



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Mr. Muhammad Fiaz
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Mr. Derek Meyers
Regina Walsh Acres

Mr. Hugh Nerlien
Kelvington-Wadena

Ms. Alana Ross
Prince Albert Northcote

[The committee met at 15:20.]

The Chair: — Well welcome to the Standing Committee on Human Services. My name is Ken Cheveldayoff. I'm the MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for Saskatoon Willowgrove, and I'll serve as your Chair this afternoon. Members of the committee are Ms. Meara Conway. Substituting in for Ms. Conway today will be Ms. Jennifer Bowes. Other members of the committee are Mr. Ryan Domotor, Mr. Muhammad Fiaz, Mr. Derek Meyers, Mr. Hugh Nerlien, and Ms. Alana Ross.

I would ask officials not seated at the table who wish to speak to take their place at the table before speaking and please introduce yourself before you answer your first question.

**General Revenue Fund
Labour Relations and Workplace Safety
Vote 20**

Subvote (LR01)

The Chair: — Today the committee will be considering the estimates for the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. We will now begin with vote 20, Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, central management and services, subvote (LR01). Minister Morgan is here with his officials. I would ask the minister to introduce his officials and begin with his opening remarks.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to introduce the individuals that I've got with me today. I've got Greg Tuer, deputy minister for Labour Relations and Workplace Safety; Sameema Haque, assistant deputy minister; Pat Parenteau, acting executive director, corporate services; Glen McRorie, executive director, employment standards; Bryan Lloyd, executive director, occupational health and safety; Denise Klotz, executive director, Officer of the Workers' Advocate; Jonathan Swarbrick, registrar, Labour Relations Board; and Phil Germain, from Workers' Compensation Board; my chief of staff, Charles Reid. And upstairs is my ministerial assistant, Mike Aman, who will be watching diligently and come rushing down here with notes to correct me in case myself or one of the people that are here have made a mistake that we can correct.

I know that you have several questions that you would like to ask, but I would like to take a few minutes to share with you how the ministry's budget will be used to support employers and workers as the province is back on track to building a strong Saskatchewan where all citizens can benefit.

The 2022-23 budget of \$21.019 million will allow the ministry to continue to play a role in building a better, safer, and healthier Saskatchewan for all citizens. As we are now in a place where we are living with COVID-19, our government is back on track to create 100,000 new jobs by 2030. As we move forward, we need to ensure that workplaces are putting safety, health, and well-being front and centre and that everyone is engaged in reducing serious injuries and fatalities.

The ministry's occupational health and safety team are focused on helping to reduce the number of serious injuries and fatalities

in workplaces through engagement, education, and enforcement. Having a low injury rate is a competitive advantage for Saskatchewan employers and is vital to a strong Saskatchewan.

Unfortunately there are still too many workplace injuries and fatalities taking place each year. Desire and commitment are not enough to change the numbers. We need to take real action. I'm pleased to tell you the 2022-23 budget will help the ministry do exactly that. From its targeted inspection approach to the WorkSafe Saskatchewan fatalities-and-serious-injuries strategy done in partnership with the Workers' Compensation Board, the ministry is working hard to reduce the time-loss injury rate in workplaces.

I want to point out while there was a slight reduction in funding for the occupational health and safety office this year, there are no reductions to the service, and the current complement of officers and staff is sufficient to provide assistance for citizens in the province. The \$125,000 reduction in occupational health and safety's subvote this year is due to the partial completion of the review of part III of *The Saskatchewan Employment Act*; in addition, an administrative position moving to the corporate services decision where they can provide assistance to the entire ministry including OHS [occupational health and safety].

I also want to note this year marks the 50th anniversary of *The Occupational Health and Safety Act* which was a first in North America. The budget for 2022-23 will allow the ministry to continue to be leaders when it comes to health and safety in the workplace.

I'd like to talk about building and growing Saskatchewan by fostering a fair and balanced labour and employment environment. The ministry also plays an important role in establishing a fair and balanced labour environment. Those of us who live here already know what a great place Saskatchewan is to start a business. By using a consistent approach with stakeholders regarding employment legislation and its application, the ministry is ensuring we can attract business investment and growth in the province. Creating the same competitive advantage across multiple sectors of the economy and labour environment is key to building a diverse economy, creating new jobs, attracting investment and workers, and ultimately more opportunities for all citizens.

Education and engagement are also vitally important to the success, particularly with young workers. The ministry will continue its work on the young worker readiness certificate course program which was refreshed this year to better use technology, so young people can take the course anywhere on a smartphone or tablet. I am pleased to say the anti-harassment content in the program was updated, and mental health and wellness resources were added. Since being introduced in 2010, more than 165,000 certificates have been issued. This course is a great resource for young workers, teaching them about workplace rights and responsibilities, but is also good for newcomers to the province as they enter the workforce.

I'd like to move on and talk about our current budget, *Back on Track*, supporting people and ensuring legislation meets the changing work environment. 2022-23 will be a busy year for the ministry as it continues its work on reviewing part III of *The*

Saskatchewan Employment Act and supporting the committee of review in its review of *The Workers' Compensation Act, 2013* and associated regulations. Funding in this budget will support both pieces of legislative work.

By ensuring legislation reflects the modern workplace, the ministry will make it more attractive for larger businesses to locate and grow in Saskatchewan while ensuring fair treatment of workers. For example we passed legislation that came into force on January 1st, 2022 that clarifies the definition of harassment and includes any unwelcome action of a sexual nature. In addition, independent contractors, students, and volunteers are now included in the definition of workers protected from any form of harassment. Our government feels very strongly that harassment of any kind is unacceptable, and the new provisions will help protect workers and create safe and healthy workplaces.

These changes came about from listening and talking with employers, employees, and other stakeholder groups. It shows the difference we can make when we work with stakeholders to ensure that legislation meets the needs of those we serve in modern workplaces. In this budget our government is back on track and is supporting workers, employers, and workplaces. In conclusion I just want to say that the last two years have not been easy, and while the pandemic is not over, we are learning to live with COVID-19 and are back on track.

I want to thank the ministry staff for the work they do every day and particularly through recent challenging times. They are passionate individuals who are dedicated to their work in occupational health and safety, employment standards, labour relations and mediation, and role as Workers' Advocate for injured workers. The ministry and the skilled people who work there are doing their part to help us set the right environment for building a quality of life for all Saskatchewan people. You really can't ask for more, and I'm honoured to talk about their work and answer your questions this afternoon.

With that, Mr. Chair, we would be pleased to take any questions from committee members.

The Chair: — Thank you. Ms. Bowes, the floor is yours.

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for your opening remarks, Minister, and welcome to your officials. Good to see many of you here whom I haven't met yet. I'll just start off with a small disclaimer. I'm new to the full Labour critic role so keep that in mind. I'll do my best taking a first crack at it here.

And so with that small disclaimer, I'll begin my questions. I'm going to start with the vote, subvotes. A few questions there, Minister. We see, as you noted in the estimates, a cut to OH & S [occupational health and safety] from 10 million to 9.9 million. And so as I understood from your opening remarks, that is a reduction solely due to the completion of part III of the employment Act. And then did you say that was a move of an administrative staff . . . was the accounting for that dollar amount?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — An individual that was working just within that area is now covering the entire ministry. So it's a spread across a number of different areas.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, so not necessarily a cut overall?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Not a reduction.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, great. Thanks for clarifying. Also noted that we aren't seeing any additional funding for the Labour Relations Board, the Office of the Workers' Advocate, labour relations and mediation, or employment standards. Can you explain the rationale for stagnant funding in these regards?

[15:30]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — For the last number of years, Labour Relations Board has been slightly under budget and has returned the excess monies to us. I periodically will have discussions with the board Chair about the adequacy of resources, and they've indicated they're there. Every time we've done either a legislative change or something that we think could possibly create additional work or require more resources, I would have that discussion. And they've said, we'll let you know if we do. And I've never had the situation during the time that I've had the file for that. And the other areas that you mentioned were . . . labour standards?

Ms. Bowes: — I also mentioned Office of the Workers' Advocate, labour relations and mediation, and employment standards.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yeah. Office of the Workers' Advocate has a role to help workers with the claims that they have before Workers' Compensation Board and they deal with the cases that come to them. They don't go out looking for the cases, you know; they make themselves available. And that's the indication of what they wanted. And so there was no intention that we would reduce the level of services or do anything that would make a change there. That's seen as being a workable budget for the Workers' Advocate's office.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And I guess just follow up specifically on that office, then. Are you saying essentially that the number of cases handled by that office have remained the same? Is that . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That would be a fair situation. The focus that we have is . . . You know, if the cases went up, naturally we'd want to provide additional resources. What we've done is we try and work with the Workers' Compensation Board and their internal appeal process to make sure they're approving the cases when they come in and minimizing whatever situations there are where an appeal would be necessary.

