And nobody can because of the impact they have on various programs and again child tax credit and the rest of it. So nothing is as simple as it should be except at the end of the day the need to ensure that the children are looked after.

Ms. Chartier: — What is the amount that the feds are providing?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — \$8.7 million.

Ms. Chartier: — Sorry . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — \$8.7 million.

Ms. Chartier: — 8.7 million, and is that on a child by child . . . Like that was a block funding that they've . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — The member is correct. It was a block funding.

Ms. Chartier: — And is that anticipated that it will go up every year?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — There still isn't a clear answer. I said the number, but we're still waiting. It's based on the number of applications. And the information that we need to receive ourselves before we can send it in to the federal government is still really unclear. But we're just, we are making sure that we're in touch with the federal government and that this issue is a priority for us.

Ms. Chartier: — Sorry. I'm just trying to get a handle on this here. So we're not sure if it's . . . probably in the range of 8.7 million but . . . So the ministry has to apply to the federal government for each child, so for each family unit.

Ms. Brittin: — So when a child is placed either in care or with extended family, the ministry applies for the benefit, yes.

Ms. Chartier: — Obviously when the child was with . . . When the family was applying for it, it was based on income. What is it based on when the ministry is applying for it?

Ms. Brittin: — It's simply based on the fact that the child is now in the care of the ministry.

Ms. Chartier: — Is it a formula though? Or how do they, how do they . . . I hate to belabour this point, but I really am trying to understand this then. So when the child was with a . . . When the family was applying, when parents were applying or a person of sufficient interest was applying, it was based on their income. So when the ministry is applying . . .

Ms. Brittin: — It is not based on the income. It is just a flat rate that is provided.

Ms. Chartier: — And what is that flat rate per child then?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — The discussion is still centred around, we're not sure what they're getting, what we can even charge them for. The discussion is internally with Finance as well, in our government. So we will, as soon as we've got the numbers, I will endeavour to get it to you as soon as I can. Right now we have a guesstimate on the amount of money we're going to get from the federal government. We know some of the initiatives, but we have to apply to the feds. I can't give you a black and white answer right now because there isn't one. As soon as I do have it, I'll get it for you.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, okay. So some. Obviously this is only a couple of months old now, and I've got, and I'm sure you . . . Well on the website, there's the children's special allowances calculation sheet for 2006-2013 which has different rates set out here. So you haven't received any money from the feds yet for children?

Ms. Brittin: — We would have received the funding for those children who are currently in the care of the minister, but we don't have that amount to share with you right now.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. How soon would I . . . Again I just want to emphasize this. Every, every week more families turn up who are having some of these struggles and are considerably stressed by this. And one particular family was told, well you still get two days of respite. Well I don't need respite. What I need is money so I don't have to go to the food bank and so I can actually send lunch with the six kids living with me.

So I just am trying to get a handle on. So the children who are already there or that you've already applied for, what have you received for them? Like on an individual, I just want a number on an individual basis.

[21:45]

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I wish we had a number on the individual basis, and it doesn't come to Social Services. It comes to the Ministry of Finance, and so they are the ones that work through the system with the federal government. There isn't anything black and white I can give you. For going into the future, we know what we've got for children in the ministry care right now. Have the numbers changed? To Ms. Chartier: as soon as we get anything, I will ensure that I get it to you as quickly as I can and that will be . . . Well I can't give you a date on it. We've been trying to do this since before Christmas when we first learned that it was going to happen. I wrote a letter to the federal minister. I've written letters to other provincial ministers asking them how they're dealing with it. It should be as simple as saying, this is what you've got; this is what we paid out; this is what you're going to get. But because it's involving child tax credit and other issues, it's not black and white.

You and I think alike. We think there should be something that's, this is the number; this is the number. That doesn't seem to be working that way, but I assure you I'm as frustrated as

you are.

Ms. Chartier: — Is it possible, is it possible that some of that money could be stopping with the Ministry of Finance? I mean obviously you're working within your Social Services budget, so I'm . . . Is it possible that a family is . . . I'm just concerned that somehow in the process from the feds to the province to the families that the same amount of money is coming to the Ministry of Finance and not making its way to individual families.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I might ask the deputy minister to discuss this as well.