There are three people on the board: the board Chair plus two others. Primary role is to have the appellate function within the Workers' Compensation Board, and the Workers' Advocate helps the workers that are there. But I think what their focus has been is if a worker is likely going to be successful in the appeal, allow the appellant . . . or seek out the information so they can streamline the process before it gets to the appellate level.

Ms. Bowes: — Yeah, thanks for that. Now I've had some experience in my past life working with the labour movement, with WCB [Workers' Compensation Board], but this is a bit new to me. I don't have a lot of experience dealing with this branch, I guess, independent branch as I understand. And can you tell me,

you know, how that's been functioning in terms of, like the stemming of cases that would otherwise turn into formal appeals?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Phil's here from Workers' Compensation Board. But they handle a large number of cases in a year. It's a sadly large operation that we would like to essentially put out of business by having a Mission: Zero. It's not likely going to happen any time soon.

But they do, I think, a remarkably good job of processing the cases as they come before them, ensuring that they get assigned to a worker and the worker will say, okay, we need to have this. Primarily what they need to do is identify, is there an injury? And secondly, was the injury caused . . . was it workplace-related? So when they focus on those things . . . And I think as MLAs, that's what we hear from people coming in saying, I have this issue or that issue. But those are the two things that they primarily need to show to prove their eligibility.

The Workers' Advocate helps the people that have gone through there. So as of February 28th in the preceding year, they'd opened 290 new files; 273 appeals were filed, many addressing multiple appeal issues. Thirty-eight per cent of them had no basis. Sixty-three per cent of them had an overall success rate. They paid back, or had paid back, about \$1 million in back pay. And they worked for, you know, a standardized quality representation — they're 95 per cent. 91 per cent client satisfaction. They've established in January of '21 and have consistently been 90 per cent or higher. 1,222 workers contacted the Office of the Workers' Advocate and received a level of service: advice, guidance, representation service. At the present time there's 200 cases open.

If you want further depth in it, I have both staff here from the Workers' Advocate as well as Workers' Compensation, and I'm sure they would be able to give you a deeper analysis than that.

Ms. Bowes: — So these last stats that you were listing are associated with the Fair Practices Office . . . sorry, with the Office of the Workers' Advocate?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Correct.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. Okay. So just back to that Fair Practices Office. Am I saying this correctly? Is that . . . Yeah, just back to that. So I think my question really had been around that office and essentially how many cases that they have handled, say over the past year and also since the inception of that office. And how many, essentially, cases . . . how many appeals that has prevented, I suppose.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Sure. I have the executive director from WCB here.

I think the purpose of the Fair Practices Office is to try and give the worker assistance at the time they make the application rather than having them go through various appeals or processes. A worker, hopefully during their working career, doesn't have to use Workers' Compensation very often, and most of them arrive without understanding or knowing what the process is. And I think it's a goal of Workers' Compensation to try and make it as helpful and offer as much assistance as they can. But anyway, I will let Mr. Germain provide a bit more particulars.

Mr. Germain: — Yeah, thanks for your question. The Fair Practices Office is an independent office within WCB that reports directly to the board of directors. In 2021 there were 440 inquiries received and all 440 inquiries were resolved. The focus of the Fair Practices Office is listening and responding to concerns raised by workers, their dependents, employers, external service providers, working to resolve the fairness of those issues as quickly as possible and ideally through informal matters. And then if necessary, the FPO [Fair Practices Office] will guide them to the Office of the Workers' Advocate or show them within the WCB system where and how they can appeal the decision that's been made.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks. And so when you say resolved, not quite sure what you exactly mean by that. But what, I suppose, what number of those 440 inquiries resulted in an appeal, for instance? I'd be curious to know.

Mr. Germain: — I don't have that specific breakdown within our annual report.

Ms. Bowes: — And is that information that you're able to obtain and get back to me on?

Mr. Germain: — We would be able to determine ultimately how many referrals from the FPO resulted in an appeal. But I can tell you that 320 of the 440 files were resolved without any other referral. Thirty-one were contacted . . . where the FPO contacted the WCB for clarification to help resolve the issue. And 64 were referred to the WCB, within the WCB, for another review. And then 25 were referred to externally. Some of those 25 may have been referred to the Office of the Workers' Advocate, but I don't know how many.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks. That's helpful.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Is that sufficient background?

Ms. Bowes: — I think that's good, yeah, thank you.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Okay, thank you.

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you. I appreciate that. And then I suppose the other two remaining, Minister, that I had asked about were labour relations and mediation and employment standards.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yeah. Go ahead, Greg.

Mr. Tuer: — Thanks. So Greg Tuer, deputy minister, Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. I think what we found over the last couple of years, primarily we assume due to COVID, was particularly the two programs that you're talking about are quite reactive. So in employment standards, we respond to complaints that have come in, and just the volumes of service requests over those two years had diminished.

And so we were at a place with both of those programs where we just felt it wasn't appropriate to ask for more funding as we were adequately staffed for the demand we had over the last couple of years. And so of course we'll track that, and if we see things picking up over the years to come, we'll be maybe asking for more resources if appropriate.

Ms. Bowes: — All right, thanks. And so you say, you know, the volume had diminished. And what do you exactly attribute that to? I mean, yeah, you've mentioned COVID and yeah, in some ways that would make sense to me. But are there specific reasons that you've seen?

Mr. Tuer: — So again I'll speak to employment standards. First just the number of people in the workforce was significantly decreased over those two years. And so with that, we just didn't have as many workplace disputes. And I'd say a significant piece of the labour relations and mediation program as well. We have conciliators in there as well as mediators, and I would say it's the same description there: a lot more people working from home in the economy, a lot less people actually physically in the workplace. And we've just seen a decrease in the requests to come in and mediate disputes.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We postponed the obligation of an employer to pay severance because we wanted to keep the employer-employee relationship alive. So the complaints or issues about severance pay would not have come in during that period of time, as long as those benefits were being paid by the federal government. So for however long that period of emergency was, the claims for pay in lieu of notice would have been gone.

Ms. Bowes: — I'm glad you mentioned that. I actually had some questions around that. And so is that, like, no longer in effect? Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yeah, it's gone now. So at the end of that period of time, the employer would have had to either recall the employee or alternatively make the pay in lieu of notice. So it wasn't a cancellation of an employer's rights. It was just a deferral for the period of time they were receiving the wage benefit.

Ms. Bowes: — And when did this end and revert back to the previous way things were done?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yeah, during the summer.

Ms. Bowes: — Summer. Okay. Well I could probably go on a bit of a tear about that situation. I'll maybe save that for another day, Minister, but it's good to know. I'm . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yeah. I don't think it was ever intended to be, impose a hardship on workers because I think most of the workers knew that they were receiving the federal pay benefit. And then the employer would know that they were eventually going to be on the hook to either pay some pay in lieu of notice or else to recall that same worker.

So it was an incentive on the employer to recall the worker, and it seemed to have done it. And we're not aware of a lot of complaints or concerns that came into MLA offices that people would have rather have just taken their severance. Most people were . . . None of us wanted to go through the pandemic, but the workers who were affected by it that were out of work were glad that they had the benefit.

And I think the few that I talked to liked the idea that they still had the tie to the work or they could . . . the employer. They could

say well, I expect to be recalled or whatever. I'm off during COVID, and hopefully it's shorter rather than longer. But that seemed to be the general reactions. So anyway, I understand there's more than one way of looking at it.

Ms. Bowes: — Yes, certainly. And yeah, I mean, I accept what you're saying about the feedback you heard. The feedback I heard was certainly different from workers.

But moving on, I was also wondering, you know, in relation to the stagnant funding for these areas that I've listed, are inflationary costs taken into consideration with budget decisions under the Ministry of Labour?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The budget is submitted and prepared by the officials. Part of the budget would be the costs of whatever changes there are to the collective bargaining agreement. A goodly number of the workers there are SGEU [Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union] members, and so they would have those type of costs. Plus costs of vehicles, etc., would go up. The budget was well presented by the officials, and there was support for their needs when it went to treasury board.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks. And I know you noted that, you know, some of the staff would be, some of the workers would be unionized, but I'm sure many others would not be. And so in the case of those workers, are inflationary costs taken into account?

[15:45]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm sorry. I missed the question.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. So you had mentioned that there is, you know, collective agreements in place for some of the workers . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes.

Ms. Bowes: — Who are unionized. I assume there are, by your answer, others who are not unionized. And so for those workers, you know, were inflationary costs taken into account?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The out-of-scope workers would receive the same compensation changes as the in-scope. I'm not sure where they are in the pattern that was across government. I'm not sure where they were. But the out-of-scope workers would have been treated exactly the same.

You had asked about when the benefits had ended with regard to . . . It was July 25th of last year.

Ms. Bowes: — That's good to know. Okay. Then I'm going to move on to some general questions, bounce around a little bit from topic to topic. And the first one, you know, being that it's Equal Pay Day, I'll start off with this question, Minister. Was the ministry involved in the Status of Women office's pay equity legislation jurisdictional scan?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No, I don't believe that we were. I think that's something that they would have done themselves.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. So there was no collaboration between the Status of Women office and the Ministry of Labour on that front.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There may have been some . . . They may have shared some information on it. We often will have a discussion as to who will present, who will take a question or not. So I'm not aware of any specific on doing research or doing background.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, that's very good to know. And so, Minister, I had my Status of Women estimates last night and had a bit of a chance to ask that minister about this topic and this situation. And so, in your perspective as the Minister of Labour, is this something that your ministry will be looking at in the current budget year and taking into consideration and contemplating in terms of implementing this sort of legislation?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can give you a little bit of background. In September of 1994, which was before my time, cabinet made a decision to address pay equity in executive government and the Crown sector through collective bargaining. So they approved, open quotes, Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value and Pay Equity Policy Framework, which established a framework for setting out the minimum standards for pay and internal equity initiatives for executive government, Crown corporations, treasury board agencies, boards and commissions. So that framework requires pay and internal equity plans to be negotiated within a collective bargaining framework by joint employer-employee committees. So the effect of that is that since 1994 there has been a pay equity plan in place for all Crowns, executive government, and health authorities. So that exists across the public sector since 1994.

Now the private sector is not covered by that. They would be covered by provisions of human rights code, etc. So far as I know, Ontario and Quebec are the only provinces that have pay equity outside of the private sector. They are the only ones that have it across public sector, or in the private sector outside of government

So we have it where it is now, and as a result of that, I think we have minimal number of people that come forward to this office or to the Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. Since 2021, going back to 2006, there have been a total of 25 claims that were made. And they're, you know, 2006, two two one zero two one zero; 2013, five zero two three, and so we're down to a trickle of people coming in. Not saying that those people don't deserve to have it, but those were issues that were resolved. So very, very few people come forward under the issues of those disparities.

So I think the work that was done going back to 1994 to ensure that a framework was established, we've done a lot to try and move things forward within. I'm not saying there isn't more work to do or more things to be looked at, but that's the status quo within Saskatchewan public sector.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks for the little history lesson. I do appreciate that — and I don't mean that to be condescending — I actually I do appreciate that. But some of this I was aware of. And certainly I am aware that, you know, this was implemented in the public sector years ago.

However as you noted, the private sector is not covered and so, you know, I guess I would wonder why the government feels that, and governments in past have felt that, you know, the public sector warranted pay equity schemes and not private sector workers, so all, you know, the majority of women who work in

the private sector. And after that I do have a question just to clarify one of the things that you had mentioned.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Sure. I think it becomes incredibly complex to go into the private sector because the workplace is different maybe. It's harder to deal with. But we have had legislation in the province since 1973 that indicates female employees cannot be paid less than a male performing similar work in the same workplace. So I think one of the challenges is if you have three or four different workplaces, is it a difference between the workplace or is it a difference between the pay that's available to men or women in the same place?

In 2014 legislation was amended so an employer could not pay one employee a different rate, based on any of the prohibited grounds in *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*. I haven't looked recently at the number of complaints that have come out of the human rights code or human rights applications, but I used to look at that periodically. I don't have that ministry at the present time. But I would look at their stats that would come out, and they would occasionally have somebody that would go there; they would often get a resolution or whatever. And I'm not aware of any recent ones that have gone forward to a hearing or having a penalty imposed.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks for that.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Having said all that, I think it's something that all of us want to do the best we can to ensure that we treat people of all genders within the workforce. So I understand the point you're making and I think it's something that all of us should listen to and take heart. We may not agree on where we go with it, but I'm supportive of the position you're advocating.

Ms. Bowes: — Well I'm glad to hear you're supportive in principle. However, you know, support from a government in principle doesn't mean much for women who are paid inequitably in the private sector in our province, not to be rude, Minister.

But so I have a few comments, I guess, and follow-up questions. You know, you mentioned it's incredibly complex to implement this legislation in the private sector, and I mean I suppose there is, you know, I mean, something to that. But it's been done in other jurisdictions so it's, you know, there's certainly cases that our government could look at and model legislation around.

You mentioned legislation in 1973 for similar work in the same workplace. This is a common kind of conflation of two very different things and I've heard numerous folks on your side make this, I guess, error. And I think, you know, some probably do know that similar work in the same workplace, like a man and a woman being paid the same for doing the same job, is very different from what we're looking to address here with pay equity legislation which is addressing the issue of equitable pay for work of equal value. So not the same job, but work of equal value.

So just as a quick example, you know, you look at for instance continuing care aides in our society. They're paid quite low wages comparatively in our province and very heavily female-dominated occupation. You look at — I used this example last night as well — library workers, child care workers, all heavily

female dominated. And you see as a pattern that the most heavily female-dominated occupations are in almost all cases the lowest paid, in not just Saskatchewan but, you know, in our society. And so that's the issue. That's the crux of the issue that we're getting at here, so just to clarify that.

And you mentioned too, you know, prohibited grounds. And yes, I do know that that exists. And as you know, in the petition I present here in the House day after day, it's been noted that, yes, that mechanism does, that complainant's process does exist through human rights. However it's complaints-based, meaning that it's reactive instead of proactive and meaning that there are barriers in place for, in this case, women who are looking to seek resolution to, you know, an inequitable pay situation. So it's a very time-consuming, lengthy process that — I'm just going to be honest — I think most people aren't even aware of that this exists, which is problematic.

And so I guess that's my counter, Minister. And I did have just a clarifying question. I mean I could talk about this all night but I'd better not because there's other matters I have to get on to. But just one clarifying question: you had mentioned since like from 2006-2021 there were a total of 25 claims made, and what was this through? Like I don't think you were referring to human rights, 25 claims.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Those are within the ministry, and those ones would have been directed to the issue. But I'll let Mr. Tuer speak specifically.

Mr. Tuer: — So in 1973 it would have been *The Labour Standards Act*, but now *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* includes employment standards, and so that's included in there. So the mechanism, as you mentioned, for making a complaint, an individual who feels they're being discriminated against based on sex would have the opportunity either to go to human rights or to come to us. And so when it comes to us, we'd assign an officer. They would investigate, go into the workplace, determine whether or not there was a differential in pay that wasn't based on seniority or merit. And then if there was, we would work with the employer to make sure they rectify that.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks for clarifying that. And just a question out of that for my knowledge. Like a worker could use either process and one would be held in abeyance while the other was being seen through. And which would have priority? Is that case by case?

Mr. Tuer: — Yeah, it would be up to the worker really. I am aware of one example in the last five years where that exact thing happened, where they filed a complaint with us, made a determination they wanted to go to Workers' Compensation, wanted to go to human rights, and then they . . . and so ours was just put in abeyance.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The Human Rights Commission as well as they're presented has the expectation that they would look at the other. There are areas of overlapping jurisdiction so a worker would be able to go to either one. But the remedies that they would seek if they were to, would be taken into account on the second application. So it's an area that some people have suggested we address legislatively so that people can't shop for different ones.

We've chosen a conscious decision to leave it there so that workers got more options. There may be other issues in the workplace that don't exist that would not be covered by the labour standards legislation that we have and it would be better covered through a human rights tribunal. So it's there but it seems to be, between the two agencies, they seem to be able to unravel things.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks for clarifying that. Like I said, I think I'm going to have to leave it there for today. But I would ask, Minister, that you know, as I've asked the Minister for the Status of Women to take a look at this and seriously take it into consideration. I mean, we've been bringing this forward for well over a year now, closer to probably a year and a half. And there's really been no response and no efforts at bipartisan collaboration around, I felt around this issue, which has been disappointing. And it feels like it seems as though, you know, this is an issue where it feels like the government is not interested in looking at implementing this legislation in the private, you know, in this case for the private sector because of the impacts that are probably assumed that would be felt by businesses. And correct me if I'm wrong, but I mean is that the reason that the government does not want to look at this?

[16:00]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think if you go back to the 1994 decision, it was determined that that would be an appropriate thing to do within the public sector, that the various positions that took place, there would be the ability on the part of the civil service to look at, to analyze, and make a determination on the degree of comparability, what the value, etc., is. They made the determination at that point in time to do this by way of policy. And it's worked since that date.

I think when they went through that process, they would have made whatever determination they did that they didn't feel they wanted to go into the private sector nor did they want to enshrine it in the legislation. And that's been the status quo going back to the beginning of the Romanow period through the Calvert period, through the Wall period, and now through the Moe period. That seems to be a status quo.

And I can't speak to other provinces. I know that it is done in Ontario and Quebec but not done any further west than that — not done in Manitoba, not done here, not done in Alberta, not done in NDP [New Democratic Party] British Columbia, and not done anywhere in the Maritimes. So I can't speak to the various reasons. And I think at this point in time, people are focusing on moving forward and trying to get through the COVID issues that are still there and still affecting the challenges that we have in the workplace. We're wanting people to get back to work. I haven't had discussions with other provinces on the issue right now.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks. And just, you know, for the record, I wasn't really asking about other provinces. I was asking about your government and your ministry. But I'm going to move on.