Mr. Acton: — Ken Acton, deputy minister. I just wanted to say that our focus right from the start has been trying to support the family. So our focus has been working with the families and the children. And while I don't have specific numbers for you, I'm quite confident that there won't be any money stopping on the way by. I mean our challenge . . . There's a number of other tax implications and that's what is making the difference for a number of families when we don't have financial information for them.

So it's not just that credit but their ability to apply for other tax benefits as well, and that's what we're trying to make sure that families are covered off on. So I'm sure that it's going to end up costing us more, not less, but we haven't been worrying about that at the moment. It's how do we make these families whole. And that's been a challenge because we've had to wait for them to come to us and then work through each one to try to find a way to support them.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — And they just heard the commitment, that instead of just waiting for them, we're going to their caseworkers and saying, okay, tell me what's happening in your specific circumstance. And because there are, we do have more child protection workers and we do have more people that are working on the front line, we are endeavouring to do this as quickly as we can.

If you have specific cases, I'm asking that you please give them to us and we'll look into them directly as quickly as we can.

Ms. Chartier: — This is the problem. We have brought specific cases and we've . . . Some of the replies from the minister's office have been, we've spoken to the family, and the family's fine. And then we speak with the family, and the family is not fine. So I think that that's some of the struggle here.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm asking, Danielle, then come to my office, and we will talk to the families or we will talk to the ministry and make sure that people are singing from the same song sheet. I know that it's not going to be easy, but the sooner we can get on doing that, the sooner everybody will be helped as much as possible.

So this is a frustrating time for all of us, and the best thing we can do is just continue to roll up our sleeves and go at it. I'm giving you my word right now, if you bring something to our office, we will work with you and get to the bottom of each individual issue. As Andrea said already, there are families who

are getting more money than they did before. So it's not a black and white issue.

Ms. Chartier: — But to those families who are getting less, it's a huge issue. I mean . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I agree totally. I'm just telling you that if we could have told you before who was going to get more and who was going to get less, we wouldn't be having this conversation right now. But it wasn't possible to do it and it's still not. But we've got a couple of months under our belt now and understanding some of the scenarios that have been happening, and understanding some of the steps we can be taking, our goal is not to make money from the federal government. Our goal is to make sure that families are supported in the way they were supported, and that will continue to be our goal.

Ms. Chartier: — Just two questions around that then. So the grandfathering will happen here pretty quick? Is that the . . .

Ms. Brittin: — Yes, that directive will be sent out this week around ensuring that those families who are still, after the increases that we've provided, are still experiencing financial hardship and unable to meet the needs of their children, that that provision would be available to them. So that information will be going out to the caseworkers this week.

Ms. Chartier: — And will there be back pay for those, who in February and I guess March now, are behind?

Ms. Brittin: — So that'll be something that we'll be figuring out on an individual basis with each one of those families.

Ms. Chartier: — And if they come shortly, is that something that you hope to work out quickly for them?

Ms. Brittin: — Absolutely. Yes.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Well thank you. I don't mean to belabour that, but it's been very frustrating for many, many people. I'm sure many people who come into your constituency offices as well have had similar struggles.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I don't believe the member is belabouring it. It's an important issue, and we will work hard to ensure we can solve the issue.

Ms. Chartier: — So on that, I hate the idea of anything being case by case. But I will endeavour to make sure everybody who comes through my office does . . . we connect them. But there's a lot of people. So is there a commitment to make sure that you're, whether it's, whomever it is . . . How do we get the word out to make sure people know that they should be connecting with you?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, we will get the word out. We've said that it will be going out through the caseworkers this week. And I don't agree with you. I believe that everybody is case by case. I believe that everybody is individuals and their individual needs have to be met, and that's why we have caseworkers. So there isn't a cookie-cutter approach to this. We have to make sure that what families need

they will be receiving. And I have given you our word that we will be looking at cases and individuals because they're not just, they're not a number; they're people. And we will be looking at them.

Ms. Chartier: — I'd agree that people aren't numbers. But sometimes global policy is . . . I'm a big believer in macro policy for dealing with issues like this. But thank you for that. I really appreciate that. And this ministry is new to my critic portfolio too, so I will have many questions here outside of that that I'm still getting a feeling for the ministry here.

With respect to the number of children in Saskatchewan who are in foster care, do you have a number on those who've had parental, whose the parental rights have been terminated and they've become permanent wards?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you. To the member, I know that these are the questions that you have asked in the House.

Ms. Chartier: — Yes, but I haven't received them yet.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Yes. You haven't, but we have . . . They will be given to you fairly soon now. There was a time frame that was allocated for it. And I have a number of answers. And if you want me to go through them, I can. Or if you want to wait to receive them in the House, I think there was, I can't remember how many questions there were, probably a couple of dozen. So if you want to go through them, we can. Or I can hand them to you in the House.

Ms. Chartier: — That would be . . . In the House is just fine. That would be great. Thank you.

With respect to the child and youth agenda, obviously working across seven ministries, there's been money invested, which is great. But is there any mechanism in place yet or what is the plan to put a mechanism in place for community connection? So making sure . . . So obviously you've got your cross-ministry work going on but a big component of work is making sure that the community is engaged and involved, and I'm just wondering if there's any mechanism in place to do that.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you. You've asked a very important question and the child and youth agenda is, as I was trying to explain in my opening statements, that it's really four different areas. So we're engaging first of all through the child welfare system and the transformation, and that transformation involves a lot of work with our First Nations and Métis partners and the agreements that we've signed with them through the, for the strategy with the Métis Nation as well as the FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations].

We also have the work that we're doing through autism and FASD. That involves a lot of CBOs and families as well. I had indicated in my opening remarks that this is 750 per cent increase in dealing with children that have autism and families with children with autism, so that's part of the agenda as well.

A huge part of it is eliminating the education and employment gap between First Nations and Métis peoples in the province. I've had the opportunity to meet on the political level with the leaders of both Métis Nation, the FSIN, and some of the tribal

chiefs, as well as some of the band chiefs as well. I had an opportunity to go to a conference in, where the directors of social determinants, health and social determinants for the First Nations were there. We had a discussion as well, so as well as our own ministry staff.

And then also I talked to you earlier about the Hub or the building partnerships to reduce crime in Saskatchewan and that's dealing with Corrections and Public Safety when we're talking about reducing crime and how we can support families so that they are, there isn't the same, they don't get involved in the crime the same way.

One of the issues that we need to talk about and one of the commitments we made was talking about preventing people, preventing our children from coming into care instead of apprehending, and that's a whole new way of looking at child protection in the province. And I believe that we are leading in the nation as well when we talk about supporting families, changing the way all of government do . . . human services deals with individuals, ensuring that we help whether it's in terms of addictions, mental health issues, education gaps. Overall there's a tremendous amount of work done and supported by seven ministries that say, how do we change the future of the province? And that is to ensure that our children are supported in every way they can.

I know that being the type of person you are, you would be absolutely amazed and thrilled with the effort that — not just ministers, but mostly the ministry — the people that work with us in government are saying, we have a chance to break down silos. We have a chance to look at the child that's being the centre of the work of government, not trying to fit the child into each one of the policies and programs. So breaking down those silos means changing the way we think.

One of the things that we're doing, and it's just an example, is the money that's being spent on the Linkin project for computerizing our system so that we can keep track of children and encouraging and including that, enhancing that as we go forward to include income assistance and disabilities payments and cases in the same system so that we can stop redundancies and start talking about the children and the families. It's an exciting way of governing. It's an exciting way of talking about the children and the future. So it's in its infancy. This is our second year. So on top of the money that's being spent through health and education and social services, we've added \$74 million more to this agenda. And getting input and feedback and measuring outcomes is an important part of it.