Some questions — you won't be surprised — around paid sick leave, Minister. Workplaces have been one of the main locations where COVID spread has been occurring over the past two years of the pandemic. Front-line workers in particular continue to be exposed to COVID at very high rates. Front-line workers in the

retail and hospitality sectors especially are some of the lowest paid workers in our province and have some of the lowest rates of paid sick leave available to them. Given that Omicron is much more highly transmissible than previous variants and spread is, as a result, much higher, will your ministry be introducing paid sick leave in this budget year?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We don't intend to at this point in time. We provide within the existing legislation 12 days of sick leave; 12 weeks of leave for a serious illness, personal injury, or illness of a family member; leave for a work-related injury, 26 weeks. That ties to some of the benefits paid by the federal government for some of the things that are there.

The Act also provides job-protected leave for maternity, adoption, parental, critically ill family care, crime-related death or disappearance, and compassionate care and leaves that are covered by employment insurance. It also covers leave for interpersonal violence, reservists, nomination or election to public office, citizenship ceremony, bereavement and organ donation leaves, the things that are not covered by employment option.

Right now the only thing that has a paid component is interpersonal violence. Employers are required to provide five paid days of the total of 10 days of leave that can be accessed for that year.

The federal government established the Canada recovery sickness benefit, which provides employees up to \$500 a week before taxes for up to two weeks due to being sick or required to self-isolate due to COVID-19. That program has been extended to actually later this month. I don't know whether it's going to be extended further or not. We're pleased that the federal government has provided that funding and that benefit.

We are not prepared at this point in time to legislate a paid sick leave at this point. Assuming that all employees in the province were to use the 10 days, it would have a financial impact of \$1.2 billion, assuming that all of the days were used. I'm not saying that they would or could be, but it would be a significant expense.

We look at the overall things that are available in our province. And we are one of the provinces . . . We are virtually unique in that we have a starting point of three weeks of holidays, 15 days paid holidays. Virtually every other province has a starting point of two weeks. So we have an additional five holidays that other jurisdictions don't have.

Now it can't be automatically used for sick pay. But when we look at a comparison of employer costs and where we go on it, I understand the argument that is being advanced that you don't spread it to other people, but it's not something we're prepared to do at this time. I've had the discussion with Lori Johb from the SFL [Saskatchewan Federation of Labour] and she presents a good argument, but it's just not something we're prepared to do as we're slowly but steadily coming out of COVID.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. I appreciate hearing that answer. And so, you know, you mentioned that we have three weeks of paid holidays here in Saskatchewan. And so, I guess, based on that, my question to you is, do you believe it's appropriate that

employers are required to offer paid vacation leave to all workers in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — So far as I know, that's our legislation. It requires paid vacation to everyone. But what we had been talking about was paid sick leave. The federal government and federal employers provide 10 days paid sick leave. Alberta does not. British Columbia offers five days to employees with at least 90 days consecutive service. Manitoba does not. New Brunswick does not. Newfoundland and Labrador does not. Nova Scotia does not. Ontario does not.

Ms. Bowes: — I know, Minister. I'm aware of which do and do not. Thanks though.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Prince Edward Island, one day. Quebec, two days. And I think it's exactly the same reasons, that it's a cost issue. And so when we look at the jurisdictional scan, it appears we are at a similar position with other jurisdictions.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. So the reason I asked, you know, about whether you believe that it's appropriate for all employers to be required to offer paid vacation leave, I mean this is something that didn't always exist, right? This is not a standard given across Canada. But yet here we are today where that's the expectation and that is, you know, the law across Canada. And so I would assume, you know, through your ministry, that you would want to look at ways to pioneer basic benefits for working people in this province and to set a standard in this province, as we used to do in Saskatchewan. And you know, I would encourage that, I think, by getting on board and offering 10 permanent days of paid sick leave.

This is something that your government could be doing, is being one of the provinces to start . . . You'd be the first province to lead the way with 10 paid sick days. And I think that's something that you could be very proud of. I think that's something that workers in this province would be extremely appreciative of. I think it would help in terms of recruitment and retention. There are many economic benefits that would be associated with that, that you know, I've spoken to at some length here in the House before.

So I think we're seeing more and more. I mean we saw just prior to the federal election where there was a commitment to 10 days of paid sick leave by the Liberal government for all federally regulated workers. And there was also the statement by the Prime Minister that they would be working with the provinces toward this goal across each provincial jurisdiction. And so this is something that I think we will see becoming more and more prevalent. And I'm interested to know, has your ministry been in any discussions with the federal government on this front to date?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, we've been contacted by the Minister Seamus O'Regan who has asked where the provinces are or where our province is at. And I've talked to a number of my counterparts. We've had joint calls on it. Certainly the federal government is supportive of it, and they've indicated that's what they're doing with their federal employees. We've indicated to them collectively, or from virtually every other province, that if the federal government wishes to do that, then they should be prepared to pay for it, rather than saying the individual employers should be paying for it. So he was going to consider where they

might be on that. But so far as I know, there has been no uptake from any of the provinces on that point.

I think I pointed out to him that we already have a starting point of five more paid days than virtually every other province. But you know, I understand what you're advancing.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. And I guess just on that note, I would hope you're not suggesting workers should have to use their vacation pay when they're sick. But I'm going to move on now.

Minister, last year in estimates you had quoted Statistics Canada data that stated 46,000 Saskatchewan workers were considered low-wage workers. And I'm wondering, do you have any updated numbers on this front since last year available?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There were approximately 46,100 low-wage earners in Saskatchewan or 10.2 per cent of paid workers in the province. So that's, I think, the most current numbers that we have. Wait. Hang on. No, I've got newer numbers based on Stats Canada [Statistics Canada] data for 2021: an increase in the minimum wage will have the greatest impact on what they refer to as 49,600 low-wage earners or 10.5 per cent of paid workers in Saskatchewan, which there's a total of 472,300 in 2021.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks for that. So we've actually seen a pretty substantial increase looks like, from 2020 to 2021 for what Stats Canada qualifies as low-wage workers in our province, which is concerning. So I'd like to know, is this something that you folks are aware of? What is the threshold for the hourly rate that Statistics Canada considers low wage, and what percentage difference is this from Saskatchewan's minimum wage?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It's actually tied somewhat to minimum wage. It's from 5 per cent below to 10 per cent above minimum wage, would be regarded as a low-wage earner.

Ms. Bowes: — Sorry. Could you repeat that, Minister.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Five per cent below to 10 per cent above minimum wage.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Fifteen per cent, sorry.

Ms. Bowes: — Fifteen? Okay. Okay, and so then I guess on average, what percentage difference does this represent? So 5 per cent below to 15 per cent above minimum wage, was that what you said?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think there's a pool of people that are in that range and that number of people may have increased as we're coming out of the pandemic. There would be more people that would be at entry-level wages.

Ms. Bowes: — Coming out of the pandemic?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — People that are going back to work, starting work, whatever. We would have more people entering the workforce as people are going back to work. Some would go back to work at their . . . [inaudible] . . . but some people would have them. So I'm not sure what percentage you're looking at.

The low wage would be regarded as that pool of people that are working at an hourly wage that is 5 per cent less than minimum wage to 15 per cent above.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks for clarifying. And so yeah, I mean, I guess who knows what all of the reasons are for that? I'm not sure that that can be attributed to COVID, but it's certainly notable and not in a good way. And so then how many workers are currently earning minimum wage in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't know whether I have that number but I can say that, as of 2021 there would have been 13,100 people that would be earning wages near the minimum, in that 5 to 15 per cent.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. Yeah, interesting. I guess the most recent I had seen is over 16,000. But if you have something different, interesting. And so that's just, yeah, so that's not actually minimum wage workers. That's just using that StatsCan.

[16:15]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That would be the people at minimum wage plus those that are in that window that are above it. The reason that it's sort of captured in that context is the effect of a change in minimum wage would usually affect approximately 10 per cent of the workforce that would either directly receive a benefit or would be close enough to minimum wage that they would end up getting pushed up in consequence. So a change to the minimum wage would affect roughly 10 per cent of the workers.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And do you have the demographic breakdown of people who are making minimum wage in Saskatchewan, for instance, gender, age, ethnicity?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We know 73 per cent . . . These are the low-wage earners, so it's slightly above as well. Seventy-three per cent would work in retail, trade, or accommodation and food services; 60 per cent would be part-time and 52 per cent of them would be in an establishment with less than 20 employees; 47 per cent were for people employed less than a year. And I'm going to come back to that in a minute. Ninety per cent of them were not covered by a collective agreement.