I'm waiting with anticipation to hear from some of my colleagues when they start measuring and continue to measure results. So how do you measure this? It's not like building a highway mile. It's not like putting a building up. It's changing the way the children, changing the number of kids that are in care, changing graduation outcomes, changing the number of people who may be in . . . have a condition like FAS [fetal alcohol syndrome] that could be prevented. You can't measure that in a short term and you can't really measure it on paper, but you can measure it in through society into the future. So I'm excited about it, and it's probably one of the most important questions you're asking tonight.

Ms. Chartier: — And that's what I'd like to understand a little bit, again just coming new to this portfolio or not, but this obviously is a big . . . covers seven ministries. So it's ministers and deputy ministers basically across the piece, those seven ministries sitting down and working together. Can you tell me what that looks like logistically?

[22:00]

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'll try and draw you a picture in your mind. We have seven ministers that will sit around the table, much like we're doing tonight except there's a real table there, and bringing forward issues. Behind us sometimes, we have deputy ministers and officials. Sometimes there's just the ministers. We've met three times this year, I believe. I can't remember the number exactly. It's a committee of government where there is minutes being kept, where there is discussions on where we're going to go forward. It's issues that we talk about all the time. I know that deputy ministers meet and I know that there's also a committee of officials that meet to say, okay, where are we? What can we be doing to remove duplication? What can we be doing to ensure that a child . . .

I'll give you an example. The Hub in Prince Albert, they sit around the table on the same kind of local level saying, this is an individual's needs. This is a child we're talking about. Have we . . . And is this same child being seen in the school system because of an education issue? Is there a health issue? Is the family involved in the justice system in some way? How do we look at the child? And it's different and it's exciting. We have barriers to overcome like things like, you know, the issues of confidentiality, but at the same time doing it in a way where the goal is to change the outcomes for children that are in the care of government.

Ms. Chartier: — I think one of my questions around that community connection, I know, Minister Draude, that you've talked about . . . You are connecting with all kinds of organizations and talking to all kinds of people who have a direct connection to some of the issues. But I'm wondering again that that community mechanisms . . . You've got seven ministers or deputy ministers sitting around a table. That ability for a Minister of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing or Minister of Health to be able to connect with the organizations that you're working with or to get the global picture — because it's one thing, you as the minister reporting back and saying, I heard this or this is the experience — but the community mechanism, that connection with people on the ground doing the work I think has a huge, probably has a huge impact.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — You're right. And the deputy ministers meet and they meet within their own ministries, but we have organizations like the RIC [regional intersectoral committee] as well, and I want to ask Ken, the deputy minister, to discuss that issue, the perspective from RIC's angle as well.

Mr. Acton: — Yes, just in terms of . . . I mean a big part of this is not only getting us all on the same page here, but how do we translate that into individual communities. And a good example is of course what's taken place in Prince Albert. We're now seeing it in discussions in Yorkton, North Battleford, Moose Jaw, and part of that is the regional intersectoral committees that come together. And that brings in the regional health

authorities, which there's obviously connections from the Ministry of Health to the authorities, but we need the authorities on board in individual communities as well as the police and other stakeholders there as well. So we have I believe there's 10 committees around the province that come together on a local level, and often that's where we can really start to drive things and move things forward.

So my challenge as a deputy is working with my colleagues to make sure that we're on the same page as well as our senior officials that also meet and then also having discussions at the local community in terms of how we can implement and how we can design programs in individual communities that meet their needs. So in fact like actually tomorrow, I'll be meeting with a number of the RIC coordinators from around the province to talk just about those very things in terms of what's the next steps and how can we work together and stay focused.

Ms. Chartier: — Are other deputy ministers meeting? I know that I'm very familiar with a RIC, but are other deputy ministers connecting with the RIC as well? I fully get that there's buy-in from Social Services. There is no doubt, and I have no doubt that there's buy-in from some of the other ministries. But just making sure that everybody, how do you make sure that everybody . . .

Mr. Acton: — That's why we have a deputy ministers committee that meets on a regular basis to discuss these things as well as a senior officials working group that also works in this particular area. So that's how we make sure that we're all on the same page.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — And maybe just make a comment, and I'm going to ask Louise to discuss some of the indicators that we have brought forward as not just as ministers but through the ministries as well. It's important to set some targets or some goals and a path, build a path for the future. So Louise, do you want to discuss some of the issues that ministers and deputy ministers have discussed?

Ms. Greenberg: — I'm one of the Co-Chairs, along with Education, for the senior inter-ministry committee. So it's at the ADM level and also executive directors. And we meet about once every two months. One of the things we do do is meet with RICs. We've been, over the past few years we've met with the RIC coordinators and the RIC Co-Chairs. From each of the regions we get a report. The senior inter-ministry committee is a mirror of the ministers committee and the deputy ministers committee in terms of representation. But we've been spending time because we're trying to work horizontal in terms of policy planning and also being able to, sort of, not work in the silos but you work across and have a cumulative effect.

We've actually tried to think about our work using four goals: children get a good start in life; youth are prepared for their future; families are strong; and communities are supportive. So what does this really mean? And so if we are going to say, will children get a good start in life, that would mean, you know, children are ready, enter school ready to learn. How, if we were going to measure, you know, are children being exposed to violence. What about the incidence of drug and alcohol use for women during pregnancy? What are the type of pre-K [pre-kindergarten] programs for three- and four-year-olds? And

what about children that are subjected to maltreatments?

So I could go on but under each of them, we're trying to say, so what type of programs do we do across government that's addressing these? And if they're not addressing these, what type of programs do we need to start to look at and develop in order to improve . . . that children (a) get a good start in life? Because around the table we firmly believe that education's important. If children don't get a good start in life, they'll experience challenges throughout the rest of their life as they grow up and become adults.

So that's where some of our focus has been. And we have been trying to look at if we were going to . . . We haven't gotten there yet, but if we were going to set some targets, what would they be and how will we go about doing them and what would we set for baselines at least to know the type of impact that we're making across government? So that's sort of in a nutshell some of the areas we're doing at the community.

One thing that I will just spend another two minutes talking on, at least on the child welfare piece, is the engagement that we have with First Nations and Métis. This past year when the child welfare review was released last year, we met with both our directors for our First Nations CFS [Child and Family Services] agencies. We met with . . . From the FSIN, with the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, and also Métis Family & Community Justice Services and asked for them to provide some feedback, provide a framework on how, what their vision is for going forward and transforming the child welfare system. So they've been working on it and we're waiting for some submissions to come shortly on their vision. So that's how we're trying to engage at the community level at least on the First Nations and Métis side.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you very much. That paints a much clearer picture of how that works. Just looking at the child and welfare review panel recommendations, a progress update from August 2011, I'm just wondering where you're at with respect to the #3, "Include concepts contained in the 'Children and Youth First' Principles and the Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth, and Families in legislation, and use these principles to guide planning and decision-making for children and youth." So it obviously says here, this recommendation will be considered in reviewing legislation in collaboration with partners. I'm wondering where that is at.

Ms. Greenberg: — I'll answer that one. I'm pleased to provide you with an update on what we're doing. That recommendation really speaks to looking at our Acts, including *The Child and Family Services Act* and adoption Act. What we've started to do, we're starting to do in April and May, is start to have discussions with a number of partners and stakeholders on looking at what's needed to, if we're going to make amendments to our legislation, what type of things should we be examining.

And these discussions are going to take place over the next two months. And they're not formal consultations, but they're really going to help us give an idea on the scope and timing of a legislative renewal. These discussions are not open to the public. We're inviting quite a large number of people to different meetings, and the invitation's been sent out. I'm going

to go to some of them. And we're going to actually have some broad-based discussions at these meetings. These meetings will really help us form the next steps for looking at how to make changes to our legislation.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think, when I had my opening remarks, I talked about the money that was going to be put forward to support the review of the child welfare legislation in consultations with the key partners and stakeholders. It's an important part of what we're doing as we go forward. And we were planning this through the budget cycle to ensure that we had the capacity to and the stakeholders that needed to be at the table had the capacity to be there with us because it's an important change in policy.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. With respect to the fourth recommendation, "Develop and implement a *Saskatchewan Child and Youth Agenda* that guarantees children and youth become a high priority in the province, and that all children get a good start in life," we've talked quite a bit about that. But one of the points is government-wide indicators, child and family well-being, are being developed.