When we started down the road after the former election, we started looking at what minimum wage was. We raised the threshold for how much a person could earn before they paid income tax. So we raised that threshold and it had the effect of taking 111,900 people completely off the tax rolls. So those people were able to go to work, earn their salary without any government taxes being paid by way of income tax so that we were the best in the nation at the time. The interesting stat was that 47 per cent of those people were at that level a year from now, but 53 per cent of those people had progressed beyond that minimum wage. They were outside of that bracket, so it was for those people a starting wage and they moved upward and onward.

I can tell you that 57 per cent of those people would have been women; 43 per cent would have been men. Fifty-seven per cent as well would have been people under age 25.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And just curious if you know the percentage of people who are under the age of 18.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The only number I have is those that would be under 25. I think probably we could look at the ones that have completed the young workers readiness certificate, but I don't think that would necessarily be a valid number to use because it wouldn't capture all of them.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, yeah. I mean my understanding is that the majority of minimum wage workers are adults in fact. And so just moving on a bit from here. Minister, as you well know, on April 1st Saskatchewan's minimum wage dropped back down to being the lowest minimum wage in Canada at \$11.81 an hour. With rising costs, people are struggling more and more. And we hear about it in our office. I'm sure that, you know, probably all of us do. So given this, why did the provincial budget not include an increase to the minimum wage?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well the minimum wage is not paid for by the provincial budget. There would be virtually nobody that would be a provincial government employee that would be earning minimum wage. Almost all of the workers would be governed by a collective agreement, or would be beyond that. So it wouldn't be something that the provincial budget would be intended to capture.

Ms. Bowes: — All right. According to the most recent statistics available that I can find — as I said earlier, what I could find — there are over 16,000 Saskatchewan workers making minimum wage. So I mean, I would be interested in where the numbers you had cited are coming from, you know, just so I can have the most accurate information. If you can have a look as we kind of move on through the questions here.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — What specifically is it that you're asking?

Ms. Bowes: — Oh I just . . . I guess I'm saying that, like the most recent information that I was able to find indicated there were over 16,000 Saskatchewan workers making minimum wage, but I think the numbers you had listed were more like . . . Yeah, well I mean, that was different, 13,100 people earning wages within that . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think all of our information would come from Stats Canada. I don't think we've got another source.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. You don't have any other sources. Okay, thanks. And so I guess, you know, my final question on this front is, will your ministry be taking steps to replace our province's minimum wage legislation with living wage legislation so that workers in our province will be legally entitled to minimum wages that reflect the actual cost of living, which would be calculated through a living wage calculation?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — When we started and did the amendments to our legislation, we went through a process to determine what the minimum wage should be at that time. And then we wanted to take the politics and the swings out of it, so we adopted a formula. So the minimum wage will increase at a midpoint between the percentage increase of the consumer price index or the average hourly wage. So for example, last year the consumer price index increased 2.63 per cent. The average hourly wage

increased 0.07 per cent. So the midpoint between those would be what the increase was.

And that actually has served the province and workers and employers by having something that is predictable and keeps workers above the point where they had the tax threshold, that I had indicated before, that took 111,900 off. So we've adopted that, and that is the position of the government right now is that we've adopted that. Some provinces have chosen to do something different, but that is where our province is.

Ms. Bowes: — Yeah. I know you've sort of stated before that, you know, this allows for predictability, but that doesn't help workers who are working full-time at a minimum wage job and simply cannot cover the basics that a person needs to live a life of any kind of dignity. So I was . . . and sorry if I just missed this in your last answer, but I was looking for the percentage changes in both the average hourly wages in Saskatchewan as well as for CPI [consumer price index] for the past year.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yeah. CPI increased 2.63 per cent; average hourly wage, 0.07 per cent. So the increase would be midway between those two numbers.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. So in essence, you know, we can see from these numbers that the increase is not matching inflation — not even close.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I didn't look at it in the context of what inflation is, and I think right now inflation is quite high. But the CPI will change as we go forward, and I assume the average hourly wage will as we go forward. I don't know what it will be further down the road, but both the average hourly wage and the consumer price index will go up. The consumer price index will accurately reflect what current inflation levels are.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. So given the numbers that you have just stated to me, why do you feel that it's acceptable for the minimum wage to not be increasing at least at the rate of inflation?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yeah, I think I'm going to have to ask the member to confine her questions to budget questions. We have the officials here to provide background or information that's here. So I'll let you save that one for question period.

Ms. Bowes: — Will do. Okay, going to move on a bit, Minister. I want to talk a bit about COVID and impacts on the workforce. One question I have is, what is the total number of workers in our province that have been displaced by COVID over the past year? Do you have that information?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm not sure what you mean by displaced.

Ms. Bowes: — Well essentially that, you know, they've lost their job throughout the pandemic.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't know whether we would be capable of capturing that information, because there would be people that were sent home on a paid leave. There would be those that would have been subject to a layoff. And I don't know how many would have been recalled. It certainly had a marked effect on our workforce.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. So there's no tracking by your ministry of how many were laid off versus recalled throughout the pandemic, nothing like that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think that information might exist in Trade and Export because they do workforce development in there. We ensure that the benefits are provided, that people are able to come to the ministry and make sure that they're getting everything that they are entitled to and given proper advice as to whether they're entitled to be getting pay in lieu of notice or whatever.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And then I guess my follow-up question was, you know, what work . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can tell you that — this may not answer your question — but Mr. Tuer says there was not a significant uptick in the number of complaints.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. Sorry. In the number of complaints related to . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That would have found their way in to the labour standards folks.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. All right. And then my follow-up . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — As you're aware, we probably took the complaints the same way you did, that people would come to an MLA office or phone and say, what about this? Are we entitled to that? Or, how do I work with workers on this? And our goal was to try and provide advice to both workers and employers as to what their obligations should be. And then we would try and refer them to wherever they need for outside help if they needed it, or if we are able to provide it from within.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, so thanks for that. And my follow-up question was going to be, what work was undertaken by your ministry to assist workers who have been displaced by COVID in getting back to work? And beyond, you know, what you just mentioned about providing advice, what work will be undertaken with this budget year?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I had indicated earlier that the period of time that they held the obligation to pay severance pay in abeyance ended last summer. So following that period of time, people went back to work. And we worked with the workers to ensure that they were entitled to go back to work or that they were entitled to pay in lieu of notice. That's what our mandate was. And so far as I know, the people that work at the ministry did, I think they did an effective job at doing that. I know they did a variety of seminars for people and whatever it was. But I know that was something they regarded as part of their mandate.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. All right. The next question is around the non-renewable sector in our province.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Non-renewable?

Ms. Bowes: — Non-renewable energy sector essentially, like for fossil fuel workers in our province. I'm wondering if there have been any initiatives pursued or if there are any dollars being set aside by the ministry in this year's budget that will effectively

work to prepare workers in our fossil fuel industries for a future energy transition.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That is not something that would be part of the mandate of this ministry. I think if you were to ask the question of some of the Crowns or some of the others, they might be able to provide you with some information. Yeah, the information and career training folks may be able to provide some information that's there as they go through the transition.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, so I'm hearing that that's got nothing to do with your ministry.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Not this time.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. Well I mean, and just for what it's worth I guess, and I would suggest that perhaps you should make that part of your mandate looking, going forward.

Moving on, I have just a question. Minister, last year in estimates you had referenced your government's plan to add 100,000 jobs by 2030. And I'm interested to know, from your ministry's take, how many of these jobs the government is hoping to create in specific, you know, sector by sector. Do you have that information?

[16:30]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No. Job creation is not something that's done in this ministry. That would be a question for Minister Harrison.

Ms. Bowes: — Well okay. All right. Thanks. I'm just going to skip around and then kind of get into some OH & S and WCB-related questions.

You had mentioned earlier the new provisions under the employment Act with regard to sexual harassment protections for workers, and I do commend your ministry, your government on that. I think that was an important step for, as you said, students as well as gig and contract workers and those that are exposed to sexual harassment in the workplace. So we are of course very happy to see that and also very grateful to the many advocates who made that a priority and brought that to your government.

And so I'm wondering, I think you had mentioned that the changes came into force January 1st of this year, and I was wondering if OH & S has received any claims related to sexual harassment since this time, since that time, January 1st.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There are no complaints based on the expanded provisions since January 1st, 2022. That's not to say there wasn't other harassment complaints that would have come in for other things on an ongoing basis, but the expanded provisions, there has not been any specific ones that we're able to identify.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks. Then . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I would like to think that it's because the harassment isn't taking place, but my guess is it's not likely the case. It's a matter that people have not yet chosen to come forward or aren't aware of the expanded coverage. And I think

that's part of our mandate is to try and make sure people are aware that that's there. It went through this House, and I think when something goes through this House we think it's incredibly public, but I . . . Frankly, most people don't follow things that are here. So I think that's something we want to make sure that we make people aware that there's expanded coverage.