Ms. Greenberg: — So those are the indicators that I was just talking to in my previous work about what we were doing at the senior inter-ministry committee trying to develop some indicators. And in doing indicators you need to, it's good to consult with a number of people across government but also to consult with the university and to, with the universities, and gather some intelligence on what type of indicators should we be looking at.

Because the challenges you have with indicators, some indicators you can measure on a yearly basis. Some indicators, if you're using stats from the federal government, are every five years. There is also an issue of some indicators take a generation to get measurements on. So that has to be considered.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think that I was indicating earlier, is that it's not easy to measure the success in this area. We can do it by things like graduation records. Have we improved the graduation rates? That's a simple one; it's something that's black and white. But overall, the success will be seen down the road in decades in the way people treat each other, the way they act, and the way the province is as a whole.

Ms. Chartier: — Again being new to this critic portfolio, the Linkin system, that was the pilot project last year?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you. And this is really exciting because this is the major program change and re-engineering that includes the computer system that's really going to make it a citizen-centred ministry and an opportunity, as I spoke earlier, about having an individual seen in there as a person rather than trying to make this computer system work right across government.

The multi-year Linkin project is going to support improved outcomes for individuals and children. It's going to enable the child welfare transformation system and income assistance re-engineering. It's going to support the public sector renewal of citizen-centred services. It's going to enhance effectiveness

and efficiencies. We actually implemented the first phase, and it's going to be completed by May of this year . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, and then the rollout of the basic case management system of all of child and family services. And then we're going to continue to expand it to include income assistance and the disability programs as well. We also have a pilot project under way right now with the child and family services so that they will be on the same system as we have.

One of the issues that we have is often the children will move from our system to the reserve system. And we have made great strides in improving our work in relationship with the First Nations Child and Family Services to ensure that there's competencies and opportunities for the professionalism, for outcomes, for ensuring that extended families can be found on-reserve, or maybe off-reserve if we're looking for a place for children.

This system that we have, we will have invested \$25 million into the Linkin enterprise system up to and including 2011 and '12, and this year we're putting another \$21 million into it. We're knowing that it's changing the way that we're working with children, but it's also changing the way that the ministry is able to deal with files and ensuring that they are looking at the children as well.

We're going to have a common client database — one child, one case, and one file concept. So the whole idea, when we became government we had, I don't like to use the term, but it was paper children. We didn't have the case system that we needed, an electronic case system. I know it was something that was being looked at, and we were able to move forward on it. And as we do this, the child and family services will all be on it this year. And the next step is to move the income assistance onto the same system.

[22:15]

Ms. Chartier: — Is child and family services on it by . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — By May of this year. By May.

Ms. Chartier: — By May, that's what you . . . Okay. And when is the hope to have income assistance and the whole next piece?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — We're taking the next steps. The goal will be . . . I can't give you the exact time because we've got to make sure that we roll it out in a way that's working with the systems. And moving from a paper-based system to the electronic system will take some time, but I'm hopeful it'll be done by 2015, but it could be 2015-16.

Ms. Chartier: — With respect to some of the numbers, the FTE [full-time equivalent] positions in Social Services, I know in the House I've heard you say that there's been an addition of 85 social workers in child and family services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — That's correct. That was one of the issues that we heard about in the child advocate, and the issues dealing with children, that the need to ensure that there was more front-line workers. So as a government, last year we committed to increasing the number as well. Since we became

government, there's now about 85 more front-line workers for child and family services.

Ms. Chartier: — Since 2007, or the '08-09 budget then. Okay. Can you tell me what these 100 FTEs, where they'll be coming from then, the decrease? Sorry, I'm having trouble making my lips work here.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Okay. Well I think that with a ministry of nearly 2,000 people, attrition is a huge part because we know that there is about 70 of our current people are working for us will be retiring this year. But we also know that there's . . . I have some notes for this initiative. But I'm glad that that member realizes that we haven't cut front-line programming. In fact we've added more than \$246 million since we became government.

But we are going to be becoming more efficient in back-office positions. We have the automated case management system that you were just talking about, the Linkin system. We won't have to enter everything individually. We have a more coordinated approach to the provincial laundry system, where we talked about that through Valley View. And we have 15 lean projects that have been undertaken right across the ministry which has saved us a number of steps and times.

We know that, and I think, Danielle, you're aware that La Ronge Child and Family Services began delivering after-hours services in the North last year. And that has worked very well. They started providing emergency services. And because they're there, because they know the caseworkers and in lots of cases know the people, that has made a difference. And Athabasca Child and Family Services is delivering off-reserve prevention services in the North as well.

So there's a number of initiatives that we have started that we know that are going to make a difference. And I'm not sure if there's something that you want to add about the First Nations Child and Family Services or . . .

Mr. Acton: — Well I'll just say that a big part of this is back through the child welfare transformation and our commitment to work differently with First Nations and Métis people. And we've had some real positive results, as the minister mentioned, with Lac La Ronge providing after-hours services. And we're certainly having discussions about further opportunities where it makes sense. So that's one of the options.

In terms of Valley View, as you know — well maybe you don't know — Valley View does laundry on a contract basis for Five Hills Health Authority. And the health authorities recently did a request for proposals, looking at other opportunities or other options to provide laundry services so that if they cancel that contract, that obviously would have an impact on some of our staff.

In addition we have traditionally . . . Because the number of residents in Valley View are declining year over year, we anticipate that this year there will actually be a cottage closure. So that's another thing that we anticipate will have an impact on our staffing levels. But you know, having said that, we've got a number of people eligible for retirement. Actually if you take retirements plus other voluntary leaves, we're actually at about

8 per cent. So if we have an 8 per cent turnover with 1,900 staff, I think that gives us a number of opportunities to look at how we're doing business and do our very best to achieve those goals.

Ms. Chartier: — I think some of the experience, both in my constituency office contacting, well income security in this case, I find it hard to believe that we need less social workers or caseworkers. I have a heck of a time getting phone calls back, a really hard time — people waiting sometimes days until we intervene, and then sometimes we don't get calls back. Or the reality too is we still have children living in overcrowded foster homes which could be partly attributed . . . If you have more staff who are working directly with families and doing evaluations and monitoring. So I struggle with . . . So help me understand this number here. So you've got about 70 people retiring, so attrition, and then about 30 from Valley View. So 70 less positions.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — And at the same time, our goal is to make sure that the essential front-line positions are filled and in this case, increased. We have hired 85 new child protection workers. That is the goal to make sure that within our child and family services that our children are protected.

So I don't think the member should underestimate the value of what we're doing back-office when it comes to things like case management systems. And if I'm hearing that calls aren't being returned, I would like to hear about that more specifically because I haven't heard about that. I hear it from you, but I haven't had calls into my office like that. I haven't had any of my 48 colleagues tell me that they have had those kind of calls into their office.

In fact what I have heard is that there is a number of . . . that things have changed. And I have colleagues sitting with me in the room right now who can tell me, who work with people that are vulnerable as well, telling me that there is a marked improvement. And I'm not saying that there isn't always more room for improvement, but I know that there isn't one individual that's working in the ministry who isn't dedicated to the job that they're doing.

Ms. Chartier: — My context is the last two and a half years of serving as the MLA in Saskatoon Riversdale. And we have a lot of phone calls where people can't reach someone or wait, people in crisis who wait and wait and wait, people on a Friday. And often people are coming with difficult struggles and sometimes aren't always helpful to themselves because they come at the last minute. But I am very happy to share with the minister numbers of people who have trouble getting calls back, and I know this isn't unique to Saskatoon Riversdale.

But around 2008, 2009, the hiring of the 85 in child and family services, have any of those . . . What does that look like in real numbers today? So you've hired 85 new social workers since 2008, 2009. With the 15 per cent decrease over four years, what will that look like? Like are any of those positions, have any of those positions departed?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Any of the front-line positions and the child protection workers? No. There's an increase.