Ms. Bowes: — Yeah, I totally agree. And I am interested to know what the ministry's plans are for the upcoming budget year in that regard to make these provisions more publicly known, and what sort of a campaign that your ministry might be initiating.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yeah. I think they're going to watch things and do a bit of an analysis as they go forward. And I know it's on websites now, and I think that work may be in other areas to see to it that the information gets out . . . Go ahead.

Ms. Haque: — Hello. I'm Sameema Haque, assistant deputy minister for Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. And we are creating quite a few resources, training material that will be posted on Saskatchewan.ca, videos that might be helpful in regards to defining what is in the Act, explaining the regulations. And it's of assistance to both employees and employers, so educational resources. In addition, we're also working under our WorkSafe partnership banner with WCB prevention side to have resources available through that website as well to educate.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thank you. Yeah, that's good to know. I don't know how many average folks in Saskatchewan pore through the Saskatchewan.ca website, just to be honest, you know. It's good that it's posted there, but I guess I would hope that, you know, your ministry undertakes a more fulsome campaign to make these new provisions more well known. I think it's certainly warranted, you know. People should be made aware of the good work that's been done by your ministry in bringing these changes in.

And I know that, you know, as I said, we had estimates for Status of Women last night and, you know, they've got a campaign under way there that they're collaborating with other ministries on around raising awareness around domestic violence. And yeah, I'm sure there could be some discussions or collaboration there if you saw fit. I will move on to ask about . . . I'm wondering the total number of OH & S inspectors in the province.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — 69.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks. And what is the total number of unannounced site visits that have occurred over the past year?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yeah, I'll give you a number of statistics. There was initially a real concern that . . . and the term that was used was "random." And that was a problem because random could have meant anything. So you used the term "unannounced," which is probably far better to do. When they were random it was, oh, well there was a bookkeeper with only one person that was self-insured through WCB would get a visit, and they were working at a table in their house. So a visit of that probably wasn't going to mean as much as a roofing contractor or something like that.

So there was 4,262 work site visits. This is as of February 28. 982 of those were COVID-related, so that would have been either a COVID complaint or a COVID issue. 1,790 were targeted intervention. That would have meant that they were directed or priority employers or ones that there was a specific reason why those ones would have been done. They would have had a prior visit or an outstanding issue, whatever. 1,215 were officer-initiated. 512 were a result of complaints. 745 were as a result of notifications.

Out of that 4,262, 1,660 received notices of contravention; 226 received compliance undertakings; 2,160 had an officer report; and the rest of them had some form of notes on the file. Of those there was, 23 had summary offence tickets issued.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. And so I just wasn't quite clear from your answer. Like how many of those were unannounced site visits?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That would have been 1,215, would have been the officer-initiated. Would those have had some notice to the employer? No, there would have been no notice on that 1,215.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And so the rest I'm assuming then the employer was aware that the inspector would be showing up.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It could have been a variety of things. They could have done an unannounced inspection some weeks or days earlier and said, we'll come back and follow up. Or it could have been a piece of hoist equipment that needed a repair or an updated guard that was there, and said, we're going to come back and make sure that it was done or whatever else. And then they would have sort of said, we'll do whatever else.

The mining operations in the province, which I think do a really good job on working workplace safety, it's difficult to do a site inspection where you go underground, where you just show up and say, we're going underground today. You know, they have to shut down the skip loaders or whatever else. So those ones they have to work with the ones that are there.

I'll give you a few more files: 27 files were sent to Justice; 17 prosecutions initiated; 10 convictions; a total of \$1,475,600 in fines; plus 20 stop work orders. So I think the thing I'd like to impress is that the OHS workers take it really seriously and are willing to refer it out for prosecution where it's appropriate, or to issue the summary offence tickets. And I think they do a remarkably good job.

We have a prosecutor designated to this, a full-time prosecutor, and I think there's a second prosecutor that does additional work on it to make sure that the things are done in a timely manner. The good news on this is that over 90 per cent of the employers in the province have reached Mission: Zero, operate injury-free. The sad part is that we have nearly 10 per cent that have got safety issues or injuries.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks. That's really good to know. So of those 1,215 which were officer-initiated, what sectors were these initiated in overall? Like do you have the top three sectors or any . . .

Ms. Haque: — We don't have that level of breakdown.

Ms. Bowes: — None of that? Okay.

Ms. Haque: — We don't have that level of breakdown. They can be for a variety of sectors. You know, our occupational health and safety officers visit from a simple welding shop to a, you know, meat-packing plant to the refinery to big manufacturing sectors. So they visit all of those sites.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think as they're determining where they're going to go to, they're trying to make their visits have the most impact. So they'll go to either a rate code that has got an abnormally high number of complaints where it has not come down or a specific employer or an area of the province, which might be southeast corner where there's been a lot of oil exploration or something. So I think that what they're doing is rather than focusing on a particular segment, they're trying to target their energies where they will make the most benefit.

Ms. Haque: — We can provide information for overall inspection.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yeah, go ahead. Please.

Ms. Haque: — Not just the officer-initiated ones, but of the COVID-19-related work site visits, they were in all sectors. 982 asbestos-related work site visits were in 117 work site visits. In the health care sector we had 557 work site visits. Out of these, 230 were COVID-19-related. In the manufacturing sector we had 318 work site visits; 63 were COVID-related. Mining sector, we had 211 work site visits; 36 of these were COVID-19-related. Residential construction, we had 316 work site visits; 15 were COVID-related.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. I'm curious to know on that with the COVID-related visits, like how many of those would have resulted in either convictions, fines, stop work orders, etc.?

Ms. Haque: — We did not have any stop work orders related to COVID-related work site visits. I have contraventions, 70 . . . So 329 plus 70 were total contraventions issued under the . . . So a little bit, one less than 400, so 399.

Ms. Bowes: — And that's related to COVID?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That's since 2020. The goal at the beginning of the pandemic was not to look for people to charge but to try and get compliance. There was a lot of lack of knowledge, lack of understanding, so they weren't seeking initially to lay charges. Later on there was probably a bit of a shift on the part of some of the employers for some businesses that were choosing to be non-compliant.

Ms. Bowes: — And so just to get clear on those numbers, you said 329 plus 17. Is that what you said?

Ms. Haque: — No, 70. So 399 notices of contravention were issued for COVID-related work site visits.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think Greg's got some other information on the timing if you want to . . .

Mr. Tuer: — Yeah. I just was saying to the minister that what we have noticed is over the period of the two years of COVID, the number of contraventions that we issued significantly decreased. And I think that's also in part to people, you know, understanding what their obligations are, understanding what their responsibilities are. And as we went through, you can see the numbers very quickly decreasing, particularly over the last six months.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, great. I'm getting a little short on time so I might just skip around here for a little bit. I did want to know, is the Workers' Compensation Board still requiring PCR [polymerase chain reaction] tests for claimants, related to COVID?

[16:45]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No, they're not. A verification from a doctor is sufficient.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. Okay, great. And when did that change occur?

Mr. Germain: — So that changed during the December to January time frame when there was the increase in Omicron, and we had made a decision then that we would accept any third-party medical confirmation that there was COVID, whether that was a PCR test or . . . yeah.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, that's great. So PCR test or doctor's note will suffice at this point in place of a PCR . . . Sorry, did I say a PCR?

Mr. Germain: — A rapid test or, yeah, a doctor-administered . . .

Ms. Bowes: — I meant a rapid test.

Mr. Germain: — Rapid test or PCR.

Ms. Bowes: — A rapid test or doctor's note is now sufficient as opposed to a PCR.

Mr. Germain: — As long as the doctor confirms that there's COVID-19, yes, we'll accept it.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, that's great. I'm really glad to hear that. And so now I understand that at least initially WCB had said that they would, on a case-by-case basis, reimburse claimants who accessed private PCR testing. And so curious to know if WCB has reimbursed any claimants, and if so, how many.

Mr. Germain: — I don't know how many but we would, if somebody went to a third party, contacted us, went to a third party or we recommended they go to a third . . . not recommended a third party but suggested they could get the test from a third party, we would pay for that test. So I don't know how many, but that was not an issue for us in terms of paying a third party.

Ms. Bowes: — So none were denied then.

Mr. Germain: — Not to my knowledge, no.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. Okay. And then I have a few more questions here around WCB. How many WCB claims were made in total over the past year that were related to COVID?

Mr. Germain: — I'm just going to grab my binder.

Ms. Bowes: — Sure.

Mr. Germain: — I'm pretty sure I know the number off the top of my head, but . . . So in 2021 there were 1,414 COVID claims submitted, and in 2022 there's been 891.

Ms. Bowes: — 891, okay. And then I guess for each of the years of these claims, how many were accepted and how many were rejected?

Mr. Germain: — Going back even to 2020, all through the pandemic, 63 per cent of COVID claims submitted were accepted. Of the ones that were not accepted: there was no medical diagnosis of COVID — that was the majority of the reason for non-acceptance; some, when working with the worker and contact tracing, there was no work-related exposure; in many cases, the worker verified a non-work-related exposure such as a barbecue or something like that outside of work.

Ms. Bowes: — Sorry, just to clarify, a non-workplace-related exposure, like hypothetically? Or how does that work?

Mr. Germain: — Through contact tracing.

Ms. Bowes: — Yes, I understand through contact tracing. But like, I guess I'm just trying to understand, are you saying that, you know, if there was determined to be someone with COVID at a barbecue and someone . . . Like what would happen, just curious, you know, through contact tracing, if there was someone at a barbecue that a worker had attended with COVID and someone in the workplace who also had COVID, then how would that determination work?

Mr. Germain: — Through conversations and contact tracing, we would try and determine the proximity. Even if two people had COVID within the workplace, they might have never come in contact with each other. They could be in one end of the hospital and the other end, or one end of the manufacturing plant and opposite. So we would actually try and verify, did people . . . Is it possible that there could have been transmission within the workplace or outside of? And most cases where we confirmed transmission outside of the workplace, it was the workers who helped verify that.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks. And sorry to put a hypothetical to you, but like I am wondering I guess, so if a worker presented a claim related to COVID and, you know, there was someone determined to also have COVID in their workplace and someone at say a barbecue they went to, and they were equidistant away from both people who had COVID, how would that determination be made?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think you're asking a hypothetical that becomes a challenge. I think the role of the Workers' Compensation Board is to make a factual determination. Was it a work-related contact or not? And you know, generally speaking on the balance of probabilities, all else being equal, it likely will

fall in favour of the worker. But they would ask the questions — where were you, when were you, whatever else — to make an appropriate determination.

And I think the stats sort of bear that out. Sixty-three per cent of the claims that were filed were accepted. Of those that were not accepted, the vast majority of them that weren't accepted didn't have COVID. So you get down to a relatively small number or percentage that were denied because it was not determined to be a workplace exposure.

So I think if you remember back to the beginning days of COVID, there was a group of dentists that had a bonspiel together. So if you would have been in the household of one of those people, chances are that's where you got it rather than at your workplace. So you know, I think WCB has done a good job of making those determinations. That's their role, to do that. But I don't think it's fair to give them a number of hypotheticals. I think all else being equal, they find in favour of the worker.

Ms. Bowes: — Yes, thanks. And you know, not trying to be difficult. Just curious if you're using a balance of probabilities how you would determine, if those circumstances were quite similar. But I'll move on.

I wonder also, then, how many fatality claims were made, if any, over the past year that were related to COVID?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think we can give you a number if we're going back to day one.

Ms. Bowes: — Sure. Great.

Mr. Germain: — There were four fatality claims accepted related to COVID.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And so how many claims were made? And how many rejected? And you said four were accepted. Is that correct?

Mr. Germain: — I don't have the specifics in here. I don't know that any fatality claims were rejected. There may have . . . I'm thinking back. There may have been one. But part of that was us working through with the employer to get all the proper information. So I don't recall us rejecting any. As long as we could connect it to the workplace, we accepted those fatalities.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. So you don't know then, off the top of your head, how many fatality claims would have been made in regard to COVID?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We believe the four. And possibly there may have been one that wasn't accepted.

Ms. Bowes: — Right. Okay, I'm wondering as well, Minister, what is the ministry doing presently to make sure that workers have safe workplaces in terms of the health and safety risks associated with COVID? So if we're heading into another wave of COVID, why is it that neither masks nor any other COVID-related PPE [personal protective equipment] are required in workplaces in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think we look to the Ministry of Health

and Dr. Shahab to make determinations as to when there are additional rules required both by way of masking, various PPE, and those things. Those are not something that would be done within the ministry. There would be recommendations that would come from the Ministry of Health, and that would be done by way of an order in council or pursuant to the emergency order that was in place.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks. And just so I'm clear then . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can tell you, I'm going to let Mr. Tuer . . . [inaudible] . . . They work with WorkSafe Sask to try and mitigate exposures, exposure control. But the requirements for masking, etc., are done under that process. But I'll let Mr. Tuer give you the better specifics.

Mr. Tuer: — Thanks. So one of the things that we have done over the course of the pandemic was — again working through WorkSafe, which is the partnership with Workers' Comp — again ensure that there are resources available to employers. And of course all employers have to do a risk assessment of what are the risks in their workplace. But as it relates to exposure, exposure to things like COVID, there are resources on the WorkSafe site around how to conduct an exposure control plan, making sure that they've taken the correct steps and understand what they need to put in place in order to protect their workers.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. And my understanding is that, you know, earlier on in the pandemic, it was the case with COVID that employers had to have a plan related specifically to COVID. And now that's just like reverted, I think, back to how you would deal with any communicable workplace disease. Is that correct?

Ms. Haque: — So I would say at that time with the public health orders in place, there was medical experts that had actually, through that process, determined that there was a risk present for community transmission that's high. Therefore an exposure control plan was required based on that risk assessment in itself.

That was for province-wide. Employers have always had an obligation to conduct a hazard assessment within the workplace and whatever risks are identified through that hazard assessment, including diseases or chemical exposure or any other hazard, they need to have a plan in place to protect the workers.

So that condition was not expanded or at any time minimized. The public health order had some additional factors in it that required.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks. So I guess you can imagine what I'm getting at here, right, is that we can see that there's continued and increasing spread of COVID throughout Saskatchewan. And so the fact is that there is currently no mandated requirements for employers in terms of providing PPE to their workers to keep them essentially safe and protect them from contracting COVID.

And so that's obviously problematic, and I would suggest that . . . I know, Minister, that you said that you look to Dr. Shahab for recommendations from the Ministry of Health, but you know, the fact is that the Ministry of Labour is responsible for the conditions of workers in this province. And so I would suggest that . . . I would certainly hope that your ministry would be able to take steps in this regard without having to seek approval from

any other avenues in government. Are you saying that's not the case?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think we want to do everything we can to keep our workers safe. We are now living in a world where COVID is accepted to being part of it. The pandemic will continue on, and we'll watch what takes place. We'll raise issues and we'll work with Dr. Shahab, who has at this point in time said that he does not recommend or is not urging any additional measures to be taken.

Having said that, you know, we walk through and we see people get COVID, get better. It's no longer a disease where you end up on a ventilator. I'm not saying that there isn't people that have a bad outcome from it. I think this is how we live with the new normal.

Ms. Bowes: — Right. Yeah, I understand that's consistent with your . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — And I don't mean that to minimize the responsibility of an employer to maintain distancing or to make equipment available, and I have confidence in the officials to work with the employers. But we're not looking at adding a regulation or making a change at this point in time.

Ms. Bowes: — And is that no matter what happens throughout the pandemic here?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I said at this time.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. Okay. Well I mean, you know, although we're getting less regular reporting, we can all still see what's happening in terms of the numbers and the death rates.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — You know, I know the issue of reporting, and I didn't come here with the idea of debating. I'm specifically avoiding that. But virtually every jurisdiction is now moving to weekly reporting. And I think they are because it's difficult to get daily averages. Reports sit, and then all of a sudden there's a day that oh, well gee, we've got four days' worth of information there instead of three.

And the numbers are now low enough that weekly seems to be a better indication of where the numbers are. And that's done virtually across Canada and well into the US [United States] that reporting is now weekly.

[17:00]

Ms. Bowes: — Yeah. And you know, appreciate your comment about not coming here to debate. But I mean also as the critic, it is my role to bring forward concerns from stakeholders, which is what I am doing here now. And so, you know, I would hope that you would be interested in hearing some of those concerns and taking those into consideration. But I'll move on.

I do have some more questions around case processing for WCB. Wondering if we can have an update on open-to-close case times for WCB claims, being the average time it takes for WCB to resolve a case.

Mr. Germain: — So the open-and-close, the average duration of

a claim is just over 40 days. So that's open-and-close. The time to adjudicate is . . . I don't have the specific number, but obviously it's less than that.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. And what are the targets you set there?

Mr. Germain: — Well we want to be sensitive to the targets because it's about a safe recovery and return to work, but our current target is 38 days. We think if we can get a little quicker at adjudication, it'll benefit the whole system.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. And how many WCB claims in total were made over this past year?

Mr. Germain: — 25,751 claims reported to WCB.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And of those, how many were accepted and how many were rejected?

Mr. Germain: — Good question. So I can tell you that of those claims that were reported, 14,342 time-loss claims were accepted; 7,888 no-time-loss claims were accepted; and then the balance would have been — whatever the math is, which I do have here, but — the balance would have been denied. Well not denied. Many of the denied claims are sometimes just dropped or withdrawn by the worker.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And then I'm wondering if we can hear how many claims in total were made over the past year for just physical injury claims.

Mr. Germain: — Of the 14,342 time-loss claims accepted and the 7,888, the only difference from a physical injury would obviously be the psychological injuries. And I have that information right here: the psychological injuries, 276 . . . 233 psychological claims were accepted in 2021.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And how many total psychological claims were made in 2021?