Ms. Chartier: — So in 2008, 2009, where were we at there, and where are we at today?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm going to ask Ken to give some of these answers. Part of the issue is, maybe you weren't aware, but there was a reorganization within the ministry a couple of years ago. And so some of the names have changed when it comes to the definition of what is a child protection worker and what is a placement worker. So, Ken, if you could give some further details.

Mr. Acton: — Sure. Really in terms of in '10-11 we had, in the ministry, we had a total 1,910 FTEs, and that dropped to 1,895, and then we added the child protection workers. We ended up at 1,914 starting in this year. So there hasn't been declines in the child and family services side. There has been the addition of the child protection workers, some adjustments anticipated around the centralization of accounts payable and finance, and some centralization on some admin functions. But the child protection or child and family services side hasn't declined.

Ms. Chartier: — Can you tell me a little bit more specifically where some of the decline . . . Let's take this year, for example, those 70 positions, and we talk about back office positions or whatnot. Those 70 positions that will be gone mostly due to attrition or other things, where will those positions be coming from?

Mr. Acton: — Well our strategy there is really fourfold: one is to work more closely with First Nations and Métis partners in terms of delivering quality, you know, culturally appropriate services; improve and build on our partnerships with community-based organizations; continue to review how we do business, focusing on citizen-centred approaches; and effectively manage those vacancies that come up, both through retirements or voluntary departures. So those are the four main strategies.

I've highlighted a few that have already unfolded in terms of staff numbers, and I can just walk through those again. It might be helpful.

In terms of, in the housing division, Living Skies Housing Authority made a decision. They were contracting with the ministry for services, and they've made a decision not to continue that work. They think they can handle that on their own, so there's five positions there. The cottage closure at Valley View that I already spoke about, which is probably 12 to 15, we won't know until we actually work through and focus on individual client needs, you know, what's the appropriate number there. Then of course we have Five Hills and SAHO [Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations] looking at different ways to deal with laundry services, so that's probably another 15 positions that may be available. And then of course we have accounts payable work across government that's being consolidated that you've probably heard about from other ministries here, so that's another couple of positions. And then on top of that we'll have some discussions, particularly in with Lac La Ronge Band, to see if there's any way that they can help us further.

So those are the positions that we've identified to date. The rest we'll work at over the year. We've been successful in the past,

and we're pretty comfortable that if we work at it, we'll achieve those positions on a go-forward, but we haven't identified those at this point.

Ms. Chartier: — I see that it's 10:30, and I would like to call the clock. I think I'm out of steam for the night.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. If the minister has any closing remarks?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you. I'm just going to confirm with the member that we'll have income support on Thursday then. That'll be the area we're going into, right?

Ms. Chartier: — Yes.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Okay. I would like to thank again, I'd like to thank you for your questions, to the member. I'd also like to thank the officials that I have here with child and family services, do a great deal of work, very caring, diligent people who are working hard on a file that's important to all of us as a province. We're talking about our children and our future. So I thank them very much for their hard work and their expertise in their area. And I look forward to seeing you on Thursday.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you to the officials.

The Chair: — Thank you one and all. Seeing now that it's 10:30, we'll adjourn until Thursday at 1 p.m. pending adjournment of the Assembly. Thank you all and good night.

[The committee adjourned at 22:30.]

CORRIGENDUM

On page 22 of the April 2, 2012, verbatim report No. 2 for the Standing Committee on Human Services, the first portion of the left-hand column should read:

comments as it relates to pressures that you may be hearing as it relates to locally negotiated aspects of contracts for school boards and some of the challenges to manage those, that aspect, and going out and whether it's with education workers or whether it's the LINC agreements, the local agreements for teachers.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — The Saskatchewan School Boards Association has put together a committee to review the different school division LINC agreements and come forward with proposals of what they may see as constructive changes. They haven't brought anything forward yet.

The concern in the past years when the school budgets were in essence frozen, only built on inflationary and student enrolment, of course we were funding increases to the LINC agreements.

The online transcript for April 2, 2012 has been corrected.

We apologize for this error.