Mr. Germain: — A total of 678 psychological claims were submitted.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, so you've got a pretty low rate there, it looks like, and I guess that would reflect what we're hearing, you know. Just to say that's one of the concerns that is brought forward is the outcomes overall, I guess, the experiences people are having in terms of making psychological claims and also the duration that it takes from open to close for those claims. I understand — at least from what we hear anecdotally — that often those are taking quite a bit longer than physical injury claims. Can you confirm if that's true?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think it was the challenge initially on obtaining the psychiatric information for it. There was a test that was required sort of to meet a threshold, and I don't know whether the testing facilities have gotten better or there's more people qualified to do it. But there was a psychological requirement that had to be, that once the people got into the testing process were able to . . . But I'll let Mr. Germain speak to it. He probably has more information.

Mr. Germain: — So in terms of acceptance since the legislation

was passed, for presumptive psychological, the number of claims submitted have been increasing, you know, which was kind of part of the goal of the legislation. And the acceptance rate has increased from 28 per cent to 38 per cent and now up to as high as 45 per cent in 2020, and then dipped down to 42 per cent in 2021.

So there has been an increase in acceptance. We do have a specific psychological unit that focuses . . . The durations of psychological claims have dropped over the last three years. So there's been a lot of work put in to try and understand how to effectively adjudicate and manage psychological claims.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And what would . . . I don't know if you have available, but what would like the average duration of a psychological claim be? I think I know overall you said just over 40 days. And what would that be for psychological injury claims?

Mr. Germain: — It's just over 60.

Ms. Bowes: — Just over 60 days?

Mr. Germain: — Yeah.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. Okay. And so am I right in assuming then that you had listed 670 total claims made under psychological injury and then the rest of the claims that you had listed as reported — that 25,751 — the remainder would be all physical injury claims? Is that correct?

Mr. Germain: — Or occupational disease, yeah.

Ms. Bowes: — Right, okay. Thanks. Okay, and then so I'm just going to move down a little bit here. I wanted to know, is there a common reason for rejection of psychological claims?

Mr. Germain: — I wouldn't say there's a common reason other than we register the claim, we start working with the claimant, and then we just simply work backwards to establish two things: (a) is there an injury based on a psychological assessment; and then (b) was that injury, in the balance of probabilities, work-related?

So that's really . . . Each case is very unique and individual. So there isn't really a main reason why we would not accept other than trying to determine those two factors coming together — injury and work-related.

Ms. Bowes: — Yeah, no that makes sense. And just for my own knowledge, when we're talking about whether something is work-related — and I know we're using the balance of probabilities test here — but for example with a psychological injury claim, would, you know, if someone I assume had some form of pre-existing sort of psychological diagnosed condition, would that preclude them from . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . It would not? If it were . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . No. How does that work?

Mr. Germain: — Well like in even a physical injury, just because you come with a pre-existing condition doesn't mean that your work didn't contribute to that injury. You know, we all come with our faults and . . .

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, that's good to know. I'm wondering specifically about serious injury and fatality rates. How many serious injuries were there, over the past year, reported?

Mr. Germain: — So we have, in our 2021 report, we have an average of about 2,500 serious injuries per year. And the number I've got here is from 2011 to 2020, and I'll explain what I mean there. There was 24,737 serious injuries. That's the statistic that we've published. The reason it's a 2020 statistic is because sometimes there's a timing in order to understand, like, a psychological injury or something, when an injury is actually serious. It doesn't just immediately manifest itself as a serious injury.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, great.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We made the determination at the outset, when we changed the legislation, to include any worker. So it wasn't just firefighters, police officers, whatever else. It got right down into, you know, anybody that had . . . and it could be something, you know, some of the things that you would never anticipate would have been there.

And I think I was worried initially that, is this a step too far? And I don't believe now that it was. I think it was absolutely a right thing to do. But I think it has made it more of a challenge for WCB to identify or work with the statistics and say, this is the type of problem we are having, or this is the type of things we can do to reduce or minimize them. Because the claims can come from virtually anywhere.

Mr. Germain: — I think we're one of only three jurisdictions that accept any type of psychological injury or from any occupation. Some jurisdictions limit it to certain occupations or certain types of psychological injuries. We don't.

Ms. Bowes: — I'm just, has that always been the case that . . . I mean, not with the presumptive clause but with psychological injuries, I mean that's always been covered under the Act.

Mr. Germain: — Yes, I know of cases dating back to 1974 where we accepted psychological injuries.

Ms. Bowes: — Yeah. Okay, thanks. And so I have many more questions that, of course, never get to them. We'll just try to pick my last question here I guess. Related to occupational health and safety and a worker's right to refuse unsafe work, we all know under the Sask employment Act workers do have that right to refuse unsafe work. Yet still, far too many workers are being seriously injured, as we've heard, or killed on the job year after year. And so I would like to know, Minister, what sort of work will be undertaken by the ministry within this upcoming fiscal year to address this tragic reality for so many people across our province, so many workers.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Over the time that we've been in government, the injury and death rate has come down, and come down substantially. I think that's credit to the workers in the province, the employers, the employee training, identifying prime contractors on construction sites, and having workers better trained on safety things. And I think I would regard as a work in progress. It's not going as fast as we'd like it to do. We used to be among the worst in the country. We're not anymore,

but we still have a place to go.

There's a shifting mentality. When some of the mining companies first started to embrace the notion of safety, some suppliers did not want to do business with them because it was too difficult, too many safety rules, and declined to do it. Over a period of time, those employers have now come back and said no, we're doing it. It's the new normal. We're absolutely comfortable doing it. So it has come along, and it's spread from some of the larger companies down through the smaller ones. So we'll continue to work, to enforce, to prosecute, to train, and to try and take a step forward. The only acceptable number is zero, so we have Mission: Zero and that's the challenge of WorkSafe Sask.

Later this month we're going to be, in this Chamber, reading the names of the workers that were killed on the job. And for me that's the toughest day of the year, but for the family members that have lost a loved one and that, it's not just one day for them. It's every day. That's their new life. So I think we'll want to continue to look and identify the different things that were there.

[17:15]

I spent some time talking to Sean Tucker, a U of R professor, on these things and I'm going to ask him — I'm . . . [inaudible] . . . spring things on our staff today but I will — to not look at it just on the basis of what our stats are, on the deaths, because we are such a small pool. One year we'll have two people killed in an airplane crash. The next year we'll have two electrocutions. And it's difficult to say what a trend or what a pattern is from there.

So I think I was going to ask people to work with some of the other jurisdictions to see, by pooling our data with them, can we better identify areas that we need to focus on and need to work on? So I think those are the type of things that we'll need to work on.

Somebody used the term, and I didn't accept it but it may be a fair term, that we've taken the low-hanging fruit, the larger employers that have got safety divisions or safety units. But I think now we need to deal with the two- and three-person jobs.

I live in an area of the city where there's new homes under construction. I drive through there and I see the ropes lying across the roof, not attached to the worker. I don't stop and yell out the window but probably I should. And then, you know, the equipment is usually there and we need to do it.

So I think it's a matter of sometimes enforcement, sometimes training, sometimes education. I'd like to get some better data so we know where to focus our energies, where we go to. We've got a consultant in, working with them now to try and focus or get our staff working on it.

But to your point that it's unacceptable, it absolutely is. And it's not just unacceptable in our province. It's unacceptable across the nation.

Ms. Bowes: — I agree. I promise I will wrap up right away here but just to that, I appreciate your comments. And I just wanted to bring to your attention, you know, maybe you've heard this as well, but what I've heard from many folks in my former line of

work and even still is that there are a lot of barriers in place in terms of accessing and exercising a worker's right to refuse. And so I would encourage your ministry to look at ways to make that process more accessible to workers and to make sure that workers are apprised of that right that they have more readily.

But I appreciate your comments, really appreciate the time that everyone's taken here tonight. Thanks a lot, Minister, for answering my questions. And to the officials, really nice to meet you and thanks for all the work you've put into this process. And thanks for bearing with me as I'm a little bit new to this role in full. And with that I'll end my questions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll just briefly thank everyone: the committee members, the opposition member, Legislative Assembly staff, people that are in the room today, broadcast services, building staff, building security.

But I would like to specifically recognize the people at Labour Relations and Workplace Safety who every day work hard to make our province a safer place. I mentioned the work in progress, and they are moving it along. And also the folks at WCB; I want to thank Mr. Germain for coming out. They are on the other end of it, so they see where things have not gone as well as they should. So I want to thank all of those people for the work that they do year round. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — All right. Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you, Ms. Bowes. Having reached our agreed time for consideration of these estimates, we will adjourn consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Ms. Ross has moved. All agreed? All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee stands adjourned until Wednesday, April 23rd at 3:15 p.m. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 17:19.]